I. Project Background

II. Factors influencing parental communication decisions

III. Implication for children’s understanding of Family Rewards

IV. Summary and Conclusions
Family Rewards Background

- Goal: reduce short term poverty through CCTs, and long term poverty through human capital development.

- Parental mediation was a critical component of the model.

- What strategies did parents and children employ to reach educational goals over time?
Why family communication matters?

Most direct way to influence education outcomes was for families to incentivize test scores and attendance.

- Parents were oriented to the program
- Younger students did not receive rewards directly
- Parents could decide how much to share
Research Questions

• How did parents explain Family Rewards to their children?

• What did children retain about the program rules and goals, and what were their views on receiving monetary incentives for school performance?

• How did pre-existing family tensions influence a parent’s ability to communicate with their children about Family Rewards?
Qualitative Sample

- 156 structured interviews with 75 families
- 3 rounds of interviews were conducted.
  - 75 parents were interviewed
  - 44 parents were re-interviewed
  - 39 children from 30 families were interviewed
## Parent’s Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 parent working (%)</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public housing or Section 8 (%)</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has condition that limits work (%)</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily speaks Spanish (%)</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual earnings ($)</td>
<td>8,901</td>
<td>6,401</td>
<td>9,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of rewards earned in years 1 and 2 ($)</td>
<td>6,714</td>
<td>7,171</td>
<td>6,183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Children’s Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met English learning standards</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met math learning standards</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

I. Parental Communication Strategies

II. Children’s Understanding of Program

III. Role of Family Tension
Parental Communication

Factors influencing communication:

• Age of child
• Household expenses
• Parenting style
• Perceptions about intrinsic motivation
Parental Communication (cont.)

- Age of child

“I really don’t discuss the program too much with my kids, because they’re young… and I don’t want my kids to get the impression that we have to do this to get money… I just tell them, oh Mommy got extra money. I can treat you to get a little something, what you want, something that they need.”
Parental Communication (cont.)

- Underlining household financial needs

“I told [my daughters] that… if they made a bigger effort… we would get more money… they would be able to buy things that I couldn’t buy for them… that encouraged them to be more interested in school… that we would get more income, a better income.”
Parenting style

“And to me, I said you know what? I reward you in a certain way because I get these rewards and I feel that I should share them with you, but I’m going to have control of everything that’s going on.”
Parental Communication (cont.)

- Perceptions about intrinsic motivation

“And I’m telling my son, you know, when you do things you should do it because you want to do it, and the love of doing it. And at the end of the day, you will find out that’s what works for you… the program is not about you abusing it.”
Younger Students

Findings:

- Knew the least about the rules and goals of Family Rewards.
- Despite lack of understanding, young children still identified with program.

“It’s a program that they care a lot about your success and your achievements towards doing good in school, more about being like a class act towards the community.”
High School Students

Findings:

- Received money directly into their own accounts.
- Overall, understood the rules of the program.
- Identified with Family Rewards values.
- Over half reported forgetting about the program at some point.
Greater understanding of the program.

“Because if you don’t give [students] some sort of motivation they will never do it. If they have, ‘Oh I need to do this because I’m going to get this,’ it gives them some type of hope and motivation to do things.”
High School Students (cont.)

- Forgot about the program at some point.

“Well, sometimes I forget the program, but then after I’ll pass the Regents, I’ll be like ‘oh yeah, that’s more money inside my bank account,’ and then I’ll get happy again and I’ll try for the next one to get it higher… I’m not saying that I don’t think about it, but sometimes… it slips your mind.”
Family Tension

Tension in households influenced parents’ ability to incorporate the program into their daily interactions.

Factors:

- High tension homes
- Transparent homes
- Middle school students
Family Tension (cont.)

- High tension homes

“Well, I was trying to get my daughter to take the parent teach[er] conference paper in, but she was like, ‘No.’ Okay. So that’s your loss. I tell her just like that, ‘That’s your loss…’ I was telling [my son] this morning, ‘If you be absent then, you’re not going to get the money.’ And he just looked at me, ‘But I don’t’ want to go.’ Okay, stay [home] then, don’t ask [me] for money.”
Family Tension (cont.)

- Transparent homes

“Mommy, she tells me, ‘Oh, we need the one for the parents’ teacher conference.’ I have to go through the book and take it out… ‘Oh, we’re going to the doctor tomorrow. Take out the ones for the dentist or for the check-up…’ I’m the one who goes and looks for them for each of us.”
Family Tension (cont.)

• Middle school students and family tension.

“I think [my sister] is receiving more rewards than me… Because I just think so. It just seems like it. When I, like, say when I like watch my little brother, she go to school so she get a reward for [attendance], and [I don’t] you know?”
Summary of Findings

- Parental decisions on how to communicate with their children influenced the child’s understanding of Family Rewards.

- Levels of communication varied from family to family, and were influenced by factors including parenting style and family tension.

- A majority of students reported forgetting about the program at some point.
Policy Implications

Work in progress:
• Spring 2011 publication (Greenberg, Dechausay, and Fraker).
• Final round of interviews with families.

Advice for future CCTs:
• Families may need more guidance on how to explain the program to their children.
• Future designers should consider rewarding more “inputs” related to school preparation over time.
Questions?

Carolyn Fraker
Research Assistant
Carolyn.Fraker@mdrc.org

David Greenberg
Research Associate
David.Greenberg@mdrc.org