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Appraisal of Parent's Awareness of the Student Support Team's Purpose and Process

and the Impact on Parent Participation and Student Achievement

First Authorship

Cheryl Ford

University of West Georgia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess parent's awareness of the student support team (SST) as a method to increase parent's participation in the process and to impact student achievement. The student support team (SST) develops strategies and interventions to assist students that are experiencing academic or behavioral challenges in the classroom. Parents are a vital part of this team and are often absent from the SST meetings. Most often they do not initiate support from the team or seek information about these services. Parents were given a survey that addressed their knowledge about the purpose of the SST and their need for information about the process. There were 116 parents of elementary school children in grades K-5 that completed the survey. Results indicated that 44% of the respondents surveyed were unaware of the existence of the SST and 53% were unfamiliar with the purpose. Of these respondents, 90% indicated that they needed more information about the SST. Results showed that there is a strong need for interventions that will provide parents with the information they need for knowledge and awareness. Recommendations for this study are to implement interventions and to do a follow up study to compare parent participation in the SST process before and after the implementation of interventions.

Appraisal of Parent's Awareness of the Student Support Team's Purpose and Process and its

impact on Parent Participation and Student Achievement.

Educating students as it appears can be viewed as a partnership between teachers, students

and parents. If any of these variables falters or does not contribute to the education process, then

student achievement can be compromised. Due to this belief, I investigated the grades of students

who were not passing and compared them to the current student support team (SST) cases. Since there

was a discrepancy, it needed to be addressed. The referral process for SST is usually initiated by

teachers. Parents can also initiate this process, but the question remains; do parents know how to do

this or are they aware of the SST process? The purpose of this action research study (ARS) was to

assess parent's awareness, provide information about the process and increase parental participation to

impact student achievement.

The SST meeting is a conference where parents, teachers and other faculty members

collaboratively develop plans for student achievement. Student strengths are addressed first; then

the areas of concern are discussed with strategies for teacher implementation in the classroom.

Some parents are unaware of the support that is offered through the SST meetings and/or do not

understand the dynamics of this process. They view it as a direct route to special education

services. Alone, it appears that this idea is discouraging to parents, thus promoting a lack of

support or participation in the process.

Conferences are only one avenue for parent participation. Parents can volunteer in the

school, become active members of the P. T. A., attend social or political gatherings in the school

or attend student concerts or plays. Through personal observations I have seen a record turnout

of parents for award ceremonies or when there were social events at the school or if their

children were performing in a concert or play. This indicates that there is significant parent

participation when parents can support and see their children in a socially productive

environment or when their children are participating in an event that spotlights their talents or

achievements. If the SST meetings were viewed in a more productive manner, then perhaps there

would be more support and participation.

One aim in appraising parent's awareness was to decrease the gap that exists between student

failures and SST referrals by empowering them to initiate the process. The other aim is to

increase parent participation for the students who are currently a part of the process. Providing

factual information about SST is one vehicle that can assist parents with developing awareness

but addressing parent participation may require creative options after understanding why they are

not participating. Addressing the need for parent participation in school meetings and programs,

obstacles or barriers to participation, strategies to increase participation and the impact parents

can have on student achievement is vital to this study. There are approximately 1,150 students in

this elementary school, 43% of the student population are on free or reduced lunch, 98% are

African American in this suburban /rural environment.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Barriers to Parent Participation

Research has shown that there are barriers that prevent parents from participating in school

meetings/conferences. Some barriers include time constraints, reluctance due to parent's poor

experiences in school and feeling intimidated or disconnected due to being undereducated

(Comer, 2005, Finders & Lewis, 1994). According to Anderson and Minke (2003), parent-

teacher conferences are "natural vehicles" for encouraging parental involvement; however the

conferences can become problematic. If the teachers focused on student strengths and or on

minor academic and behavior concerns and address these concerns using a conversation type

format instead of just presenting the facts, then the conferences would be viewed in a more supportive and constructive light. This would keep parents more involved instead of promoting dissension. Berger (1991) found parent-teacher collaboration is a needed partnership if students are to find success during and after school. Parent and teachers must recognize their role and responsibilities. This is a work in progress; a collaborative effort.

Types of Parental Involvement

Types of parental involvement as suggested by Dauber & Epstein as cited in Driessen, Sleegers & Smit (2005) are: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and community collaboration. Parents have many avenues in which they can participate or become involved. Regardless of their choice, students need their participation.

Characteristics that Lower Parent Participation

Characteristics of specific groups associated with lower parent participation are: being a member in minority group, being of lower socioeconomic status and or being in a limited English Proficiency program or special education program (Griffith, 1998). According to Coleman (1987), at- risk studies also included single parent households, parents with lower than average educational achievements, and parents with personal and/or adjustment problems as factors for lack of parental involvement or participation. Taking these factors into consideration, strategies have to be implemented to assist parents with becoming more active. Strategies range from tokens for transportation, a community shuttle, and specific cultural activities or as suggested by Olmstead (1991), an outreach operation is a viable option. Another strategy for improving parent involvement or participation is keeping parents informed about their children's' education and or school events (Eccles & Harold, as cited in Griffith, 1998).

Griffith (1998) stated that little research has been done on motivation for parental involve-

ment in their children's school. However, (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, as cited in Closson et al., 2005), presented a motivational model delineating parental involvement. The model outlines two belief systems that addressed parent's role construction and their sense of efficacy. These beliefs play a vital role in parent participation.

Parental Support toward Student Achievement

Student achievement is the primary goal of schools. Parental support is one contributing factor that impacts student achievement. Scientific evidence does not support this fact (Kayzar, Mattingly, McKenzie, Prislin, & Rodriguez, 2002), but existing evidence from correlational studies does (Dauber & Epstein, 1991; Griffith, 1998). Research provided by federal and state agencies indicated that parental involvement influences student achievement.

Berla and Henderson (1994), documented studies indicating that schools and families work together, higher student achievement is the result and when parental involvement is evident, their children go farther in school. Students need encouragement, guidance and support from parents and teachers. When this is provided students usually perform better. This was evidenced from conversations held with students. They look to parents and teachers for support, and seem to thrive from that support.

Literature Summary

A growing body of research (Berla & Henderson, 1994, Griffith, 1998, Kayzar et al. 2002), on parent involvement and or participation with their children in school demonstrates a positive correlation or a connection to student success and/or achievement. If educators are to make an impact on students it is necessary to be a catalyst for achievement. We can do this by observing our surroundings, taking notice of any problem areas, concerns or challenges and exercising our professional judgment to influence change. This ARS is one way that I can influence change in

my educational setting. Parents can choose to impact their children's educational achievement and play an active role in concert with their children and teachers. The SST is one vehicle for parental participation. It is hoped that my work in this area will not only assist with student achievement but will enhance the communication between our school and its community.

Methodology

Preliminary activities required administrative approval, submitting paperwork/forms, informing and soliciting feedback from supporting staff and informing parents about the survey. The support and assistance from the administration and the support staff to conduct the inquiry into lack of parent awareness of SST indicated the need to conduct this ARS. Action research thus is warranted because it resolves a problem or issue (Dwyer & Stringer 2005). This ARS evaluated the need for further program implementation to increase parent's awareness of the student support team. Variables for the study included parent and staff participation and timely return of the completed survey.

The hypothesis of this study is: if parents are aware of the SST purpose and process, and their participation increases, student achievement will increase. Although student achievement is measured over an extended period of time, parents who actively participates in the SST process, and with follow up meetings and by gauging growth through regular progress reports then gains can be determined.

Prior to this study, the perception of SST was thought of as a referral source for students who may need special education services. This is a personal assessment based on informal discussions with staff and parents. By utilizing interventions that will provide concise information about the purpose of the SST, a greater generalized perspective can be ascertained.

Interventions

Interventions are a critical component in action research. There would be minimal gains if any occurred at all, if interventions were not implemented. Parent's awareness of the SST process was assessed to provide a balanced score card for referrals and academic support as one option for student achievement. The preliminary results from the surveys administered indicated a need for more publicity and dissemination of information about the process. As a result the following interventions have been created and will be implemented: a) program description and purpose of the SST placed in the school's newsletter in April 2009, b) an insert in the school brochure in August 2009, c) an in-service meeting held during the first P.T.A meeting in the beginning of every school year beginning in the fall of 2009.

Interventions are critical variables that can affect the outcome of a study. They must be timely, relevant and properly executed to make a significant impact. It is hoped that after parents are more informed an increase in parental participation in the SST process will occur. If there is an increase in parental involvement then there should be a decrease in student failures; thus student achievement will take place. Since interventions are a valuable asset to any study, the interventions that are implemented in this project should make a significant impact.

The Value of Interventions

Since it appears that parental involvement is crucial in child development, it is necessary for the parents to assist with their child's educational advancement with implementing strategies developed during the SST process. Providing parents with the techniques and methods on "how" to implement these strategies is beneficial for student achievement.

Carlson and Christenson (2005) examined the scientific basis for family and parent interventions in schools and found a change in learning problems and school related behaviors. They addressed six domains; parental involvement was one of them. Epstein & Jansom (2007)

also suggested that there is a strong correlation between parental involvement and student

achievement. Although they indicated that a positive correlation exists, they further stated that

target populations (at-risk, limited English proficiency) have to be identified with specific and

relevant interventions. An example of this would be child care provisions for single parent

families.

Types of Interventions

Interventions may vary and their usefulness can be significant. There are many types that can

impact parent participation. Interventions can be family education programs, workshops,

activities that meet parent's needs as well as others. These programs have to be flexible in

scheduling and visitations. Educational information can also be provided with programs offered

that reinforces literacy skills and aids parents with helping their children (Huang & Mason,

2008).

The Orlando School System used interventions to connect with parents to make them more

active in their learning community. Their premise was that parental involvement can help

students "soar to new academic heights". One of the interventions they used was providing

transportation for parents who needed it because this was an obstacle for participation in school

activities (Anonymous, 2005).

Data Collection Sources

The survey responses from parents can be found in the Appendix A and by grade level

Appendix B. The data collection consisted of survey items, a questionnaire, interviews and a

literature review. Survey responses were formatted on a Likert scale with the response choices

being strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree (SD, D, A, SA). The Survey Monkey

Website was used to design the 10 item survey (www.surveymonkey.com). The respondents

volunteered to participate with anonymity insured.

Participants

Parents were the principal respondents to the survey. It was designed to assess their

awareness of the SST purpose and process. The random sample consisted of parents at the

elementary school across grade levels. The sample was achieved by placing surveys in the

reception area. Parents could elect to fill them out when they entered the school. They had to

identify the grade level(s) of their students. Another method to disseminate the surveys was to

distribute surveys to classroom teachers to distribute to students in their classroom (5 per class).

Surveys that were not distributed were collected.

Additional information gathered through staff interviews provided information that supported

the research questions that guided this study. There were 8 staff members (2 teachers, 2

administrators, 1 curriculum support teacher 1 instructional support teacher and 1 counselor)

who participated. Two hundred and ten surveys were distributed with 116 completed, a return

rate of 55%. Staff member responses/perceptions (Appendix C, D and E) provided ideas and

insight for additional program interventions.

Data Analysis

Surveys were used as the primary source of information. The results were tabulated and

analyzed by combining responses and comparing response percentages. Each survey item and

response option was developed to measure parent's awareness or knowledge about the SST

process and 10 of the parents that completed the survey also completed a questionnaire

consisting of 5 questions. Triangulation was accomplished by examining staff interviews, parent

responses and literature reviews on parent participation and student achievement. Accuracy of

the data was not facilitated through electronic submission but through individual calculation and verified with staff assistance. Additionally, responses and interviews led to increased awareness of the program needs for educational development at the elementary school.

Results

The data provided insight into the research questions. The responses from the interviews indicated an alignment with the interventions that will be implemented and supported the need for this ARS. The demographics indicated that the parents who participated represented students across all grade levels. Many of the respondents (56%) indicated that they were aware that there was a student support team in the school (item 3); the other 44% had no idea. Item 4 results indicated 46% were familiar with the purpose of SST but 53% were not. A small percentage of the respondents (12%) knew who served on the student support team and 81% had no idea. Over 13% of the respondents attended an SST meeting and the other 81% have not. Almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated they were aware that the student support team develops strategies and interventions for academic achievement and the other 52% were unaware. Although 46% of the respondents indicated that they were familiar with the SST purpose, 90% of them indicated a need for additional information. A large number of respondents (92%) indicated that they would attend an informational meeting to learn more about SST and less than 1% would not. One respondent wrote on the survey that he/she wanted the information to be provided through literature dissemination.

The results of the staff interviews on parent awareness indicated 87% of them believe that parents are not aware of the SST process and 13% believe they are (Appendix C). The same amount 87% and 13% respectively indicated that there are adverse effects from lack of parent awareness on the SST process (Appendix D).All of the staff interviewed thinks there should be

more information provided for parents about the SST process through workshops, newsletters, small group meetings, presentations during open house and educational packets (Appendix E).

Discussion

The student support team is a viable resource for students experiencing academic or behavioral challenges in the classroom. The team also provides recommendations for those students who need strategies for academic success. Teachers at times are reluctant to refer students to the SST because of the enormous amount of paperwork. Although this can be a contributing factor for limited referrals, the need for student support is still prevalent. Since the SST process can also be initiated by the parents, the 43% who indicated they were unaware, they need to be informed. Once parents are aware of the SST, this will be another avenue for referrals.

Over half of the respondents who were surveyed (53%) indicated they were not familiar with the purpose of the SST because no interventions were put in place in a timely fashion to inform them. If this had occurred then this percentage could conceivably be significantly lower. Along with this statistic, 43% who indicated that they did not know that there was an SST, would have known that there was one at this elementary school. It is evident based on these findings that interventions are needed.

A point of concern that should be noted is that 10 parent respondents filled out a questionnaire that was attached to the surveys. The purpose of this questionnaire was to see if those respondents who indicated they knew the purpose of SST actually did. The respondents who indicated familiarity about the purpose of the SST, could not state that purpose. This leads me to question the veracity of some of the 46% who indicated they knew the purpose.

Another point of concern is parent participation. If parents do not participate in the process, then the invaluable strategies that are offered will be less effective without their support. If the

support is not there from the parent then student achievement may be compromised. There is a

pattern that needs to be looked at closely: parent awareness = empowerment, parent participation

= student support, student support =student achievement.

Since 54% of the parents surveyed indicated that they were not familiar with the student

support team and 87% of the staff interviewed specified the adverse effects this has on the SST

process, interventions must be implemented in a timely fashion if student achievement is the end

result. This is the basis for this ARS; student achievement.

Limitations of this Action Research Study

Limitations of this study are time constraints, survey design and sample size. Since there are

numerous counselor responsibilities, numerous tasks can place limitations on project focus. I

found this to be the case. If I dedicated more time in this ARS, then other duties would have been

compromised. As a result, only a limited percentage of surveys (although a random sample) were

administered. The design of the survey questions did provide sufficient information but because

the questions were not research based, the validity and reliability are brought into question.

Another limitation is the accuracy or honesty of some of the responses as noted in the discussion.

Although the majority of the respondents may have given honest responses, the results can be

brought into question because of those few who did not.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are areas for improvement in this study. One area is validity. Research based surveys

can possibly indicate greater reliability although the survey that I used does have significance.

Does this survey measure what it is suppose to measure is one question that's a concern. This is a

rhetorical question because ARS has its limitations and the validity can be determined once a

follow-up study is conducted. Another recommendation is to give the survey to a group of

participants in the presence of the researcher to eliminate others from randomly filling it out. One final recommendation is to eliminate any time constraints to allow adequate time to complete the research. One suggestion would be to have the ARS extended an additional semester.

Implications and Conclusions

The results indicated a strong need for interventions for the provision of information about the SST process and purpose at this elementary school. Since it is not widely understood, the dissemination of information is warranted. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated they would attend an in-service on the topic and also indicated they needed more information. If interventions are relevant then they can have a significant impact on parent participation (Carlson & Christenson 2005). This ARS addressed parent awareness of the student support team's purpose and process and the impact on parent participation and student achievement. Once parents are aware, they can also be a referral source for SST. Presumably, this will increase the likelihood of parents participating, thus achievement will be impacted. The timely and consistent implementation of the interventions will be vital to the success of this study. Follow up studies are a necessity to determine if there are any significant improvements in parent participation with a definite correlation to student achievement.

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Appendix A

Table A1 Survey statements and results   (Response Percent/n=116)

Statement #	SD	D	A	SA
3. I am aware that there is a student support team at this school.	18.9%	24.1%	32.7%	24.1%
4. I am familiar with the purpose of the student support team.	24.1%	29.3%	30.1%	16.3%
5. I am aware of who the student support team members are.	35.6%	45.2%	12.1%	.06%
6.[a] Omitted				
7. I have attended a student support team meeting.	37.3%	44.3%	13.0%	.05%
8. I know that the student support team develops interventions for academic achievement.	27.8%	24.3%	35.6%	12.1%
9. I need more information about the student support team.	.027%	.055%	33%	58.7%
10. I would attend an informational meeting to learn more about the student support team.	.009%	.06%	46.3%	46.3%

Note. [a] Question was omitted due to study irrelevancy.

Appendix B

Table B2

Survey responses per grade level

Grade Total	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10
K=14	SD =2 D=5 SA =1 A=6	SD=2 D=4 SA=1 A=7	SD=7 D=6 SA=0 A=1	SD=7 D=7 SA=0 A=0	SD=2 D=4 SA=1 A=7	SD=0 D=0 SA=5 A=8	SD=0 D= 1 SA=6 A=5
1=9	SD=5 D=2 SA=2 A=2	SD=5 D=0 SA=1 A= 3	SD=6 D=3 SA=0 A=0	SD=6 D=2 SA=0 A=1	SD=6 D=0 SA=1 A=2	SD=0 D=0 SA=6 A=3	SD=0 D=0 SA=8 A= 1
2=11	SD=0 D=2 SA=5 A=4	SD=1 D=3 SA=4 A=3	SD=1 D=6 SA=2 A=2	SD=1 D=5 SA=1 A=4	SD=0 D=3 SA=3 A=4	SD=0 D=1 SA=3 A=5	SD=0 D=0 SA=4 A=5
3=19	SD=4 D=6 SA=3 A=6	SD=7 D=4 SA=1 A=7	SD=11 D=5 SA=1 A=2	SD=7 D=7 SA=1 A=4	SD=6 D=5 SA=1 A=7	SD=1 D=1 SA=14 A=3	SD=0 D=1 SA=9 A=9
4=27	SD=6 D=8 SA=5 A=8	SD=6 D=10 SA=4 A=7	SD=8 D=13 SA=2 A=4	SD=11 D=12 SA=1 A=3	SD=7 D=7 SA=2 A=11	SD=2 D=1 SA=14 A=9	SD=0 D=1 SA=10 A=15
5=17	SD=3 D=4 SA=5 A=5	SD=2 D=9 SA=4 A=2	SD=3 D=10 SA=2 A=2	SD=4 D=10 SA=3 A=0	SD=4 D=6 SA=4 A=3	SD=0 D=3 SA=9 A=4	SD=0 D=3 SA=6 A=7
Multi=19	SD=4 D=1 SA=7 A= 7	SD=5 D=4 SA=4 A= 6	SD=5 D=9 SA=1 A= 3	SD=7 D=8 SA=0 A= 3	SD=7 D=3 SA=2 A=7	SD=0 D=0 SA=13 A= 4	SD=1 D= 1 SA=8 A= 9

Note. Response omissions occur where sum does not equal grade total.

Appendix C

Table C3 Interview responses by certified staff

Response #	Q. Do you think that parents are aware of the SST process and why?
1	Parents are not familiar with the SST process unless their child has been through the process. Parents do not know unless they are made aware by the school.
2. .	No, parents are not aware. The only parents aware are those contacted by the school.
3.	No, parents are not aware because they haven't been trained.
4.	No, because there has been no educational marketing.
.5.	No. Only if they are active and have a concern. For the most part, no.
6.	Not entirely, due to the change in the process. Parents know that if their child is struggling, they can refer for special education, but not for SST.
7.	No, because it has not been made available to them.
8.	Yes, but they are not receptive.
Theme	Predominant perception is parents are not aware of the SST process.

Appendix D

Table D4   Responses from certified staff

Responses #	Q. What impact does lack of parent awareness/knowledge about the student support team have on the SST process?
1	Parents are often very hostile towards the SST when they are uninformed of the process. They often feel that their child is being victimized unfairly and not being represented in a positive light. This perception bogs down the process until the parents can be brought on board through the use of sufficient data.
2	If they don't know what the process is then they are less likely to initiate it on behalf of their students. As well, if initiated by the school, they are more likely to see it as a negative instead of a positive.
3	Parent awareness and participation is an integral part of the SST process, without their input the SST may not completely be able to provide the student with the most appropriate interventions. For example, if a student has a medical condition or a history of atypical development that the team is unaware of, the team may seek to implement interventions that will not be advantageous to the student due to a preexisting condition.
4	It does not impact the SST process at all because the teachers will do whatever is necessary to accommodate the child.
5	Lack of knowledge can be correlative with lack of participation. Lack of participation delays the required paperwork/forms. It halts the SST process.
6	The lack of parent awareness impacts the number of SST cases that we have because parents don't initiate the process. If they were more aware and initiated the process there would be a more shared responsibility of struggling students and thus a greater level of service to this population.
7	If the parents are not aware, then they don't know how to work with their child.
8	If the parents are not aware, they cannot set up the implementation plan with the students.

Appendix E

Table E5   Interview responses by certified staff

Response #	Q. What type of services can be provided to make parents more aware of the SST?
1	Workshops, newsletters, the state website and print packets at the beginning of the year.
2	Small group meetings or classroom meetings.
3	Parent workshops once a semester. The do's and don'ts – the basics of what a parent should look for.
4	Provide information in a grade level setting.
5	During open house, a presentation or a seminar could be given.
6	Q's and A's on SST through the county.
7	An FYI orientation.
8	A workshop at the beginning of the year or informational packets.