The Impact of School Climate on Parental School Involvement and Early Academic Achievement

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Abstract

The purposes of the study were to investigate the following: (1) what factors consist of the school climate? (2) does the school climate influence parental school involvement? (3) does the school climate affect children’s early academic achievement at kindergarten? and (4) does parental school involvement mediate the impact of the school climate on children’s early academic achievement? Data for the study were extracted from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study –Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K), (NCES, 2004); the research focused on 10,743 children, their parents, teachers, and administrators who participated in the study in the spring of 1999. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), results showed that the school climate that could be explained by four indicators (children’s, parents’, and teachers’ perception about teacher/school and school learning environment) contributed to parental school involvements, representing parent-school partnerships. Results also demonstrated that parental school involvement mediated the impact of the school climate on children’s reading and mathematics achievement. Findings were discussed in relation to future research and policy-making.

Key words: parental school involvement, school climate, early academic achievement

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Introduction

As the awareness of the significance of parent involvement in their young children’s education has increased (Marcon, 1999; McBride, Bae, & Wright, 2002; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), identification of the variables that encourage parental school involvement is important for the successful implementation of current state and federal policies that emphasize academic competence and school readiness for children as well as development (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Kreider, 2002; Powell, Son, File, & Juan, 2010). In particular, No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002) and Race to the Top (RTTT; U.S. Department of Education, 2009) legislations have put the topic of parental school involvement in education into public discourse. One of the indicators of a successful educational program is to collaboratively work with parents (Grant & Ray, 2010; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Educational programs which include school-based parental involvement were reported to have a positive influence on kindergarteners’ gains in reading and math achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Powell et al., 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010) as well as later school performance (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Hong & Ho, 2005; Marcon, 1999).

The focus of research on school-based parental involvement has gradually moved away from which demographic factors of parents led to their involvement in children education toward what school characteristics have parents engaged in their children’s education in ways to contribute to their children’s academic gains and development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Kreider, 2002) as well as social skills (Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2010). When teachers show responsiveness to parents by communicating openness to new information, suggestions, and other types of feedback about their children and classroom, and make efforts to support parents, parental school involvement is increased and maintained (Cohen, 2006; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli &Pickeral, 2009; Dixon, 2008; Powell, 1991; Powell et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Teachers’ responsiveness to children, such as showing interest in children’s concerns, helping children feel valued and accepted, and truly interacting with children, is a significant factor to make a promising parent-school partnership (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Powell et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Also, some research have demonstrated that the setting’s quality of school and classroom, school socioeconomic status, teacher degree level, teachers’ sense of efficacy, and curriculum are related to parental school involvement (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Dixon, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, & Gehlbach, 2014). Cohen and his colleagues (2009) explained that the school