

# PARENTS ONBOARD: THE BENEFITS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMMING

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown significant correlations between increased parental involvement and satisfaction in K-12 education. The current study aims to analyze this trend utilizing secondary data collected from a 21st Century Community Learning Center, an organization that provides after-school care in communities with higher poverty rates. This study used purposive sampling via survey distributions to measure the participation and program satisfaction of 376 parents in an after-school program with a large population of Hispanic individuals. The findings of this study align with previous research, which indicate a positive correlation between parental engagement and parental satisfaction in after-school programs. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Children's learning experiences are heavily influenced by their surrounding environment, including their home, school, and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Children's social experiences, such as their interactions with their parents, are important in aiding their development. While parents contribute a lot of early learning experiences to their children, teachers and educators later play a vital role in continuing the children's learning experiences as the child is enrolled in school (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Oftentimes, children will spend most of their weeks in school under the supervision of a teacher, and if the parents are occupied after school hours, the children may be enrolled in an after-school program. This

introduces another social source of learning in the children's experiences. As children begin to engage in more learning activities, and education takes place in both their homes and schools, a relationship between the children, parents, and teachers begins to form. The aim of this study is to address how parental involvement in an after-school program may influence parents' satisfaction.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement in education has been significantly linked to improved student outcomes (Comer & Haynes, 1991). From various studies, parental engagement has led to improved test scores and positive behaviors (Cervantes et al., 2018, Cooper et al., 2020). Recent studies have also demonstrated the positive impact that parental engagement has in after-school programs, giving insight into its potential to serve as a tool for students to grow academically beyond the traditional classroom (Cooper et al, 2020; Stott et al., 2017). By being involved in after-school program activities, parents are more involved in their child's education and can provide direct assistance to their child's academics. Research also shows a trend in increased parent involvement and parent satisfaction, as parents have more knowledge of their educational experiences and can contribute to their child's education (Cooper et al., 2020; Stott et al., 2017).

However, previous findings on parental involvement and satisfaction in after-school programs are limited as the majority of the literature focuses on the traditional K-12 school system and there are very few findings on community programs that serve a more diverse population. The current findings suggest that parents with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to be involved in their child's education, compared to parents who have lower SES (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Shao et al., 2022). This leads to lower satisfaction in parents with lower SES, as they do not see similar positive impacts on their child's academic progress. It is important to note that parents with lower SES may not have the

time, opportunity, or resources that will allow them to be more involved. While these findings align with the current trend that higher involvement correlates to higher satisfaction, parents of diverse backgrounds in predominantly White areas have reported the opposite effect (Wallace, 2013). As parents become more involved with the school, they begin to notice that the resources and opportunities available do not tailor to their child's experiences. When they speak up about it to the school administrator, they are told that the resources are already in place, or that they are going against the school system (Carreón et al., 2022). This leads to a pushback in their satisfaction as they feel their feedback is not welcomed.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The School-Family-Community Partnership Model is a framework that explains how the interpersonal relationships of the community influence children's learning experiences (Epstein et al., 2018). There are six types of involvement in the framework, however, this paper will focus on two types: collaborating with the community and volunteering. Collaborating with the community refers to utilizing the resources available and integrating them within the school systems (Epstein et al., 2018). The after-school program that participated in this study is a community program, a part of the 21st Century Learning Center. The program was designed to serve children in low-income areas outside of school hours by providing additional educational opportunities (Office of Elementary & Secondary Education,



2023). Through community programs, families participating in the program are able to receive resources and care that are accommodating to their situation. This allows for the community to work with both the teachers and families, and parents of participating children have a voice in the program. The second type of involvement is volunteering, in which the schools recruit parents to assist with events and programs (Epstein et al., 2018). By involving parents in the ongoing curriculums, parents are able to actively engage in their children's education in schools. The parent's perspective on their child's learning experiences and progress is crucial in understanding the parent's satisfaction, as parents are hoping to see a positive impact on their child's education.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to bridge the gap in the literature, this study aims to investigate parent involvement and satisfaction in an after-school community program by analyzing their satisfaction ratings. This study investigated parent satisfaction with the overall program and perceived child’s satisfaction. Parent satisfaction aimed to measure the extent to which the parents are satisfied with the services and staff. Perceived child’s satisfaction measured the satisfaction level of the child through the parent’s perspective.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is there a significant correlation between parental involvement and how parents rate the quality of the after-school programs?
- Is there a significant correlation between parental involvement and perceived child’s satisfaction among parents of after-school programs?

Data collection for the present study was previously collected from 10 learning centers in the Greater Houston, Texas area that are part of a 21st Century Learning Center. The sampling plan was a purposive convenience sample, where Site Coordinators invited all available and willing parents to complete the

survey during a selected two-week period. According to the Texas Education Agency (2022), these 10 schools serviced a high population of Hispanic, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and Economically disadvantaged students (see Table 1). The survey was created using the online software, Qualtrics, and was developed by an external evaluator. There were a total of 21 questions, however, for the purpose of this paper, only five questions were analyzed (see Table 2). The evaluator sent each of the site coordinators at the 10 schools. Each site coordinator oversaw distributing the survey to the parents via email or QR code. The survey obtained hundreds of responses from parents (n=376) for the 2021-2022 year.

Table 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR THE 10 SCHOOLS

| CAMPUS  | HISPANIC | ECODIS | LEP   |
|---------|----------|--------|-------|
| A       | 98.1%    | 97.1%  | 55.0% |
| B       | 87.0%    | 88.6%  | 50.9% |
| C       | 68.3%    | 90.9%  | 40.5% |
| D       | 46.8%    | 84.0%  | 21.7% |
| E       | 94.0%    | 97.7%  | 42.1% |
| F       | 99.7%    | 97.7%  | 40.0% |
| G       | 66.9%    | 93.1%  | 23.0% |
| H       | 72.4%    | 81.3%  | 39.4% |
| I       | 82.6%    | 89.4%  | 54.1% |
| J       | 93.1%    | 97.0%  | 87.9% |
| Average | 80.9%    | 91.3%  | 45.5% |

Table 2.

**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

| CATEGORY                     | ITEM | QUESTION                                                                           | RATINGS       |
|------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Parental Involvement         | 1    | Did you attend any ACE parent activities this school year?                         | 1 = Yes       |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 0 = No        |
| Perceived child satisfaction | 2    | My child(ren): Enjoy attending the after-school program                            | 4 = A Lot     |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 3 = Some      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 2 = A Little  |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 1 = None      |
| Perceived child satisfaction | 3    | My child(ren): Have an improved attitude toward school since attending the program | 4 = A Lot     |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 3 = Some      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 2 = A Little  |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 1 = None      |
| Parental Rating of Program   | 4    | Please rate the quality of program staff                                           | 4 = Excellent |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 3 = Good      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 2 = Okay      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 1 = Poor      |
| Parental Rating of Program   | 5    | Please rate the quality of program overall                                         | 4 = Excellent |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 3 = Good      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 2 = Okay      |
|                              |      |                                                                                    | 1 = Poor      |

Considering the nature of the data as ordinal responses to Likert-scale survey questions, a nonparametric test was preferred over a parametric test. As a result, an Independent Sample Mann-Whitney U Test with the alpha of .05 was utilized to examine if parental involvement is significantly correlated with perceived child satisfaction and parental rating of the after-school program. This analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V29.0.1.0) Software.

## RESULTS

To measure the level of parental involvement, this study utilized the survey question “Did you attend any parental activities this school?” This variable is a binary “yes/no” variable which simply asks the parents if they were able to attend at least one event in the after-school program their child is attending. Roughly 73% (n = 275) of parents who completed the survey provided a response to this question and were examined in this study. To measure perceived child satisfaction results, the variables “My child(ren) have an improved attitude toward school since attending the program” and “My Child(ren) enjoy attending the

after-school program” will be utilized. Both variables are measured on a scale from 1-4, where 1= None, 2= A little, 3= Some and, 4= A Lot.” A Cronbach’s Alpha test was ran using SPSS for this subscale, resulting in  $\alpha = .78$ .

A Mann -Whitney U test was performed to evaluate whether perceived child satisfaction differed by parental involvement. The results indicate that parents who participated in an after-school program activity reported higher scores in response to “My children enjoy attending the after-school program” in comparison to parents who did not participate in at least one activity,  $z = (-2.42)$ ,  $p = (.015)$ . Similarly, shows parents who participated in an

after-school activity reported higher scores in response to “my children have an improve attitude towards school since attending the program” compared to parents who did not participate,  $z = (-3.65)$ ,  $p = (<.001)$ .

To measure parental rating of the after-school program, this study utilized two variables – “Quality of program staff” and “Quality of program overall.” Both questions were measured on a 4-point scale, where 1= Poor, 2=Okay, 3=Good and 4=Excellent.” A Cronbach’s Alpha test was ran using SPSS for this subscale, resulting in  $\alpha = .83$ . A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to evaluate whether a parent’s “Quality of program overall” rating differed by parental involvement. The results indicated that parents who participated at least one time in an after-school program activity had significantly greater program ratings than parents who did not

participate in at least one activity,  $z = (-3.59)$ ,  $p = (<.001)$ . Similarly, parents who participated in an after-school activity reported higher scores in response to “Quality of program staff” rating than parents who did not participate in an after-school activity,  $z = (-4.20)$ ,  $p = (<.001)$ .

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between parental involvement in an after-school program and their satisfaction with the results in the child and the program itself. The results of this study align with and contribute to the existing literature involving the School-Family-Community Partnership model proposed by Epstein. All four satisfaction variables measured in this study had a statistically significant relationship with parental involvement at the established alpha level of .05. Across all four satisfaction

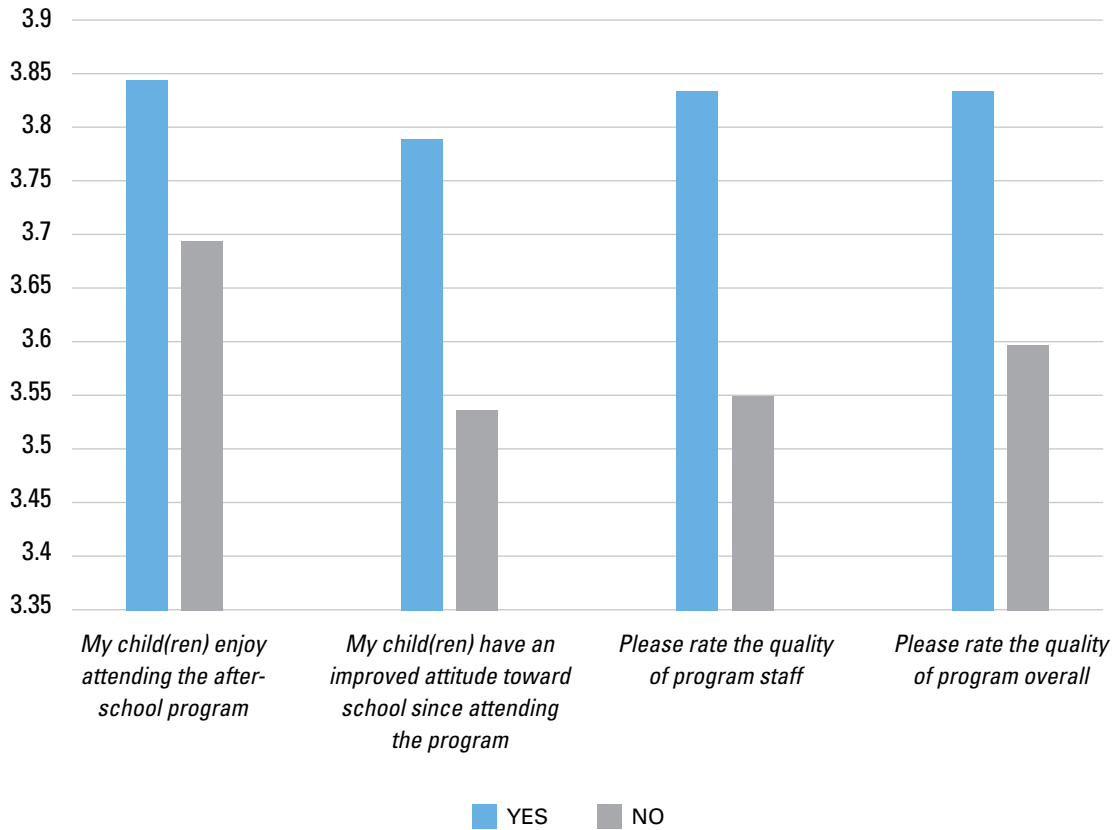
variables, parents who participated in at least one program activity were overall more satisfied with the program than parents who did not participate at all (see Table 4 and Table 5 below). This study and its finding contribute to the existing body of literature around parental involvement and after-school programs (Cooper et al., 2020; Stott et al., 2017) by both examining the relationship in a high-poverty community and, taking a further look into the types of parental satisfaction associated with after-school programs – perceived child satisfaction and program satisfaction.

Table 3. **COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES BETWEEN PARENTS WHO DID AND DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN AN AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITY ACROSS ALL FOUR VARIABLES EXAMINED.**

| Did you attend any ACE parent activities this school year? |                | My child(ren) enjoy attending the after-school program | My child(ren) have an improved attitude toward school since attending the program | Please rate the quality of program staff | Please rate the quality of program overall | TOTAL  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------|
| Yes                                                        | Mean           | 3.83                                                   | 3.78                                                                              | 3.82                                     | 3.82                                       | 3.81   |
|                                                            | N              | 143                                                    | 143                                                                               | 143                                      | 143                                        | 143.00 |
|                                                            | Std. Deviation | 0.428                                                  | 0.533                                                                             | 0.484                                    | 0.422                                      | 0.47   |
| No                                                         | Mean           | 3.69                                                   | 3.53                                                                              | 3.55                                     | 3.59                                       | 3.59   |
|                                                            | N              | 132                                                    | 132                                                                               | 132                                      | 132                                        | 132.00 |
|                                                            | Std. Deviation | 0.568                                                  | 0.704                                                                             | 0.657                                    | 0.605                                      | 0.63   |

Table 4.

MEAN SCORES OF PARENTAL SATISFACTION  
ACROSS ALL FOUR VARIABLES



As after-school programs continue to grow and provide much-needed services to underprivileged communities, critical research into these programs and their practices should grow alongside them. The communities that benefit from these types of programs are likely to face socioeconomic challenges that may limit or prohibit parental involvement. For this reason, continued research into the role that parental engagement plays in the student’s success is critical. However, it is understood that these underprivileged communities are likely to face challenges associated with parental involvement due to unique limitations. As a result, it is

suggested that after-school program administrators engage in continued research and provide solutions to any barriers that may prevent parents from these communities to participate in their child’s after-school program, thus increasing the programs impact on improving the lives of the students and families they serve.

LIMITATIONS

This study is not without limitations. First, there exists a potential threat to validity in terms of how the data was captured. Individuals at each of the 10 schools participating in the program were instructed to implement the

survey via QR codes and emails. The delivery and capture of these parental surveys may differ depending on the local practices at the campuses. The survey was implemented to parents across all 10 schools participating in the study, which range from K-12 grade levels. The study examined parental participation in a binary concept, comparing parents who participated in at least one event to parents who did not participate in any events. Future research would perhaps benefit from expanding the scope of the research to examine the level and type of parental involvement in after-school programs.

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