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Predictors of Parent Involvement Behavior in the Los Angeles Unified School District

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Summary

The analysis of a Parent Survey conducted with parents from across the eight Local Districts of the Los Angeles Unified School District for the “Parent perspective: A survey of belief systems and involvement behavior in the Los Angeles Unified School District” study identified the following key findings:

- Parents’ self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to assist their children academically played an important role in the extent to which they were involved in their children’s education at home and at school.
- How welcoming a school environment was perceived by parents was related to the extent of their involvement in school-related activities.
- Mothers’ employment status was related to the extent of their involvement in school-based activities.

Findings identify key areas of focus that should be considered in the District’s goal to increase parent involvement in every school.

Overview

Engaging parents as partners with schools has emerged as a top priority in the District as a means to support children’s academic success. Superintendent Cortines’ *Plan of Action* goal that, “each school develop a strong relationship and communication with parents, community and other school connections” makes it clear that developing ways to facilitate and support parent involvement should be key on their agendas.

While supporting and increasing parents’ involvement in their children’s academic success has been a priority for District, there has not been a formal process for collecting the data necessary to understand the degree to which parents and families are involved with schools and the processes underlying their involvement. As a means to provide the District with the data necessary to inform strategic planning decisions around improving parent engagement, the Research and Planning Division created a systematic process for surveying parents. This brief focuses on three main questions from the survey of randomly selected parents of students at all grade levels (pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade) representing the eight Local Districts of the LAUSD:

1. What factors are related to parents’ involvement in their children’s education?
2. Are parents who work full-time less likely to be as involved with their children as parents who don’t work full-time?
3. Are parent involvement practices different across ethnicity or socioeconomic level (SES)?

Methods

A parent survey was completed by approximately 4,000 parents from across the District. The demographic make-up of the respondents was fairly representative of the population of families in the LAUSD: 73% Latino, 11% Black, 9% White, 4% Asian, 3% other ethnicities, and nearly 80% of students eligible for free or reduced meal programs. The survey was mailed directly to households during the summer of 2008 and focused on the following:

- Parents' perceptions about:
 - A welcoming school environment
 - How well their children were doing academically
- Parent engagement opportunities at their children's school
- Parents' satisfaction with their children's school
- Parents' self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities to assist their children academically
- Parents' involvement behavior specific to:
 - Home-based verbalizations
 - Home-based actions
 - School-based involvement
 - Home-school conferencing

Key Findings

The more confident parents felt about their ability to help their children academically, the more likely they were to be involved academically with their children at school and at home.

Parents' self-efficacy beliefs (in their ability to help their children succeed in school) were significantly and positively correlated with the following four types of involvement behavior we assessed: home-school conferencing (e.g. parent-teacher conference), home-based actions (e.g., spending time with child on educational activities), home-based verbalizations (e.g., talking to child about the importance of an education), and school-based involvement (e.g., volunteer at child's school). Thus more efficacious parents tended to be more involved, while less efficacious parents tended to be less involved.

Parents' self-efficacy beliefs were more important in their school-based involvement than was a welcoming school environment.

Parents' self-efficacy beliefs had a stronger influence on parents' school-based involvement than a welcoming school environment. How involved parents became in school-based activities was influenced more by how efficacious they felt in their ability to assist their children academically than by how welcoming schools were to parents. How welcoming schools were to parents was more important in how likely parents were to become involved in home-school conferencing activities than how efficacious they felt about their ability to help their children academically. Thus, findings suggest that schools should focus on building parents' sense of efficacy in their abilities to help their children academically in order to better support parents'

involvement in school-based activities and focus on creating a school environment that is welcoming to parents to facilitate their involvement in home-school conferencing activities.

Mothers who work full-time are less involved than mothers who work part-time or are unemployed/homemakers.

Fathers' involvement behavior did not differ at all across the four employment levels we identified (i.e., retired, unemployed/homemaker, part-time, or full-time). However, employment status was significantly related to involvement behavior for mothers. Mothers who reported being unemployed/homemaker or employed part-time were significantly more involved in school-based activities than mothers who were employed full-time. Mothers identified as unemployed/homemaker were significantly more involved in home-school conferencing activities than mothers who were employed full-time. These findings suggest that mothers who work full-time may have less time flexibility to engage in activities at the school site and therefore such opportunities need to consider this reality for many family households.

Parents' socioeconomic status was not a significant influence on their involvement behavior but differences in the extent of school-based involvement were identified across ethnically diverse mothers.

Because surveys were predominantly completed by Latino, African-American, and White parents, we limited our analysis to these groups. Findings showed that Latino and White mothers were significantly more involved in school-based activities in comparison to African-American mothers, even when accounting for mothers' employment status. No other involvement differences across ethnicity were identified. Results can be interpreted to suggest that perceptions about involvement in school-based activities may differ across ethnic backgrounds and therefore the relative importance of such activities may not necessarily align to views held by schools. An alternative interpretation is that barriers may limit the involvement of African-American mothers in school-based activities and therefore additional research is necessary to better understand why some mothers are more inclined to become involved in school-based activities while others are not.

Conclusion

Parents' sense of efficacy in their ability to assist their children academically was predictive of home- and school-based involvement and how welcoming schools were perceived by parents was predictive of their involvement in home-school conferencing activities. Mothers' employment status was also related to the extent of involvement in school-based activities. Finally, mothers' involvement in school-based activities differed across ethnic groups. These findings, taken together, contribute to an understanding of the various ways parents are involved in their children's academic lives and the underlying factors that contribute to the extent of their involvement at home and at school. This information can be used to support strategic planning in the District around parent engagement practices at the school level to increase parent involvement, which has been well documented in the education research literature to support student academic success.

Recommendations

1. Provide a Welcoming and Attentive School Environment for Parents

- a) Central and Local District leaders should work together to adopt a professional development curriculum that focuses on how school staff, that includes administrators, teachers, and office personnel, can best communicate and work with parents and families of ethnically and economically diverse backgrounds.
- b) School-site administrators and school staff should collect data on a regular basis from parents to continually improve their collective efforts on ensuring parents feel welcome and attended to.

2. Build on Parents' Self-Efficacy Beliefs

- c) Central and Local District leaders should identify research-based practices that schools can utilize to build on parents' self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities to help their children succeed academically. Such practices can be identified through connecting with researchers and academics with expertise in this area as well as through sharing of knowledge with other school districts and public agencies that have been successful with engaging parents.
- d) School-site administrators should incorporate parent engagement practices that are specific to building on parents' self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities to help their children succeed in school.
- e) Parent Center personnel or personnel charged with working with parents should provide organized and systematic parent engagement opportunities that build on parents' self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities to help their children succeed in school.

3. Incorporate a Continual Improvement Cycle

- f) Central and Local District leaders should establish a data driven process to monitor the progress of schools in their efforts to engage parents.
- g) School-site administrators and school staff should collect data on a regular basis from parents to continually refine their parent engagement efforts.
- h) School-site administrators should assign responsibilities and accountabilities to Parent Center staff to ensure alignment between parent involvement expectations of the District and school-site practice.
- i) School-site administrators should incorporate monitoring practices to assure that Parent Center personnel or personnel charged with working with parents effectively work to increase involvement of ethnically and socioeconomically diverse parents in their schools.

For more information regarding this study see the full report:

Fernández, Alicia. The parent perspective: A survey of beliefs systems and involvement behavior in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Research and Planning Division No. 2008-12. Available Online: research.lausd.net