

The Challenge of Effective Family/School Partnerships: The Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Pilot Program

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Abstract

Research supports the idea that positive family/school community partnerships during middle school can enhance student success. Thus schools are partnering with local universities to increase school and student outcomes. In order to support local middle schools, The University of Alabama created the Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy, a training program that prepares middle school parent and teacher leaders with the skills to strengthen school and student outcomes. Using a mixed methods design, we analyzed pilot data from the first year of the Academy on parents' and teachers' leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Pretest and posttest results showed that parent and teacher participants significantly increased their leadership behaviors. Qualitative thematic analysis revealed answers to the question: "What has the Academy meant to you?" as follows: 1) Facilitates parent-teacher collaboration, 2) Increases parent and teacher school leadership behaviors, 3) Enhances parent and teacher school leadership self-efficacy, 4) Increases opportunities for school change, and 5) Increases parental-school involvement. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Introduction

Family engagement and family/school partnerships are a strong predictor of child school success during middle school (Hill & Tyson, 2009). However, custodial parents and caregivers often become less involved in their middle school students' school experiences (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005) than during the elementary grades, due to a variety of factors (Halsey, 2005; Lam & Ducreux, 2013). Caregivers become less involved at the middle school level because they believe that they are supporting their students' independence and growth. As their child experiences the tensions of burgeoning independence and adolescence, many are faced with the challenge that occurs when their students do not want them to participate in school activities. Another factor that may impact parental involvement during middle school may be their own negative experiences as middle school students. Furthermore, parents may also become less involved because of their own lack of confidence in the content knowledge that accelerates during the middle grades (Lam & Ducreux, 2013).

The relationships between teachers and parents may further complicate parents' involvement during middle school. Middle school teachers report providing less information and

involving parents less than elementary school teachers (Sanders, 2001). Halsey (2005) noted the importance of addressing and overcoming misconceptions between teachers and parents about each other's roles as well as their perceptions about each other's desire for parent involvement. Another challenge to the relationship between teachers and parents may be the structure of the middle school itself. Specifically, middle school students may have a different teacher for each core academic class, elective class, and physical education, which makes it difficult to build relationships with their students' teachers. This is a difficult transition from the elementary school in which there is often one teacher in a self-contained classroom. Moreover, Hornby and Witte's (2010) research on middle schools in New Zealand posited additional reasons for less parental involvement at the middle school level. They noted that several middle schools did not have written policies on parental involvement, failed to provide defined experiences for parents, lacked home visits, and were deficient in their attempts to engage diverse parents. They also concluded that there was a lack of training provided to preservice and in-service teachers on how to engage their students' parents in their children's school experiences.

Despite these obstacles, developmentally tailored parental involvement is associated with positive student outcomes (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Addressing the developmental level of the students is essential since students undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages of 10 and 15 than at any other time in their lives. During this time, students often encounter many changes both in- and out-of-school, including changes in personal relationships, developmental processes, and academic success during this stage of their lives (Hill & Tyson, 2009). To address these changes and support middle school students, the curriculum, pedagogy, and programs of middle grades schools must be based upon the developmental readiness, needs, and interests of young adolescents. This student support should include a “sustained, coordinated, collaborative relationship between parents, educators and the communities surrounding schools” (Elias, Patrikakou, & Weissberg, 2007, p. 541).

Hill and Tyson’s (2009) meta-analysis discovered that academic socialization, or strategies that support normal developmental autonomy, independence, and cognitive abilities, had the strongest association with middle school student achievement. This type of involvement includes parents communicating their expectation for academic achievement and fostering educational goals, and discussing learning strategies. Academic socialization is adaptive for the context of middle schools because it is dependent on parents’ competencies to navigate the middle school environment. School-based involvement, or being involved in school activities, was also related to academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In middle school, school-based involvement entails less direct involvement in the classroom than in elementary school and a greater emphasis on fundraising, administrative tasks, and committee work (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Results for home-based parental involvement were mixed. Specifically assisting with homework was not consistently associated with academic achievement. Involvement at home includes providing an overall educationally supportive environment that includes providing structure as well as monitoring and checking homework (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

While increasing parent involvement can be a challenge, family/school partnerships have been shown to increase student success, improve student behavior, and enhance overall school climate (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As noted by Epstein (1995) “...the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families” (p. 701). This may be even more

important during the middle school years (Elias, et al., 2007). Lam and Ducreux (2013) concluded that when communication between teacher and parents increased, student academic achievement also increased. This also included improvements in students’ attitudes, behavior, and attendance. Positive outcomes also occurred for the parents in their levels of confidence, satisfaction, and interest. Increased parent involvement has a positive impact on teachers as well. Specifically, successful parent involvement programs have a higher rate of success and facilitate higher job satisfaction among teachers (MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2012).

One method for improving family/school relationships is developing community partnerships. Indeed, such partnerships can promote academic achievement and increase student attendance and graduation rates (e.g., Epstein, 2011; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Sanders, 2005; 2009). In order to enhance student and school outcomes, schools are developing partnerships with local universities. Universities as community partners allows for the potential influx of resources and capacity building. Utilizing the Dual Capacity-building Framework for family/school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), the purpose of this article is to provide pilot data on The University of Alabama’s Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy, a parent and teacher leadership professional development program that equips parents and teachers to form school partnership teams for improving school and student outcomes.

Dual Capacity Framework

Recently, there has been a strong emphasis for adopting a broader framework for parent/school partnerships. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) propose moving beyond traditional concepts of parental involvement to a more broadening view of parent engagement that contains multiple constructions of how parents can be involved. The Dual Capacity Framework provides the conceptual model underlying the Academy (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The adapted framework is presented in Figure 1.

The Challenge

The Dual Capacity Framework describes the challenge as the lack of opportunities for school staff and families to build capacity for effective partnerships. The Academy meets the capacity-building challenge by providing a professional development program to enhance parent-teacher partnerships.

Opportunity Conditions

The Academy professional development program and partnership model institutes capacity-building opportunities for parent and teacher participants. Each school partnership team will tailor strategies and procedures to their idiosyncratic context, with each meeting a number of process and organizational conditions.

Process Conditions

Professional development. The Academy is an interactive professional development leadership program that develops school partnership teams comprised of parents, teachers, and administrators (see below for full description). The experiential-learning-based modules provide the content for improving family/school partnerships. This structure naturally fosters relationships between parents and teachers from participating schools while at the same time developing capacity for actively improving parent/teacher relationships within each respective school. Participants gain understanding of the research based on the association between family/school partnerships and student educational outcomes, as well as parental school involvement and student outcomes. Additionally, school participants become familiar with their state-approved school improvement plan and student learning outcomes. Finally, sessions occur in a group format to maximize partnership team cohesion and collaboration.

Partnership Team Model. The Academy's training intentionally nurtures partnership team relationships through their training modules and emphasis on meeting between Academy sessions. The focus of each team is to develop positive relationships with other parents, teachers, and administration. Each partnership team creates a school project linked to at least one goal of their school's Alabama continuous improvement plan, linking their project to learning outcomes. Each project involves other parents and teachers—in addition to administrators, school personnel, and community members—creating a collaborative, shared learning environment that develops parent and teacher ownership for transforming schools.

Organizational Conditions

Systemic. Statewide education agencies and school improvement plans prioritize the development of family/school partnerships to improve student achievement. Furthermore, each district monetarily contributes to the Academy, thereby making the program a district-wide systemic initiative.

Integrated. Districts, schools, and administrators recognize the Academy as a family/school partnership capacity-building program for improving family/school relationships and student outcomes. Thus, participating districts and schools continue to send new participants every year.

Sustained. School administration are committed to and have a systemic vision of family engagement and family/school partnerships. School district superintendents acknowledge family/school engagement as a crucial part of each school's school improvement plan.

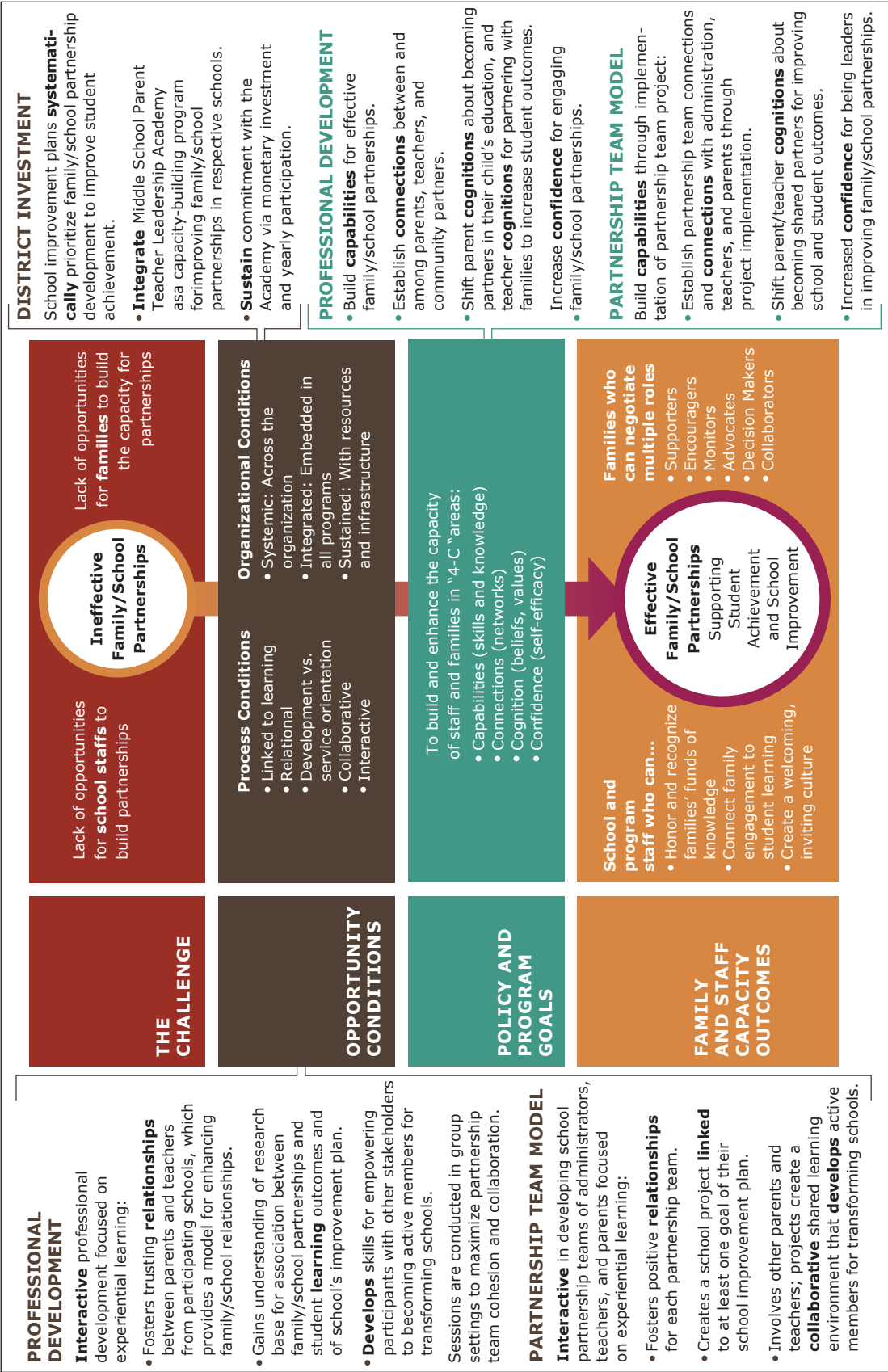
Policy and Program Goals

This component of the Capacity-Building Framework posits that fostering thriving family/school partnerships includes a dual focus on the capacity of school personnel and families to engage in partnerships. Programs and procedures enhance partnerships through the four components of partnership capacity: Capabilities, connections, cognitions, confidence.

Professional development. Academy session content builds capacity through increasing knowledge and enhancing skill-building for initiating and developing trusting family/school partnerships. Participants understand the context of their school and community in which they work, adapting their new knowledge to their respective school. Throughout the program, participants actively develop trusting and respectful connections with each other, as well as strategies for improving teacher/family relationships, parent/parent relationships, and connections with community services agencies. Through teacher/family connections, parents' cognitions change to perceiving themselves as partners in their child's education. Teachers' cognitions are changed to perceiving themselves as a partner with parents in order to meet school goals. As a result, parents and teachers' confidence for engaging in family/school partnerships increases.

Partnership Team Model. Participants are able to build their capabilities of initiating and developing effective family/school partnerships through implementation of their partnership team project. Through project development and implementation, each school's partnership team establishes connection with administration, teachers, and parents. Throughout this process, parent and teacher participants will shift their cognitions about becoming shared partners for improving school and student outcomes. Furthermore, school-wide engagement events will

Figure 1. Dual Capacity Framework: Middle School Parent Teacher Partnership Academy



build family/school connections, and thus, change parents and teachers' cognitions for becoming partners in increasing student outcomes. As participants engage in each session and apply their knowledge to their school, caregivers shift their cognitions about becoming partners in their child's education, and teachers shift their cognitions for partnering with families to increase student outcomes, thereby increasing their confidence for establishing such relationships. The Academy strives to build parents and teachers as leaders initially and then develop them as collaborative partners in order to impact their team and school as a whole. Thus, the intent for increasing confidence for being school leaders in improving family/school partnerships will hopefully have a ripple effect by which other parents and teachers will become partners for improving student and school outcomes.

According to the Dual Capacity Framework, enhancing these goals allows school personnel and families to engage in partnerships that will support student learning and achievement. Specifically, school personnel demonstrate the following capacity outcomes: 1) honor and recognize families' existing knowledge, skill, and forms of engagement; 2) create and sustain school and district cultures that welcome, invite, and promote family engagement; and 3) develop family engagement initiatives and connect them to student learning and development. Families will be able to negotiate the following multiple roles: 1) supporters of their children's learning and development; 2) encouragers of an achievement identity, a positive self-image, and a "can do" spirit in their children; 3) monitors of their children's time, behavior, boundaries, and resources; 4) models of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education; 5) advocates/activists for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools; 6) decision makers/choosers of educational options for their children, the school, and their community; and 7) collaborators with school staff and other members of the community on issues of school improvement and reform.

Academy Partnership Team Model

The mission of the Academy is to build community by supporting children and families. To accomplish this mission, the Academy leadership members believe that community is built and children and families are supported through a Partnership Team Model. Throughout

the Academy, parent and teacher members attend leadership training sessions that equip them to serve as Partnership Team members. These training sessions provide parents and teachers with a framework for school, family, and community partnerships, but also provide specific leadership training in order to equip both parents and teachers as leaders of the Partnership Team. In the words of one parent participant, "The sessions taught me the importance of not only being a leader, but empowering others along the way."

Throughout sessions, parents and teachers learn how to develop a partnership proposal based upon a goal from their school's improvement plan. Parents and teachers come together to develop specific, planned, and sustainable programs that are directly related to their school's curricular, behavioral, or cultural needs (Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2013; Sheldon, 2007; Sanders, 2005). Parents and teachers commit to continuing the work of the Partnership Team at their schools between each session in order to prepare for final presentations at the end of sessions. Academy members update progress each month, and facilitators provide feedback to Partnership Teams during the planning time allotted at each session.

Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Structure

The University of Alabama Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy has a clearly defined structure that begins with the nomination process at the local school level. It is a unique leadership program in that it provides both research-based professional development to parents and teachers (e.g., modules), as well as a structure for application of that new knowledge (e.g., Partnership Team Model/school-based projects). In addition, since its inception, the Academy has offered its graduates the opportunity for celebration with a final graduation ceremony, in which Dr. Samory T. Pruitt, vice president of the Division of Community Affairs, honors each team's graduates.

Partnership Team Nomination

Before each school year, principals from participating middle schools nominate team members to participate in the Academy. At least two parents and two teachers per school are selected to complete the school's Partnership Team. Teams vary in size based upon the membership in various academies; there are four various elementary academies, while the pilot only consisted of a

parent and teacher component. However, teams must consist of a combination of both parents and teachers. Principals nominate those who have demonstrated leadership abilities and/or leadership potential and who are currently active in supporting the school's mission. Parents and teachers who agree to participate in the Academy attend leadership training modules throughout the academic year and create a partnership project proposal based upon a goal from the school's improvement plan. In addition, these Academy members agree to serve as the core Partnership Team for the school, promoting school, family, and community engagement based upon research-based methods (Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). (See Table 1.)

Academy Training Sessions

Academy parent and teacher participants attend multiple professional development training modules throughout the school year. Each module includes time for networking with other participants; leadership training presentations facilitated by faculty members, community experts, school leaders, and previous Academy graduates; and time to develop school projects. Each parent session occurs during the evening hours, while teacher sessions occur during the workday; substitute teachers are provided (see Table 1 for alignment between parent and teacher sessions).

Session I: Parents as leaders; teachers as leaders. The first session provides an overall introduction to Academy goals and objectives. Parents and teachers meet separately. This module affirms parents and teachers in their role as leaders who are capable of making a difference in their school communities. In addition to learning from Academy graduates, parents and teachers identify potential strengths and skills they can use to engage other parents, teachers, and school administrators in solution-building discussions to improve their respective school communities.

Session II: Goal-oriented school, family, and community partnerships. All parent and teacher participants attend this session in order to begin their collaborative work in their school teams. During this evening session, teams are provided opportunities to network over a meal prior to receiving their instruction. Not only do the teams discuss their respective school's improvement plan, they also receive specific training regarding Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home,

decision-making, and collaborating with the community) and the Academy framework for partnership project proposals.

Session III: Helping your child achieve academic success (parents); collaboration and communication (teachers). The third module provides differentiated learning to support the individual needs of Academy members. "Helping Your Child Achieve Academic Success," supports participants' understanding of academic issues and building a collaborative relationship with the school's principal. Parents are allowed to network with individuals other than the principal within their child's school community who can assist in various ways to achieve academic success (e.g., school counselor, school psychologist, school librarian, etc.).

In the session entitled "Collaboration and Communication," teachers have the opportunity to reflect upon their own methods of communication and current collaborative practices. Effective practices for two-way communication are shared and discussed, and feedback on current Partnership Team implementation is provided (Brownstein, Maushard, Robinson, Greenfeld, & Hutchins, 2006; Epstein, 2009).

Session IV: School and board of education relations. The fourth session of the year is marked by a second joint session of both parents and teachers. This session was designed to assist school Partnership Teams comprehensively understand the roles and responsibilities of school boards and school district leaders. Panel presenters—a collection of administrators and board members from most of the participating school districts—discuss the basics of school finances, school board policies and operations, and strategies to work with school board members. Before the module, participants design questions to pose to the panel. For the second half of the evening, parents and teachers are given time to collaborate on their partnership project proposal. This dedicated planning time is integral at this mid-year point in order to receive feedback from facilitators and learn from other school Partnership Teams.

Session V: Safe and healthy schools (parents only). Guest lecturers present to parent academy members on child behavior management, physical and mental health, school safety, student wellness, and school disciplinary policies. Topics may also include bullying and discipline issues, and sharing best practices to create a safe and optimal school climate. Parents are encouraged to discuss learned

Table 1. Alignment Between Middle School Parent Leadership Academy and Middle School Teacher Leadership Academy

Middle School Parent Leadership Academy	Middle School Teacher Leadership Academy
Goal-Oriented School, Family, and Community Partnerships (Collaborative Session) - Parents and teachers will learn the foundation of goal-oriented school, family, and community partnerships based upon Epstein’s framework. - The PTLA Partnership Project will be addressed.	
Parents as Leaders	Teachers as Leaders
Parents committed to helping their child achieve academic success	- Characteristics of teacher leadership necessary to increase parent/family engagement - Existing parent/family involvement effective practices at participants’ schools - Research based models for effective parent/family involvement
Collaborations and Communication Strategies for communicating to parents the necessary support schools need for: - Academic (e.g., Common Core Standards, standard testing) - Programmatic (e.g., core curriculum, art, music, extracurricular a activities) - Strategies for effective collaboration with parents, stakeholders, and community members	
School and Board of Education Relations (Collaborative Session) - Facilitating all stakeholders (e.g., administrators, other teachers/school professionals, parents) in specific strategies to increase overall student achievement - Parent/family and school/district decision-making - Understand the roles and become knowledgeable about the operations of the school board and school administrators - Facilitate communication with and among local leadership	
Safe and Healthy Schools	Communicating Standards for Safe and Healthy Schools
Supporting Connected School Communities	- Behavior (e.g., bullying, attitude) - Healthy living - Learning environment (e.g., cultural, social, economic) well-being of schools
	Supporting Connected School Communities - Community resources - Extracurricular activities and community activities - Communicating the support necessary for school success
PTLA Partnership Project	Aligned to at least one goal of the school’s Continuous Improvement Plans and focused on engaging school, family, community

health and safety practices with their children at home and to seek opportunities to share with their school’s administration, teachers, and staff the information acquired during this session.

Session VI: Supporting connected school communities (parents); supporting safe, healthy, and connected schools (teachers). The topic of this final module, “Building Community,” continues to solidify the Academy’s mission. It is important to note that teachers have a combined curriculum

of Modules V and VI because they attend a full-day session rather than an evening session. Parent and teacher participants learn about community resources to access in order to support families and schools. Additionally, all Academy participants are provided training in small grant writing and project sustainability during this session. Final partnership proposals are shared with peers, and Academy members have the opportunity to debrief with facilitators regarding their overall experience.

After proposals, partnership projects should be implemented during the final semester of the Academy or the semester following graduation.

Graduation

A graduation ceremony recognizing participants' completion of the Academy is held at the end of each school year. To be eligible, participants must complete all requirements, including the partnership proposal presentation at the final session. Attended by participants, principals, superintendents, school board members, staff from the Center for Community-Based Partnerships and the Division of Community Affairs, members of the Academy Advisory Council, and University of Alabama faculty and administrators, the graduation ceremony acknowledges Academy members' contribution to their schools. During the ceremony, graduates have opportunities to display summaries of their partnership proposals. In addition, each school receives a plaque for display that honors the graduating Academy members.

Research Questions

The specific aim of this study was to evaluate the Academy's first-year pilot program to increase school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy and to understand participants' experiences of involvement in the program. In order to assess these items, we addressed the following research questions:

1) Does the Academy program significantly increase parent and teacher school leadership self-efficacy and behaviors? 2) What were the benefits of participating in the program? 3) How can the Academy leadership support partnership teams in the design and implementation of their project?

Method

Participants

Twenty-eight parent and 30 teacher Academy participants completed the pretest and posttest surveys. Parents and teachers were from 17 middle schools in six school districts (67% rural; 20% urban; 13% suburban). There were 26 female and two male parent participants (64% Caucasian; 86% married; 92% completed some college), and 26 female and four male teacher participants (83% Caucasian; 72% achieved a master's degree). Teachers have spent an average of six years teaching at their current schools and almost 12 years in the teaching profession.

Measures

Research Question #1

Parent surveys. Academy parents completed a survey to assess school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Participants completed the pretest before the first module and a posttest survey after the final module. The survey consisted of five leadership behaviors (1 = never, 2 = very rarely, 3 = rarely, 4 = occasionally, 5 = frequently, 6 = very frequently). Example items include: "I get other parents involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school." "I talk with other parents about being involved in my child's school." "I talk with my child's teacher and other staff about school issues and/or projects that could be implemented in my child's school." Items were summed to create an aggregate score of school leadership behaviors. (See Table 2 and Table 3 for list of items.)

The survey also consisted of 11 school leadership self-efficacy items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree). Examples of self-efficacy items include:

Table 2. Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Pre-Post School Leadership Attitudes and Self-Efficacy Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

	Mean pre-test (SD) Min - Max	Mean post-test (SD) Min - Max	Median Change	Standardized Test Statistic	P value	Cohen's d effect size	CL effect size
Parents (n = 28)							
Leadership Behaviors	21.10 (4.86) Min - Max: 8 - 30	24.54 (3.20) Min - Max: 18 - 30	3.59	3.70	< .001	.70	.79
Leadership Self-Efficacy	56.52 (8.40) Min - Max: 31 - 75	58.85 (5.28) Min - Max: 45 - 66	2.58	1.89	.06	.36	.69
Teachers (n = 30)							
Leadership Behaviors	21.19 (4.62) Min - Max: 9 - 29	25.16 (3.65) Min - Max: 19 - 36	4.00	3.43	.001	.63	.73
Leadership Self-Efficacy	41.92 (6.98) Min - Max: 29 - 54	43.67 (6.50) Min - Max: 24 - 53	2.50	1.81	.07	.33	.60

Table 3. Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Parent Pre-Post Individual Item Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

School Leadership Behaviors Individual Items (Range 1–6)				Pre-Survey Mean (SD)	Post-Survey Mean (SD)	Pre/Post Median Change	Standardized Test Statistic	Cohen's d Effect Size	CL Effect Size
I get other parents involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school.				4.64 (1.12)	4.91 (.98)	.00	1.09	.21	.61
I talk with other parents about being involved in my child's school.				4.60 (1.02)	5.32 (.63)	.30	3.48**	.66	.82
I talk with the principal at my child's school about school issues and/or projects that could be implemented in my child's school.				4.08 (1.02)	4.92 (.72)	1.00	3.11**	.59	.71
I talk with my school's PTA/PTO committee members about school issues and/or projects that could be implemented in my child's school.				3.88 (1.29)	4.47 (1.23)	.52	2.58*	.49	.79
I talk with my child's teacher and other staff about school issues and/or projects that could be implemented in my child's school.				3.88 (1.34)	4.92 (.86)	1.00	3.60***	.68	.79
School Leadership Self-Efficacy Individual Items (Range 1–6)									
I have the skills to be an effective parent leader in my child's school.				5.36 (.71)	5.14 (1.29)	-.19	.08	.02	.50
I have the knowledge that it takes to be an effective parent leader in my child's school.				4.88 (.99)	5.10 (1.27)	.13	1.74	.33	.71
I know how to get other parents and school staff involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school.				4.46 (1.15)	4.83 (1.11)	.27	1.63	.31	.61
I can make a difference in my child's school.				5.20 (.72)	5.32 (1.03)	.34	1.29	.24	.57
I feel comfortable accessing community resources that can support my child's school.				4.54 (.90)	4.87 (.74)	.46	1.90	.36	.64
I feel comfortable contacting a member of the School Board of Education regarding my child's school.				5.52 (3.51)	5.32 (.69)	-.17	1.34	.25	.61
I feel comfortable participating in meetings with teachers.				5.60 (.61)	5.86 (.41)	.00	2.25*	.43	.57
I feel comfortable leading meetings with teachers.				5.08 (1.09)	5.29 (.62)	.32	1.03	.19	.54
I feel comfortable participating in meetings with other parents about school-related issues.				5.44 (.61)	5.77 (.37)	.56	2.86**	.54	.64
I feel comfortable leading meetings with other parents about school-related issues.				5.16 (1.11)	5.49 (.54)	.30	2.23*	.42	.61
I plan to be involved in a specific school initiative to improve school climate and/or student academic success.				5.26 (.93)	5.49 (.54)	.72	2.79**	.53	.64

Note: ***p < .002 **p < .01. *p < .05.

Table 4. Middle School Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Teacher Pre-Post Individual Item Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

School Leadership Behaviors Individual Items (Range 1–6)	Pre-Survey Mean (SD)	Post-Survey Mean (SD)	Pre/Post Median Change	Standardized Test Statistic	Cohen's d Effect Size	CL Effect Size
I collaborate with parent leaders on plans to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.03 (.81)	4.28 (.72)	.00	1.52	.28	.68
I communicate with parent leaders in my school.	4.39 (.99)	4.52 (.84)	.13	.67	.12	.50
I initiate communication with my school administration on plans to support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	3.17 (1.05)	3.96 (.72)	1.00	2.96**	.54	.73
I initiate communication with my school's PTA/PTO committee members on plans to support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	3.24 (1.10)	4.00 (.59)	.78	2.88**	.53	.70
I work together with parent leaders in my school to implement projects that support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	3.07 (1.05)	4.24 (.84)	1.00	3.65***	.66	.83
I work together with community members to implement projects that support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	3.28 (1.11)	4.16 (.68)	.36	3.30**	.60	.77
School Leadership Self-Efficacy Individual Items (Range 1–6)						
I view myself as a leader in my school.	4.97 (1.16)	5.22 (.88)	.11	1.33	.24	.60
I am willing to take leadership roles in my school.	5.20 (.85)	5.11 (.92)	.00	-.06	.01	.63
I have the skills to assume a leadership role in my school.	5.03 (.85)	5.11 (.92)	.00	1.07	.20	.63
I feel comfortable initiating meetings with parent leaders to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.67 (.96)	4.74 (1.10)	.00	.81	.15	.53
I feel comfortable initiating meetings with other teachers to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.57 (1.07)	4.74 (1.07)	.00	.81	.20	.57
I feel comfortable initiating meetings with administration to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.80 (1.16)	4.96 (1.07)	.00	.81	.11	.57
I feel comfortable initiating meetings with community members to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.20 (1.03)	4.46 (.75)	.46	.81	.27	.63
I feel comfortable initiating meetings with my school's PTA\PTO committee members to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.14 (1.14)	4.44 (.79)	.00	.81	.25	.63
I know how to effectively collaborate with parent leaders to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan.	4.34 (1.03)	4.88 (.76)	1.00	2.64**	.48	.73

Note: ***p < .001 **p < .01. *p < .05.

"I have the skills to be an effective parent leader in my child's school." "I feel comfortable leading meetings with other parents about school-related issues." "I can make a difference in my child's school." Self-efficacy items were summed to create an aggregate score for school leadership self-efficacy.

Teacher surveys. Academy teachers completed a survey to assess school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Surveys were completed before the first module and following the final module. The survey consisted of six leadership behaviors (1 = never, 2 = very rarely, 3 = rarely, 4 = occasionally, 5 = frequently, 6 = very frequently). Example items include: "I collaborate with parent leaders on plans to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan." "I work together with parent leaders in my school to implement projects that support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan." "I initiate communication with my school administration on plans to support my school's Continuous Improvement Plan." Items were summed to create an aggregate score of school leadership behaviors.

The survey also consisted of nine school leadership self-efficacy items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree). Examples of self-efficacy items include: "I view myself as a leader in my school." "I have the skills to assume a leadership role in my school." "I feel comfortable initiating meetings with other teachers to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan." Self-efficacy items were summed to create an aggregate score of school leadership self-efficacy.

Research questions #2 and #3. In order to understand participants' experience of program involvement, we gathered feedback on the ways in which the Academy was beneficial. Additionally, because each partnership team designed and implemented a project, we wanted to understand how Academy leadership can assist partnership teams in carrying out their school project. Academy parent and teacher participants responded to two questions: 1) What has the Academy meant to you? 2) How can Academy leadership support the design and implementation of your Academy Partnership Project?

Analysis Plan

Research question #1. Parent and teacher pretest and posttest mean differences on school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy were tested using the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranked Test.

Individual items were tested in addition to the aggregate scores. Cohen's *d* effect size was also calculated. Cohen's *d* represents the magnitude of the effect of the Academy's intervention, with .2 indicating a small effect size, .5 a moderate effect size, and .8 a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). CL effect size, which estimates the probability that a randomly selected score from one population will be greater than a randomly selected score from the other population, was also estimated (McGraw & Wong, 1992). Wilcoxon Signed-Ranked Tests and descriptive statistics analyses were performed using SPSS.

Research questions #2 and #3. Narrative responses for each question were analyzed through thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first author conducted an analysis of each narrative response and then provided conceptual labels of thematic contents that emerged from the data. The first and fourth authors independently coded the narrative responses using the labels. Following coding comparisons, they resolved any discrepancies by consulting the narrative responses for further clarification until a consensus was reached.

Results

Research Question #1

Parents. Paired samples *t*-test results revealed that Academy parent participants significantly increased in their self-assessment of school leadership behaviors from pretest to posttest. Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that leadership behaviors at posttest ranks were statically higher than pretest ranks ($Z = 3.70$, $p < .001$).

The effect size of the intervention was moderate-large ($d = .70$). The CL effect size was .79, indicating that after controlling for individual differences, the likelihood that a person scores higher on mean posttest is 79%. Parent leadership self-efficacy was approaching significance from pretest to posttest ($Z = 1.89$, $p = .06$). The effect size of the intervention was small-moderate ($d = .36$), and the CL effect size was .69. (See Table 2 aggregate results and Table 3 for individual item results.)

Teachers. Paired sample *t*-test findings found that Academy teachers significantly increased in their assessment of leadership behaviors from pretest to posttest. Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that leadership behaviors at posttest ranks were statistically higher than pretest ranks ($Z = 3.43$, $p = .001$). The effect size of the

intervention was moderate-large ($d = .63$), and the CL effect size was .73. Teacher school leadership self-efficacy also increased from pretest to posttest, approaching significance ($Z = 1.81$, $p = .07$). The effect size of the intervention was small-moderate ($d = .33$), and the CL effect size was .60 (see Table 4 for individual item t-test results).

Research Question #2

Thematic analysis revealed five categories for the question “What has the Academy meant to you?” 1) Facilitates parent-teacher collaboration. 2) Increases parent and teacher school leadership behaviors. 3) Enhances parent and teacher school leadership self-efficacy. 4) Increases opportunities for school change. 5) Increases parental-school involvement.

Facilitates parent-teacher collaboration.

The Academy provided intentional opportunities for parent and teacher leaders to collaborate. One teacher commented that the Academy “allowed us (parents and teachers) to work together as a team and gave us a forum for collaboration.” Another stated that the partnership model brought parents and teachers together to focus on school issues:

But just to see how excited parents are to get involved and have a voice and then how receptive the teachers were to make the partnership with the parents and how by being focused we were addressing the issues that were most important to the parents and to the teachers...kind of collaborating together.

One teacher noted how the Academy provided a greater understanding of the importance of the parent-teacher relationship:

It has been eye-opening to me as a teacher just realizing the importance of the relationship between the parent and the teacher. I mean I've always known that was important but this was just eye-opening when we had the parents come in and we were answering questions, just getting their feedback and realizing, oh wow, maybe I underestimated what they knew, maybe I just assumed they knew this information but now I actually know that they didn't know this so I was able to fill in those gaps along. We were able to fill in those gaps and answer those questions

and understand that parent involvement is essential in our students learning and it's fundamental.

One teacher reported that involvement in the Academy shifted the teacher's perception on parents being valuable contributors to the school:

We were talking a little bit today and one of the things that was helpful to us was it opened up to us some knowledge to some of the skills and gifts that our parents had to offer. Some of the parents that we worked with we knew a good bit about to start with and others we just realized some of the unique contributions they could make.

Increases parent and teacher school leadership behaviors. Participants said that their involvement in the Academy provided an avenue to increase leadership behaviors in their respective schools. One respondent reported, “To me the [Academy] has been a great opportunity just to really dig into those leadership skills and make a change in my school.” A teacher noted that the Academy provided avenues to initiate conversations with parents and become more involved in parent-teacher groups. “With the project we've been able to converse back and forth with the parents, be more involved with the Parent Teacher Association, and it's just been amazing!”

Enhances parent and teacher school leadership self-efficacy. Parents and teachers describe the Academy as developing the skills to become a school leader. One participant stated, “The [Academy] has given us the ideas and resources and some training to help us realize what we can do and what we could do and should do to engage the community and parents at the school level.” One teacher detailed gaining confidence as a school leader:

As a second year teacher, I didn't really know where my role is or where I stood on the map of making a change but this has really given me the opportunity to have some input and actually make a difference and add those things and see the changes in my school. Now that we have done this it's like OK now I feel more comfortable with being able to go forward with more things that I want to see in my school.

Increases opportunities for school change.

Most participants commented that the Academy provided the structure and avenue for school partnership teams to create school change. One teacher articulated:

I think these particular parents that we worked with have always been wonderful to deal with in the first place but I think it got us all on the same page so that we are sending a unified message to our school district and our community.

One respondent explained:

The training and programs have been excellent in helping us really think through creating a product and project that will be meaningful, sustainable, and have evidence and data to back up our purpose for doing it.

A parent reported that the Academy supplied the time, venue, and resources to develop and implement impactful projects:

[The Academy] provided us with the opportunity to explore other avenues that we hadn't looked at before. With the activity that we did for our project, we increased our parental involvement in our school meetings almost 200 percent.

Increases parental-school involvement.

Respondents detailed that the Academy provided the professional development and training for partnership teams to increase parent-school involvement. One teacher affirmed that the teacher now "understands that parent involvement is essential in our students learning and it's fundamental." Another teacher said:

We talked about what opportunities can we do to get our parents into the building where they don't have to pay anything and they get to come and learn something that will help them be a parent to our kids.

Another participant specified that the partnership team's project focused on increasing parental-school involvement:

[We] hosted a meeting where parents had to come in, they volunteered, they painted. We had a panel of students and parents to actually speak and they were able to share information about the school with each other. Parents were allowed to ask questions. It's a way for us to communicate better with our parents and for the school to be involved.

Research Question #3

Participants provided narrative responses to the question, "How can Academy leadership support the design and implementation of your Partnership Project?" Three main themes emerged: Project support, project promotion, and project funding.

Project support. Parents and teachers responded that Academy leadership can provide more support by being "available for questions and guidance" and "validating our efforts." Additionally, partnership teams reported wanting more "communication" from Academy leadership. Respondents also stated their desire for Academy leadership to attend their project implementation: "Would love to have you guys come to our event."

Project promotion. Participants requested Academy leadership to assist in promoting their project on difference platforms. Respondents expressed that Academy leadership can help "promote and advertise our project," and "promote our project on social media."

Project funding. Parents and teachers reported that Academy leadership can help partnership teams find funding to financially support their partnership team project. One participant stated that Academy leadership can "help with grants moving into the coming years." Another commented, "Ideas on how we can raise money for our project. Our concept is strong and well thought out but money will be the problem to come to reality."

Discussion

Robust evidence suggests that family engagement and family/school partnerships enhance student outcomes during the middle school years (e.g., Hill & Tyson, 2009). Family/school partnerships, where universities serve as partners, can potentially provide the resources for the development and sustainment of family/school partnerships. The current study analyzed the first year pilot data of The University of Alabama's

Middle School Parent Leadership Academy's program to build parent and teacher participant leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Pretest and posttest survey responses reveal that parent participants significantly increased their leadership behaviors from the first session to graduation. Examination of individual leadership items suggest that parents significantly increased their communication with other parents, administrators, Parent Teacher Association members, and their child's teachers and other school staff.

Although mean scores improved over time on getting other parents involved in projects, it was not significant. One reason could be is that at the time of completion of the posttest survey, partnership teams have not fully implemented their projects. Another reason could be that the Academy emphasizes building effective parent-teacher partnership teams. Each team developed their projects as a partnership team and thus maybe did not invite other parents to execute project implementation.

Approaching significance, parent participants increased their overall leadership self-efficacy from pretest to posttest. Consultation of individual items show four significant items: 1) "I feel comfortable participating in meetings with teachers." 2) "I feel comfortable participating in meetings with other parents about school-related issues." 3) "I feel comfortable leading meetings with other parents about school-related issues." 4) "I plan to be involved in a specific school initiative to improve school climate and/or student academic success." Two items had lower mean scores (and lower median scores) from pretest to posttest: 1) "I have the skills to be an effective parent leader in my child's school." 2) "I feel comfortable contacting a member of the School Board regarding my child's school." The high baseline scores on most items may provide rationale for the lack of significant change. Parents are nominated by administrators, so it may be likely that Academy parent participants are already in leadership positions at their respective schools. Another reason could be that some Academy parents participated in the elementary version of the program (e.g., Elementary Parent Teacher Leadership Academy), which would have provided training on leadership skills and building family/school partnerships in an elementary school context.

Teacher pretest and posttest results found that school leadership behaviors significantly increased over time. Further analysis of individual

items shows that teachers reported relatively low initial mean scores on their leadership behaviors, specifically initiating contact and working together with school administration, parent leaders of Parent Teacher Association and Parent Teacher Organization members, parent leaders, and community members in order to support the school's Continuous Improvement Plan. The items that are not significant, which have higher pretest scores (and higher mean posttest scores), include collaborating and communicating with parent leaders. Teachers possess many time demands that inhibit their ability to communicate with other parents. While further research is needed to tease out the process by which teachers increase their leadership behaviors, results suggest that the Academy likely expanded teachers' leadership beyond school walls.

Teacher school leadership self-efficacy is approaching significance. As evidenced by the high pretest scores, one reason may be that the Academy teacher participants already perceive themselves as leaders. Similar to parents, teachers are nominated by their administrator based on their leadership potential. It is likely they have experience in leadership positions at their schools. Additionally, teachers receive a lot of training on the value of family/school partnerships and have more experience in talking with school administration. The item, "I am willing to take leadership roles in my school," had a slightly lower mean at posttest. The lower value may be due to the high pretest score; this particular item had the highest pretest score of all the self-efficacy items. Another rationale may be the timing of the posttest, which was completed near the end of the academic year. At this point, teachers are typically emotionally and physically exhausted, and so they may be less willing to assume a leadership position.

One individual item possessed significantly higher posttest ranks: "I know how to effectively collaborate with parent leaders to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan." Although significant, it is interesting that the corresponding behavioral leadership item, "I collaborate with parent leaders on plans to facilitate support of my school's Continuous Improvement Plan," was not significant. Through participation in the Academy, teachers may gain better understanding of how to collaborate with parent leaders, but there seems to be a gap when practicing learned skills. One reason for this gap may be the combination of reduced parental-

school involvement and having different students for each class period. Unlike elementary school where students typically stay with the same teachers throughout the entire school day, middle school may have 20 to 30 different students for as many as seven periods throughout the day. Logistically, this makes it difficult for teachers to personally get to know the caregivers and potential parent leaders. Moreover, teachers have increasingly demanding schedules, so it is even more difficult to coordinate times to collaborate with parent leaders.

Qualitative results suggest that the Academy program enhanced parent-teacher collaboration by: 1) gaining greater understanding of the importance of parent-teacher collaboration and 2) shifting perceptions that both teachers and parents can be valuable contributors to school and student success. Session content, partnership team formation, and subsequent project implementation expanded participants' belief in their ability to effect change at their school and provided insight into the importance of effective collaboration and the opportunity to develop relationships via partnership teams. Supporting quantitative results, parents and teachers noted that the Academy increased participant leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. In addition to specific skill-building strategies offered during sessions, parents and teachers reported that participating in the Academy provided action steps to get more involved in creating family/school relationships and increasing parental-school involvement. Because this is the inaugural year of the Academy, leadership inquired how to support partnership teams in their project design and implementation. Participant suggestions included being more available to each partnership team, providing more ideas on promoting and advertising their project to their school, and offering funding to help with associated project costs.

Several limitations exist in this study. First, not all Academy graduates completed the pretest and posttest surveys. Second, although the composite mean scores of parent-teacher leadership behaviors and teacher self-efficacy were significantly different, not all individual items were significant. This could be a product of self-report bias, as participants are likely to report higher scores. As stated before, it could also be a result of participants already having visible involvement with the school before participating in the Academy. Future cohorts should involve more parents and teachers who desire to be a school leader but are not heavily involved in other school leadership positions.

Third, most parent participants were female, with the majority reporting Caucasian ethnicity; teacher participants were even more homogeneous, with most being Caucasian females. Homogeneous sampling limits the application of results to dissimilar populations. Fourth, the quantitative measures for leadership behaviors and self-efficacy are untested instruments for measuring these constructs. Furthermore, these self-reported questionnaires do not actually measure the effect the Academy had on actual leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Future research should focus on utilizing validated measures with a more heterogeneous sample. Fifth, because this was not an experimental design with a no-treatment control group, it is difficult to ascertain the actual effectiveness of the Academy program. However, in community engagement effectiveness research, it is difficult to recruit a control group. Subsequent research should utilize an experimental design methodology with a control group. Sixth, it would be important to include a follow-up measure to assess whether leadership behaviors and self-efficacy sustain over time following completion of the Academy. Finally, it would also be beneficial to measure the effectiveness and impact of the partnership team school projects on school student outcomes.

Despite these limitations, results reveal that the Academy significantly increased parent and teacher leadership behaviors and teacher self-efficacy. With family engagement and family/school partnerships continuing to be a necessary component of student school success during the middle school years, more schools are partnering with universities for building parent and teacher capacity in these areas. The Academy provides resources and opportunities for parents and teachers to develop successful family/school partnerships through engaging in leadership professional development and the evolution of their partnership team. As parents and teachers develop their leadership behaviors and enhance their leadership self-efficacy, the Academy's goal is that these trusting collaborations will foster parental school involvement, strengthen school climate, and enhance student outcomes.

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