

Exploring Effective Pre-Kindergarten Family-School Partnerships: The Pre-Kindergarten Parent Leadership Academy Program

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Abstract

Research suggests that positive parent-teacher relationships and increased parent involvement can improve student achievement. Family-school-community partnerships can promote these outcomes. This article describes the Pre-Kindergarten Parent Leadership Academy (Pre-KPLA) within the Parent Teacher Leadership Academy (PTLA) at the University of Alabama. To support local elementary schools and their students and families, the Pre-KPLA gives parents the opportunity to develop leadership skills within their school community while promoting parent-teacher relationships. Using a mixed-methods design, we analyzed data from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 years of the Pre-KPLA on parents' leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Pretest-posttest results showed that parent participants significantly increased their leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Additionally, qualitative thematic analysis revealed that parents were inspired to take action in their school, gained new knowledge about school improvement goals, and learned new ways to seek additional funding for their school.

Keywords: parent involvement, family-school-community partnerships, community engagement



The positive impacts of family-school relationships and parent involvement on elementary and middle school student achievement have been thoroughly documented (Henderson, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002); however, research examining involvement of parents within early childhood education is still developing. The first 5 years of a child's life are critical to establishing a foundation for initial cognitive, social-emotional, and regulatory skills and competencies that, over time, will develop and provide function for the rest of their life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). To some degree the skills and competencies can be measured by a child's preparedness to enter the formal school environment in kindergarten (Sheridan et al., 2010). Children with developed emotional and social skills have been proven to be more prepared for kindergarten (Sheridan et al., 2010). Barriers to readi-

ness for kindergarten also exist for children faced with poverty, low parental education, parental mental health concerns, or living in a linguistically isolated household (Snow et al., 1998; Zill & West, 2001). To begin to overcome some of these barriers, the promotion of parental involvement and the expansion of family-school programs into early childhood education can better prepare pre-K students for elementary school (Sheridan et al., 2010). These programs can support parents to become leaders early on in their child's education by providing them with the tools and confidence necessary to fulfill this role.

The scope of parent and family engagement within schools is broad; however, a parent's leadership within their child's education represents one form of parent and family involvement in school (Cunningham et al., 2012). When parents are developed as leaders within the school, they are more likely

to be engaged and have a greater awareness of the challenges facing their child and the school community (Marschall, 2008). Parent leadership can appear in approaches that are either individual (e.g., advocacy on behalf of one's own child) or collective (e.g., participation in parent associations or councils, community involvement). When parents become leaders within the school and community, are they role models not only to their child, but also to other families (Cunningham et al., 2012). Further, when parents are taught the skills needed and gain the confidence to become a leader in their child's education and school, the degree to which a parent believes in themselves grows, increasing their school leadership self-efficacy.

A parent's school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy can be impacted by collaborative partnerships and parent-teacher relationships (Berryhill & Morgan, 2018; Berryhill et al., 2019). Raffaele and Knoff (1999) discussed the importance of developing these relationships, especially parent-teacher, during the preschool years when parents are formulating their initial roles and constructs in relation to their child's education. One way to build relationships at the preschool level is through collaborative partnerships. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019) identified teachers' preparation and parental support as essential in children's development. Their national standards include an emphasis on developing "collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings" (NAEYC, 2019, Standard 7). Not only do collaborative partnerships initiate parent-teacher relationships and strengthen social-emotional outcomes for children, they also increase the efficacy and efficiency of interventions designed to foster supportive relationships both within and across home and school contexts (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Family-school relationship programs that encompass early childhood education have the potential to mitigate the long-term effects of known risk factors (Sheridan et al., 2010).

The importance of effective parental involvement and parent-teacher relationships in education are well documented in elementary and middle school settings (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Positive parent-teacher re-

lationships can affect children's academic outcomes and achievements (Hornby, 2000, 2011; Jeynes, 2005). Children whose parents are involved in their education and school are more likely to have enhanced academic performance and social skills, demonstrating a higher level of achievement (El Nokali et al., 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2007). These results are particularly true for children in early education (preschool and prekindergarten). Young children whose parents and families are involved in school exhibit gains in reading, math, and academic achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Additionally, gains can be measured in the emotional and social skills of children in preschool and prekindergarten who have parents involved in school (Zhang, 2015).

Pre-K family-school relationships can be established through community partnerships. As with parent-teacher collaboration, NAEYC's (2019) standards state, "Relationships with agencies and institutions in the community can help a program achieve its goals and connect families with resources that support children's healthy development and learning" (Standard 8). One way to promote these relationships is through family-school-community partnerships that will promote student academic achievement and parent involvement (Epstein et al., 2011; Henderson, 2007). Community partnerships with local universities can provide schools with additional innovative ways to enhance student and school outcomes. When local universities form partnerships with schools, it creates the potential for increased resources and capacity building (Berryhill et al., 2019). The purpose of this article is to provide data on the University of Alabama's Pre-KPLA, a parent leadership professional development program that equips pre-K school parents to increase involvement and form school partnership teams for improving school and student outcomes.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to evaluate the Pre-KPLA and its ability to increase parents' school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy and (2) to understand parents' experiences of involvement in the program. In order to assess these items, we addressed the following research questions:

1. Does the Pre-KPLA program significantly increase parent self-efficacy and

behaviors?

2. What were the benefits for parents of participating in the Pre-KPLA program?
3. How can the Pre-KPLA leadership support partnership teams in the design and implementation of their project?

Parent Teacher Leadership Academy Structure

The Pre-KPLA operates within the University of Alabama’s Parent Teacher Leadership Academy (PTLA). The PTLA is a unique leadership program that provides research-based professional development to parents and teachers, as well as a structure for application of that new knowledge. The PTLA originally began in fall 2007 with only an Elementary Parent Leadership Academy and Elementary Teacher Leadership Academy. The PTLA now also includes Middle School Parent Leadership Academy, Middle School Teacher Leadership Academy, Hispanic Parent Leadership Academy, and, recently, the Pre-KPLA, conceptualized in fall 2015.

In addition to providing a clearly defined and structured professional development opportunity, the PTLA also offers graduates the opportunity for celebration with a final graduation ceremony, in which the University of Alabama’s vice president for community affairs and school superintendents honor each team’s graduates. In 2017 the academy began providing partnership teams the opportunity to apply for project implementation grants beyond graduation.

Conceptualized Through Partnerships

The University of Alabama’s Center for Community-Based Partnerships is responsible for housing, organizing, and implementing the PTLA. The mission of the CCBP, an initiative of the Division of Community Affairs, is to connect faculty, staff, students, and community partners in research-based projects designed to solve critical problems identified collaboratively by community members and the university. In 2006 the PTLA was formed to increase parent engagement within the local elementary schools, a relevant need within the community. An initial advisory committee was developed to discuss and determine community needs. The Advisory Committee consisted of representatives from each of the partner organizations: the University of Alabama’s

College of Human Environmental Sciences, the College of Education, Tuscaloosa City Schools, and Tuscaloosa County Schools. Representatives included college deans, administrators, college vice presidents, local school superintendents, and federal program directors. Although the PTLA takes place outside school, benefits are expected to be shared back in the school and community to meet their specific needs. Frequently seen needs within the school communities are reading ability, attendance, and student behavior.

Partnership Team Nominations

Principals from participating elementary schools nominate team members to participate in the Pre-KPLA before the initial PTLA session. Each school principal ideally selects at least two parents and two teachers to participate in the school’s partnership team. Within the Elementary Parent Teacher Leadership Academy, parents can be nominated for Elementary Parent Leadership Academy (EPLA), Hispanic Parent Leadership Academy (HPLA), or Pre-KPLA. However, all partnership teams must be made up of both parents and teachers. Principals are encouraged to nominate parents who have demonstrated leadership abilities or leadership potential, or who are currently active in supporting the school’s mission. Parents and teachers who agree to participate in the academy attend leadership training sessions throughout the academic year and create a partnership team project proposal based upon a school improvement goal. Partnership teams agree to serve as the core leaders for the school, promoting school, family, and community engagement based upon research-based methods (Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Partnership Team Model

Family–school partnerships create the foundation of the Pre-KPLA. The mission of the Pre-KPLA is “building community by supporting children and families.” A partnership team model is utilized in Pre-KPLA to support children and families in the school environment. Parents and teachers nominated by their school principal attend professional development sessions throughout the academy with an emphasis on leadership. These professional development sessions equip participants to serve as partnership team members. Intentional leadership training sessions provide parents

and teachers with a framework to utilize for family, school, and community partnerships. One Pre-KPLA parent described the sessions as providing a “great insight into ways to help prepare my children for various social and educational situations.”

At the end of the academy, partnership teams share a partnership project proposal. The partnership project proposal is based upon a goal from the team’s school’s continuous improvement plan. To prepare the partnership project proposal, during sessions, parents and teachers begin to develop and collaborate on the project. Partnership projects are developed by parents and teachers to be specific, planned, and sustainable programs that are directly related to their school’s curricular, behavioral, or cultural needs (Epstein, 2009; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Sanders, 2006; Sheldon, 2007). In order to present final partnership projects upon completion of the academy, parents and teachers must pledge to continue the work of their partnership team in between sessions. Additionally, beyond the final presentation, many partnership teams pledge to implement their partnership project back in their school. Academy facilitators and staff provide support and feedback to the partnership teams in between sessions. Additionally, the partnership teams report the progress of their partnership project proposal to facilitators and staff each month. This open dialogue between partnership teams and academy facilitators and staff promotes project completion and implementation.

Pre-KPLA Training Sessions

Pre-KPLA parent participants attend six professional development training sessions throughout the school year. Table 1 displays the session title, invited participants (parents, teachers, or both), and a glimpse of the session objectives. In addition to session objectives, each session includes time for networking with other parents, teachers, facilitators, and school administrators; leadership training presentations led by faculty members, community experts, school leaders, and past PTLA graduates; and time to create and collaborate on partnership team project proposals.

Graduation

All parents and teachers were recognized for their hard work, dedication, and partnership team project proposals during a graduation

ceremony upon completion of the academy. Parents and teachers who consistently attended sessions and completed the partnership team project proposals were eligible for graduation. Principals, superintendents, school board members, staff from the Center for Community-Based Partnerships, the Division of Community Affairs, and University of Alabama faculty and administrators were all in attendance at graduation to recognize academy participants. At the graduation ceremony, graduates had the opportunity to display summaries and posters of their partnership team project proposals. Academy members were acknowledged for their contribution to their schools and given the opportunity to share stories about their experiences in PTLA. Each school received a plaque honoring the graduating academy members to display at their school.

Dual-Capacity Framework

Mapp and Kuttner’s (2013) conceptualized dual capacity framework (DCF) provides the Pre-KPLA with a dynamic lens to investigate the utilization of family-school-university collaboration to support family-school partnerships and parent involvement. The DCF’s nontraditional and broad structure provides a unique framework to explore parent-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). An extensive view of parent involvement and multiple components of parent involvement are promoted through the framework. First, they are promoted through opportunity conditions. The DCF describes the opportunity conditions for building capacity through two types of subconditions: organizational conditions and process conditions. The participating school district’s investment within the Pre-KPLA is linked to organizational conditions. Organizational conditions include conditions that are systemic, integrated, and sustainable. The professional development program embedded in the Pre-KPLA applies to the process conditions for capacity-building opportunities through sessions and parent-teacher team partnerships. Process conditions are often linked to learning, relational, developmental, and collective/collaborative.

Additionally, the DCF promotes policies and program goals, which are necessary to foster thriving family-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Policies and program goals should have a dual focus, not only on the capacity of families, but

Table 1. Pre-KPLA Training Sessions

Training session	Attendees	Session objectives
1. Parents as leaders	Parents only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to academy goals and objectives • Supports parents in their role of capable leaders who are making a difference in their school communities • Identify potential skills to reach other parents, teachers, and school administrators in solution-building discussions to improve their respective school communities • Supports participants' understanding of skills and knowledge required to be an effective parent leader within their child's school
2. Goal-oriented school, family, and community partnerships	Partnership teams (parents and teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent and teacher participants begin their collaborative work in their school teams • Epstein's (2009) six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community) • Teams are provided opportunities to network and discuss their respective school's school improvement plan, to make a positive difference in the school
3. Helping your child achieve academic success	Parents only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports participants' understanding of academic issues and building collaborative relationships with the school administration and PTA/PTO committee members • Parents network with other parents and individuals in the school community who can support academic success (i.e., teachers, school counselor, school psychologist, school librarian, other parents, etc.)
4. School and board of education relations	Partnership teams (parents and teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the roles and responsibilities of school boards and school district leaders • Interactive panel with administrators and board members from participating school districts • Discuss the basics of school administration: finances, board policies and operations, and strategies to work with board members • Partnership team project planning time and feedback
5. Safe and healthy schools	Parents only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers lead information sessions encouraging parents to discuss learned health and safety practices with their children at home and to seek opportunities to share new information with their school's administration, teachers, and staff • Information sessions about child behavior management, physical and mental health, school safety, student wellness, and school disciplinary policies
6. Supporting connected and school communities	Parents only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents learn about community resources that support families and schools and how to access these resources • Training in small-grant writing and project sustainability • Final partnership proposals and specific school initiatives are shared with peers to improve school climate and/or student academic success • Academy members have the opportunity to debrief with facilitators

also on the capacity of school personnel to engage in partnerships. The Pre-KPLA uses policies and program goals to build capacity for effective family-school partnerships. Capacity is built in Pre-KPLA through the implementation of the four components of partnerships capacity: capabilities, connections, cognitions, and confidence. The four components are explored below through the Pre-KPLA's professional development sessions and partnership team model.

Professional Development

Program sessions are used in Pre-KPLA to build capacity for parent-teacher partnerships. Goals of the sessions include increasing participant knowledge and enhancing skill-building needed to grow effective family-school partnerships. Secondary objectives of the sessions include sharing strategies for improving parent-teacher relationships and parent-parent relationships, and for building relationships with community organizations while purposefully developing trusting and respectful participant *connections*. Through the relationship-building process, the perceptions of parents and teachers are changed. Parents view themselves as partners in their child's education, and teachers view themselves as partners with parents to meet school goals. As the *cognitions* of parents and teachers adjust, confidence for engaging in family-school partnerships increases.

Partnership Team Model

The four components of partnership capacity (capabilities, connections, cognitions, and confidence) are met through the partnership team model, discussed in detail above. Over the course of the program, parents and teachers develop trusting and respectful *connections* with their partnership team. These connections are built while partnership teams build their *capabilities* of establishing effective family-school partnerships through the implementation of their partnership team model. During program sessions, parents' and teachers' *cognitions* about family-school partnerships are changed through the connection-building process, and, further, their *confidence* in engaging in family-school partnerships increases. Highlighting the four components of partnership capacity allows school personnel and families to engage in partnerships that will support youth development and ultimately academic achievement

(Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Methods

A mixed-methods design was employed during this study. Specifically, the goal was to examine the impact of the Pre-KPLA on parents' leadership behaviors and self-efficacy using multiple sources of data. The university institutional review board approved the study protocols. Additionally, all participants provided the appropriate consent.

Participants

Thirty-four parent participants took part in the Pre-KPLA during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years. Parents were from 16 different elementary schools in three public school districts (31% rural, 50% urban, 19% suburban). All Pre-KPLA participants were female and all had at least one child enrolled in a public pre-K program at the time of the study. Over half of the parents were African American and married (64% African American, 71.4% married). All of the mothers with pre-K students participating in the study had received a high school diploma or higher form of education at the time of the study.

Participating District Snapshot

Participants represented 16 different elementary schools from three different school districts. The three districts represent three different school settings: urban, rural, and suburban settings. Within District A, pre-K students make up 4.63% of the student population. In Districts B and C, pre-K students make up 3.16% and 1.15% of their student populations, respectively. Additionally, Table 2 provides a look at the district's state report cards for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research Question 1

School leadership behaviors and self-efficacy were evaluated using pre and post surveys. Surveys were distributed to participants during the first and sixth sessions for completion. The survey consisted of statements regarding leadership behaviors and school leadership self-efficacy, with participants responding on a Likert scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *very rarely*, 3 = *rarely*,

Table 2. District Snapshots

		Year 1		Year 2	
	School type	Free & reduced lunch	State report card	Free & reduced lunch	State report card
District A	Urban	43.397%	80%	43.417%	83%
District B	Rural	48.229%	77%	46.548%	83%
District C	Suburban	33.251%	85%	35.088%	91%

4 = occasionally, 5 = frequently, 6 = very frequently). Examples of the seven leadership behavior items include "I get other parents involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school" and "I talk with other parents about being involved in my child's school." The 11 school leadership self-efficacy items included "I have the knowledge that it takes to be an effective parent leader in my child's school" and "I feel comfortable participating in meetings with teachers about school-related issues." We analyzed individual item and aggregate pre-post mean program school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy using paired-sample *t*-tests (see Table 3 for individual list of items and Table 4 for aggregate data). SPSS was used to conduct paired-sample *t*-tests. Cohen's *d* and common language (CL) effect sizes were also calculated for each. A Cohen's *d* effect size of .2 is interpreted as a small, .5 as medium, and .8 as large. We handled missing data using mean imputation.

Research Questions 2 and 3

In order to understand parents' perceptions of program involvement, we used participant interviews during Session 6 to gather qualitative feedback on the ways the academy was beneficial. Additionally, we wanted to understand to what extent the Pre-KPLA supports parents as leaders through school partnership teams. Upon conclusion of each of the six sessions, Pre-KPLA parent participants responded to two questions: (1) How did today's session contribute to my leadership development as a parent leader in school? and (2) What was most beneficial about today's session? Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narrative responses for each question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An analysis of each narrative response was conducted, and conceptual labels of thematic contents that emerged from the data were recorded. The first and second authors independently coded the narrative responses using the labels. Trustworthiness and cred-

ibility were established through member checking and searching for discrepant and negative cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Any discrepancies were resolved following coding comparisons by consulting the narrative responses for further clarification until a consensus was reached.

Results

Research Question 1

Paired-sample *t*-test analyses showed that Pre-KPLA participants significantly increased their self-reported school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy (see Table 4 for overall *t*-test results and Table 3 for item *t*-test results). Effect size of the program on leadership behaviors ($d = 1.08$) and self-efficacy ($d = .79$) was large. The CL effect size for school leadership behavior was .86, and for school leadership self-efficacy .79, indicating that the likelihood an individual will score higher on the posttest is 86% and 79%, respectively.

Research Question 2

Pre-KPLA parents provided narrative responses to the question "What was most beneficial about today's session?" Three main themes emerged: (1) improving kindergarten readiness, (2) health and character development speakers, and (3) hearing and learning from others.

Improving Kindergarten Readiness

The Pre-KPLA sessions provided parents with a better understanding of kindergarten and steps needed to prepare and support their child. One parent said, "I think I'm more prepared to get my son ready for kindergarten." Another parent stated that the sessions provided "good information on what to expect in kindergarten." To provide parents with these experiences, speakers from the school districts presented and led sessions on how to help students succeed.

Table 3. Pre-KPLA Pre-Post Individual Item Survey Results

	Presurvey mean (SD)	Postsurvey mean (SD)	Cohen's <i>d</i> effect size	CL effect size
School Leadership Behaviors Individual Items (Range 1-6)				
I get other parents involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school.	4.33 (.89)	4.88 (.61)**	.51	.70
I talk with other parents about being involved in my child's school.	4.48 (1.00)	5.29 (.55)***	.74	.77
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.	3.52 (1.31)	3.94 (1.20)*	.36	.64
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.	2.86 (1.06)	4.00 (1.08)***	.86	.80
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.	4.00 (1.11)	4.88 (.56)***	.83	.80
I have been asked to take leadership roles at my child's school.	4.04 (.78)	4.31 (.59)	.26	.60
I have been asked to be involved in projects to improve student and school outcomes at my child's school.	3.76 (1.04)	4.69 (.78)***	.82	.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.	4.63 (.99)	5.53 (.45)***	.83	.80
I have the knowledge that it takes to be an effective parent leader in my child's school.	4.95 (.90)	5.47 (.52)*	.48	.68
I know how to get other parents and school staff involved in projects I'd like to implement at my child's school.	4.38 (1.03)	4.94 (.59)*	.48	.69
I can make a difference in my child's school.	4.95 (.82)	5.00 (.84)	.05	.52
I feel comfortable accessing community resources that can support my child's school.	4.45 (1.10)	4.94(.65)*	.39	.65
I feel comfortable contacting a member of the School Board of Education regarding my child's school.	5.19 (.87)	5.59 (.36)*	.44	.67
I feel comfortable participating in meetings with teachers about school-related issues.	5.57 (.54)	5.64 (.44)	.15	.56
I feel comfortable leading meetings with teachers about school-related issues.	4.71 (.99)	5.00 (.76)	.30	.62
I feel comfortable participating in meetings with other parents about school-related issues.	4.71 (.56)	5.35 (.67)**	.63	.73
I feel comfortable leading meetings with other parents about school-related issues.	4.57 (1.03)	4.82 (.77)	.25	.60
I plan to be involved in a specific school initiative to improve school climate and/or student academic success.	4.67 (.76)	5.29 (.55)**	.66	.75
Note: Paired-sample t-test analyses performed. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.				

Table 4. Pre-KPLA School Leadership Attitudes and Self-Efficacy *t*-Test Results

	Mean pretest	SD pretest	Mean posttest	SD posttest	Mean difference	<i>t</i> -value	95% CI	<i>p</i> value	Cohen's <i>d</i> effect size	CL effect size
Leadership behaviors	27.00	4.44	32.00	3.67	5.00	6.10	3.33, 6.67	< .001	1.08	.86
Leadership self-efficacy	52.79	6.21	57.59	3.84	4.79	4.48	2.61, 6.98	< .001	.79	.79

Health and Character Development Speakers

Through the professional development sessions additional speakers and presentations provided information on mental and physical health, as well as children's character development. Parents recognized that these sessions provided the opportunity to be a better leader not only for their child at school, but also at home. One parent explained, "I learned how to contribute to my child's health at home and school [and] how to teach my child empathy, problem solving, and deal with emotions." Another parent described how this encouraged supportive parent-teacher communication: "1) Learning tools to use when working on bullying! Helping the victim; 2) Working with your teacher to form a team; 3) helping the bully work through their issues/trouble etc." Parent-child communication was also encouraged: "I really enjoyed the session regarding opening the doors of communication with my children, very helpful."

Hearing and Learning From Others

Each year the PTLA invites past participants back to share their school partnership team projects and lessons learned from involvement in the program. Additionally, the PTLA encourages the collaboration and networking of different school partnership teams. These connections provide a valuable opportunity for partnership teams to brainstorm and learn from each other. One parent said, "I enjoyed getting other ideas from everyone's project boards and sharing our board with others." Another parent shared benefits of networking with previous PTLA participants, namely, "seeing the ideas/task taken by members of other projects that would be beneficial to my child's school."

Research Question 3

Following each professional development section, Pre-KPLA parents answered the

question "How did today's session contribute to my leadership development as a parent leader in school?" Thematic analysis revealed three categories: (1) inspired to take action, (2) new knowledge of school improvement goals, and (3) learning about additional school funding.

Inspired to Take Action

Depending on the focus of the session, many parents completed sessions feeling prepared to take action in their school or in their child's education. One parent explained that the session inspired her "to want to take more initiative and be involved with my kid's education." The sessions not only inspired parents to take personal action but promoted the importance of parent involvement in schools. One parent explained that the session "helped me see that parent involvement is an important part in the school," and another stated that the sessions taught her about more "opportunities to be involved in school."

New Knowledge of School Improvement Goals

School team partnership projects are created to meet the needs of a state-approved individualized school improvement goal. For many Pre-KPLA parents, these sessions provided an introduction to understanding these school improvement goals. One parent told how these sessions made the important connection between school improvement goals and partnership team projects: "The [school improvement goal] and the PTLA project must bring growth to school improvement." Another parent expanded and shared how learning about the school improvement goals led to "different ideas to help better with school involvement and learning."

Learning About Additional School Project Funding

The last theme to emerge in the third re-

search question revolved around grant writing, fund raising, and raising money to implement school improvement projects. Many parents were unaware of the extra funds available for their school and that it was possible to apply and seek out these funds. A parent explained that “understanding I can apply for grants or donations for my child’s school” contributed to her leadership development as a parent leader. Another parent said they felt better prepared by “learning how to properly ask for a grant” and “preparing a [grant proposal] letter.” Parents are encouraged to use these skills to further implement their partnership team projects and promote sustainability.

Discussion

Pre-K children can be better prepared for elementary school through established family-school programs (Sheridan et al., 2010). The Pre-KPLA promotes family-school partnerships with the University of Alabama acting as a community partner and key stakeholder. Young children are often faced with barriers associated with kindergarten and elementary school readiness such as poverty, low parental education, and parental mental health concerns (Snow et al., 1998; Zill & West, 2001). However, building capacity for parent-teacher relationships and effective parental involvement can minimize these barriers (Berryhill et al., 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The current study analyzed the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 cohort data of the University of Alabama’s Pre-KPLA to build parent participants’ school leadership behaviors and self-efficacy.

Pre- and posttest survey responses determined that parent participants significantly increased the scores on their self-assessment of school leadership behaviors between the first session and graduation. Seven individual leadership behavior items were included in the pre- and posttest survey. Consultation of individual leadership items indicates that three significant items—(1) “I talk with other parents about being involved in my child’s school,” (2) “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,” and (3) “I talk with my child’s teacher and other staff about school issues and/or projects that could be imple-

mented in my child’s school”—might be attributed to opportunities provided during sessions to communicate and collaborate with peers and teachers. Another significant item, “I have been asked to be involved in projects to improve student and school outcomes at my child’s school” could be looked at in direct relation to participation in Pre-KPLA. However, this item could include new or ongoing school projects in which parents are involved. Through the partnership team model, Pre-KPLA emphasizes effective parent-teacher teams through collaboration and relationship building. Sessions provide parents and teachers a space for guided meaningful conversations centered around student learning in their respective school. Pre- and posttest survey responses indicate that parents’ leadership behaviors—specifically, having these conversations—increased between the first session and graduation. The high effect sizes of the survey, however, should be regarded with caution, as these sizes are based on 34 participants’ responses.

Overall school leadership self-efficacy of parent participants also significantly increased from Session 1 to graduation as indicated by pre and post survey responses. Eleven individual school leadership self-efficacy items were included in the pre- and posttest survey. Consultation of individual leadership items indicates seven significant items. The item with the greatest mean change was “I have the skills to be an effective parent leader in my child’s school.” The Pre-KPLA not only provides parents and teachers with the skills to build a project with their partnership team during the time of the academy, but provides teams with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable partnerships beyond the academy. Other significant items included (1) “I feel comfortable participating in meetings with other parents about school-related issues” and (2) “I plan to be involved in a specific school initiative to improve school climate and/or student academic success.” After completing the academy, Pre-KPLA parents not only felt more comfortable meeting with other parents about school-related issues, but planned to continue to do so beyond the program. Supporting and building capacity for effective parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships can improve children’s academic outcomes and achievements (Hornby, 2000, 2011; Jeynes, 2005).

Qualitative results suggest that the Pre-

KPLA supported parent-teacher partnerships by (1) inspiring parents to take action, (2) providing information about school improvement goals, and (3) teaching parents about additional school project funding. These results reinforced the parents' involvement in their child's education, while also supporting parent-teacher partnerships. Past research suggests that children are more likely to achieve enhanced academic performance and social skills when their parents are involved in the child's education and school (El Nokali et al., 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2007). The Pre-KPLA utilized purposeful implementation within its sessions to promote meaningful content, partnership team collaboration, and, additionally, team project application. These steps enabled parent participants to expand their belief in their ability to effect change at their school through leadership. Qualitative themes support pre and post survey results, indicating that parents increased leadership behaviors and self-efficacy through the six sessions.

Next Steps and Conclusions

Limitations within the study contribute to the program's next steps, improvement, and growth. Additionally, collaboration between partners, facilitators, and participants led to the following recommendations for the program. The study limitations and their impact on the program moving forward will be discussed. First, not all Pre-KPLA graduates completed the pre- and posttest surveys. Lack of participation in program surveys ultimately stemmed from a barrier surrounding attendance. In an effort to improve attendance and further retention, all academies within the PTLA will be transitioning to a 2-year mentor model. The 2-year mentor model provides parents and teachers with the opportunity to serve on their school team for two consecutive years. Each year, one new parent and one new teacher will rotate onto the school team. The transition to this model provides 2nd-year participants to serve as mentors and leaders for first-year participants. Additionally, this model will alleviate some of the stress that principals and administration are subject to while choosing and nominating participants. Parents and teachers who are eager to participate are invited back to continue to build upon their partnership project.

Second, although the composite mean scores of the parent leadership self-efficacy were

significantly different, not all individual items were significant. For example, the following items saw a difference in pre and post mean test scores but not a significant difference: (1) "I can make a difference in my child's school" and (2) "I feel comfortable participating in meetings with teachers about school-related issues." Future research should further investigate the possible barriers to these items and how to build stronger parent-teacher relationships. The initiation of the 2-year mentorship model will allow us to further explore these limitations as Pre-KPLA parents return to the academy as kindergarten EPLA parents and mentor new Pre-KPLA parents.

Third, future research should use follow-up assessments to further investigate whether leadership behaviors and self-efficacy persist over time following completion of the Pre-KPLA. Additional knowledge can be gained by also factoring in the impact of attendance on sustainable behaviors, which will require the implementation of a clear attendance policy in addition to the 2-year mentor model. The attendance policy will figure into requirements for academy graduation and eligibility for academy partnership project grants. Further, taking into account the world's transition to virtual and remote learning, all academies will offer virtual and hybrid sessions. Offering these virtual and hybrid sessions will provide parents and teachers with more flexibility and options to attend.

Fourth, the pre- and posttests for leadership behaviors and self-efficacy are unvalidated instruments for measuring these constructs. Furthermore, these self-reported questionnaires do not measure the effect of the Pre-KPLA on actual leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. Future research should focus on utilizing a validated and reliable measurement tool.

Other limitations included the homogeneity of parent participants, with all participants being female. Homogeneous sampling limits the applicability of results to dissimilar populations.

The purpose of this article is to provide data on the Pre-KPLA, specifically to what effect and how the development program equips Pre-K school parents to increase engagement and form school partnership teams. Significant results indicate that the Pre-KPLA increased parent leadership behaviors and self-efficacy. As demonstrated through

past research, family engagement and parent-teacher relationships are a necessary component of student success, and also figure in elementary readiness for young children. The Pre-KPLA provides opportunities for parents and teachers to develop successful parent-teacher relationships and increase parent involvement. The creation and implementation of school partner-

ship teams additionally strengthens these relationships and increases the number of opportunities for teams to support their school. Pre-KPLA's goal is for these collaborations to foster additional parental school involvement, build parent-teacher relationships, and, ultimately, enhance elementary student readiness and outcomes.



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