


PEDAGOGY

Effect of Parental Involvement on Perceptions of Physical Education

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Abstract

This study sought to address the large gap in the literature regarding parents' roles and views about physical education programs. Guided by Epstein's model of parental involvement, this study investigated the effect of increased parental involvement in a child's physical education program on parents' perceptions of that program. Participants included 31 parents (28 female, 3 male) of students enrolled in fifth- through eighth-grade physical education classes at a school in the Southwestern United States. The design employed was a pre-post mixed-methods design. Over 6 weeks, the physical education teacher increased communication with parents through twice-weekly newsletters, weekly emails, family homework assignments, and family physical activities. Parents completed three validated surveys and open-ended questions, while the teacher kept field notes across the intervention. Parents increased their positive views of physical education, communication with teachers, and ideas about the importance of the field as well as their perceptions of their connections with physical education and ability to support their students in developing healthy lifestyle behaviors. Four themes emerged from the data including (a) lifetime physical activity, (b) socialization, (c) immediate benefits of physical education, and (d) parental support. The results of this study suggest that regular, open parent-teacher communication regarding physical education programming plays an important role in promoting the field. Extra effort by teachers in facilitating opportunities for parental engagement led to

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more positive perceptions and value of the physical education program by parents. This investment of teacher time is essential for maintaining positive parents' and students' perceptions of quality physical education programming and creating more partners and advocates for the field.

Existing research is mainly focused on parental involvement and perceptions regarding core content areas. Moreover, there is a paucity of research specifically pertaining to parental perceptions and involvement in their child's physical education experience. The research studies relevant to this project can be grouped into the areas of (a) parental involvement and academic performance, (b) parental involvement and perceptions of physical education and sport and recreation, (c) increasing parental involvement in physical education, and (d) Epstein model for parental involvement.

Parental Involvement and Academic Performance

It can be difficult to gain strong parental involvement in physical education school programming even though there are numerous benefits to this involvement (Smith et al., 2011). Smith et al. (2011) examined parental involvement strategies that led to high levels of involvement in urban charter schools. They reviewed the charter school legislation in each state and selected schools that identified special provisions related to parental involvement. They found that the charter schools had systems to support parental involvement including (a) parental involvement plans and requirements in the application process for the school, (b) regular communication required from parents to the school, (c) enrollment preference given to parents who were active in the application process, and (d) parental representation on school decision-making teams. They found that parents were required to continue learning at home with provided educational resources. Parents were also involved in school policies through parent-specific focus groups. Incentives were provided as rewards for attendance and wrap-around services were provided to support family health and well-being. Involvement in school events during the day or outside of the day was encouraged and, on occasion, required. Smith et al. found that the provision of wrap-around services for parents and their families helped them to fulfill their basic obligations and eliminated some of the barriers to parental involvement. They also found that materials and communications

sent home were provided in native languages of the families in the school community. Parents were provided volunteer and school beautification opportunities, which showed a sense of ownership and belonging with parents.

Topor et al. (2010) examined the connection between parental involvement and a child's overall academic performance at school. They looked at the possible methods of association through a child's perception of cognitive competence as well as quality of student-teacher relationships. Perceived cognitive competence showed a significant positive relationship with parental involvement, but teacher and student relationships did not. Overall, increased parental involvement led to significantly higher academic performance. Similarly, Williams and Weiss (2018) found that parental involvement led to improved academic performance in a physical education program. They examined the perceived influence of significant others' beliefs on student performance in physical education. Students completed surveys assessing expectancy of success, attainment value of physical education, utility value of physical education, and importance of others' beliefs, with moderate to high positive relationships identified among variables. Student participants who had higher ability and attainment levels perceived significant others to have higher ability expectations and utility value for physical education.

Parental Involvement and Parents' Perceptions of Physical Education and Sport and Recreation

Parental understanding and involvement in physical education programming appears to impact parents' perceptions of physical education. Parents who do not receive accurate information about their child's physical education programming draw from their personal experiences to create views of programming (Sheehy, 2006). Graham (2008) revealed that parents may not have access to accurate information regarding their child's physical education programs.

George and Curtner-Smith (2016) showed that parents' previous experiences play a role in their perceptions of what should or should not happen in physical education programs. Parents reported that programs exposed their children to different sports and activities, increased their health-related fitness, and developed their personal and social skills. Parents' personal experiences in physical education, previous athletic participation, and the outside influence of beliefs of

family and friends impacted their perceptions of physical education. While some of the measures showed that parents had positive views of physical education, negative perceptions limited the benefits of physical education for their children. George and Curtner-Smith suggested that “parental support for physical education programs is essential if the subject is to survive, grow, and continue to make a positive contribution to the lives of children and youth” (p. 42).

Related to physical education and youth sports, Na (2015) examined parents’ perceptions of their children’s physical education and youth sport experiences. Regarding physical education, parents viewed the class as valuable to students’ physical, cognitive, psychomotor, emotional, and social development. However, some parents were unable to identify what specifically their students learned, while others believed physical education was more for playing and less for learning. As for youth sport, parents believed that students learned life skills and health promotion in youth sports. Concerningly, parents believed that more was learned from youth sport than from physical education and expressed they would not be concerned about losing physical education as a class, though they would be very concerned if youth sport were to disappear. Parents also felt as though they had more opportunity to engage with their child in youth sport than through their child’s physical education program.

In the aforementioned studies (i.e., George & Curtner-Smith, 2016; Na, 2015), parents expressed their value regarding physical activity in their children’s lives; however, they could not identify specifically what physical education could provide that youth sport could not. They appreciated that youth sport and recreation provided parents opportunities to be involved and participate with their child more often than in physical education.

Increasing Parental Involvement in Physical Education

Fernandez-Rio and Bernabe-Martin (2019) investigated promoting parental involvement through the use of social media (Facebook) and the impact that it had on perceptions of physical education, specifically through the use of the Sport Education model. Overall, the study showed that parents responded positively to the use of social media and were actively engaged in their child’s learning. Parents found the use of social media appealing and interactive. Themes reported around promoting parental participation included

learning, affiliation, and involvement. Notably, one critical finding was that there was a positive change reported in parents' views of physical education's status. Very little is known, however, about how to intervene to improve parents' perceptions and support of physical education programming.

Epstein Model for Parental Involvement

The Epstein Model of Parental Involvement framed this study. This model breaks down different types of involvement and provides examples for how schools and organizations can successfully build partnerships and relationships with the families in their school communities in the areas of (a) basic obligations for parents or guardians to meet students' needs at home; (b) basic obligations for schools to provide open communication with families; (c) involvement opportunities for parents or guardians to participate in volunteering or attending events at the school; (d) learning opportunities for parents or guardians to participate at home with their students; (e) parental involvement in school-related decision making through participation in parent-teacher associations or other committees; and (f) collaboration opportunities with school personnel, which may include partnerships with the community.

This study addresses this gap in the literature by intervening in the promotion of physical education programming through planned events, class information, and use of curriculum materials with middle school physical education parents to determine if this programming impacts parents' perceptions of physical education. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how parental involvement (past and current) in physical education may impact their perceptions of physical education programs.

Method

This study provided increased opportunities for parental involvement in a middle school physical education program. This study collected written responses in the form of parents' answers to questionnaires and researcher field notes throughout the intervention to determine if parents' perceptions of physical education changed with increased parental engagement. This study used a mixed-methods experimental research design.

Participants & School Context

Information regarding the study was sent to parents of all 357 students enrolled in physical education. Participants in this research study were 31 parents of students enrolled in physical education in Grades 5 through 8 at one suburban middle school in the Southwestern United States. Parents created self-selected pseudonyms for the study (e.g., sunshine or Greek mom). See Table 1 for parents' demographic information. Two physical education teachers taught physical education. One taught fifth and sixth grades, while the other taught seventh and eighth grades. A multiactivity, exposure-oriented curriculum based on state standards was used for physical education.

Data Collection

The instruments used in this study included (a) a self-efficacy questionnaire for parents, (b) a parent perceptions survey, and (c) a school and family partnership survey (including four open-ended written responses). Field notes were also taken by the teacher throughout the intervention targeting parental involvement in middle school students in physical education.

Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Parents

The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C) gathered information on parents' perceptions of their child's self-efficacy in physical education as well as their perceived role in their child's physical activity experience. Validation efforts found three factors and satisfactory internal consistency reliability with a similar sample of youth (Muris, 2001). The SEQ-C contains 15 questions on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from *definitely yes* (1) to *definitely no* (5). A sample item from this questionnaire is "If my child works hard in physical education, it will help them in other areas of their life." Minor modifications were made to the SEQ-C to reflect a physical education setting.

Parent Perception Survey

The Parent Perceptions Survey (PPS) that assesses personal experiences was also used in this study (Tannehill et al., 1994). The survey provides information about parents' views toward their child's physical education program and their own personal

Table 1
Participant Demographics

NAME (Pseudonym)	Participant #	Gender	Education	Age	Ethnicity	Employment	Kids at Home
motherfishie	01	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	Hispanic or Latino (a)	Employed for wages	2
Anon	02	Female	Doctorate Degree	35-44	Hispanic or Latino(a)	Other	2
NLA9780	3	Female	Master's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
Sjo	04	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	Native American or American Indian	Employed for wages	2
DT2	05	Male	Master's Degree	45-54	Other	Employed for wages	2
Devon6853	06	Female	Master's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	2
cmdmamcm	07	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
Wilocat	08	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
ANB	09	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	4
Dav211	10	Female	Master's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	1
2646	11	Female	Professional Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	2
18Carleigh	12	Female	Master's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	2
HanseBoy	13	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	1
Deborah Wright	14	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	White	Self-employed	2
gss955	15	Male	Master's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	2
Tatham2135	16	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	White	Self-employed	3
1522	17	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	White	Homemaker	4
Nursesara	18	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	1
RBR	19	Female	Master's Degree	45-54	White	N/A	1
Az68	20	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	White	Homemaker	3
maroney	21	Female	Master's Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
lpm3rd	22	Male	Bachelor's Degree	55-64	White	Self-employed	2
IMOM21	23	Female	Master's Degree	45-54	White	Employed for wages	1
Sunshine	24	Female	Some college, no degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
Greek mom	25	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	Other	Out of work but not currently looking for work	2
A288	26	Female	Master's Degree	55-64	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	2
X Apple	27	Female	Bachelor's Degree	35-44	Hispanic or Latino(a)	Self-employed	2
Ordseaphx	28	Female	Bachelor's Degree	45-54	Asian/Pacific Islander	Employed for wages	3
liningradka	29	Female	Professional Degree	35-44	White	Employed for wages	2
Phoebe	30	Female	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lizmom	31	Female	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

experiences in physical education. The PPS is a 21-item survey that includes questions in the areas of (a) demographics, (b) personal physical education experiences, (c) current physical activity experiences, (d) comparison of importance of physical education to other subjects (3-point Likert-like scale with anchors of from *more important*, *equally important*, or *less important*), and (e) most and least important activities in physical education (9-point scale from *most important* to *least important*). Validation efforts involved content validity with experts and pilot testing with parents (Tannehill et al., 1994).

School and Family Partnerships Survey

The School and Family Partnerships Survey (SFPS; Armstrong-Piner, 2008) addresses features of Epstein's model of parental involvement. The SFPS contains 31 questions in three sections: (a) Current Involvement, (b) Relationships With Physical Education Teacher, and (c) Perceptions of Current Physical Education Program. The first section relates to parenting and family support, specifically current involvement in their child's physical education program and learning. This section includes 10 questions on a 4-point Likert-like scale with anchors of *never*, *1–2 times*, *few times*, and *many times* (i.e., "Talk to your child about physical education"). The questions are specific to how often the parent engaged in activity, checked in with their child, or initiated communication regarding physical education class. The second section (12 questions) relates to communication between the family and physical education teacher. It uses a 4-point Likert-like scale with anchors of *does not do*, *could do better*, *does well*, and *I do not know*. The questions are specifically about the parents' perceptions of how well the physical education teacher communicated with them regarding their child's progress, learning, and providing additional opportunities (i.e., "Teacher sends home news about curriculum and current physical education topics"). The final section relates to physical education learning experiences and perceptions of their child's current program. It contains nine questions on a 4-point Likert-like scale with anchors of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Seventeen items were added to the postsurvey of the SFPS for the study to capture parents' perceptions of the intervention program. Four open-ended written questions were also added for a better understanding of parents' views of the

intervention. Efforts included content validation comparing the instrument with features of Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement (Armstrong-Piner, 2008).

Field Notes

Field notes were taken by the teacher throughout the 6-week intervention. These notes addressed topics such as parents who followed up with the teacher with specific comments and questions regarding the physical education program materials posted and distributed.

Intervention

The 6-week intervention included four components put in place to increase opportunities for parental involvement as well as positive experiences for families around physical education. The first component implemented was a newsletter that was sent out via email twice weekly. The newsletter included current learning objectives for students, photos of classes in session, health and wellness resources for families, and an interactive component. The second component was email updates with class happenings, announcements, and requests. These were sent out once a week throughout the intervention. The third component of the intervention activities was a family involvement activity. In Week 5, a Bring PE to Your Family Week packet of activities was sent home for students and parents to complete together. Initial design of the intervention was to have parents volunteer and participate in activities at their child's school (to address the third Epstein component of volunteering/attending school events); however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the activity was adapted for the home environment. The final component was a take-home activity discussion for families. Students were asked to take it home, discuss the questions with their parents, and get a parent signature verifying completion.

Design and Procedures

Before implementation, a welcome letter, introduction to the study, and parental consent forms were emailed to all parents of students in Grades 5 to 8 enrolled in physical education. A presurvey was sent to parents with a consent form and the initial instruments. Parents completed the SEQ-C and PPS instruments preintervention

only. The SFPS instrument was completed pre- and postintervention, including reports of current involvement in the physical education program at posttest. Opportunities for parental involvement throughout the 6 weeks were designed to address four of the six categories of the Epstein model including parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home (Smith et al., 2011). Parents completed the SFPS to provide feedback addressing the aforementioned components of the Epstein model and the interventions.

Data Analysis

Internal consistency reliability was assessed for continuous variables for each of the three surveys. Descriptive statistics were calculated including means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Subtotals were calculated across sections of the instruments. The study used *t* tests to explore possible pre–post differences in perceptions of and involvement in physical education from the intervention. Select responses from the surveys were graphed. The study used visual analysis to draw conclusions from the graphs.

Thematic analysis with constant comparison was used in the analysis of qualitative data from the open-ended portion of surveys and along with information from the field notes. Trustworthiness measures included data triangulation (across surveys, open-ended question responses, and field notes), a search for negative cases, and peer review with negotiation of themes to consensus.

Results

The instruments showed adequate internal consistency reliability of .905 (SEQ-C), .78 (PPS) .85 (SFPS) in the sample of parents. This section presents findings for the parents on the three survey instruments (SEQ-C, PPS, and SFPS).

Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children

SEQ-C results (Table 2) showed that parents had an overall positive perception of their child's self-efficacy in physical education and in their role in supporting their child. Parents overall reported that they strongly agree that they encourage their child to put in their best effort to all activities in physical education ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .42$; with 1 being *definitely yes*). These parents' self-ratings were even higher than their ratings for their perceptions of their child's self-efficacy

for physical education and physical activity. They reported that their children were able to navigate different situations effectively and confidently in the physical education environment ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .87$; with 1 being *definitely yes*). An area of uncertainty for many parents was whether their child was a “go-getter and a leader in athletic settings.” While parents had positive perceptions of their child’s performance and response in physical education, this could be an area in which a physical educator may provide feedback to a parent regarding these items through regular communication for parents to support and nurture children’s self-efficacy in different movement contexts.

Parent Perceptions Survey

Parents indicated that they had participated in an average of 11.83 ($SD = 2.16$) years of physical education. They rated the quality of their physical education experiences between satisfactory and excellent ($M = 2.10$ – 2.17 on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being *excellent*). Parents ranked the outcomes from physical education from most important to least important (Figure 1). They also ranked skills and activities from most to least important (Figure 2). Parents also indicated that they exclusively participated in individual workouts. When comparing physical education to other subjects, parents rated math, English, science, and foreign language as more important than physical education and technology, art, music, athletics, and intramural sports as equally important or less important (Figure 3).

School and Family Partnerships Survey

Table 3 shows the inferential and descriptive statistic results for the SFPS instrument between the pre- and postsurveys of parents’ relationships with physical education teacher, current involvement with the physical education, and perceptions of current physical education program.

Regarding parents’ relationships with their child’s physical education teacher, current involvement, and perceptions of the current programming, there were statistically significant improvements after the intervention for parents in various areas. Parents reported significantly more knowledge about their child’s performance in physical education. They also reported that students had improved skill and character development from the program. Parents also

Table 2

School and Family Partnerships Survey: Descriptive Results for Parents' Relationships With Teacher, Current Involvement in Program, and Perceptions of Current Physical Education Program

Item	Pre-M	Pre-SD	Post-M	Post-SD	t	Cohen's d Effect Size
Relationship with Physical Education Teacher						
Help you understand the importance of physical activity and healthy behaviors	2.17	1.193	3.08	.515	-2.727*	1.19
Tell me how my child is doing in physical education class	2.08	.996	2.42	.793	-1.000	
Parent teacher conference with me regarding my child's progress in physical education	1.25	.452	1.75	.965	-1.593	
Explain how to check my child's physical education grade and assignments on Powerschool and Schoology	2.58	.900	2.83	.577	-.897	
Send home news about curriculum and current physical education topics	1.75	1.138	2.75	.452	-2.872*	1.36
Give me information on how grades are earned in physical education	1.92	1.084	2.50	.798	-2.028	
Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things they learned in their physical education class.	2.42	1.240	2.92	.793	-1.318	
Send home clear communication regarding physical education that is easy to understand.	2.08	1.084	2.58	.669	-1.732	
Contact me if my child is having problems in physical education	2.17	1.467	2.83	1.267	-1.483	
Contact me if my child is does something well or improves in physical education	1.83	1.337	2.25	1.288	-.834	
Include me in health and physical education curriculum development	1.67	1.155	2.42	1.165	-2.283*	.44
Provide information on community services/resources that I may want to use regarding health and fitness related topics	1.92	1.084	2.58	.900	-1.876	
Current Involvement						
Talk to child about physical education	3.67	.778	3.42	.669	-1.393	
Exercise with child	3.67	.492	3.50	.674	1.000	
Discuss health and wellness with child	3.92	.289	3.83	.389	.561	
Encourage 60 minutes of physical activity	3.75	.452	3.67	.651	.561	
Talk to child's physical education teacher	1.00	.000	1.75	1.055	-2.462*	.48
Check child's physical education grade	3.25	.754	2.83	.937	1.332	
Take child to health and fitness community programming	3.42	.900	2.92	.996	1.254	
Communicate importance of physical activity to child	4.00	.000	3.92	.289	1.000	
Limit child's screen time	3.83	.389	3.67	.492	1.483	
Discuss importance of physical education with child	3.42	.996	3.58	.996	-.518	
Perceptions of Current Program						
This is a very good physical education program	2.17	.389	1.75	.622	1.820	
The physical education teacher cares about my child	1.83	.389	1.58	.996	.897	
My child frequently talks about physical education at home	2.33	.778	2.17	.937	.804	
I feel I can support my child in health promotion	1.75	.622	1.42	.515	2.345	.35
I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas	2.17	.835	2.42	.900	-1.915	
This physical education program teaches lifelong health habits to my child	2.08	.793	1.83	.577	1.149	
This physical education program promotes positive peer-to-peer relationships and character development	2.33	.888	1.67	.888	3.546	.68
This physical education program provides an opportunity for my student(s) to develop physical skills	2.08	.793	1.67	.888	2.803	.67

Note. R Scale 1= never, 2=could do better, 3=does well; CI Scale 1= never, 2= 1-2 times, 3=few times, 4= many times; PCP Scale 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=disagree, 4=strongly disagree
*t-test showed significant difference

Figure 1
Parent Perceptions Survey: Physical Education Outcomes Ranked From Most Important (9) to Least Important (1)

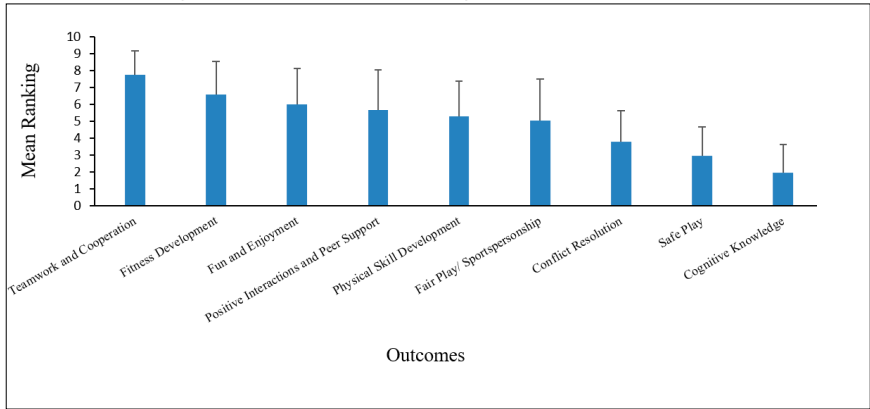


Figure 2
Parent Perceptions Survey: Physical Education Skills and Activities Ranked From Most Important (12) to Least Important (1)

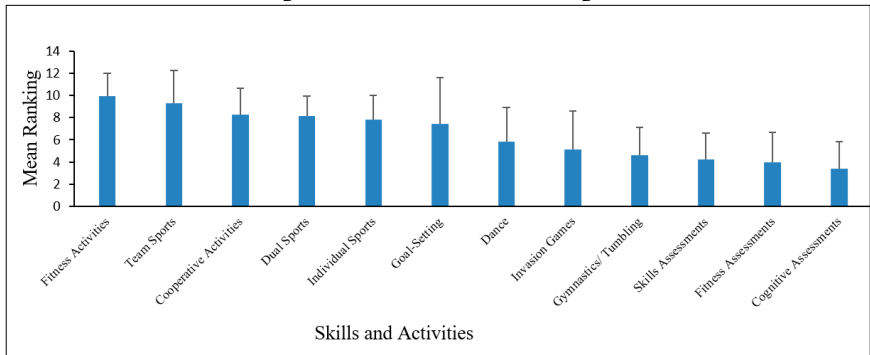
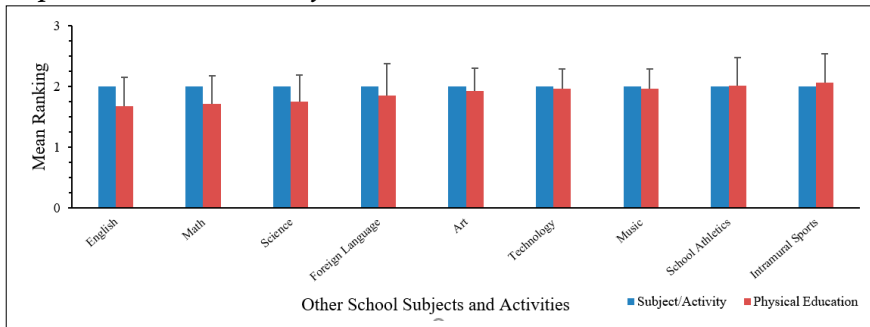


Figure 3
Parent Perceptions Survey: Physical Education Compared by Importance to Other Subjects



reported more knowledge about the physical education curriculum and program in general. Further, they reported increased communication with the teacher and student communication with other students. Additionally, parents reported that they felt included in the health-promoting curriculum and were better positioned to support their child in health promotion (see significant *t* tests in Table 3).

Four Themes About the Purpose and Outcomes From Physical Education From the Lens of Parents

Four main themes emerged regarding the purpose of physical education from the analysis of the open-ended question responses and field notes including (a) lifetime physical activity, (b) socialization, (c) immediate benefits of physical education, and (d) parental support.

Lifetime Physical Activity

The first theme showed that parents believed the purpose of physical education was to promote and teach students how to engage in a lifetime of physical activity. Two subthemes in this area were identified. Parents believed students should learn about healthy behaviors in physical education and be exposed to a variety of activities that will increase enjoyment and build skills.

Knowledge of Healthy Behaviors. Thirteen parents mentioned that the purpose of physical education was to teach students to make healthy choices and lead a healthy lifestyle. *Tatham2135* (note parent-selected pseudonyms and parents' demographics are available in Table 1 by name) shared that physical education should "teach students how to take care of themselves and keep them healthy, both physically and mentally," while *NLA9780* and *Cmdmamcm* emphasized that physical education teaches "the importance of regular exercise early in life" and "gets them hooked on exercise for the rest of their life," respectively. *Gss955* built on the impact of these decisions on students, stating that "every student that builds better LONG TERM habits around healthy living is a person who may lead a happier life and better contribute to our community."

Exposure to New Activities. Parents also felt that physical education provided an opportunity for students to be exposed to new activities while increasing enjoyment and building skills. Nine parents addressed this theme in their written responses. *2646* expressed

Table 3
Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children: Parent Perceptions of Student Self-Efficacy

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I encourage my child to put in their best effort into activities even if they do not enjoy them.	1.30	.542
I encourage my child to try their best in physical education.	1.48	.580
If my child works hard in physical education, it will help them in other areas of their life.	1.63	.565
My child is successful in physical education.	1.74	1.059
My child demonstrates strong sportsmanship when playing games.	1.78	.934
My child demonstrates resilience and persistence in game and athletic activities.	2.11	1.188
My child participates in every activity during physical education class.	2.15	1.379
My child demonstrates strong athletic skills.	2.19	1.210
My child feels comfortable coming to me if they are struggling with something in their physical education class.	2.19	1.272
My child has much to offer when participating as a part of a team.	2.22	1.188
My child is comfortable in full game settings when playing team sports.	2.37	1.214
My child demonstrates positive self-talk when engaging in physical activity.	2.37	.967
My child asks me for support in physical activity related skills.	2.74	1.163
My child thrives in competitive settings.	2.81	1.331
My child is a go-getter and is a leader in athletic settings.	3.00	1.414

Note. 1= Definitely Yes; 2= Probably Yes; 3=Might or Might Not; 4= Probably Not; 5 = Definitely Not

that physical education should “provide [students] skills and training to try different types and styles [of activities] to explore what is possible and what they enjoy most.” In similar sentiments, *Nursesara* believes that students should “start learning sports and activities [they] might do as an adult,” and *Sjo* stated that physical education “is a great opportunity to expose students to different activities they otherwise wouldn’t know or learn about.”

Socialization

The second major theme that emerged was that parents believed that physical education provided an opportunity for socialization that helped build confidence and promoted healthy peer-to-peer interactions. Five parents mentioned something about socialization and teamwork being an important benefit of physical education. Overall, the general response from parents can be summed up by *Maroney’s* response: “[Physical education] teaches teamwork and having fun with others during sport-related activities.” Similarly, *Greek mom* noted that physical education teaches “team playing” and the importance of “encouraging others during a sport.” While there were many comments regarding the positive impact that physical education had on socialization, it is important to note there was one negative case noted by *HanseBoy*, who said that physical education is a “breeding ground for bullying.”

Immediate Benefits of Physical Education

The third theme pertained to parents’ perceptions of physical education related to the immediate benefits of physical education for students. Three subthemes were identified. Parents believed that physical education provided necessary movement throughout the school day, physical education provided a change in environment compared to the classroom, and students were able to make mind-body connections and learn healthy coping strategies.

Movement Throughout the School Day. Physical education provided needed movement throughout the school day. Seven parents provided specific comments to support this benefit of physical education. *DT2* stated that physical education “provides [students] with an opportunity to engage in activities not behind the desk,” while *1522* added that it provided “general activity to break up the day and to do something productive that wasn’t schoolwork.”

Liningradka built on this sentiment, stating that physical education helps “keep [students] fit, off screens, and keeps their bodies moving.” *ANB* summed this up, writing that “it’s a fun way to get them moving during the school day.”

Change of Environment. Physical education provided a change of environment compared with the classroom and got students outside. Seven parents provided comments on this topic. *Sunshine* stated that physical education “allows [students] to get out their energy in a positive environment.” *Ipm3rd* and *Sjo* shared that physical education “gives a needed break” and provides an opportunity for “physical activity out of doors,” respectively. *Az68* summed up these responses, stating that physical education “rounds out the book/computer learning by giving [students] a chance to bond, play, and learn while exercising.”

Mind–Body Connections. Physical education provided an environment in which students could work on developing mind–body connections and healthy coping strategies. Thirteen parents emphasized the importance of students making mind–body connections in physical education and the impact of physical activity during the day on their child’s focus. *Phoebe* believed that physical education should help “children achieve a balance with their social-emotional, mental, and physical health,” while *A288* added that it is “a way to release energy [and] helps with overall brain function.” *RBR* summed up this idea clearly: “I think it helps [students] focus on the holistic end of well-being beyond the intellectual discourse of academic work. It should bring a sense of mind–body connection to our students.”

Parenting

The final theme from these parents was simply “parenting,” which addresses four of the Epstein model components including parenting, communication, volunteering, and learning at home. Three subthemes related to parenting also emerged from the data: (a) communication between parent and child, (b) communication with child’s teacher, and (c) at-home learning opportunities.

Increased Communication Between Parent and Child. Parents believed that their main role in supporting their child in physical education was increased communication with their child regarding physical education and the modeling and promotion of a healthy

lifestyle at home through physical activity and healthy eating. Eight written responses addressed open communication between student and parent, while six responses addressed modeling healthy behaviors at home. *Phoebe* stated that parents' role in supporting their child included "asking questions, monitoring grades, and encouraging him to try his best," and *Tatham2135* built on this sentiment, stating that she will "ask what they are doing in class." *Motherfishie* added that she would "emphasize the importance of physical education and continue physical exercise activities at home." *18Carleigh* expressed that her role in supporting her child was to "encourage exercise and healthy eating habits." *Nursesara* mirrored these sentiments while also adding that she would help "promote good rest."

Increased Communication With Child's Teacher. The three main methods of communication and interaction that parents wanted to continue to receive after the study from their child's teacher regarding physical education included a newsletter, email updates, and family assignments and activities. Eighteen parents' responses welcomed increased communication from their child's physical education teacher and commented on the aspects of the intervention they found the most beneficial. Six parents specifically mentioned wanting email updates from their child's physical education teacher to continue, while seven parents expressed a desire to see the newsletter continue. *1522* shared her thoughts on the newsletter: "I love the newsletter because it helps update me with what is going on in the class."

Field notes (March 22, 2021) on the final week of the study included parental communication via email with feedback regarding the intervention. A parent expressed that the increase in communication helped them make a better connection to their child and what the child was learning in physical education. *Greek mom* reiterated this sentiment in a written response on the perception survey: "There seems to be a major increase in communication and student learning in physical education this year."

At-Home Learning Opportunities. Parents valued at-home learning opportunities, whether homework assignments or family activities. On the SFPS, there were eight mentions of wanting the teachers to continue to promote activities that could be completed as a family. Overall, *Sunshine's* response summed up the general

sentiments: “[Teacher should continue to] encourage family participation. It is great for the kids emotionally and physically. It also creates the drive to continue participation as a family.” While most parents mentioned the importance of the family assignments, there were a couple statements about student homework. *Wilocat* expressed her support of homework: “I am a fan of homework and think that assigning physical movement would be great. Homework would require kids to take a step back from technology.”

The Bring PE to Your Family assignment provided a variety of activities for parents and students to engage in as a family. Only two families, however, submitted evidence of completion of the at-home assignment. Field notes also supported that families who participated submitted feedback and felt they were more active and welcomed the opportunity to engage in activity as a family. Parents also noted that physical education assignments for students should be continued, but the assignments need to be intentionally connected to the curriculum being covered in class and assigned a grade for completion for increased participation from the class as a whole.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if parental involvement in a child’s physical education program would influence parents’ perceptions of the program. Parents valued physical education and wanted to be involved in their child’s physical education experience; however, it is the role of the physical educator to initiate communication and facilitate a relationship with their students’ parents. Parents who feel like they are building relationships with the adults who work with their children may be more interested and involved in their child’s learning experiences (Maria, 2016).

Perceptions

Overall, parents had positive perceptions regarding the value and role of physical education in their child’s development and educational experience. Project results indicated that parents not only had positive perceptions of physical education but also had positive views of their child’s self-efficacy in physical education. This suggests that if parents believe that their child has the skills and mindset to be successful in their physical education class, then they may perform at a higher level. The study findings support those of Topor et al.

(2010) and Williams and Weiss (2018), who suggested that student performance success is based on the perceptions of parents regarding their child's ability and utility and attainment value of physical education experiences. Increased parental perceptions regarding physical education and a child's ability to succeed indicate that students may be more successful in physical education with more parental communication similar to the components of this intervention. This also demonstrates the importance of parents maintaining positive perceptions of physical education programming.

The study results give insight into parents' perceptions regarding the current physical education program and their role in their child's physical education experiences. Parents had overall positive perceptions of physical education and believed it enriched a child's school day and helped to develop the whole learner. The findings in this study are congruent with those in Na (2015), with parents reporting that physical education provided overall value to all components of a child's development including social and cognitive development.

The skills and activities of physical education ranked by importance by parents reflect their belief of exposing students to a variety of activities and skills. The top six skills and activities included fitness activities, team sports, cooperative activities, dual sports, individual sports, and goal setting. These findings were similar to those in George and Curtner-Smith (2016), who reported that parents believed the main purpose of physical education was to expose students to new activities, activities to improve fitness levels, and opportunities to build social skills and make connections. Similarly, the top five most important outcomes for physical education included teamwork and cooperation, fitness development, fun and enjoyment, positive peer interactions, and physical skill development. Parents believed physical education should help provide healthy and positive social interactions for their children while providing the opportunity for them to learn health-enhancing activities and behaviors to keep them active for a lifetime of physical activity. In addition and similar to this study's findings, Na (2015) and George and Curtner-Smith (2016) showed that regardless of parental involvement levels or parents' previous personal experiences, parents believed physical education provided value to their child's social, cognitive, and physical development.

Involvement

Parents believed their role in supporting their child included increasing communication with them regarding physical education and healthy lifestyle choices, as well as modeling and promoting an active and healthy lifestyle at home. This emphasized the importance of parents staying engaged by asking questions and modeling healthy behaviors at home. This supports the first Epstein model component of parenting, which encourages parents to engage with their child and fulfill their basic obligations of supporting their child's learning experiences. These findings also support those of Maria (2016), who found that parents felt more connected and willing to engage in their child's learning when the teacher included them in open communication and decision-making processes.

Parents wanted to be engaged in their child's physical education experience and valued being in communication with their child's teacher. Parents also wanted to know what was happening and how their child was doing in class, as shown in the positive response to the newsletter and email updates. This supports the second Epstein model component of communication, in which schools are encouraged to engage in open communication with families to build relationships and a strong school community. Fernandez-Rio and Bernabe-Martin (2019) discussed the importance of teachers engaging with parents in multiple ways and providing ways for parents to engage with their child's learning, specifically using technology through social media platforms. The results of both this study and the Fernandez-Rio and Bernabe-Martin (2019) study show that parents are open to multiple means of communication with their child's teacher and want to engage with their child and what they are learning in physical education. This study's findings also provide evidence to support the third and fourth Epstein model components of volunteering/attending school events and at-home learning, which promote opportunities for parents to engage with their child and their learning experiences not only in the school environment but also in the home environment as a family.

This study has a few limitations. It has a small sample size. The intervention with parents occurred while physical education classes were participating in online and hybrid learning formats due to COVID-19. Parental engagement opportunities in physical

education were also limited because parents could not be on campus for any special events.

Implications for Schools and Families

While many research studies explore the effect of parental involvement on core content in education and parents' perceptions of athletic programming, there is a paucity of information about parental involvement and perceptions of physical education programming. Developing a better understanding of current parental perceptions and the impact of their involvement levels on those perceptions will provide physical educators with the knowledge to create more meaningful and positive interactions with their students and families. Teachers can use this information to communicate with their students' parents more effectively. This partnership between parents and teachers helps to maintain positive parental perceptions regarding physical education programming and program outcomes. Physical education teachers are often encouraged to provide multiple engagement opportunities to increase involvement with their students' parents. The time and effort may pay off through positive support and involvement from families in physical education activities. Positive communication, increased understanding of the program and curriculum, and positive physical education experiences as a family may help keep the overall perception of physical education positive and provide parental advocates for the field. Lux (2010) reported that parental communication can lead to positive parental view changes of physical education and to greater understanding of the value of the content.

There are various ways physical educators can create strong partnerships with parents that will help maintain positive perceptions of physical education programs. Action steps that physical education teachers can use within their classes to demonstrate pride, value, and professionalism for their field include (a) offering community programming; (b) providing family programming and personal interactions with students and families; (c) offering support to teachers in core content areas to create alliances across subjects; (d) becoming involved in academic matters by showing up to core meetings and being part of the academic teams; (e) and acting and dressing professionally (Lux, 2010). Additional ideas that can improve parental

perceptions of a child's physical education program include physical educators (a) creating webpages for their programs; (b) sending out proactive messages with program details and highlights, physical activity logs, self-assessments and goal-setting information, and calendars with activities for families to participate in; (c) inviting families to participate in a physical education class and physical education/physical activity-focused school events (e.g., STEM and fitness night); and (d) assigning interactive homework that students can bring home to complete with families (Hager & Beighle, 2006; Sheehy, 2011).

Conclusion

Parental perceptions of physical education were significantly more positive after this intervention targeting parental involvement in a middle school physical education program. Parents also reported mostly positive attitudes about the physical education program as a whole. Parents expressed a desire to be engaged in their child's physical education experiences through open communication with their child's teacher, increased communication with their child, modeling healthy behaviors at home, and participation in family physical activities. Physical education teachers are encouraged to invest the time needed to facilitate opportunities for parents to engage in programming and communication with teachers about their physical education programs at the middle school level. Further research studies and examination regarding parental perceptions and involvement regarding physical education are warranted because of the paucity of research studies, particularly interventions targeting parents of students in physical education.

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