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Parent Partnerships: Promoting Student Growth of Exceptional Students

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Introduction & Purpose

Meaningful parent partnerships are key in the educational process (Lueder, 1998/2000), especially for students with high incidence disabilities, as these students often "slip through the cracks." Academic success and quality of learning improve for students of all ages and abilities when the family and school join forces (National Education Association Policy and Practice Department, 2008). This study analyzed parent partnerships in various school settings. Data was used to develop a meaningful parent partnership model to promote student growth, both academically and socially. Data collected allowed us to learn how individuals in varying roles within the educational system and parents presently view the involvement of families of students with special needs.

Literature Review

When parental involvement is high, it is likely the students' opportunity for success will also be high. Evidence indicates although the condition of the parent-school relationship does have an impact on the level of parent involvement and student achievement, strong parent-child relationships have a far greater impact (McNeal, 2014).

Barriers To Parental Engagement

Parent Financial & Employment Issues
- lack of money
- lack of access to financial resources
- lack of access to educational resources due to minimal monetary funds
- lack of time due to work schedules and working multiple jobs

Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Olmstead, 2013; Williams & Sanchez, 2013

Parent & Familial Issues
- parents' personal negative experiences with the educational system
- negative interactions with staff members
- an overall negative social experience
- conflict between the family's beliefs or cultural values and the school system's expectations

Gross et al., 2015; Jeynes, 2015; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Mendez, 2010; Williams & Sanchez, 2013

School Climate Issues
- territorialism and a closed-door or disconnected vibe

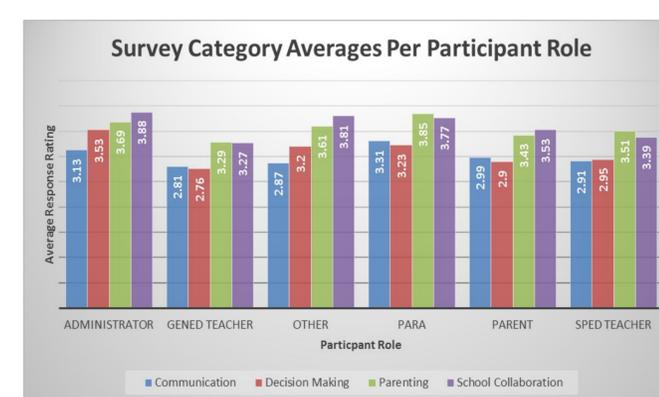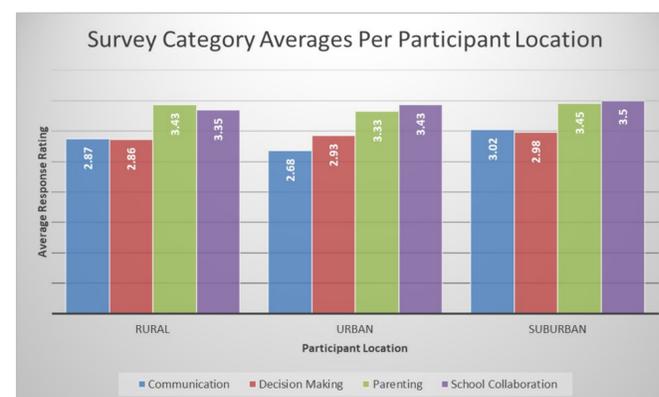Gross et al., 2015; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Olmstead, 2013

Methods

Setting/Participants

Participants included six administrators, 62 general education teachers, five general educators who are also parents of students with special needs, 25 parents, one participant who is both a general educator and special educator, 32 special educators, two special educators who are also parents of students with special needs, five paraeducator professionals, and five who identified with other educational roles completed an online Google form survey.

Data Collection/Analysis

Data were gathered using a survey questionnaire adapted from the "Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships" (Salinas et al., 1999). Two sections were not utilized during this study due to their irrelevance for this particular study. The survey was completed electronically by participants via a Google form. Responses by participants to prompt statements were given using a Likert type rating scale from 1 (not occurring) to 5 (extensively), and then gathered on a spreadsheet and analyzed. In order to better analyze the data on the spreadsheet, text was replaced with the corresponding number according to the Likert scale used for this study. Four general groups of people were originally targeted for participation in this study, including administration personnel, general educators, special educators, and parents. Data were also gathered regarding participant location: rural, suburban, and urban.

Survey Category Averages Per Participant Location

Survey Category Averages Per Participant Role

Findings

Participant responses for parenting and collaboration were rated the highest, regardless of the school setting or the participant's role. The averages for communication were consistently the lowest or second lowest across setting and participant role. Within this category, paraeducators yielded a higher average than did either general educators or special educators. This result reinforces some of the barriers from the previous research relating to parents seeing a lack of consistent communication among school personnel. In addition, several participants noted similar barriers in the open-ended questions as did study participants throughout previous literature review studies. These included a lack of time due to work schedules and other commitments, lack of technology access and understanding, mobility and transportation issues, and cultural factors.

Implications

Decision Making
- Key members of school district leadership teams should utilize tools such as surveys to gather data on the needs, interests, and ideas about families within the community (National Education Association Policy and Practice Department, 2008)
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities (National Education Association Policy and Practice Department, 2008)

Parent Engagement
- Implement programs to foster parent-child relationship and school discussions (McNeal, 2014)
- Provide workshop opportunities for parents on topics such as positive discipline strategies and extended learning too to easily accessible for parents (National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, 2005)

Communication
- Ensure information is provided in parents' primary language (National Education Association Policy and Practice Department, 2008)
- Districts need to establish policies and procedures to ensure consistent communication across school personnel

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