

The Test-Retest Reliability of the Parent And School Survey (PASS)

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Abstract

The Parent And School Survey (PASS) is an instrument designed to quickly, easily, and accurately measure parental involvement in their children's education. It is based on Epstein's six-construct framework, with four items devoted to each construct. A test-retest reliability study of the PASS was conducted with 40 subjects to refine the 24 items designed to measure parental involvement. The range and standard deviation of each item were also examined to determine breadth of responses in the sample. Finally, open-ended questions in which subjects interpreted the items were used to assess clarity. Consequently, 11 of the items were altered in order to compensate for identified limitations. The most common limitations included items that were too vaguely worded or didn't sufficiently encourage a wide range of responses. The rationale for each item change is discussed; further testing will be needed to support or refute these changes. Finally, future norming plans and intended uses of the PASS are considered.

Key Words: parental involvement, students, parents, test-retest, reliability, education, parent attitudes, parent influence, parent role, instrument, program evaluation

Introduction

Improving children's school performance is the goal of many educators, theorists, and policymakers. Of particular emphasis is the need to help low-performing children "catch up" with their contemporaries. Most efforts to improve children's school performance are, not surprisingly, focused on the schools. However, as Levin and Belfield (2003) point out, most of children's waking hours are not spent in school. Children spend more time at home than anywhere else. Thus it makes more sense to strengthen the home learning environment, particularly for low-performing children. Finding ways to support parental involvement in children's education (hereafter referred to as parental involvement) has received increasing attention, particularly in light of the mandates of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation. The effectiveness of parental involvement is being promoted ideologically by the federal government and verified through various research studies. Parental involvement is correlated with better grades, attendance, school engagement, and greater child knowledge in specific health-related school programs (Coletti, 1993; Jeynes, 2002; Kirby, 1984; Simon-Morton & Crump, 2003; Weeks, et al., 1997). Programs designed to encourage parental involvement have led to improved math scores, fewer disciplinary referrals, increased attendance, and greater child participation in extracurricular activities (Hara & Burke, 1998; Ramirez, 2003).

One problem with the parental involvement studies is the limited agreement about how to define parental involvement. Parental involvement has been defined in a variety of distinct but related ways. One approach to defining parental involvement includes various aspects of the parent-child relationship, such as helping with homework, establishing clear homework expectations, providing enrichment experiences, encouraging attendance, and reading to children (Jeynes, 2003; Levin & Belfield, 2003; Shumow & Harris, 2000). Another way to define parental involvement is the parent-school relationship. Examples include parents' communication with, presence at, knowledge about, trust in, and aspirations for their children's schools (Lawson, 2003; Levin & Belfield, 2003; Ramirez, 2003; Simon-Morton & Crump, 2003; Weeks et al., 1997). Fine (1993) also examined whether the parents believed that they meaningfully shaped school policy. Brain and Reid (2003), through interviews with parents and teachers, identified four perceptions of what roles should constitute parent involvement: police officers, promoters, co-educators, and clients. Lawson (2003) even allowed parents and teachers to define parental involvement individually in his ethnographic study.

Further evidence that parental involvement has a complex structure is provided by Mau (1997) and Zellman and Waterman (1998). Mau (1997)

explored four aspects of parental involvement among parents of high school students: helping, supporting, controlling, and participating (in school activities). The sample included Asian American, Asian Immigrants, and white parents. Higher levels of helping were associated with lower grades among Asian Immigrants and whites. Greater participation was associated with higher grades in children of white parents and lower grades among Asian Americans. It is possible that helping (typically helping with homework) was used remedially, to assist struggling youth. Thus the “helping-lower grades relationship” reflects a response to greater need rather than “helping” negatively impacting grades. It is also possible that parental participation in the school was done for different reasons among the different racial groups.

Zellman and Waterman (1998) defined parental involvement as parent-school interaction and found it to have a statistically significant but limited relationship with academic outcomes when placed in a multiple regression model. This relationship fell out of significance when “parenting style” was added to the model. However, the description given of “parenting style” is nearly identical to many of the parent-child relationship aspects of parental involvement used in the aforementioned studies.

The variety of definitions, implied and explicit, points to a multifaceted construct. Epstein (1992) recognized this multifacetedness and subsequently defined parental involvement as comprised of six (originally five) sub-constructs; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1992). These sub-constructs encompass many aspects of the definitions used in the aforementioned studies, with an emphasis on behaviors more than specific outcomes of those behaviors. They also imply that parental involvement does not merely mean passively following the direction of school personnel. It involves meaningful dialogue between parents and professional educators that has the potential to alter both (Fine, 1993).

Parenting (construct 1) is more specific than the term implies. It refers to the creation of a home environment supportive of child cognitive development and children as learners. Communicating (construct 2) refers to home-school communication specifically about the child’s academic progress, school programs, and other information that is academically relevant about the child. Volunteering (construct 3) includes a variety of school activities in which the parent is present, whether larger school events or classroom activities. Learning at Home (construct 4) reflects encouraging children in their roles as student by actively helping with schoolwork and encouraging hard work in school. Decision-Making (construct 5) reflects the degree to which parents actively shape the school environment. Collaborating with the Community (construct

6) is the degree to which parents know about and use community resources (formal and informal) that support child learning (Epstein, 1992).

In spite of the recognized importance of parental involvement, defining it remains a challenge (Brain & Reid, 2003). Subsequently, no widely used instrument has been developed to measure it. Most published studies use instruments designed specifically for that particular study (e.g., Jeynes, 2003; Lawson, 2003; Simon-Morton & Crump, 2003). Salinas, Epstein, and Sanders have developed and published Starting Points, an instrument designed to track the implementation of school-based programs to promote parental involvement. However, this instrument does not measure parental involvement directly and is completed by educators rather than parents (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). If parental involvement is a meaningful predictor, or even cause, of higher academic achievement, it is important to find agreement as to what parental involvement means and how it should be measured. A common definition and measurement tool will allow easier comparisons across studies and a clearer dialogue about parental involvement.

In 2001, a coalition of agencies serving parents and children in Northwest Indiana applied for a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. One stipulation of the grant was measurement of parental involvement. Following an unsuccessful search for a broadly applicable instrument, this evaluator decided to design such a tool. Joyce Epstein was both the most published researcher in this field, and the author of the most thoroughly articulated and commonly used definition of parental involvement (e.g., Hara & Burke, 1998; McBride & Lin, 1996). Therefore, her conceptual framework was adopted as the basis of the instrument.

The original Parent And School Survey (PASS) consisted of 30 items, 24 of which reflected parental involvement, four per subscale. Items 1-24 address specific behaviors that reflect the corresponding construct rather than providing broad descriptions of the construct. This decision was based on the need for unambiguous and, consequently, reliable items. Therefore, most of the items are narrow in scope. This was remedied by having multiple items for each sub-construct, allowing each sub-construct to be more fully addressed. The remaining six items (25-30) asked about barriers to involvement, and are not analyzed here. Each subscale represented one sub-construct (see Table 1). Each item included a five point Likert scale with responses "strongly agree," "agree," "partially agree/partially disagree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The Likert scores range from one to five. Six items (6, 8, 16, 17, 18, 20) are reverse ordered, in which "strongly disagree" is the most positive response. This article outlines the initial critique of the PASS and the resulting changes to the instrument.

Table 1. PASS Items and their Correspondence to Epstein's Constructs

Epstein construct	Item #	Items
1. Parenting	4.	I explain difficult ideas to my child when she/he doesn't understand.
	14.	There are many books in our house.
	16.	My child misses school several days each semester.
	19.	Reading books is a regular activity in our home.
2. Communicating	3.	If my child misbehaved at school, I would know about it soon afterward.
	6.	Talking with my child's principal makes me uncomfortable.
	7.	I always know how my child is doing academically in school.
	17.	Talking with my child's current teacher makes me uncomfortable.
3. Volunteering	1.	I feel comfortable visiting my child's school.
	12.	I have visited my child's classroom several times in the past year.
	15.	I attend activities at my child's school several times each semester (e.g. fun nights, performances, award nights).
	23.	I regularly volunteer at my child's school.
4. Learning at Home	2.	I display my child's schoolwork in our home (e.g., hang papers on the refrigerator).
	5.	I compliment my child for doing well in school.
	9.	I read to my child every day.
	18.	I don't understand the assignments my child brings home.
5. Decision-Making	8.	I am confused about my legal rights as a parent of a student.
	13.	I have made suggestions to my child's teachers about how to help my child learn.
	21.	I know the laws governing schools well.
	22.	I attend school board meetings regularly.
6. Collaborating w/ Community	10.	I talk with other parents frequently about educational issues.
	11.	My child attends community programs (e.g., YMCA, park/rec, community theatre) regularly.
	20.	If my child was having trouble in school I would not know how to get extra help for him/her.
	24.	I know about many programs for youth in my community.

Sample and Methods

The eventual goals of this researcher are to test the applicability of Epstein's theory and to develop a widely applicable instrument for assessments of programs designed to improve parental involvement. However, before testing the structure of the factors of parental involvement or making the instrument

widely available, it was important to assess the clarity (test-retest reliability) and breadth of responses elicited (standard deviation) of the individual items.

A convenience sample was sought at several locations where parents of elementary school children visit on a regular basis. These sites included daycare centers, churches with parenting classes, and after school athletic programs. To do this, subjects were approached and asked to complete the PASS twice, approximately one week apart. Subjects with multiple children were asked to report on their oldest child specifically to compensate for the disproportionate number of parents with younger children. Retests were completed between 4 and 14 days after the test. Therefore, the research team needed to return to the site for retests on multiple occasions. Sometimes the parent who initially completed the PASS was not the same parent who came to pick up the child the next day that the research team was present. When the research team returned to the weekly parenting classes, not all parents were in attendance that week. Researchers carried clipboards with the names of all parents who had completed a test and the date on which they completed it. If a retest was not completed within 14 days, the data was not used. Although completion time was not measured, the average is estimated to be five to eight minutes. Attempts were made to collect a diverse sample. However, as shown in Table 2, the sample of 40 is predominantly female (82.5%) and white (75%). Women were more likely to pick up children from various programs, and the two-county area in which the sample was drawn is 89% Caucasian. However, a diverse sample is less crucial when establishing and refining the reliability of items than it is in establishing normative scores.

In addition to completing the PASS twice, respondents were asked to complete four open-ended questions about their understanding of items on the PASS. Each of the questions began with "In your own words, please explain what," followed by one of the items verbatim. One example is, "In your own words, please explain what 'I feel comfortable visiting my child's school' means". The items were included at the end of the PASS, in groups of four (1-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-16, 17-20, 21-24). Groups of items were rotated on the forms administered. This method of interpreting test-retest reliability results was pioneered in the norming of the UNOCCAP DISC-IV Reliability Study (e.g., Bidaut-Russell, et al., 1995). Subjects' answers were used to understand specifically what was confusing about various items.

As shown in Table 2, the mean age of the sample was 36.9. The mean family income was \$48,441. The sample reported levels of educational attainment higher than national averages. Most of the sample reported completing high school (90%), and 42.5% reported completing at least a four-year college degree. Moreover, 4 of the 10 subjects who reported some college had returned

to college to complete their degrees. The sample included children in every grade from Kindergarten to Sixth Grade. Most of the sample reported English as their first language. However, the three people who reported other primary languages spoke and read English comfortably.

Table 2. Sample Demographics. N = 40

Age			
	Range	24 - 53	
	Mean	36.9	
Family Income			
	Range	\$11,000 - \$120,000	
	Mean	\$48,441	
Gender			
	Female	33	82.5%
	Male	7	17.5%
Race			
	White	30	75.0%
	African American	5	12.5%
	Hispanic	4	10.0%
	Other	1	2.5%
Parent Education Level			
	11 th	1	2.5%
	12 th	9	22.5%
	College, < 4 years	10	25.0%
	College, 4 year degree	8	20.0%
	Graduate School	9	22.5%
	Did not answer	3	7.5%
Child's Grade in School			
	Kindergarten	5	12.5%
	1 st	8	20.0%
	2 nd	11	27.5%
	3 rd	3	7.5%
	4 th	5	12.5%
	5 th	7	17.5%
	6 th	1	2.5%
Primary Language			
	English	37	92.5%
	Spanish	2	5.0%
	Urdu	1	2.5%

Each demographic variable was tested for its relationship to reliability of reporting. Reliability of reporting was measured by the number of points that a respondent differed from pretest to posttest (e.g., answering “strongly agree” at test and “agree” at retest is a difference of one point) for all items combined, divided by the number of items (for most people 24). No statistically significant relationships were found. However, the average native English speaker had a reliability of reporting score of .47 (i.e., on average a respondent deviated .47 points per item). The average person whose first language was something other than English had a score of .64. This non-statistically significant difference is probably a result of lower comprehension in English, but excessive speculation or generalization is not warranted based on only three people whose first language was not English.

Results

Convention allows for ordinal data, such as Likert scales, to be treated as interval data; that was done here. Bartko (1991) recommends intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for test-retest studies with interval data. ICCs were generated for each of the 24 items. Four items failed to reach statistical significance (5, 6, 7, and 15). Cicchetti’s (1994) criteria for ICCs in test-retest situations are as follows: below .40 = poor, .40 to .59 = fair, .60 to .74 = good, and .75 to 1.00 = excellent. By this criteria, nine items were excellent (1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, 13, 19, and 23), nine items were good (10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 24), two items were fair (8 and 20), and four items were poor (5, 6, 7, and 15). These are the same four items that failed to reach statistical significance.

Table 3. Reliability and Variance Tests Per Item

Item	ICC	SD
1	.856***	.679
2	.930***	.549
3	.917***	.931
4	.851***	.572
5	.123	.675
6	.341	1.318
7	.378	1.154
8	.567**	1.046
9	.797***	1.112
10	.748***	.946
11	.882***	1.224
12	.646**	1.150
13	.872***	1.137
14	.733***	.427
15	.300	1.032
16	.678***	1.099
17	.619**	.781
18	.688***	1.063
19	.832***	1.121
20	.533*	1.661
21	.677***	1.090
22	.744***	1.088
23	.780***	1.244
24	.684***	1.013

* - p < .05, ** - p < .01, *** - p < .001

Cutoff guidelines as to acceptable levels of variance were not available. Because of the lack of guidelines, the distribution of scores and the mean scores were also considered when determining which items to alter. The dividing line separating acceptable standard deviations and unacceptable was drawn between item 3 (SD = .93) and item 17 (SD = .78). Aside from the .15 difference in SD, item 3 had fewer responses in the most desirable category (either “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” depending upon the direction of the wording) and included responses for every response category (which item 17 did not). The mean score for item 3 was 1.58. The mean score for item 17 was 4.58, only .42 units from a “perfect” score for the entire sample.

The open-ended questions gave further information about subjects' understanding of the items. Subjects gave descriptions of the items that were largely both consistent with the intent of the author and with other subjects. Two exceptions were items 22 (attending school board meetings) and 23 (volunteering at child's school). Subjects showed understanding of the concepts such as equating volunteering with "supporting school endeavors with personal time," but varied in their understanding of "regular" attendance or volunteering. For example, some interpreted regular attendance at school board meetings as attending monthly; others based it on attending 50% or more of the meetings offered. Part of the discrepancy for item 22 may be the result of differences between schools in frequency of meetings.

Discussion

Four items were altered because of poor ICCs, six due to low SDs, and two due to responses on the open-ended questions. However, item 5 made both the ICC and SD lists. Because item 5 had both clarity and distribution problems, the new language is more precise and sets a more demanding standard (see Table 4). Item 6's low ICC is largely due to subjects answering "Strongly Agree" one time and "Strongly Disagree" the other, implying that "uncomfortable" is sometimes being read as "comfortable." The item was altered by bolding and underlining "un" in uncomfortable. The reason for item 7's poor ICC is less clear. A decision was made to drop the word "academically," in favor of the resulting simplified sentence. Item 15 may have had a poor ICC because "each semester" asks the parent to reflect on the average of previous semesters. "In the past 12 months" is more precise and doesn't imply the need to recall multiple past years.

Items 1, 2, 4, and 14 were all problematic because of limited ranges (positively skewed). In order to encourage answers of greater variance, the criteria was made more demanding. The words "very", "always", "every", and "many" were added. Item 17 is negatively worded and consequently had a high negative skew. Two changes were made to the item. The word "somewhat" now precedes "uncomfortable," hopefully making affirmative answers more common. Also, because the wording of item 17 is almost identical to item 6 (except teacher and principal), the same bolding and underlining of "un" was included in order to clarify that to future subjects.

As mentioned earlier, the open-ended questions revealed discrepancies in interpreting "regularly" in items 22 and 23. Both items now begin with "In the past 12 months" to provide a time frame. Item 23 was further clarified by adding "at least three times." The term "several," rather than a specific number, was added to item 22 to allow for differences between schools.

Table 4. PASS Item Changes Based On Study

Item Changes Based on ICC scores	
5. I compliment my child for doing well in school.	5. Every time my child does something well at school I compliment him / her.
6. Talking with my child’s principal makes me uncomfortable.	6. Talking with my child’s principal makes me <u>un</u> comfortable.
7. I always know how my child is doing academically in school.	7. I always know how well my child is doing in school.
15. I attend activities at my child’s school several times each semester (e.g. fun nights, performances, awards nights).	15. In the past 12 months I have attended activities at my child’s school several times (e.g., fun nights, performances, awards nights).
Item Changes Based on SD	
1. I feel comfortable visiting my child’s school.	1. I feel very comfortable visiting my child’s school.
2. I display my child’s schoolwork in our home (e.g., hang papers on the refrigerator).	2. My child’s schoolwork is always displayed in our home (e.g., hang papers on the refrigerator).
4. I explain difficult ideas to my child when she/he doesn’t understand.	4. I frequently explain difficult ideas to my child when she/he doesn’t understand.
5. I compliment my child for doing well in school.	5. Every time my child does something well at school I compliment him / her.
14. There are many books in our house.	14. There are many children’s books in our house.
17. Talking with my child’s current teacher makes me uncomfortable.	17. Talking with my child’s current teacher makes me <u>un</u> comfortable.
Item Changes Based on Open-Ended Questions	
22. I attend school board meetings regularly.	22. In the past 12 months I attended several school board meetings.
23. I regularly volunteer at my child’s school.	23. In the past 12 months I volunteered at my child’s school at least 3 times.

Limitations

The sample used for this study has two noteworthy limitations. The first is size. Ideally, a larger sample could have been used. The need for subjects to complete the PASS twice made obtaining complete data sets a challenge. Additionally, in some of the settings (e.g., after school programs) parents were in a hurry. Some refused explicitly for this reason.

The next limitation of this study is that the sample is more educated and probably more involved in their children’s education than average parents. The latter assertion is based partly on the higher-than-average education levels of the parents, but also on the locations in which the sample was drawn. The need to interview parents twice in short succession made places such as parenting classes ideal locations to solicit subjects. However, those attending parenting classes voluntarily are likely to be more involved than typical parents.

The fact that this is a test-retest study rather than one in which normative scores were established makes the sampling issue much less of a concern. In fact, if this sample is more involved in their children's education than average Americans, the problems with the items with limited variance may be less serious in more representative samples than they were in this sample, because all the items with limited distributions were ones in which people responded with the most socially desirable response. This study is merely the first step in norming the PASS. Further instrument testing is planned with larger samples following the previously mentioned item changes.

Summary

Of the 24 PASS items, 20 had at least fair ICCs, with 18 reaching the good or excellent criteria. Eighteen of the items had acceptable ranges of scores. Two additional items were altered due to feedback from the open-ended questions. Thirteen of the 24 items had acceptable reliability and variance as well as no observable problems detected by the open-ended questions. The remaining 11 items were altered to correct for flaws identified in this study.

A copy of the altered instrument is included in the Appendix, in part because there are no other known instruments that measure parental involvement and whose psychometric qualities have been tested. Additionally, while further testing may reveal the need to alter or remove items in the future, it is likely that the most serious psychometric limitations of the PASS have already been addressed.

Further testing of the PASS with a larger sample is planned. Aside from testing the reliability and variance of the altered items, several other issues will be examined. First, the six "barriers to involvement" items will be tested to determine their psychometric properties, as well as their relationship to parental involvement. Second, once reliability is established in the parental involvement items, the factorial structure of the subscales will be explored. This will allow for either confirmation of the designed structure consistent with Epstein's framework, or a reorganization of the subscales to be more consistent with parental responses. It is hoped that this process will result in a broadly applicable instrument that measures parental involvement quickly, accurately, and inexpensively.

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See next page for Appendix.

Appendix: Parents And School Survey (Elementary)

Parent Name: _____ Date: _____

Below are several statements followed by answers. Please read them and circle the answer that best describes how much you agree with the statement. It is most helpful if you try to answer honestly and accurately. This information helps us plan how to make the program as helpful to parents as possible.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I feel very comfortable visiting my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My child's schoolwork is always displayed in our home (e.g. hang papers on the refrigerator).	1	2	3	4	5
3.	If my child misbehaved at school, I would know about it soon afterward.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I frequently explain difficult ideas to my child when she/he doesn't understand.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Every time my child does something well at school I compliment him / her.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Talking with my child's principal makes me un comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I always know how well my child is doing in school.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am confused about my legal rights as a parent of a student.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I read to my child every day.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I talk with other parents frequently about educational issues.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	My child attends community programs (e.g. YMCA, park/rec, community theatre) regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I have visited my child's classroom several times in the past year.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I have made suggestions to my child's teachers about how to help my child learn.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	There are many children's books in our house.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	In the past 12 months I have attended activities at my child's school several times (e.g. fun nights, performances, awards nights).	1	2	3	4	5
16.	My child misses school several days each semester.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Talking with my child's current teacher makes me somewhat un comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I don't understand the assignments my child brings home.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Reading books is a regular activity in our home.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	If my child was having trouble in school I would not know how to get extra help for him / her.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I know the laws governing schools well.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	In the past 12 months I attended several school board meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	In the past 12 months I volunteered at my child's school at least 3 times.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I know about many programs for youth in my community.	1	2	3	4	5

How difficult do the following issues make involvement with your child's school?

		A lot	Some	Not an Issue
25.	Lack of Time	1	2	3
26.	Time of Programs	1	2	3
27.	Small Children	1	2	3
28.	Transportation	1	2	3
29.	Work Schedule	1	2	3
30.	Other (Specify _____)	1	2	3

01/05