

PEDAGOGY

Parent Perceptions of Systemic Success in Physical Education: A Study of Advocacy in Action

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Abstract

A district-wide PE program identified in previous studies as having achieved and sustained Systemic Success in Physical Education (SSPE) for over four decades requires advocacy practices of PE practitioners to assist in obtaining the support needed for program stability. This study aimed to examine parent perceptions of the program, and the advocacy strategies required of PE practitioners. A qualitative design consisting of 20 parents of fifth and sixth-grade students from five different schools in the district participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Six themes emerged from the inductive content analysis, providing valuable insight into the benefits of regular program advocacy and strategies that may be most beneficial in acquiring and sustaining the support needed for a resilient program. Four implications are made, including (1) building relationships, (2) keeping open lines of communication, (3) program transparency, and (4) the role of the PE District Coordinator.

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Introduction

Change in education is a given! Educational change is driven by external forces (e.g., society, school boards, or lawmakers) and internal (e.g., administration and, primarily, the teachers). Incremental change is the norm but, for some, is too slow. External pressures result in increased *instability* and vulnerability to fundamental upheaval. Thus, change is often viewed as chaotic, the antithesis of stability. Some embrace change, others resist. Managing educational change is a challenge. However, planned or otherwise, change carries no guarantee of success (Cuban, 1992). As in chess, the victor is the one who moves the most powerful players available into the most advantageous position. While external agents of change are indeed formidable, an often overlooked and certainly underestimated group exerts powerful external influence on the fickle winds of change, *the parents*.

School boards wisely identify their community of parents as one group that is so influential it can change the intended and taught curricula (Cuban, 1992). Parents are a force to be reckoned with, and the advantage often goes to the side they choose to support. Fortunately, parents are not only powerful change agents, but they are also almost universally supportive of curricular offerings that are best for their children. They are willing to go to great lengths financially or by donating vast amounts of time and talent in support of their children's education. Although educators generally value family involvement, teachers report needing information on how to advocate and to form collaborative partnerships with families (Epstein, 2010).

The following couplet may provide a simple guide: *advocacy* creates *awareness*, and *awareness precedes* support (Pennington et al., 2023). If educational programs do not effectively reach out and create awareness of program needs, parents will not know when or how to get involved. According to Davies (1993), families in general, particularly those from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, often wait for guidance from educators before interacting with the school. Mapp (2003) provides evidence that advocacy practices can foster and sustain respectful, caring, and meaningful relationships between parents and school staff. The ability of schools to connect with parents is driven by the common focus on the children's learning and growth. Mapp's study demonstrates how

effective parental advocacy practices can create a unified interest in achieving program goals, increase program support, and help break down barriers.

On the other hand, since parents can impact education policies and practices positively and negatively, Sheehy (2006) underscores that parent advocacy may contribute to program stability and sustainability during periods of vulnerability to fundamental change (e.g., cutting programs). Thus, regular monitoring of parent perceptions provides indicators of the effectiveness of advocacy efforts to increase parental support and assess the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

Of course, advocating the benefits of a PE program presumes that the program is worthy of parental support. Not all PE programs are of equal quality, and some are not highly regarded. Nonetheless, Claxton et al. (2013) propose that parental involvement in, or support of a quality PE program can do much to change even negative preconceptions, stereotypes, and attitudes toward PE.

Systemic Success in Physical Education (SSPE)

When Siedentop and Lock (1997) labeled PE as a “systemic failure,” researchers started focusing on studying those few large-scale PE programs that were successful and sustainable. Pennington et al. (2014) and Prusak et al. (2010) explored the history, making, and structures of the SSPE model that, for more than 40 years, seems to have gone against national trends, resulting in an insurmountable list of barriers to quality PE. Their work examined how a district systemically removed most of the barriers that had all but eliminated PE programs across the nation.

Prusak et al. (2010) used Cuban’s (1992) curriculum change and stability framework to examine how this program has accomplished systemic success (i.e., district-wide and sustained over four decades). Circumscribing its four key components (see Prusak et al. for a full description of the SSPE model) is the notion of mutual accountability, which requires teachers to engage in a prescribed set of parental advocacy activities throughout the year.

Parental Advocacy in SSPE

This program services more than 42,000 children yearly with a mandated, quality PE curriculum. When district elementary physi-

cal educators are interviewed and subsequently hired, they commit to and are held accountable for advocacy practices by the district elementary physical education (EPE) coordinator. These practices for the academic school year consist of (a) keeping a positive phone call logbook with required weekly minimum entries, (b) creation and disbursement of four annual newsletters, (c) scheduling and conducting at least two parent PE demonstration/curriculum presentations, and (e) holding at least two evening track-and-field play days *in addition to* the (f) usual required biannual parent/teacher conferences (D. Pangrazi, personal communication, Sept. 28, 2018). These required practices are implemented to enhance student learning and progression and increase ongoing parent awareness, positive perceptions, and support toward PE. While these advocacy practices are laudable, it is unclear which program advocacy practices are most effective.

Although these or similar outreach or advocacy efforts have been in place for decades, their effects on parent perceptions are only anecdotally supported. What remains unclear is if and how they (a) have shaped parental perceptions and (b) have moved parents to action in support of the district PE program and its teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how the systemic, required advocacy practices used by district elementary physical educators has shaped parent perceptions and support of the SSPE program.

Methods

Participants and Setting

Participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling method to ensure equal representation of program awareness and district demographics. For example, to help assure exposure to the PE program and its parental advocacy efforts, 20 parents of fifth and sixth-grade students who have attended elementary school for three or more years in the district were invited to participate. Parents were recruited from five elementary schools deemed representative of all locations and socioeconomic levels across the district. In addition, the district EPE coordinator, the school EPE coordinators, the elementary PE teachers (at each of the five selected schools), and a Physical Education Teaching Education (PETE) professor from the

partner university agreed to participate. These interviews sought to understand and confirm the nature, routines, training, teacher perceptions, expectations, and oversight of the required advocacy practices used throughout the district.

The district in this study is in the Southwestern United States. Fifty-two schools serve about 42,000 kindergarten through sixth-grade students each year. District demographic information indicates ethnic identities as follows: 46% Hispanic, 41% Caucasian, 5% Native American, 4% African American, two percent report as multi-ethnic, and less than 1% Asian. Fifty-nine percent of students live in a single-family home while 22% live in a single-parent family. Seventy-two percent speak English as their primary language, and 67% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Outdoor instructional/play areas, including large blacktops and grass fields, are common to each school. Indoors, a multipurpose room/gymnasium is equipped with floor markings, baskets, mats, climbing walls, and climbing ropes. Each location is provided with a wide variety of equipment, such as gymnastic mats, climbing ropes, jump ropes, a variety of balls, Frisbees, and hockey gear sufficient for all children to participate at once.

All elementary PE teachers use a mandated curriculum and are provided monthly in-service sessions to train them to do so. Approximately 80% of the teachers graduated from the nearby partnership university that trains them in this program. All are trained in and are expected to employ standard management and instructional practices. All are required to complete the aforementioned advocacy activities. The district coordinator, tasked with oversight of the fidelity and quality of the EPE program, performs regular assessments of compliance to district expectations.

Procedures

University IRB and district approval for this study were attained before data collection began. All participants received, signed, and returned a letter of informed consent. Selected parents were invited to participate in a 40-60-minute interview to share their perceptions of PE and their child's PE program. Of particular interest was how the district advocacy efforts had influenced their perceptions or urged them to take action in support of their child's PE program.

All parents/guardians that met the criteria were invited to participate. The first four parents to respond from each of the five selected schools participated in the study and were scheduled for an interview at their child's school. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All identifiers were removed to ensure anonymity, and pseudonyms were assigned once the transcriptions were complete.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study was interviews with 20 parents, five elementary PE teachers from the five schools, the district PE coordinator, and a PETE faculty member from the local partnership university. Further, researcher field notes were collected and transcribed for analysis. District documents describing each advocacy activity and its expectations were also included in the data set.

Interviews

All interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) constructed from six relevant concepts, including Cuban's Curriculum Change and Stability Framework (1992); a pilot phone interview with the elementary PE district coordinator; the K-6 elementary PE district coordinators written expectations for annual observation and evaluation (this includes specific advocacy requirements of teachers); the critical role of parent perceptions to the future of PE in schools (Sheehy, 2006); Claxton et al. (2013) study of negative attitudes of PE and the need to promote its benefits to the community through encouragement of parent participation; and the three published studies that identified the SSPE model and its components (Pennington et al., 2014; Prusak et al., 2010; Prusak et al., 2014).

The questions included asking participants for examples of experiences that have broadly shaped their perceptions of PE and, more specifically, within the district. They were asked about any specific examples of information provided by the district or their child's PE teacher that may have influenced their perceptions of their child's PE.

Field Notes

Field notes consist of summaries of conversations along with emerging ideas, strategies, hunches, and insights obtained throughout the data collection and analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). They served as a guide in discussions held with the peer debriefer and in formulating the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was content analyzed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to examine parent perceptions of the advocacy practices used by elementary physical educators. The constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which has been described as a process of categorizing (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), was used to compare and contrast each unit of information with all other units of information to unite those with similar meaning and to separate those with different meanings (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). These information units were extrapolated from the raw data, consisting of a few words in a sentence to an extended paragraph. The initial themes that emerged containing similar units of information were cut and pasted into a computer file, printed out, and placed on large poster boards for further analysis. As a result of this process, themes were established, and subsequently, each theme was analyzed to identify common themes of greater generality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Efforts to establish trustworthiness included triangulation by (a) collecting data from sources from differing perspectives (e.g., parents, teachers, district coordinator, and PETE professor), (b) using multiple researchers throughout the data collection and analysis, and (c) seeking out negative cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Further, to maintain methodological rigor and establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this study employed additional strategies such as (a) member checking (source checking), (b) peer debriefing, and (c) an inquiry audit (Hanson & Newburg, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researchers were surprised that all 20 parents interviewed shared a positive perception of the PE program. Consequently, it is important to share from the researcher's field notes that as the inter-

views were in process, this positive perception was strong, and the researchers noted it. As a result of this concern and to address the possibility of a perceived research bias, researchers sought to identify negative cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and purposefully probed further for any possible negative perceptions parents were willing to share. The only negative comments researchers could extract from parent interviews and member-checking processes included comments related to environmental factors such as high temperatures or the limited days the PE classes were offered to the students: they wanted more.

In the researcher's efforts to practice triangulation by interviewing those involved beyond the primary source of data (parents), a consistent theme emerged from the five PE teachers of the schools participating in the study is worthy of mention. These teachers were keenly aware of the required advocacy practices they were held accountable for by the district EPE coordinator, and they validated the parents' perceptions regarding the value and importance of such practices to their school programs. However, they also mentioned numerous times that such required practices take considerable time and effort. As one teacher shared, "at the end of a long day or week you think, oh I have to write those positive notes home or make those phone calls and it can feel like an added burden when you are already so tired." In seeking out negative cases, this was the most common complaint, but it came from the teacher's perspective rather than the parents. The teacher's perspective of these required advocacy practices warrants further exploration but was not the primary focus of this study.

Results and Discussion

According to Cuban (1992) and Siedentop and Locke (1997), an organization becomes vulnerable to substantial cataclysm usually caused by outside sources if it does not have a system to manage change. The key elements of this district's SSPE model identified by Prusak et al. (2010) were carefully shaped and refined over the years for the purpose of preserving its continued success through periods of incremental change and occasional fundamental upheaval. Cuban's assertion that parents can be, and often are, potent change agents, this district considers their parental advocacy efforts imperative to program stability and sustainability. This qualitative

study examined the parents' perceptions of the program, factors that influence those perceptions, and the advocacy practices applied by PE teachers in the district in order to shed light on the effectiveness of these practices.

Six major themes emerged regarding factors that influenced parent perceptions of the district's PE program and advocacy practices: (a) student enjoyment shapes positive parental opinions; (b) the teacher passion; (c) teacher involvement and presence outside of the PE class (d) teacher-to-parent communication and feedback; (e) program transparency: come see what your child is doing in PE; and (f) a well-structured and organized program. For the reader's convenience, the authors will present and discuss each theme in turn.

Theme 1: Student Enjoyment Shapes Positive Parental Opinions

Until parents develop a relationship with their child's teacher or acquire knowledge of their child's curriculum, most of their perceptions are tainted by their own experiences from childhood. However, according to parent feedback in this study, one of the first and largest factors that reshape current parent perceptions is the experiences and opinions their children share with them. One parent shared the following statement when discussing how her perceptions have changed:

If you're going to talk about perceptions of PE before I had kids, it'll be from my own experience—which was if you spit on the ground, you had to do wall sits for fifteen minutes; and the PE teacher wore the tight little shorts; and it was rough. I wouldn't have described it as fun...now my kids love their PE experience.

Another parent explained how important a positive teacher-student relationship was to her. "Even though I didn't necessarily see the PE teacher very often, I knew my kids loved him, so then I liked him. Having that positive relationship with the students is probably number one."

These parents validate the following assumptions shared by one of the PE teachers in the district who stated, "I have parents that would probably say nice things about me that have never really seen

me teach, but I think their kids think positively about me.” This PE teacher and others interviewed seem to have caught on to the importance of being a positive influence and creating a fun, enjoyable atmosphere for the children. The parents further revealed the effect that the quality relationships these teachers build with their students have on the opinions that students and parents have towards teachers and the PE program. Many of the parents also spoke about how much they allow their children’s opinions to influence their perceptions of the PE program and the PE teacher. Therefore, creating a fun environment and developing positive relationships with the children is one indirect way teachers can incite program support.

Cuban (1992) and Sheehy (2006) underscore parents’ influence on intended and taught curricula and can influence change in a program. Their perceptions of the field most often affect the role that parents play, whether those perceptions are accurate or not. Gaining the endorsement of a community through positive perceptions, such as the perceptions displayed by the parents in this study, contributes to curricular continuity. Because parents in this study identify their child’s enjoyment of the program as an influential factor toward their perceptions, assessing for student satisfaction and developing gratifying lessons and activities are methods that will ultimately contribute to SSPE.

Theme 2: The Teachers’ Passion

It may seem obvious, but when a teacher genuinely enjoys what they do, a positive atmosphere develops, affecting students’ perceptions (Mitchell, 2013; Prusak et al., 2014). In turn, students share their enthusiasm with their parents.

Teacher-student interactions and relationships are highly affected by teacher passion, desire, or enthusiasm a teacher has toward teaching their subject. One teacher explained his decision to become a PE teacher as follows:

I see what’s going on with our kids...When I was growing up, as soon as I got home from school I was outside until Mom called me in. I dreaded that moment! You look in your neighborhoods now and it’s not the same. This is why I do this—get kids moving, get kids active, get kids interested so that hopefully they can pick up something they enjoy and be

active for the rest of their lives. That's the reason I'm doing this.

Many parents recognized the effects of the PE teachers' passion across the district. Here is an example of how parents felt about the impact that the PE teachers' passion for their job has on their children.

I feel like the PE teachers not only want to do a good job, but also want to positively impact the lives of the students on campus. This is evident in the high fives and thumbs up they get as they walk through campus. If they weren't teaching good lessons and actively involving the kids, the children would not seek [to hang] out [with] the PE teachers!

All in all, parents seem to define a passionate teacher as one who genuinely cares about the students, builds meaningful relationships with the students and the parents, is enthusiastic and encouraging in the delivery of lessons and feedback, creates fun and engaging lessons that lead to student enjoyment, provides plenty of positive feedback to both the students and the parents, and goes above and beyond in their job, such as being involved and present outside the PE classes.

Theme 3: Teacher Involvement and Presence Outside of the PE Class

A striking observation was that almost every parent referred to the extra programs and events that the PE teachers conducted outside of their class time (a required advocacy activity). Interestingly, they associated these extracurricular activities and events with the PE program and additional evidence of teachers' passion for helping their students create a healthy and physically active lifestyle. Parents shared over 20 extracurricular activities (e.g., traditional field days to a mud run) organized by their child's PE teacher.

Notably, these extra-curricular activities involve the children *and* their families. Considering the extra work these outreach activities require, when asked why she organized so many activities, one teacher responded, "I feel like we are a hub, not just for this school but for this community. So, what we do is we try to get as many kids

and families active as possible.” After one teacher spoke about the abundance of support he felt he received in return, he shared:

I think that parents see that I put a lot in because I do programs after school and I have fitness nights and I do running-club, girls on the run... They see that I’m really trying not to just be a teacher and clock in and clock out and get out of here. They see that I really want to teach the kids healthy lifestyles and give them opportunities to explore and grow. It’s appreciated, then they [the parents] do what can to support the program and activities.

It is almost as if teachers in this district are teaching parents how to be more involved and present in their children’s lives through their actions and example. When parents see teachers going above and beyond the classroom to be a part of their children’s lives, they are more apt to model that involvement by supporting and contributing to their children’s education outside of the home.

Theme 4: Teacher-to-Parent Communication and Feedback

Acquiring constructive feedback is one of many benefits of creating open communication channels between a teacher and parents. However, most of these parents admitted that they seldom take the time to provide feedback to the PE or *any* teacher unless there is a problem. “You never provide feedback when it’s good. Honestly, there’s never been anything bad to say about the PE program. When things are going smoothly, no one ever says anything.”

Nonetheless, parents always appreciate PE teachers’ efforts to keep them informed, as illustrated in the following:

I like that the teachers call me a lot, anytime there is something going on ... ‘Can you participate in this?’. They let me know what my daughter is up to...its good things, always good things. I think just reaching out to the parents to make sure the parents are involved and know what’s happening. I think that’s really important.

Parents report that teachers’ communications are largely negative reports of misbehavior or concerns about their children. However,

district PE advocacy practices are specifically designed to report the many good things their children do in PE. Consequently, parents find communications from PE teachers a relief and a pleasant surprise that makes a positive impression. One parent shared:

It was a fun surprise to receive a phone call about how well my son was participating and what a pleasure it was to have him in class. At first, I didn't know that it was going to be positive. [The PE teacher] said, 'We are just calling to let you know that your son is doing an awesome job in PE and let mom know that.' I thought that was positive feedback. I think a lot of times we don't get that positive—we just receive the calls when it is not good. I think it is great that they actually take the time to call. It was brief, but it meant a lot to me. I told my son and I think it boosted his morale...that he is doing a great job.

Positive feedback should far outweigh the negative feedback given to the parents about their child. Constructive or negative feedback is always better accepted when a relationship has already been established using plenty of positive feedback. A PE teacher demonstrated her understanding of this approach in her explanation for why she likes to provide ample positive feedback early in the year:

The key is to get parents on board starting with positive phone calls; because when you build a relationship with them and then you have an issue with that kid in class, you call them and they're on board 100% because they know you love their kid! We had a kid last year, and he was a superstar, but he got into some crazy trouble. All the sudden, he was on suspension. This is an amazing kid--*amazing* kid, and he messed up this one time. I called that mom, I said, 'Listen, I know he's going through tough times, but I want you to know that he's an amazing kid.' She starts crying on the phone saying, 'I needed that right now. I needed someone saying my kid's a good kid.' Every kid's gonna mess up, but if you build that relationship, you call, they're 100% behind you in whatever you need.

Every parent enjoys hearing good news about their child, and if a parent feels that a teacher enjoys having his/her child in the class, they are going to be more cooperative and supportive (Krasnow, 1990).

In addition to positive reports, open communications allow for invitations to attend or volunteer at PE-sponsored events. One parent said:

I feel like their newsletter ... about how parents can be involved, is good. I think parents don't know 'How can I be involved in my child's PE class?' ... and so a contact ... helps them feel like they are involved just by knowing what is going on. And like I said, those positive phone calls and positive emails...I think that is a huge thing because I think that parents want to know those things. It is important.

Although teachers use a variety of communication strategies, there are times when the type, timing, or delivery method of the information does not get through. One parent indicated that more consistent communication concerning the curriculum, approaching units or lessons in the PE class, or a curriculum map would be appreciated.

I just think that if we got a little bit more of what is going on like in an email, saying 'this is what we're working on this week in PE' or 'this is the curriculum they are hitting every quarter, because I know they probably plan that out ahead of time.' Just letting us know. You notice your kids wanting to practice whatever it is they are learning because they want to do that at home now or do it more on their own instead of just in PE.

Although the preferred form of teacher-to-parent communication varies, the most preferred were email, then text messages, and lastly, phone calls. Obviously, with hundreds of students, it is a huge undertaking and requires a great deal of commitment on the teacher's part, but there is no denying the benefits. Teacher-to-parent communication has become a strong tool in affecting positive parent perceptions of the program.

Here Are a Few Examples of How to Communicate With Parents About PE

A teacher may include a small segment in the school's monthly newsletter informing parents what activities, lessons, or units are approaching. At the end of the unit, the teacher may follow up in a bulk email referring to the school newsletter segment, thanking parents for helping their children be prepared for the unit, sharing how the unit went, and asking parents for their feedback regarding the unit or inquiring what their children shared with them about the lessons. This may sound like a lot of work, but connecting in different ways is more feasible than trying to reach each parent individually through their preferred form of communication. One parent shared the following:

Our PE teacher always adds some fun information in our [school] newsletter. It helps keep us informed on new and exciting things that she is working on for our kids. She also is a great communicator through email. I definitely feel like I am in good communication with her. Every effort that is made is appreciated. I feel like I can't say a negative thing about our PE program.

Robotic phone calls and email group lists are common at all schools. Asking parents to push the reply button and immediately share positive, neutral, or constructive feedback is a quick and easy way to solicit parent responses. Group text messaging is a very handy means to inform or remind parents about upcoming activities or events, assignments, and deadlines. Personal phone calls can be time-consuming but allow for a more personable touch, especially when addressing delicate issues. Whatever the method, teachers can reach more parents, make more connections, and increase the number of opportunities to shape the perceptions of their program.

Theme 5: Program Transparency: Come See What Your Child is Doing in PE

Parents tend to feel more positive about a welcoming, open, and inviting program. They experience a stronger sense of belonging and involvement in their children's educational experiences. However, even if a parent's participation or involvement does not increase,

merely having a simple awareness that the door is always open and parents are always welcome creates a sense of trust. For example, hosting several demonstration nights where parents observe and participate creates transparency in the curriculum their children experience. Here is a parent's account.

[Starting] in kindergarten, they have a demonstration night... They tell you leave all your other kids at home. They want it to be very focused on just that child being able to show you what they do. They take us through how a PE class would go. The little kids are really excited to show us that they know, how to follow the directions, stuff like that. They demonstrated a few of their activities and then they had us do some activities with them—encouraging that active relationship with your kid, which I really liked. It was fun.

Another parent says:

I think the fact that they're open and inviting to the parents incites the most participation because, if they weren't, even if I thought the PE program was great, if I wasn't invited to participate, I don't think I would see how great it ends up being for the kids and what the kids are experiencing. And so, because they invite the parents to come, you can watch them any time. And when you see what they're doing for them, it inspires more support.

Creating transparency demonstrates confidence in the program's benefits for their children and can even change past negative experiences. One teacher explained:

It drives me nuts when someone's had a poor PE program experience and they throw out comments like, 'You guys don't do anything.' I'm like, 'Come watch! Come for one lesson and see what we do.' And if they do, it changes their opinion immediately. They're like, 'Holy cow, this is different!'

Whether the parents have the time or means to accept the invitations to observe, participate, or volunteer, if the invitation is always present and the doors are always open, parents often assume that, since there is nothing to hide, great things are happening. When

asked what advice parents would give a new PE teacher, a majority of parents related the following:

Just making sure that parents know that [the teacher has an] open door communication, and [the parents] welcome to come participate in the class. I've definitely done that before. Rope climbing days, those are my favorite. I drop in on that. Just making sure that the PE teachers are very upfront...and say, 'Come check in on us anytime you want.'

Theme 6: Well-Structured, Organized Program

Teachers and school-and-district administrators make great efforts to showcase their EPE program precisely because of its quality, which is not lost on the parents. When asked why parents liked the program so much, one mother replied:

The PE curriculum is differentiated between grades so instruction and participation can be tailored to specific developmental abilities. The PE teachers are wonderful and start every day with a warm-up activity that then transitions into a lesson, and then, they get to play a game that aligns with the curriculum. What a neat and fun way to keep kids excited and engaged in physical activity.

However, teachers revealed that the program organization is more than merely structured lesson plans. Thorough planning goes into every aspect of the program, from the yearly curriculum scope and sequence to the posted objective for each day's lessons. One teacher shared the following, "We've got our objective wall that has to be refreshed every week on what we're doing, and kids can say, 'That's what we're learning today.' After being asked how this district-wide PE program has changed her perception of PE in general, one parent shared the following:

I have a greater appreciation for the purpose of PE and what they're trying to accomplish. I think before that; 'Oh, it's just for fun, it's just to get exercise.' But being more involved, I see how it's more about the overall emotional, mental, and

physical growth...there's just a broader purpose now in the PE program.

Although they shared a variety of reasons as to why they believed the program was so successful, many parents were unaware that this success is consistent throughout the district. Unless they had experience in other schools within the district, parents assumed that their school was special or unique due to the extreme efforts of the PE teachers at their school. For example:

This school has the most organized and well-run PE program I can imagine. I am incredibly pleased with our program. I feel like our school has wonderful PE teachers who offer a great variety of activities in PE. My children come home talking about what they learned or how far they got each week with their goals in PE. I feel like the PE program is a lot more involved then when I was in school.

In the minds of many parents, the PE teachers at *their* school are the heroes. However, every school attended by researchers found these similar hero-attributing characteristics in their teachers. Additionally, each class observed by the researchers was participating in the same highly organized four-part lessons. So, how were all these teachers on such similar pages simultaneously? Certainly, there had to be more to the story.

Although the PE teachers are recognizably highly trained, professional models of effective PE practitioners, prior research of the program and recent interviews with current PE practitioners in the district revealed that the true backbone of this successful and sustainable district PE model is the role of the Elementary PE District Coordinator. The current district coordinator has been working with the district for 20 years. Before her employment in this position, the previous Elementary PE District Coordinator retired after 26 years of service. Both believed strongly in teacher accountability. Both believed in the power of reaching out to the parents and have employed and refined advocacy practices to win the support of the parents. The current district coordinator holds every PE teacher accountable for keeping regular parent communication logs, attending monthly district-wide PE in-service meetings, maintaining a quality website, conducting at least two PE demonstration nights, keeping parents

informed through regularly distributed newsletters, and inviting parents to attend PE classes. All the PE teachers interviewed talked about the support *and* accountability from the district coordinator and the motivation it provides them. One of them stated, “[The PE district coordinator] is a huge advocate. [She] requires contact with parents on a weekly basis.: While another teacher shared an insightful comment about the role of the district coordinator with respect to accountability:

I’m telling you, if [the PE teachers] don’t do these things or they do it out of fear—they don’t get it. Because if you do them, it just improves what you’re doing as a PE teacher... You need to talk to parents. You’re going to see huge improvement and help.

The parents’ perceptions of a well-structured and organized program have much to do with the effective role of the district coordinator. All the busy work (i.e., curriculum development, lesson enhancements, assessment formation, equipment purchases, etc.) that usually prevents teachers from being more present and involved in building relationships and conducting extra-curricular activities or events that enrich their programs are taken care of by the PE district coordinator. With the support of the district coordinator in breaking down the barriers that usually impede the efforts of PE teachers in building and sustaining a strong program, PE teachers are free to focus on quality teaching, professional development, building strong relationships with parents, students, and community, and strengthening the perceptions and support of their program with effective advocacy practices.

Conclusion

Extending Cuban’s (1992) notion of change and stability, previous examinations (Pennington et al., 2014; Prusak et al., 2010; Prusak et al., 2014) of this district-wide PE program have used the phrases “dynamic stability” and “stagnant stability.” Stagnant stability harkens back to Siedentop and Locke’s (1997) assertion that the field of physical education was in a state of gridlock, unable to change (even for the better) due to a lack of collaboration between PETE, districts, schools, and the teachers. Conversely, the SSPE district has

achieved a state of dynamic stability in which changes are managed measuredly. Reaching out to parents is an intentional measure with two specific advocacy purposes and goals in mind: (a) to establish open communication, transparency, and goodwill and (b) to create parental support that may be called upon when needed. In short, the teachers advocate with the parents so that they might value PE and subsequently be more inclined to advocate for it.

This study highlights six advocacy activities, all of which are intended to (a) open lines of communication and transparency (e.g., phone call log, quarterly newsletters, open gym policy, and bi-annual parent-teacher conferences), (b) highlight student successes (e.g., positive reports to parents by phone or hand-written notes) and (c) highlight the quality of the program and its delivery by enthusiastic teachers (i.e., demonstration/curriculum presentations, track-and-field evenings and play days).

Few physical educators would disagree with the value of open communication, but too many shy away from engaging in the work it takes to make it happen. Indeed, despite all the positive outcomes that result from engaging in these advocacy practices, teachers admit that it is time-consuming and, at times, overwhelming. Nonetheless, they are quick to emphasize that the time and effort is well worth it. Strengthening teacher-student relationships, giving plentiful, positive feedback, and reporting good things to parents about their children is, after all, just good teaching. In turn, happy children relay positive experiences and feelings toward their PE teacher and class to their parents. Parents, some without ever meeting with the teacher, have positive perceptions and are inclined to support the program and teacher.

However, to win someone's heart, trust must be present. One of the best ways to gain the trust of others is through transparency. When it is evident to parents that teachers believe enough in their program to always make it open and available to the parents, and confident in their curriculum and teaching skills to invite them to come see what it contains, parents trust that the teachers have nothing to hide and assume good things are happening. Parents develop a sense of connectedness with teachers who create an open and trustful relationship (Davies, 1993). Taken even a step further, when teachers invite parents to participate in the lessons, events, and activities, par-

ents tend to acquire a sense of ownership. Parents, of their own accord, become loyal advocates of the program when teachers involve them in enhancing their children's health and well-being (Beddoes et al., 2021; Pennington et al., 2023).

One of the reasons PE teachers do not consistently engage in these types of activities is that they are dealing with the never-ending onslaught of barriers to their programs (large classes, low budgets, lack of administrative and collegial support, etc.) (Barroso et al., 2005; Jenkinson & Benson, 2010; Prusak et al., 2010). They do not have the time. As has been reported before in Prusak et al., (2010), many of these overwhelming responsibilities are largely nonexistent in the SSPE model due to the efforts of a diligent, full-time district PE coordinator. Besides relieving the PE teachers of common program barriers (Barroso et al., 2005; Jenkinson & Benson, 2010), the district PE coordinator also heightens teacher effectiveness and motivation by holding them accountable and providing them with the ongoing professional development and support needed to win the hearts of the community through consistent program advocacy practices. The work provided by the District PE Coordinator allows teachers (whom Prusak et al. (2010) believe is the most important part of the SSPE model) to focus on what should be their top priorities, teaching and advocacy.

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