INCREASING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM IN ONE URBAN CHARTER SCHOOL

Thesis

Submitted to

The School of Education and Health Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Educational Specialist in School Psychology

By

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Dayton, Ohio

August, 2017

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ABSTRACT

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Parental involvement in education improves students' learning and development (Reece, Staudt, & Ogle, 2013). In spite of this, a number of barriers exist - particularly in low-income, urban areas - which discourage or prevent parents from becoming actively involved. Thus, the current study examined the effectiveness of a parental involvement program, as perceived by stakeholders, in increasing parental involvement in one urban, elementary, charter school. A summative program evaluation was completed; data were gathered through ($n = 48$) parent/guardian and ($n = 10$) teacher and school administrator surveys. Results indicated that stakeholders hold neutral perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the *Classroom Parent Community* (CPC) program. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in education is a multifaceted topic that has provoked much discussion and debate among educators. Parental involvement is the wide-range of home, school, and community activities that parents - and additional caregivers - engage in to improve their child's development and educational outcomes (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Substantial research has shown involvement is integral to students' academic, social-emotional, and behavior outcomes (Reece et al., 2013; Ross, 2016). Researchers, policymakers, and educators acknowledge the critical role that parents play in supporting students' learning and development (Evans & Radina, 2014). However, despite widespread recognition of the importance of these practices, several barriers (including cultural, social, and economic factors) restrict parents' ability to be fully involved (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Reece et al., 2013). Likewise, not all parents are afforded equal opportunity to participate in the educational process. In particular, minority parents with lower income levels are less likely than their high-income, White counterparts to be involved in their child's education (Park & Holloway, 2013). This is particularly important given the differences in academic performance between students from low- and high-income families (Stull, 2013).

In recent years, the state and federal governments have launched initiatives, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), to address barriers to parental involvement in public schools. NCLB was a federal mandate intended to improve student learning and achievement. One important component of the law called upon schools to assist in the mobilization of parental involvement in education (Evans & Radina, 2014; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Furthermore, many schools and school districts offer various activities, events, and programs to encourage the participation of parents in their children's learning within the home and school environments. Educators often use Joyce Epstein's (2006) model of the six types of parental involvement as the framework for these strategies. Although the literature demonstrates the continued need for these parental involvement initiatives, scholars have infrequently examined their effectiveness (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). In addition, more research is needed on parents' perceptions of the benefits of these initiatives. Specifically, data are needed for charter schools located in urban and high-poverty settings (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & Pedro, 2011).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an introduction to Ohio's public charter schools. A discussion of the benefits of parental involvement on student academic achievement, social-emotional development, and behavior outcomes follows. The reasons for lack of parental involvement are considered, as well as parent and educator perceptions of parental involvement. Strategies to increase levels of parental involvement are described followed by a review of parental involvement in urban, charter schools. This discussion provides a foundation for the program evaluation.

Ohio's Public Charter Schools

The definition of public charter schools varies widely from state to state. Public charter schools in Ohio are officially known as "community schools"; however, for the purpose of this study they will be referred to as charter schools (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2015). ODE oversees the state's K-12 charter schools, defined as:

> public nonprofit, nonsectarian schools that operate independently of any school district but under a contract with an authorized sponsoring entity that is established by statute or approved by the State Board of Education. Community schools are public schools of choice and are state and federally funded (p. 5).

Ohio's first charter school law was enacted in 1997 allowing for the creation of charter schools across the state. The charter school concept has since gained tremendous interest by parents, educators, and policymakers. The state of Ohio has more than 395 charter schools (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2014).

CREDO (2014) conducted a study examining the demographics and performance of Ohio's charter schools across eight academic years (2006-2014). Findings revealed that 48% of charter school students are Black, 41% are White, and 5% are Hispanic. CREDO also conducted multiple comparisons of the state's charter schools and traditional public schools. They found that the percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) and students receiving Special Education is comparable across charter schools and traditional public schools. However, charter schools enroll proportionally more students living in poverty (74% of enrolled students) than traditional public schools. Educational researchers use the National School Lunch Program's (NSLP) data on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch as an indirect measure of school poverty. The NSLP's eligibility criteria are based on a student's family-size and income level. A student whose family income falls at or below 185% of the federal poverty line qualifies for reduced-price meals; they qualify for free meals if their family income falls at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (CREDO, 2014).

In Ohio, charter schools are located in a variety of settings- urban, suburban, town, and rural; however, they are typically located in urban areas (68%; CREDO, 2014). Urban charter schools are - by definition - located in large central cities. They generally serve a disproportional number of students in poverty as well as Black students. These students typically make greater academic gains from year to year than their public school

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counterparts; however, they still underperform in the areas of reading and mathematics (CREDO, 2014). In fact, charter school students in urban areas demonstrate, on average, a seven-day learning deficit in a 180-day academic year (CREDO, 2014).

Dayton Early College Academy Preparatory (DECA PREP). DECA PREP is a K-6 urban, charter, elementary school. It receives financial support from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a Race to the Top Innovation grant, and other private contributions (Dayton Early College Academy [DECA], 2014). DECA PREP's mission is to prepare first generation, urban, college students in a tailored and challenging elementary and character-building curriculum that supports their future success in high school and prepares them for college.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, DECA PREP enrolled 445 students. A vast majority, 93.5% of DECA PREP's student body, is comprised of students who are Black (DECA, 2014). Of their total enrollment, 73.9% of students qualified for free and reduced price lunch. It is projected that at least 82% of the students who complete the DECA PREP curriculum will succeed in becoming first generation, college graduates (DECA, 2014).

Benefits of Parental Involvement

In the past two decades, researchers have identified parental involvement as one factor that is positively correlated with students' educational success and learning (Crozier, Rokutani, Russett, Godwin, & Banks, 2010; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Young et al., 2013). Researchers suggest that this is the result of students' perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward and expectations for education. In other words, parental attitudes have a significant effect on students' beliefs about learning and

the impact of those beliefs on their motivation to learn. When parents are involved in their children's learning, they express the value of academics and create a positive learning environment. In turn, these students internalize and legitimize the significance of education (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2013; Young et al., 2013).

Student success is most commonly associated with academic achievement. There is an extensive body of literature documenting the academic benefits for students, including improved school attendance, increased course completion, and higher graduation rates (Lam & Dureux, 2013; Ross, 2016). Consequently, many schools report improved rates of homework completion, grade point averages (GPA), and standardized achievement scores (Crozier et al., 2010; Lam & Dureux, 2013). Students whose parents are involved in their education report higher levels of academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, improving their ability to face challenges in school and in life. These students are also more likely than their peers whose parents are uninvolved to be engaged in school instruction and extracurricular activities, such as academic clubs, recreational sports, and the performing arts (McNeal, 2012).

In addition to academic achievement, parental involvement also appears to have a direct effect on social-emotional development and behavior outcomes (Young et al., 2013). Researchers have consistently found a positive relationship between parental involvement practices and students' locus of control, emotional stability, and connectedness to school. These factors contribute to students' positive self-evaluation, which in part affects their level of happiness and life-satisfaction (Lam & Ducreux, 2013). Involvement can also lay the foundation for parents' communication with educators. When parents have positive relationships with educators, parents promote

appropriate social skills and behaviors (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). As a result, students

are more likely to engage in healthy interactions with educators and to have strong

relationships with their peers (Lowe & Dotterer, 2013). Other studies have found that

parent-educator relationships can improve school climate and prevent and reduce

students' challenging behaviors (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; McCormick et al., 2013).

Collaboration between parents and educators allows for problem behaviors to be

addressed in both the home and school environments (El Nokali et al., 2010).

Consequently, involvement is associated with fewer instances of insubordination and

disciplinary referrals (Lam & Ducreux, 2013).

Reasons for Lack of Parental Involvement

Despite the clear benefits of parental involvement, numerous barriers can limit

parents' capacity to become involved in their child's education (Bartel, 2010; Ludicke &

Kortman, 2012). Schools, educators, and even parents can intentionally or unintentionally

create and reinforce these barriers. One of the most commonly cited reasons for parents

not becoming involved is the cultural difference between parents and educators.

Dissimilar norms and values can lead to miscommunication, mistrust, and tension (Bartel,

2010). This can occur when educators do not establish clear expectations and guidelines

for involvement practices. Studies also suggest that educators sometimes assume that

parents are members of a homogeneous group; they are viewed as the same or similar to

other parents instead of as individuals who have differing experiences, cultural beliefs,

and linguistic backgrounds (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). These factors affect how and

why parents choose to support their child's learning. Involvement is greatly influenced by

educators' ability to acknowledge, respect, and embrace the diverse backgrounds of parents.

Many researchers have investigated the social and economic factors that restrict levels of parental involvement in their child's education. Educators are more apt to make negative assumptions about parents whose thinking and behaving differs from schools' values. Despite good intentions, educators often view minority parents with lower income levels through a deficit lens. The "deficit model" posits that parents and their children have particular needs and that educators (and schools) should focus on remediating these problems (Rattigan-Rohr, He, Murphy, & Knight, 2014). Educators view parents' lack of participation as evidence of lack of interest in their children's education. Parents are also often perceived as lacking resources (e.g., experience, education, and monetary resources) required to support learning within home and school environments. Some educators disregard contextual factors that hinder parents' ability to participate, such as working multiple shifts, being a single parent, and living in poverty (Smith et al., 2011). Educators focus their efforts on how they can change the ways in which parents choose to participate.

Literature suggests that the "reactive hypothesis" negatively affects educators' interactions with parents (McCormick et al., 2013; McNeal, 2012). This theory asserts that communication between parents and educators often only occurs to address students' academic difficulties, behavior problems, and disciplinary actions (McCormick et al., 2013). In these instances, parents perceive educators' reactive, rather than proactive, communication as less meaningful (Bartel, 2010). As a result, reactive parent-educator

communication is predictive of lower levels of future parental involvement. The reactive

hypothesis more often holds true in high-need, urban schools (McNeal, 2012).

Perceptions of Parental Involvement

There are many challenges associated with parental involvement in education.

Even so, both parents and educators have congruent and positive views of the value of

involvement. Parental involvement is seen as an important factor in supporting students'

learning and future success (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). In spite of this, a disconnect

exists between parents' and educators' ideas of parental involvement across both home

and school environments. Research has suggested that this is due in part to dissimilarities

in parents' and educators' role construction and the actions that they take (Bartel, 2010).

Thus, to overcome obstacles to parental involvement, parents' and educators' beliefs

about participation must be understood.

Parent perceptions. The contexts of parents' lives influence their attitudes and

support for their child's learning. Contextual factors include culture, socioeconomic

status, and educational background. Parents' perceived self-confidence, time, and energy

impact how and why they become involved in their child's education (Bartel, 2010).

Parents' beliefs are also shaped by the context of their child's school (e.g., geographic

location, school climate, nature of parental expectations). When parents feel welcomed,

supported, and valued by educators they are more likely to be involved in their child's

school (Cardona, Jain, & Canfield-Davis, 2012). Educators can communicate the

importance of parental involvement by specifically inviting parents to participate in their

child's education through face-to-face interactions, written exchanges, and verbal

communication.

Parents feel empowered when educators provide them with various opportunities to participate within their child's school and are able to share experiences with other parents (Christianakis, 2011). Research has suggested that parents often believe that their primary responsibilities are to make sure that their child arrives at school on time, provide homework assistance, and disclose their child's medical history and family background to educators (Bartel, 2010). Conversely, parents are less likely to accept responsibilities that are not directly related to their child's success, such as interacting with other parents and making sure that the school has the needed resources and support.

Educator perceptions. Likewise, educators' backgrounds influence their perceptions and practices toward parental involvement. Such background variables include educators' educator preparation programs, prior interactions with parents, and educational philosophies. Educators' beliefs are also influenced by their feelings of preparedness for working with parents. Scholars suggest that educators might express high verbal support for parental involvement, but in reality, fail to reduce or remove the most common barriers that prevent involvement (e.g., language barriers, work schedule conflicts, and lack of childcare; Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik, 2012). Further, educators oftentimes do not believe that parents play an equal role in the education of students; thus, educators do not form collaborative partnerships with parents (Christianakis, 2011).

Many educators view parent relationships as an obligation, but also as a tool for improving student achievement (Young et al., 2013). Educators are motivated to support parental involvement in activities that are beneficial to the entire school. However, they are not motivated to invite parents to take part in school decision-making or other activities that might lead to their ongoing presence in the school (Smith et al., 2011).

Educators perceive positive parental involvement as participation in activities that reinforce, practice, and support learning in the home environment (Christianakis, 2011). Educators also expect that parents will communicate important information about their child's background, medical history, and individual needs to the school (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). Educators tend to view highly involved parents as the standard. For example, they expect every parent to be accessible, flexible, and generous in their ability to help in their child's classroom. When parents are unable to meet these demands, educators view them as disinterested.

Improving Levels of Parental Involvement in School

A growing body of empirical literature suggests that applying Epstein's (2006) model of six types of parental involvement is effective in improving levels of participation in education. Epstein's model is based on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence- whereby families, educators, and other members of the community have a direct effect on students' learning and development. Educators often use this model as a framework for creating, implementing, and evaluating parental involvement initiatives (Smith et al., 2011). Epstein's model distinguishes six types of parental involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community.

Involvement type 1: Parenting. The first type of involvement, parenting, refers to parents meeting the basic needs of their children (e.g., health, safety) and establishing supportive home learning environments (Smith et al., 2011). Other responsibilities related to this type of involvement include parents providing their children with adequate clothing, nutrition, housing, and transportation. Educators can support parents with

meeting their child's basic needs by providing them with information on the availability of community-based resources, parent-training programs, and family support groups (Robbins & Searby, 2013).

Involvement type 2: Communication. Communication refers to parents interacting with educators in order to support their children's progress in school (Bartel, 2010). Parents share relevant information with educators about their child's health history and family background. Parents also share their educational aspirations and expectations. Educators can encourage communication by offering parents a variety of ways to exchange information with them. For example, parents can communicate through email, notes, in-person, or by phone call (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).

Involvement type 3: Volunteering. The third type of involvement, volunteering, refers to when parents assist educators, students, and other parents in the classroom or in other school-related activities (Smith et al., 2011). It also refers to parents' attendance at student demonstrations, art performances, sporting events, and other programs. Educators can increase volunteerism by surveying parents to identify volunteer interests, skills, and availability (LaRocque et al., 2011). Educators can also recruit, organize, and train parent volunteers (Smith et al., 2011).

Involvement type 4: Learning at home. Learning at home refers to the activities that parents engage in to support their children's learning outside of the regular school day (Young et al., 2013). Activities that parents engage in include helping their children with homework and other curriculum content areas, setting academic goals, and coordinating trips to local libraries and museums (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Educators can improve learning at home by providing workshops to parents that increase

their skills, knowledge, and self-confidence with guiding their children's learning (Siddiqui, 2011).

Involvement type 5: Decision-making. The fifth type of involvement, decision-making, refers to parent participation in educational decisions and school governance that impacts students' education (Smith et al., 2011). Parents participate in this type of involvement when they take an active role on committees, advocacy councils, and parent organizations at the school, district, and state levels (Siddiqui, 2011). Educators can increase parental involvement in decision-making by extending an invitation to parents to participate (Bartel, 2010).

Involvement type 6: Collaborating with the community. Collaborating with the community is the final type of involvement and refers to when parents employ community resources to support their children's learning and development (Smith et al., 2011). Parents connect their children with community health services, recreational activities, arts and culture events, and faith-based programs. Educators can increase collaboration between parents and the community by coordinating wraparound services focused on the health and safety of children and their families (Siddiqui, 2011; Smith et al., 2011).

Parental Involvement in Urban Charter Schools

Educators have historically assumed that urban charter school parents are more involved than traditional public school parents in their child's education (Smith et al., 2011). Specifically, educators believe that a parent's choice to enroll their child in a school outside of their local school district is predictive of increased participation (Smith et al., 2011). However, in many instances this is not the case. Scholars suggest that

parents often believe that their choice to send their child to a charter school, without their continued involvement, is sufficient to guarantee future academic success (Okado, Bierman, & Welsh, 2014). Moreover, urban charter schools typically serve low-income, minority families. This population is more likely to experience risk factors associated with unpredictable and chaotic home environments. Examples include financial hardships, poor living conditions, single-parent households, and social isolation within their communities. Risk factors increase stress of daily life and reduce nurturing and parenting capabilities, including involvement in their child's education.

Most urban charter schools incorporate school-level policies for developing and strengthening parental involvement (Smith et al., 2011). Policies that encourage parental participation in their child's learning and school-related activities are actively implemented to reduce barriers between home and school environments. Urban charter schools' parental involvement practices typically differ from those seen in traditional public schools. For example, parent-educator contracts are used to enforce parents' participation. Many charter schools also require that parents attend a predetermined number of education programs (Smith et al., 2011). However, studies suggest that even with innovative strategies, many urban charter schools struggle to build connections and sustain relationships with parents.

Program Evaluation

There is a growing interest in the use of program evaluation to understand and improve educational practices. In education, it is a valuable tool for evaluating programs, services, and policies in a comprehensive and meaningful way (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Before a program evaluation is conducted, it is necessary to identify

key stakeholders, understand their needs and interests, and determine the type of evaluation to be used (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). In the current program evaluation, the stakeholders included parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators. The stakeholders' needs included determining the effectiveness of the *Classroom Parent Community* (CPC) program in increasing parental involvement in their child's education. The researcher employed a summative program evaluation to determine the perceived effectiveness of the CPC program. The researcher also made suggestions for modifying the CPC program and for educators planning future parental education programs.

The Present Study

Over the past two decades, considerable research has documented the different factors that increase parental involvement in education; however, there is limited research on the effectiveness of parent education programs in urban, charter schools (Smith et al., 2011). Thus, the current program evaluation examined the effectiveness of the CPC program, as perceived by stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators), in increasing parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter describes the current study's research question and prediction. Furthermore, the research design, participants and setting, and procedures are discussed.

Research Question and Prediction

Research question. What is the effectiveness of the *Classroom Parent Community* (CPC) program, as perceived by stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators), in increasing parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school?

Prediction. It was predicted that stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators) would perceive the CPC program as effective in increasing levels of parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school. This prediction was based on literature suggesting that school-initiated education programs provide parent participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to become involved in their child's education (Reece et al., 2013).

Research Design

The current study employed a summative program evaluation design in order to provide DECA PREP with information on stakeholders' perceptions regarding the CPC program's effectiveness in increasing parental involvement in their child's education. The

primary purpose of a summative evaluation is to assess the outcomes and efficacy of a program; stakeholders typically use it to help make programmatic decisions about an existent program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). The researcher selected this design for the study, over an experimental design, because DECA PREP implemented the CPC program prior to the researcher's involvement and it was not possible to randomly assign participants to control or treatment groups. Further, the researcher chose this type of evaluation to help stakeholders make decisions about the continuation, expansion, or modification of the program. The evaluation used surveys as the data collection method, resulting in quantitative data.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this program evaluation included ($n = 48$) parents/guardians and ($n = 10$) teachers and school administrators who were considered stakeholders in the CPC program at DECA PREP during the months of August 2015 through May 2016. The purpose of this evaluation was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceived level of effectiveness of the program among stakeholders. Participants were selected by convenience sampling based on the voluntary submission of the paper-based survey that was distributed by the researcher to parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators at DECA PREP in May 2016. This yielded a response rate of 12% for parents/guardians and 42% for teachers and school administrators.

The CPC program consisted of 10 monthly one-hour group-based parent education classes facilitated by teachers at DECA PREP. At least one parent/guardian of each student was required to attend eight or more classes per academic year in accordance with the enrollment contract established between the school, students, and

parents/guardians. DECA PREP is a K-6 charter school located in Dayton, Ohio. Dayton is a city in the Midwestern region of the United States. The city has a total population of 140,599 (United States Census Bureau, 2015a). DECA PREP is a medium-sized school enrolling approximately 450 students or more each academic year (DECA, 2014). The percentage of DECA PREP's families living in poverty (73.8%) is significantly higher than the state of Ohio's average of 14.8% (DECA, 2014; United States Census Bureau, 2015b). Further, it is estimated that only 18% of students' parents at DECA PREP have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher (e.g., master's degree, doctoral degree).

Materials

The researcher designed two paper-based survey instruments to measure the effectiveness of the CPC program, as perceived by stakeholders, in increasing parental involvement in education. One instrument was distributed to parents/guardians (see Appendix A), and included nine Likert-type scale items and one qualitative item. The instrument was used to measure program satisfaction (item 1), perceived usefulness (items 2, 3, 4, and 5), and changes in frequency of parental involvement-related behaviors (items 6, 7, 8, and 9). It was also used to identify topics of interest for future CPC program classes (item 10). The other instrument was distributed to teachers and school administrators (see Appendix B), and consisted of five Likert-type scale items that focused on program usefulness. Both surveys were brief in order to improve the response rate. To evaluate the validity and reliability of the survey instruments, the surveys were pilot tested and changes were made based on the recommendations of ($n = 10$) school psychology students at the University of Dayton. Based on these recommendations, several survey items were reworded to improve clarity and understanding. In addition,

other minor changes were made to the visual layout of the surveys, including font size and spacing.

Procedures

Phase I: Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The researcher received approval from the IRB at the University of Dayton to conduct this study before recruitment and data collection. The researcher also received permission from the superintendent of DECA PREP (see Appendix C).

Phase II: Participant recruitment and consent. Recruitment of parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators occurred through word of mouth and face-to-face interactions. The researcher provided information to potential participants on the general purpose of the evaluation, risks and benefits of their participation, and the researcher's availability to answer any questions or concerns. The researcher also informed individuals that their participation was voluntary, and submission of the completed survey would indicate their consent to participate in the evaluation. The researcher assured individuals that their responses would remain confidential and reported only in the aggregate form. Further, the survey would not collect personally identifiable information. Completed surveys were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office.

Phase III: Data collection. Data collection occurred through paper-based surveys administered between May 2016 and June 2016. The researcher distributed surveys to parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators during the final CPC program class of the 2015-2016 academic year. The researcher instructed individuals to return their completed surveys in the envelope provided to DECA PREP's front office within a 2-

week period. At the end of the process, the researcher analyzed the data and shared

evaluation results with the superintendent of DECA PREP.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the methods used to analyze the information gathered from the surveys. Furthermore, the results to the proposed research question are presented.

Research Question

What is the effectiveness of the Classroom Parent Community (CPC) program, as perceived by stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators), in increasing parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school?

It was predicted that stakeholders would perceive the CPC program as effective in increasing levels of parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school.

This prediction was evaluated using two researcher generated survey instruments that measured stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of the CPC program in increasing parental involvement in education. As discussed in Chapter 3, parents/guardians completed a 10-item survey after the last class of the CPC program for the 2015-2016 academic year. Five items reflected respondents' satisfaction with and the perceived usefulness of the CPC program. Respondents were asked to rate their level of

agreement with statements using a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Four items on the survey focused on respondents' perceptions of changes in the frequency of their parental involvement-related behaviors following participation in the CPC program. Responses were organized on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*much less often*) to 5 (*much more often*). A final item asked respondents to identify additional topics of interest for future sessions; however, this item was excluded from analysis due to a 0% completion rate. Teachers and school administrators completed a separate survey, after the last CPC class, which contained five items that assessed perceived usefulness of the program. All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Data from returned surveys were entered into Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS; Boyer, McFarland, Zajicek, & Waliczek, 2011). Thereafter, the researcher calculated descriptive statistics in order to compute the response percentages, means, and standard deviations of each survey item for the total sample. Survey items with mean scores at or above 3.50 were interpreted as *positive* perceptions of the effectiveness of the CPC program. Those with mean scores between 2.50 to 3.49 were interpreted as *neutral* perceptions. Mean scores at or below 2.49 were interpreted as *negative* perceptions of program effectiveness. Table 1 and Table 2 display the descriptive statistics for responses of ($n = 48$) parents/guardians to survey items. The composite mean score for all nine items was 3.20 ($SD = 0.41$), which indicates that respondents were neutral in their perceptions of the effectiveness of the CPC program in increasing parental involvement. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for ($n = 10$)

teacher and school administrator survey items. The composite mean score for all five items was 3.48 ($SD = 0.64$). This mean score indicates that respondents were neutral in their perceptions of program effectiveness.

Table 1

Parent/Guardian Level of Agreement for Each Survey Item

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1 I enjoyed participating in the program	4%	15%	25%	42%	15%	3.48	1.05
2 Class topics related to my needs and situation	8%	15%	35%	35%	6%	3.17	1.04
3 The program helped me to better understand the importance of parental involvement	6%	17%	23%	27%	27%	3.52	1.24
4 The program offered helpful suggestions to support my child's learning	4%	19%	38%	35%	4%	3.17	0.93
5 I now have more confidence as a parent to become involved in my child's school and academic work	8%	27%	40%	17%	8%	2.90	1.06

Table 2

Parent/Guardian Perceived Level of Behavioral Change for Each Survey Item

Survey Item	Much Less Often	Less Often	The Same	More Often	Much More Often	Mean	SD
6 Heard by my child's teacher	4%	8%	31%	33%	23%	3.63	1.06
7 Volunteer at my child's school	17%	13%	48%	23%	0%	2.77	0.99
8 Help my child with homework	2%	4%	40%	35%	19%	3.65	0.91
9 Participate in decision making related to my child's education	21%	15%	58%	6%	0%	2.50	0.90

Table 3

Teacher and School Administrator Level of Agreement for Each Survey Item

	Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1	The program has helped to improve my attitude toward parents	10%	20%	20%	40%	10%	3.20	1.23
2	The program has helped to improve my engagement with parents as partners	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%	4.00	0.82
3	The program has helped to improve my relationship with my students' parents	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%	4.00	0.82
4	I am satisfied with the current level of parental involvement	20%	40%	20%	10%	10%	2.50	1.27
5	I would suggest this program to other schools	0%	0%	40%	50%	10%	3.70	0.67

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Review of Purpose and Major Findings

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effectiveness of the

Classroom Parent Community (CPC) program, as perceived by stakeholders

(parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators), in increasing parental

involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary, charter school. To

date, few studies have examined the effectiveness of parent education programs in charter

schools located in high-poverty settings (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Smith et al., 2011;

Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Results from the current program evaluation

indicated that stakeholders held *neutral* perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the

CPC program.

Interpretation of Findings Relative to Predictions

Overall, the results of this study did not support the researcher's prediction that

stakeholders would perceive the CPC program as effective in increasing parental

involvement in their child's education. Stakeholders were neutral in their perceptions of

the overall effectiveness of the program. However, despite their generally neutral views,

stakeholders reported positive, negative, *and* neutral perceptions toward various aspects

of the CPC program. Researchers have suggested that analysis of individual items on a

survey can provide a deeper and more accurate understanding of respondents' feelings about a program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004).

In this study, results of item analysis revealed that 6 out of 10 respondents to the teacher and school administrator survey indicated that they would recommend the CPC program to other schools. The results also revealed that the majority (54%) of respondents to the parent/guardian survey reported greater understanding of the importance of being involved in their child's education after participating in the CPC program. According to Bartel (2010), effective parent education programs help parents to see the critical role they play in shaping their child's future academic and occupational success.

Several survey items measured stakeholders' perceptions of changes in frequency of specific parental involvement-related behaviors following participation in the CPC program. Over half, 54%, of parent/guardian respondents reported an increase in frequency of behavior with regard to helping their child with homework. Perhaps this is the result of the various CPC program materials and activities that encouraged home-based parent-child learning (e.g., materials on homework policies, information about skills required at each grade level, and ideas related to learning styles). This finding coincides with previous research suggesting that parent education programs increase participants' self-confidence to become more involved in their child's learning in the home environment (Siddiqui, 2011).

An important component of the CPC program was to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. Survey responses revealed that the majority (56%) of parent/guardian respondents felt that teachers acknowledged their input more often after program

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completion. Similarly, nearly 70% of teacher and school administrator respondents reported that the CPC program helped to improve their relationships and engagement with parents. In contrast, half of these respondents reported that the CPC program did not help to improve their attitudes toward parents. In addition, 60% of teacher and school administrator respondents indicated that they remained unsatisfied with the current level of parental involvement.

Interestingly, a high number of parent/guardian respondents (75%) reported no difference or a decrease in level of confidence in becoming involved in their child's school after participating in the CPC program. This finding differs from earlier studies (Graf, Grumm, Hein, & Fingerle, 2014; Wright & Wooden, 2013), which found that parent education programs increase participants' sense of competence. A plausible explanation for this decrease or no change in confidence is that parents/guardians may conclude that if they need to be educated on the skills and knowledge required for effective involvement then they are likely lacking those skills. It is possible that the mandatory nature of the CPC program created feelings of inadequacy or inability among participants with regard to their involvement in school. Wright and Wood (2013) have suggested that positioning parents/guardians as deficient can lead to lower parenting self-efficacy.

Finally, the majority of parent/guardian respondents in the present study reported no change or a decrease in frequency of behaviors related to school volunteering (78%) and decision-making (94%) after participating in the CPC program. Both parental involvement activities require parents' physical presence in their child's classroom or school. Thus, these findings may be attributed, in part, to various barriers such as lack of

time or transportation, though this was not explored in the current evaluation. Another possible explanation for these findings is that participants learned other, more desirable ways to become involved in their child's education through participation in the CPC program.

Limitations

While the current study provided valuable information for the stakeholders in the CPC program, it was not without limitations. One limitation was that the study employed a summative program evaluation design, which restricted the ability to generalize findings beyond the current program. Because the CPC program was implemented prior to the researcher's involvement, the researcher was unable to use control and treatment groups. As a result, findings cannot establish a cause-and-effect relationship.

A second limitation was that the researcher used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, to recruit participants. This presented another threat to the generalizability of the results. Participants self-selected themselves for the study based on the voluntary submission of a survey. Since participants were not chosen at random, there was a high possibility that the sample was unrepresentative of non-respondents and the larger population from which it was drawn. Data were limited to stakeholders willing and able to complete the survey. It was possible that non-respondents had more favorable opinions of and experiences with the CPC program than those who participated in the study. Stakeholders who were satisfied with the program may have felt less inclined to share their opinions.

A further limitation of the study was that it relied on self-report. Self-report data are especially vulnerable to social desirability response bias (Mertens, 2015). This

phenomenon refers to the tendency of people to answer questioning in a manner believed to be viewed most favorably by others, rather than providing a truthful response. Therefore, data may not be a reliable measure of respondents' perceptions.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Findings of the current study suggest directions for future research. First, evaluators could expand this study by conducting a long-term and more thorough evaluation of the CPC program. This study explored key stakeholders' perceptions of the program's effectiveness in improving parental involvement in their child's education. Key stakeholders were identified as parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators. In the future, evaluators could also include the voices of students and community members. Furthermore, evaluators could conduct follow-up interviews with survey respondents. This would give respondents the opportunity to reflect upon, clarify, and expand their previous responses.

Second, it is suggested that future research on the effectiveness of the CPC program, and other parental involvement programs, be conducted using an experimental research design. Such a design would allow the researcher to make causal claims and would allow for the generalizability of results. This study examined a parental involvement program within one urban, elementary, charter school. Future research could include the replication of this study with different types of schools including charter schools, traditional public schools, and private schools. Studies suggest that parental involvement decreases as students move into higher grades (Ferrara, 2015). Future research could also examine the effectiveness of parental involvement programs across different grade levels.

In addition to implications for future research, the findings of this study suggest several implications for practice. One implication to consider is that a parent education program may only be effective in improving certain types of parental involvement. For example, findings suggest that the CPC program was effective in increasing parental involvement in homework, but not in school volunteering. Schools must also consider alternative ways in which parents may become involved in supporting their children's learning. Schools should promote a variety of involvement activities that require varying levels of commitment at different times of day. Another implication is that schools must accept that parent education programs may not reach all parents. Parents may remain uninvolved or uninterested in their children's learning for reasons outside of a school's control (e.g., work schedule conflict, lack of childcare). In an effort to improve the CPC program, it is recommended that DECA PREP continually gather feedback from key stakeholders. Feedback helps to ensure that participants view the program as being relevant and important. It can also reveal whether the CPC program could benefit from modifications. Further, eliciting feedback provides evidence that the school values stakeholders' knowledge and opinions as a critical component of a successful program.

Conclusion

Parental involvement plays an important role in students' future success (Crozier et al., 2010). Research has shown a clear link between parental involvement and students' academic, social-emotional, and behavior outcomes (Lam & Dureux, 2013; Young et al., 2013). Thus, the current study examined the effectiveness of the CPC program, as perceived by stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators), in increasing parental involvement in their child's education within an urban, elementary,

charter school. The findings indicated that stakeholders hold neutral perceptions of the

overall effectiveness of the CPC program. Further research on the CPC program, and

other parent education programs, is needed to provide information to schools on effective

programming.

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DECA PREP - Parent Academy

Please take a few minutes to complete the survey below to help us improve the Classroom Parent Community program. Your responses are confidential.

Directions: Rate your level of agreement with the following statements. Circle the appropriate number.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I enjoyed participating in the program.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Class topics related to my needs and situation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The program helped me to better understand the importance of parent involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The program offered helpful suggestions to support my child's learning.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I now have more confidence as a parent to become involved in my child's school and academic work.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Think about each statement and any application you were able to make AFTER participating in the classes. Circle the appropriate number.

	Much Less Often	Less Often	The Same	More Often	Much More Often

6.	Heard by my child's teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Volunteer at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Help my child with homework.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Participate in decision making related to my child's education (e.g., parent-teacher conference, PTO).	1	2	3	4	5

10. List three topics you would like to see covered in the program next year.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Thank you for your feedback!

APPENDIX B

TEACHER AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

DECA PREP - Parent Academy

Please complete this brief survey below to help us improve the Classroom Parent Community program. There are 5 questions, and it should take about 5 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Directions: Rate your level of agreement with the following statements. Circle the appropriate number.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The program has helped to improve my attitude toward parents.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The program has helped to improve my engagement with parents as partners.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The program has helped to improve my relationship with my students' parents.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am satisfied with the current level of parental involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I would suggest this program to other schools.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your feedback!

APPENDIX C

IRB MATERIALS AND CONSENT LETTERS

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON - PARENT/GUARDIAN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Research Project Title: Increasing Parental Involvement: The Effectiveness of a Parent Education Program in One Urban Charter School

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by Lauren Evans from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Counselor Education & Health Sciences.

The purpose of the project is: Literature has identified parental involvement – both inside and outside of the classroom – as a key factor in increasing student achievement. Thus, the current study will investigate the effectiveness of a parental involvement program in improving participation within one urban, elementary, charter school. Through the use of a summative program evaluation, surveys will be conducted based on the perceptions of stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators).

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 10 minutes.

- You will not be compensated for your participation.

- All of the information you tell us will be confidential.

- Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.

- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Researcher: Lauren Evans, evansl2@udayton.edu,740-815-0958

Faculty advisor: Susan Davies, sdavies1@udayton.edu, 937-229-3652

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Candise Powell, J.D., Chair of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Dayton, IRB@udayton.edu; Phone: (937) 229-3515.

**UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON – TEACHER/SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR INVITATION
TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Research Project Title: Increasing Parental Involvement: The Effectiveness of a Parent Education Program in One Urban Charter School

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by Lauren Evans from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Counselor Education & Health Sciences.

The purpose of the project is: Literature has identified parental involvement – both inside and outside of the classroom – as a key factor in increasing student achievement. Thus, the current study will investigate the effectiveness of a parental involvement program in improving participation within one urban, elementary, charter school. Through the use of a summative program evaluation, surveys will be conducted based on the perceptions of stakeholders (parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators).

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 5 minutes.

- You will not be compensated for your participation.

- All of the information you tell us will be confidential.

- Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.

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Faculty advisor: Susan Davies, sdavies1@udayton.edu, 937-229-3652

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Candise Powell, J.D., Chair of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Dayton, IRB@udayton.edu; Phone: (937) 229-3515.

District Consent Form

University IRB Office:

As Superintendent, I have given Lauren Evans permission to conduct her research in DECA Prep. I have spoke with Lauren and understand the scope of her research and how she will collect and present her data. All information to be gathered will be done in a confidential and appropriate manner.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judy Hennessey
Superintendent, CEO