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

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Parent Perception of Systemic Success in Physical Education:

A Study of Advocacy in Action

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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

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Master of Arts

In a search to discover effective means of reversing the marginalization in the field of physical education (PE), researchers have been studying exceptional PE programs that have not only broken down the growth-impeding barriers formed by changes in education, but have also successfully and consistently prevented new program barriers from developing. One such PE program, located in the southwestern United States, has been identified in former studies as having achieved and sustained Systemic Success in Physical Education (SSPE) for over four decades. Embedded in the SSPE model that this district uses to maintain dynamic growth and program sustainability are advocacy practices required of the PE practitioners for the purpose of obtaining and upholding the necessary support needed for program stability.

The purpose of this qualitative follow-up study was to examine three things: (a) parent perceptions of this district-wide elementary PE program, (b) the advocacy strategies used by the physical education practitioners and (c) which factors parents believe most shape their perception of the program. Twenty parents from five different schools that bridge the demographic make-up of the district were interviewed along with four teachers in the district, the PE district coordinator, and a Physical Education Teaching Education (PETE) professor from the partnering university for the purpose of triangulation to avoid researcher bias. The Inductive Content Analysis was used to create themes and subthemes until saturation.

The results of this study provide valuable insight into the benefits of regular program advocacy and strategies which may be most beneficial in acquiring the support needed to construct and retain a fruitful and resilient program. The following six themes emerged from the data that represent the top factors that parents reported influence their perceptions of the PE program: (a) student enjoyment, (b) teacher passion, (c) teacher involvement and presence outside of the PE class, (d) teacher-to-parent communication, (e) program transparency, (f) and a well-structured and organized program.

Researchers found the following key implications as the most important and beneficial take-aways from this study. Building strong relationships with parents helps parents better appreciate the intentions of the teacher and her goals for their children. The process of building effective relationships includes developing ample open channels of communication. Through these channels, teachers will strengthen parent connections by providing plenty of information regarding their children. This information should not only include what their child will be learning and when, and what information is needed to help their child be best prepared for what is to come; it should also include feedback about the progress of their child, particularly positive feedback. This pleasant form of communication is always welcomed and appreciated by parents, but is most beneficial early on because it opens the ears and hearts of parents straightaway.

However, in order to win someone's heart, trust must be present, and one of the best ways to gain the trust of others is through transparency. When it is evident to parents that teachers believe enough in their program to make it open and available to the parents at all times, and proud enough of their curriculum to invite them to come see what it contains, parents trust that the teachers have nothing to hide and assume good things are happening. Taken even a step further, when teachers invite parents to be a part of the lessons, events, and activities, parents tend to acquire a sense of ownership; and it is very difficult to feel a part of something great and not provide loyalty and support in some way.

Since such relationships, communication, and powerful programs that merit transparency take plenty of effort, passion, and time to develop, many PE teachers may question how one can manage such a feat and still accomplish all of the additional tasks most physical educators must endure as they attempt to break down common barriers that continually hinder their progress. They don't—at least not in this district. Many of these overwhelming responsibilities are nonexistent in the SSPE model due to the existence of a proficient and effective full-time district PE coordinator. Besides relieving the PE teachers of common overwhelming loads and program barriers, the district PE coordinator also heightens teacher effectiveness and motivation by holding them accountable and providing them with the ongoing professional development and support needed to win the hearts of the community through regular program advocacy practices. This alleviation provided by the district PE coordinator allows teachers to focus on what should be their top priorities: teaching and advocacy. Apparently, the existence of this crucial role makes an enormous difference in the program's success and sustainability.

Keywords: program advocacy, parent perceptions, physical education

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DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

In an effort to meet both university submission requirements and education journal submission requirements, this master's thesis has been written in hybrid format. *Parent Perception of Systemic Success in Physical Education: A Study of Advocacy in Action* has been specifically formatted to fulfill submission guidelines to the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*. In addition to featuring empirical studies in physical education, as well as reviews and analysis of educational and methodological issues in physical education, *The Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* discusses current topics of interest to physical educators.

This document also contains several appendices. Appendix A includes an extended review of the literature; Appendix B contains the consent forms; and Appendix C consists of the surveys.

Furthermore, there are two reference lists in this document. The references included in the journal-ready article make up the first reference list. The second list only includes references that are in Appendix A. Although certain references from the journal-ready article are used again in Appendix A, repeated references are only listed in the journal-ready article reference list.

Background

Change and education go hand in hand. Many educational decision makers assume that change is good. Some assume that change and program stability cannot coincide, or that change will inevitably cause instability. Others believe that once *planned* change is adopted, improvements occur (Cuban, 1992). Cuban addressed these assumptions in his framework for curriculum change and stability alongside a continuum of curriculum change which ranges from external/involuntary change to internal/voluntary change. His continuum implies that most sources of change originate from outside of schools (e.g. society, legislators, and school boards). He also identified the difference between incremental and fundamental forms of planned change. He defines incremental change, or first order change, as attempts to repair policy deficiencies through deliberate efforts to improve the system that already exists. Alternatively, fundamental changes, or second order changes, seek to rework the entire constructs of an organization's policies and practices because of strong dissatisfaction with present arrangements. These differences, the change continuum, and the three common assumptions about change shape his framework. This framework supports the relationship between schools and society while recognizing that society is one of the main external forces for change in public schools.

To ensure continuity in a successful program, Cuban (1992) says school boards use warning systems that gather input from these members of society at public meetings, informal meetings, and periodic surveys of citizen opinion. He identifies community parents as one group that is so influential it can change the intended and taught curricula all by itself. This influence parents can have on educational programs underlines the extreme importance of acquiring and retaining parent endorsement to ensure progress towards program goals.

However, awareness precedes support, and program advocacy creates awareness. If

educational programs do not effectively reach out to society, parents will lack the understanding of what proper involvement entails. According to Davies (1993) families in general, particularly those from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, often wait for guidance from educators before interacting with the school. According to parents in a study examining factors that lead to successful educational partnership between school and parents (Mapp, 2003), when school personnel initiate and engage in program advocacy practices that connect parents to the school community through awareness and involvement in their child's educational experience; respectful, caring and meaningful relationships are fostered and sustained between parents and school staff. One of the most important findings that emerged from Mapp's study is the major role school factors play in influencing parents' involvement. Mapp continues with the following:

The process of joining with families creates an environment where many of the parents' past negative school experiences and/or feelings of alienation are diminished. Validation of any contribution made by the parents helped them to feel like important contributors to the school community, increasing their efficacy and their sense of confidence in being able to help their child. Connecting with parents by focusing on the children and their learning environment brought these parents together with school staff over common goals and objectives. (p. 59)

Mapp's study demonstrates how properly implemented advocacy practices directed towards parents may create a unified interest in achieving program goals, increase program support, and help prevent the development of barriers that interfere with program growth.

Furthermore, since parents can impact both education policy and the particular nature of the school attended by their children in both positive and negative ways (Sheehy, 2006),

advocacy efforts toward parents may be a strong contributor to program stability and sustainability during periods of fundamental and incremental change. Reciprocally, parent perceptions may not only be an indicator of the effectiveness of advocacy efforts aimed at involving parents and increasing support, but may also reveal which program advocacy efforts are most effective and worthwhile. Since parents can and have been known to play the role of an external force that can govern the success of any susceptible educational program, the ability to influence parent perceptions of a program is a tactic that will strengthen and help sustain that program. Although educators generally value family involvement, they report needing information on how to form collaborative partnerships with families (Epstein, 2010).

Parent Perceptions in Physical Education

The field of physical education (PE) is no exception to the vulnerability of change agents (both external and internal, incremental and fundamental). In fact, according to Prusak, Graser, Pennington, Beighle, and Morgan (2010), “despite the increasing pressures of external forces—such as newly articulated national goals and standards, declining health indicators, and the obesity epidemic, ... PE has been subjected to a constant barrage of external forces resulting in nearly insurmountable barriers to its success” (p. 86). Some of these barriers include lack of administrative support and funding, unmanageable class sizes, restrictions in time provisions compared to the crowded curriculum, the lack of professional development, and the lower priority given to the subject versus other academic subjects (Jenkinson & Benson, 2010). Due to the external forces behind many of these barriers, efforts made to break them down may seem near impossible or feel like a lost cause to many physical educators. Siedentop and Locke (1997) went as far as describing PE as being in a “state of gridlock—unwilling or unable to enact incremental changes—making it vulnerable to external mandates and forced fundamental

upheaval, often by those who have insufficient understanding of the complexities of what it is they are trying to ‘fix’” (Prusak et. al., 2010, p. 86). This void is often the result of ineffective or nonexistent advocacy efforts on the part of physical educators to educate administrators and other stakeholders such as parents.

However, external forces demanding modification or reconstruction in PE programs do not always have to play the detrimental role that is most commonly evident. If both outside forces and a PE program have common and informed goals and interests, those forces will act as allies in support of program improvements and sustenance. Similarly with all educational programs, parents play the role of one of the strongest external forces that exist in the field of PE, and the role they play is most often influenced by their perceptions of the subject whether those perceptions are accurate or not. Consequently, for PE teachers in particular, there is a commonly held belief that positive parent perception and the resultant external support and attention (e.g., community, legislators, school boards) matter a great deal and are critical to the future of the subject in schools (Sheehy, 2006).

Nevertheless, even though gaining the endorsement of a community through positive perceptions may be a substantial benefit to curricular continuity, such an undertaking can require a daunting effort due to the negative preconceptions and stereotypes that many individuals hold toward the field of PE. Many of these negative perceptions are drawn from their childhood PE experiences. In fact, PE has not appeared significant in education for more than 40 years (Henry, 1964). Nonetheless, according to Claxton, Kopp, Skidmore, and Williams (2013) the breakdown of these negative attitudes is possible through increased awareness of the multiple benefits today’s PE programs have to offer the community as a whole and through encouragement of parent participation. As stated in a study highlighting the topic of changing attitudes in PE,

Prusak, Davis, Pennington, and Wilkinson (2014) claim, “if you change one’s beliefs about a target object (e.g., PE) then you can change one’s attitude” (2014, p. 5).

Although rare, successful and sustainable PE programs do exist; and if the recommendations of Siedentop and Locke (1997), Barroso McCullum-Gomez, and Hoelscher (2005), and Ward (1999) are followed, then these programs should be sought out and examined. Graham (1995) states the following:

If researchers can identify programs that have a positive impact on students, it would be helpful to understand, for example, why the impact is positive, what these positive programs look like, and perhaps most importantly, how the teachers were able to create and *sustain* their positive programs in a time of budgetary constraint when *school boards* and *administrators* are being forced to cut “frills” such as art, music, and physical education. (emphasis added, p.481)

Several studies have been conducted regarding such PE programs including Rovegno’s (1991, 1992, 1993) direct work with her undergraduate students and practitioners—the Saber-Tooth reform project (Ward, 1999), and South Carolina’s state level assessment in physical education experience (Rink et al., 2002).

Systemic Success in Physical Education (SSPE)

At the time Seidentop and Lock (1997) were labeling PE as a “systemic failure”, researchers started focusing efforts on studying rare, successful PE programs. These studies led to the finding of a district that not only displayed success, but also sustainability. Pennington, Prusak, and Wilkinson (2014) reveal the history and making of the sustaining SSPE model that seems to go against national trends in the profession of PE by removing most barriers that prevent physical educators from developing or nourishing a successful PE program. The program

began in 1972, when two doctoral students who had developed a K-6 PE curriculum took jobs at a university and nearby school district--who, coincidentally, had just completed a needs assessment isolating their top necessity as quality K-6 PE--to implement a district-wide PE program partnered with a nearby university. Through dedication, determination and perseverance, the founders gradually built a successful and sustainable program based on heavy collaboration and accountability.

Prusak et al. (2010) used Cuban's (1992) curriculum change and stability framework to examine how this program has accomplished SSPE by achieving critical elements that Siedentop and Locke (1997) believe are needed in order to make a difference in PE. The program provides the means for a model which guides and manages the curriculum change process in K-6 PE. This SSPE model is comprised of four key components, supporting themes and subthemes that frame the center of the model, systemic success, namely: (a) a mandated district wide PE curriculum and methodologies, (b) a full-time district coordinator who removes and precludes barriers, plays position of gate-keeper, and mandates program advocacy (c) partnership between the school district and the local university and (d) ongoing professional development for teachers. These four components are all driven by accountability measures (Prusak et al., 2010).

According to Prusak et al. (2010) not only does this model give a framework for districts, teachers, and universities to create a successful PE program, but the sustainability of the SSPE model that is evident in this district gives hope to the PE field with the display of success in the ability to deal with change from any source, create mutual accountability, create a stable and sustainable tradition, and overcome classic failings. This dynamic stability (the ability to maintain stability during mandated change) displayed in the key elements of the SSPE model may be evidence of a series of what Cuban (1992) would refer to as bargained responses to

change seeking, internal and external forces (Prusak et al., 2010). Prusak et al. (2010) state the following:

When the key components have ongoing, successful interactions, interdependence and mutual accountability, changes that are externally mandated or internally originated are (a) examined, (b) processed, and (c) rejected or assimilated without threat to the stability of the systemic success. The dynamic stability of the SSPE model is the result of a thriving, vital situation whose underlying structure is not threatened with change whether internal or external. In effect, the momentum of the SSPE model is preserved by the dynamic stability it has achieved. (p. 103)

Program Advocacy in SSPE

This program, which currently services more than 32,000 children each year with a well-established, quality PE curriculum, has embedded into its model accountability of regular and consistent program advocacy practices expected of all elementary physical educators in the district. These program advocacy expectations include but are not limited to practices such as (a) keeping a positive phone call log book with required minimum entries, (b) creation and disbursement of four annual newsletters, (c) scheduling and conducting several parent PE demonstration/curriculum presentations, and (e) holding several evening track and field play days *in addition to* the (f) usual required biannual parent/teacher conferences (D. Pangrazi, personal communication, Sept. 28, 2013). These required practices were implemented not only to enhance student learning and progression, but to also increase ongoing parent awareness and support for the program through increased positive perceptions toward PE.

The three studies aforementioned (Succeed Together or Fail Alone: Going from Good to Great in Physical Education, Pennington, et al., 2014; Children's Perceptions of a District-Wide

Physical Education Program, Prusak et al., 2014; Systemic Success in Physical Education: The East Valley Phenomenon, Prusak et al., 2010) have explored the history, the full-functioning model, and the perceptions of children in SSPE. However, parent perceptions of the efficacy of SSPE and its embedded advocacy efforts have yet to be examined. Such a study may retort to Cuban's third assumption of change, relating to whether the 'planned changes' of the program advocacy practices required by teachers using the SSPE model ultimately lead to perceived improvements that add to the dynamic stability of the program. These parent perceptions may also identify which program advocacy practices are most effective. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine parent perceptions of the existing program advocacy practices required by elementary physical educators using the SSPE model in this district.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned, several researchers have recently studied a district-wide elementary PE program that has sustained SSPE for over four decades. This program, which puts a heavy emphasis on teacher accountability, has succeeded at removing most barriers that prevent physical educators from developing or nourishing a successful PE program. Regular and consistent program advocacy practices, especially directed toward district parents, are just some responsibilities expected of physical educators in this district. In sync with Cuban's third assumption of change as 'planned changed' (1992), these advocacy practices were implemented to increase parent awareness and support for the purpose of maintaining the success and dynamic stability of the district program.

Previously mentioned studies have explored the history, the full-functioning model, and the perceptions of children in SSPE. However, there has yet to be a study that examines the relationship between the advocacy practices embedded in the model and parent perceptions.

Researchers hypothesize that these properly implemented and consistently carried out advocacy practices have positively affected the parent's perceptions of the district's PE program leading to stronger community support, which in turn results in greater program sustainability.

Statement of the Purpose

Therefore, this follow-up study will examine parent perceptions of the advocacy practices embedded in the SSPE model and their effect on eliciting 'planned change' and 'dynamic stability.' It will identify parent perceptions of SSPE in hopes of drawing connections, if any exist, between consistent advocacy practices implemented by teachers using the SSPE model, perceptions parents have toward the program, and its successful dynamic stability revealed by Prusak et al. (2014). In order to further investigate these connections, the following question will be explored in this study: How do SSPE advocacy efforts shape parent's perceptions of PE and, as a result, affect the dynamic stability and sustainability of a successful program?

Delimitations

This study is delimited to parents of students in fifth or sixth grade who have attended elementary schools within an SSPE district for at least three years. Participants will not be randomized.

Limitations

This study will be limited to parents of children at elementary schools within a school district located in the southwestern United States region. Parent who did not have accessibility to the internet were unable to complete the online questionnaire administered in the study.

Methods

Setting

The district examined in this study is located in the Southwestern United States. Fifty schools exist in the district that serves about 32,000 K-6th grade students each year. Facilities provided at these schools include large blacktops and large grass fields on the exterior and a multipurpose room within the school that is equipped with basketball floor markings and baskets and serves as a gym, cafeteria and auditorium. Inside the multipurpose room there is enough equipment, such as gymnastic mats, climbing ropes, jump ropes, a variety of balls, Frisbees, and hockey gear for all of the children to participate at once. Demographics vary from school to school. Overall, 46 percent are Hispanic, 41 percent of the students in the district are Caucasian, five percent are Native American, four percent are African American, two percent have a multi-ethnicity, and less than one percent are Asian. Fifty-nine percent of students live in a single family home while 22 percent live in a one parent family. Seventy-two percent speak English as their primary language and 67 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch.

A district-wide physical education program, which provided evidence that it is a successful program by Prusak et al. (2010), is used in all of the elementary schools. Besides collaborating with a partnership university in the enhancement of professional development and preparation of future teachers through the use of similar methodologies to ensure for a smooth transition from preparation to practice, this program employs a K-6 district physical education coordinator and is comprised of a common, mandated curriculum, methodologies and language, and frequent professional development (Prusak et al., 2010).

Participants

A purposeful sample of 20 parents of fifth and sixth grade students from five different

elementary schools in the district participated in this study.

Procedures

Parents of fifth and sixth grade students who attend one of the five elementary schools in the district that agreed to participate in this study were invited to take an online survey about their perceptions of PE, their child's PE program, and what, if anything, in regards to the district's advocacy efforts has influenced their perceptions. The sample of five elementary schools were selected as a representation of the range of SES across the school district. An email (Appendix A) containing the University IRB approval, permission from the school, district, and school principals was sent to parents in English and Spanish. Also, a letter of collaboration from the participating school district was included in the email. Anonymity was preserved throughout collection of the data and names were changed when reporting results. Throughout the study, data was kept confidential and secure with the researcher or collaborating school liaisons.

This email (Appendix A) contained a link to the online survey administered via Qualtrics software in both English and Spanish. It clearly stated that by clicking on the link, participants gave their informed consent to participate in the survey portion of the study. Within the online survey itself, they were asked if they would be willing to participate in a 20-40 minute follow-up interview. If they indicated "yes," they were invited to participate in a follow-up interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Participants who completed the interview received a \$25 gift card for a local establishment. The initial email inviting them to participate was sent out a month before the follow-up interviews took place. Those who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview were notified by email to schedule their interview. Only the senior author and members of the research team knew the follow-up interviewee's identities, and pseudonyms are used throughout the study to guarantee anonymity.

Alongside the parent survey/interview process, the district PE coordinator and a Physical Education Teaching Education professor from the partnering university were contacted by phone to participate in interviews to explore the advocacy practices and procedures expected of teachers in the district and included in the professional development of in-service teachers along with other related questions to the advocacy practices embedded in SSPE couched in Cuban's framework (1992; see Appendix B).

Elementary physical educators in the district were emailed a short survey inquiring about their advocacy practices and invited to participate in a follow up interview. Four of the physical educators who indicated they were willing to participate in a follow up interview were purposefully selected as a representative sample in terms of gender and years of teaching experience ranging from six years to more than twenty. These four PE teachers were asked additional questions relating to advocacy practices and routines, training, and perceptions of effectiveness couched in Cuban's framework (1992).

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this study were an online survey administered to parents of fifth and sixth grade students in five different elementary schools in the district and subsequent follow-up interviews with 20 of those parents. Field notes from the follow-up interviews were used to guide the analysis of the data. For the purpose of establishing trustworthiness through triangulation, additional interviews with the PE district coordinator, elementary PE teachers, and the partnering university Physical Education Teaching Education faculty were conducted to explore existing advocacy practices and perceptions.

Online survey. A link to the online survey was emailed to parents who agreed to participate (see Appendix A). The online survey questions for parents were derived from six

separate sources; the primary source being Cuban's Curriculum Change and Stability Framework (1992). The survey included several questions from each defining area of Cuban's framework that were being explored in this study including questions relating to external influences (EI), negotiated change (NC), voluntary/internal change, incremental change (IC), fundamental change (FC), and internal routines (IR) (see Appendix B). Other supporting sources, for the purpose of survey development, included a pre-pilot phone interview with the district coordinator; the K-6 elementary PE district coordinator's expectations for annual observation and expectations (this includes specific advocacy requirements of teachers); the critical role of parent perceptions about the future of PE in schools (Sheehy, 2006); Claxton, Kopp, Skidmore, and Williams (2013) study of negative attitudes of PE and the need to promote its benefits to the community through encouragement of parent participation; and the three published studies that identified the SSPE model (Prusak et al., 2010), its 40 year history and use of successful business principals applied to an educational context (Pennington, Prusak, & Wilkinson, 2014), and the perceptions of its students (Prusak, Davis, Pennington, & Wilkinson, 2014). The on-line survey questions (see Appendix B), which are couched in Cuban's framework of curricular change and sustainability (1992), attempted to ascertain the perceptions of parents whose children participate in a district PE program using the SSPE model and possible connections, if any, that parent perceptions have to the advocacy practices of the district program and its teachers. A pre-pilot of the online survey was administered to two groups of approximately ten parents in an uninvolved district to ensure clarity and understanding of survey questions. One pre-pilot group answered the survey questions as if they were parents in the district. The other group answered questions with opinions and suggestions for improving clarity and understanding of survey questions.

Follow-up interviews. The second source of data originated from follow-up interviews with parents. The use of follow-up interviews is a technique suggested by Patton (1990) who asserts that the use of follow-up interviews with a subsample of respondents can provide meaningful additional detail to help make sense out of, and interpret survey results. Additional probing and follow-up questions based on the participants' responses from the on-line survey constituted this source of data collection (Patton, 1990).

Selection of interview participants. This study used a nonrandomized selection of 20 interview participants implemented by purposeful and selective sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The 20 interviewed participants were purposely selected from those who indicated through the online survey that they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview and have students who have attended an elementary school within the district for at least three years (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Interview protocol. After being selected, the 20 follow-up interview participants were contacted by e-mail and asked to participate in an interview at their child's elementary school. The interview participants completed and signed a copy of the informed consent form discussing the issue of confidentiality before the interview was conducted. A translator was provided by the elementary school of parents who's native language was Spanish.

At the start of each interview, the purpose of the study was discussed. The questions were then asked based on the participants' responses to the online survey (Patton, 1990). The questions included asking participants' for example(s) of what experiences have shaped their perceptions of PE broadly and then specifically within the district being studied. They were asked further about any specific examples of information provided by the district and/or their son or daughter's PE teacher that may have had an influence of their perceptions of PE in their child's school. The

interviews were approximately 20-40 minutes in length. These interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

Field notes. Field notes were taken both during and after the follow-up interviews. Field notes consist of summaries of conversations along with emerging ideas, strategies, hunches, and insights obtained throughout the data collection and analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). They served as a guide in discussions held with the peer debriefer and in formulating the categories that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

This study used an inductive content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to analyze the qualitative data generated from the open-ended questions and comments from the online survey (see Appendix B) and follow-up interviews. The constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which has been described as a process of categorizing (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), was used to compare and contrast each unit of information with all other units of information to unite those with similar meaning and to separate those with different meanings (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). These units of information were extrapolated from the raw data, consisting of a few words in a sentence to an extended paragraph. The categories that emerge containing similar units of information were cut and pasted into a computer file as well as printed out and placed on large poster boards for further analysis. As a result of this process, categories were established, and subsequently each category was analyzed to identify common themes of greater generality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Researchers were astonished to find that all 20 parents interviewed shared a positive perception of the PE program. Consequently, in order to eliminate the possibility of perceived research bias, researchers purposefully probed for any possible negative perceptions parents were willing to share.

In attempting to maintain methodological rigor and ensure the study is trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) researcher bias statement, member checking (source checking), triangulation, peer debriefing, and an inquiry audit was used (Hanson & Newburg, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher bias statement. In performing qualitative research a researcher may assume different membership roles. Adler and Adler (1994) suggested three predominant researcher membership roles: the complete member researcher, the active member researcher, and the peripheral member researcher. Researchers in peripheral membership roles interact closely enough with the members they are studying to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities that may constitute core group membership (Adler & Adler, 1994). The researchers in this study were considered peripheral members.

Along with the researchers' role of peripheral membership, they bring personal biases to the study through their beliefs, knowledge, and experiences based on their responsibilities as physical educators. The primary researcher received a bachelor degree in PE and has been teaching in the field for nine years. In consistent efforts to improve her own program, she has invested interest in the effects appropriate advocacy practices have on program support and sustainability. While the researcher has no affiliation to the district or university using the SSPE

model, she has read multiple studies regarding SSPE in preparation of this follow-up research and is impressed by the model of success proposed in these studies.

Member checking. Member checking was performed several times throughout the study. The first checking took place after the follow-up interviews were transcribed into a verbatim written document, which was subsequently sent via e-mail to the participant for comment and verification. Member checks were also used during data analysis with both survey respondents and interview participants when particular information appeared to fit into multiple categories or needs further explanation. In this case, participants were asked for comment and clarification via e-mail.

Triangulation. Data triangulation was used in this study by asking similar questions of participants with different perspectives in the questionnaires and interviews. Also, multiple researchers were involved in the study, known as investigator triangulation, which helped establish the validity of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In addition, researchers not only investigated the particulars of the advocacy practices nested in the SSPE model, they examined the perceptions of teachers and the district coordinator relating to the methods, outcomes, and feelings of preparedness pertaining to the task of carrying out these efforts along with their views relating to changes that have taken place in the program, reactions to external and internal forces, and the program's current stability (see Appendix B).

In addition to studying the teacher and coordinator perceptions of the SSPE model and its practices, researchers further established trustworthiness by exploring the extent of professional development relevant to advocacy practices that takes place during the preparation of pre-service teachers at the district's partnering university.

Peer debriefer. The primary researcher used a university professor as a peer debriefer. The role of the peer debriefer includes exploring the primary researcher's biases, discussing their field notes, clarifying the primary researcher's interpretations, and playing the role of devil's advocate (Hanson & Newburg, 1992). This was accomplished by the primary researcher and the peer debriefer meeting at a set time once a week after data collection began and continued until data analysis was completed.

Inquiry audit. The last technique to give the study credibility was that of an inquiry audit, which is metaphorically based on a fiscal audit. In order for the inquiry audit to occur, the primary researcher prepared and maintain an audit trail. An audit trail consists of five categories: (a) raw data, (b) data reduction and analysis products, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, (d) process notes, and (e) instrument development information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inquiry audit was performed by an experienced qualitative researcher in the Department of Teacher Education.

Results and Discussion

According to Cuban (1992) and Siedentop and Locke (1997), an organization becomes vulnerable to substantial cataclysm usually caused by outside sources if it does not have a system in place to manage change. The key elements of this district's SSPE model identified by Prusak et al. (2010) were carefully shaped and refined over the years for the purpose of preserving its attainment of success during periods of incremental change and periodic fundamental upheaval, necessary to appease external and internal forces. Since parents have been identified as a force so influential they alone can change the intended and taught curricula (Cuban 1992), constant parent support is considered by this district as an imperative facet to program sustainability. Program advocacy practices specifically targeting parents were woven into the model's common threads

of accountability for the purpose of strengthening the sustainability of the program. This qualitative study examined parent perceptions of the program as a whole, factors that influence those perceptions, and the advocacy practices applied by PE teachers in the district in order to shed light on the effectiveness of these practices and other possible implications. Following is a review of parent perceptions reported, an examination of major themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis, and a discussion of additional insights revealed by parents that researchers found to be salient in establishing parent support.

Data revealed that all 20 parents who were interviewed shared a generally positive perception of the PE program. Consequently, in order to eliminate the possibility of perceived research bias, researchers purposefully probed for any possible negative perceptions parents were willing to share. Regardless of this determined attempt, researchers could only find varying degrees of positive perceptions of the program. In fact, the only negative comments researchers could extract from parent interviews included comments relating to environmental factors such as high external temperatures or the limited days the PE classes were offered to the students—they wanted more! Apparently, efforts to employ a common mandated set of advocacy practices backed with regular supportive professional development and training seem to have successfully resulted in contributing to the positive parent perceptions of the program. The purposeful selection and sampling of parents from schools that bridged the demographic make-up of the district offered researchers with the ability to construe parent perceptions toward PE regardless of the distinctive characteristics of each school.

As researchers further analyzed the data, six major themes emerged regarding factors that influenced parents' perceptions of the district's PE program. These themes are (a) student enjoyment; (b) teacher passion; (c) teacher involvement and presence outside of the PE class (d)

teacher-to-parent communication; (e) program transparency; and (f) a well-structured and organized program. Hereafter, researchers will discuss each theme and connect them to prior research and supporting evidence provided during this study.

Theme 1: Student Enjoyment

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

Here it's a fairly different school. But if you're going to talk about perceptions [of PE] before I had kids, it'll be from my own experience—which was if you spit on the ground, you had to do wall sits for fifteen minutes; and the PE teacher wore the tight little shorts; and it was rough. It was rough. I wouldn't have described it as fun. It was rough.

Necessary, I felt like, because we all had to do it; but now kids love it. My kids love learning about sports. They love learning about golf. They enjoy PE.

When another parent was asked what factors influenced her perceptions of the program, she explained that a lot of her perceptions are based off of what her children share with her. She then shared the following:

So they come home and tell me what they are learning, "Today we learned how to dance, or do this, or that." My son came home and said they were practicing golf which I don't ever remember doing growing up. Just recently, my sixth grader said, "We are learning how to drive golf balls." I think it is kind of fun for them to come home and tell you what

they are doing. I have a second grader, third grader, and a sixth grader. So, it is all different. They all learn different things. Each of them are learning different things. It is not the same. So, it is kind of fun.

Another parent explained how much her children's perceptions of their teacher influenced her opinion of him. She expressed how important a positive teacher-student relationship was to her. She stated the following:

As a parent, having a positive influence on my kids was a way I had a positive relationship with the teacher. So, even though I didn't necessarily see the PE teacher very often, I knew my kids loved him, so then I liked him. Having that positive relationship with the students is probably number one.

These parents validate the following assumptions shared by one of the PE teachers in the district who stated, "I have parents that would probably say nice things about me that have never really seen me teach, but I think their kids think positively about me." This PE teacher and others interviewed seem to have caught on to the importance of being a positive influence and creating a fun, enjoyable atmosphere for the children. The parents further revealed the affect the quality relationships these teachers build with their students have on the opinions that students and parents have towards teachers and the PE program. Many of the parents also spoke about how much they allow the opinions of their children to influence their perceptions of the PE program and the PE teacher. Therefore, creating a fun environment and developing positive relationships with the children is one indirect way teachers can impact program support.

These findings also support prior research by Cothran. In a study by Cothran and Ennis (1997), students ranked fun and enjoyment, good grades, and time with friends as the top three outcomes for physical education. In a follow-up study, students *and teachers* ranked fun as the

first and foremost objective of physical education (Cothran, 2013). The findings of this current study now add parents to the group of individuals who believe fun should be a top priority in a successful physical education program.

Not surprisingly, these perceptions also align with the current national standards created for the field of physical education. According to the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) National PE Standards, Standard five states: “The physical literate individual recognizes the value of physical activity for health, *enjoyment*, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction” (SHAPE America & Human Kinetics, 2014). So, by ensuring that National Standard Five is implemented into a highly effective physical education program, fun and enjoyment should be a natural outcome for students.

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

Theme 2: Teacher Passion

There is an obvious link between teacher passion and student enjoyment. When a teacher genuinely enjoys what they do, a positive atmosphere develops. This positive atmosphere affects the perceptions of students. Students then share their perceptions with their parents. Conversely, teachers who develop negative relationships with students or who are disconnected from class

activities produce lower levels of student participation in PE classes (Cothran, 2013; Mitchell, 2013).

Teacher-student interactions and relationships are highly affected by teacher passion, that is, how much desire or enthusiasm a teacher has toward teaching their subject. Researchers asked one of the teachers in this SSPE program why he decided to become a PE teacher. His response is as follows:

I got into PE because of exercise—I love it. I've always loved it. And I see what's going on with our kiddos. I see in my neighborhood. When I was growing up, as soon as I got home from school I was outside until Mom called me in. And I dreaded that moment! You look in your neighborhoods now and it's not the same. So, this is why I do this—get kids moving, get kids active, get kids interested so that hopefully they can pick up something they enjoy that will keep them active for the rest of their lives. For me, it's basketball. But every kid is different. That's the reason I'm doing this.

However, attitudes like this teacher displays extend beyond the students to the parents. Parents vouched for the passion this teacher and other PE teachers in the district have. One parent shared the following:

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

Another parent stated:

I believe the effort put forth by my children's PE teacher/coach has made me more aware of what my children need to do to have a healthy lifestyle and what kinds of things we can do as a family to help with that.

Additionally, another parent shared similar feelings:

[My daughter's teacher] genuinely cares about her and loves to see the progress she makes. He (the PE teacher) lets me know when he sees that she is improving in different areas, or when things are coming up that might cause trepidation on her part, events that she might like to participate in, and concerns about how she is able to move in PE.

These are just some of the comments made by parents regarding the passion that they see exists in their child's teachers. Additionally, when parents were asked what advice they would give new PE teachers, they included some of these characteristics and practices that they admire in their child's teacher. One parent put it this way:

Just always be encouraging with the students. Just encourage them to do their best because some of them learn slower than others. But as long as you tell them they're doing their best I think it makes a great impact on them. And it kind of pushes them like, "I'm doing great. I'm gonna keep doing it." [My son] even tries to exercise at home with some of the exercise equipment that I have. It's encouraging to see because he's only 10.

Usually elementary kids just want to play video games but he tries to take that little time to do something healthy.

All things considered, parents seem to define a passionate teacher as one who genuinely cares about the students, builds meaningful relationships with the students and the parents, is enthusiastic and encouraging in the delivery of lessons and feedback, creates fun and engaging lessons that lead to student enjoyment, provides plenty of positive feedback to both the students

and the parents, and goes above and beyond in their job—such as being involved and present outside the PE classes.

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

A striking observation made by every interviewer conducting follow-up interviews was a common response parents gave when interviewers asked them about their perceptions of the PE program. Almost every parent referred more to the extra programs and events that the PE teachers conducted outside of their class time than the PE classes themselves. Interestingly, they associated these extracurricular activities and events with the PE program. The quantity of extra programs and activities that were disclosed by parents in this district made evident the passion these teachers have toward helping their students create a healthy and physically active lifestyle. Parents shared over twenty different extracurricular activities organized by their child's PE teacher. These activities ranged from traditional field days to mud runs.

However, these activities do not stop at the children. Families are invited and participate in a multitude of these events. When researchers asked a teacher why they conduct so many activities and events outside of PE class, she responded, "I feel like we are a hub, not just for this school but for this community. So, what we do is we try to get as many kids and families active as possible." After one teacher spoke about the abundance of support he felt he had at his school, the interviewer asked him why he thought that was. He shared:

I think that parents see that I put a lot in because I do programs after school and I have fitness nights and I do running club, girls on the run... I think they see that I'm really trying not to just be a teacher and clock in and clock out and get out of here. They see that I really want to teach the kids healthy lifestyles and give them opportunities to

explore and grow. So, I think that's a big... It's appreciated, and then they do whatever they can to support the program and support the activities.

Many parents considered the existence of these programs a strong indication of the desire and willingness the PE teachers possess in going above and beyond what is required of them. Several parents shared the following statements:

I always loved PE as a kid. I always hoped my kids would have a great experience as well and find a love of exercise and sports. [This] PE program surpassed all of my expectations. Our teacher/coach goes far beyond her duties so that my kids can gain extracurricular experiences to further their knowledge and love of Physical Education.

Another parent stated:

I feel like the PE teachers here are genuinely invested in the kids, their education and physical well-being. I have seen them go above and beyond in participating in runs, field trips and after school activities that encourage, build up and educate students.

However, as much as these parents appreciate the sacrifices their children's teachers make in order to organize and implement such beneficial extracurricular activities and events, they also expressed how much they value the simple presence and involvement of the teachers *anywhere* outside of the PE class. Many of them feel that the simple presence and interactions of the teacher in a variety of situations affect the relationship they have with that teacher. The following statement was shared by one parent who supports this notion:

Every event we have here, the PE teachers are out. So, school carnival night—it's dunk the PE teacher. They're on bus duty. They're helping kids find their parents. They're being involved. As a parent, that's how I met most of them.

Another parent expressed her appreciation for the presence and involvement displayed by her child's PE teacher with the following statement:

We've actually gone through two PE teachers, and even though they have very different personalities, the enjoyment is still there for the kids. And I think it's because the guys in the gym aren't just in the gym. We actually just had [the PE teacher] come through our classroom two days ago and talk for 20 minutes about some health program. So it's not like they're just relegated to the stinky little room/cafeteria. They're out there on the first day of school, high-fiving kids. They get out there on the playground sometimes, and you see them hula-hooping with the kids because it's fun. It made physical education not a job or some class you had to complete. It was, "Hey, come run with me!" So, honestly I think, especially at this school, the involvement that the PE teachers have outside of the PE classroom makes them much more relatable to the kids; and even if you're a parent who's never actually been able to witness PE, you see how excited your kid gets to see [their teacher] in the hallway, and the high five they give them. So you think, "Okay, this is good."

Thus, it is clear that teachers who make an appearance and initiate optimistic interactions outside of the PE class have a positive impact on the perceptions these parents have about this PE program. One of the teachers shared his understanding of this concept and emphasized his belief in the importance of establishing those relationships with parents through simple presence and meaningful connections. Here is what he had to say:

You've got to establish those relationships. You have to be that person they see and trust. That's why I put myself out front when parents drop off. Those things, I think, are huge—establishing that relationship with your parent base and your community. And it doesn't

always have to be in the PE realm. I think if they see you as a positive person they will automatically transfer that into the P.E. program.

While sharing advice for new PE teachers, one parent put it this way:

I think just being around. So, like, if it's in the afternoon when they pick up their kids, just being out there and saying, "Hi! I'm their P.E. teacher or coach." You know, and always getting with PTO and asking who are your parent volunteers. And then, well, here they give us emails. So, you can email them. Just having that communication so they don't feel like you're a stranger.

It is almost as if teachers in this district are teaching parents how to be more involved and present in the lives of their children through their actions and example. When parents see teachers going above and beyond the class room to be a part of the lives of the children, parents are more apt to model that involvement by being more supportive of and contributing to their children's education outside of the home. One parent expressed the influence the PE teacher's behavior had on her perception of her own involvement with her son in the following statement: "It honestly did remind me, 'Oh play with them! Have fun with them in this way!'"

Theme 4: Teacher-to-Parent Communication and Feedback

There are many benefits to creating open channels of communication between a teacher and parents. Acquiring constructive feedback is just one of those benefits. However, parents interviewed for this study reported that they rarely to never offer feedback to the PE teacher. However, this is not out of spite. In fact, most of these parents admitted that they do not take the time to provide feedback to *any* teacher unless it is negative feedback. Some parents expressed their belief that this was common for most people. This notion was reflected by one parent who stated:

You never provide any feedback when it's good. Honestly, there's never been anything bad to say about the PE program here; but again, when things are going smoothly, no one ever says anything.

Another parent shared similar thoughts in regards to communication by saying:

There's always opportunities to communicate with people but do you take those opportunities? No. Obviously most people don't give a lot a feedback...and that's bad...but they don't give a lot of feedback unless it's negative feedback.

The absence of feedback can make it very difficult for a teacher to know what aspects of a program need modification. Therefore, teachers must learn to be proactive in seeking out feedback necessary for program development. Sometimes, simply keeping the channels of communication open with parents allows for easier feedback submission. Other times, teachers may need to directly ask specific questions in order to receive beneficial input.

Even though most parents acknowledge their lack of proactivity when it comes to providing feedback to their child's PE teacher, they prefer that the teacher not reciprocate such actions. Most parents strongly welcome, appreciate and value communication and feedback from teachers, especially positive feedback. In fact, they desire it enough to list it as one of the main factors that positively influences their perceptions of the PE program. This was evident in the following parent comment about her daughter's PE teacher:

One thing that I like: the teachers call me a lot, anytime there is something going on or, "Can you participate in this?", or whatever. They let me know what [my daughter] is up to. And its good things, always good things.

Another parent shared a similar sentiment in relationship to the important connection between teachers and parents stating:

I just think it's really important to involve the parents, especially with P.E. You *can* just connect with the students. Totally. But if the parents don't have that connection too, it seems to be hard to have the full circle. So, I think just reaching out to the parents to make sure the parents are involved and know what's happening... I think that's really important.

Some parents assume that when a teacher contacts them regarding their child, it will be followed by a report of some misbehavior or alerting concern. When they end up receiving an earful of positive remarks, it is a relief and pleasant surprise that will most likely never be forgotten. The contact ends up producing an even deeper positive affect on their perception of the program. This was the case as one parent shared:

It was such a fun surprise to receive a phone call about how well my son was participating and what a pleasure it was to have him in class. I at first didn't know that it was going to be positive. So, at first I was like, 'what? (in a bleak tone)' And then they said, "We are just calling to let you know that your son is doing an awesome job in P.E. and we just wanted to recognize him for doing that and letting mom know that he is doing a great job." I thought that was good positive feedback. I think a lot of times we don't get that positive—we just receive the calls when it is not good. So, I think it is great that they actually take the time to call a parent to let them know. We know they are busy and that it takes time. I thought it was great that they took the time to call even if it was just to share. It wasn't very long. It was brief, but it meant a lot to me. I told my son about it and I think it boosted him...his morale...that he is doing a great job.

Positive feedback should far outweigh the amount of negative feedback given to the parents about their child. Constructive or negative feedback is always better accepted when a

relationship has already been established using plenty of positive feedback. A PE teacher demonstrated her understanding of this approach in her explanation for why she likes to provide ample positive feedback early in the year:

I try to always make positive calls early on to make connections in case there is something down the road where I have to talk to a parent about any particular issue. And it's like, "Hey, remember how I called because your kid was doing so well? Well, now I need a little help."

Another teacher shared similar feelings towards the importance of providing plenty of positive feedback, especially early on:

The key, I feel, to get parents on board is to start with positive phone calls; because when you build a relationship with the parent and then you have an issue with that kid in class, you then call them and they're on board one hundred percent because they know you love their kid! We had a kid last year, and he was a superstar, but he got into some crazy trouble. All the sudden, he was on suspension. This is an amazing kid--*amazing* kid, and he messed up this one time. When I called that mom, and I said, "Listen, I know he's going through tough times, but I want you to know that he's an amazing kid." She starts crying on the phone saying, "I need that right now. I needed someone saying my kid's a good kid." I mean every kid's gonna mess up, but if you start that, and you build that, you call, they're one hundred percent behind you in whatever you need. And [the parents will] help you at home more, saying, "Hey buddy, we gotta do better at PE." I mean, you see a huge improvement with those kids.

Immediately after sharing this statement, the other PE teacher from the same school shared another example of providing positive feedback to parents but in an opposite scenario:

I've had the opposite, where it's a troubled kid having issues all around campus, but we never see an issue with him in PE. It's like their favorite class. So, they'll come in and I'll call home and, I mean this is horrible to say, but the dad answers and says, "What'd the little shit do now?"

And I was like, "Sir, no—actually nothing. I was calling to say what a great job he's been doing!"

He was like, "This is the first positive call I've gotten home from the school." So, it was good that he heard that. And then his whole tone changed, and his attitude. And we spoke about what a role model his child is.

And I'm thinking, "Geeze, [this kid] never gives me an issue. I wish I would have called sooner. That poor kid. I mean, he needs some of that at home. Otherwise, the same behaviors continue..."

Every parent enjoys hearing good news about their child, and if a parent feels that a teacher enjoys having his/her child as a part of the class, they are going to be more cooperative and supportive.

The benefits of providing plenty of positive feedback are not the only advantages of teacher-to-parent communication. In fact, the two most common purposes of teacher-to-parent communication reported by parents in this study were positive feedback regarding the performance and/or behavior of their child and invitations to attend or volunteer at PE sponsored events or activities that take place outside of the PE class. One parent shed some light on why she feels these two purposes of teacher-to-parent communication are so important:

Obviously, I feel like some kind of newsletter, talking about how parents can be involved, is good. I think a lot of the times people don't know how, you know, "How can

I be involved in P.E.,” or, “How can I be involved in my child’s physical education or school period.” I think they don’t know how to be involved, and so a lot of the times a connection or contact letting them know what is going on helps them feel like they are involved just by knowing what is going on. And I think, like I said, those positive phone calls and positive emails... I think that is a huge thing because I think that parents want to know those things. It is important.

Besides feedback about their child and information to keep them in the know, parents also conveyed a desire for more communication concerning the curriculum. Although some parents reported receiving information about approaching units or lessons in the PE class, many parents indicated that they do not recall receiving such information and admitted that a curriculum map of some sort would be appreciated. This was reflected best by one parent who addressed this aspect of communication stating:

The only thing that really comes to mind is the communication thing. It makes me realize, “Wow, I really don’t realize what’s going on with the PE program.” I’m happy with it because of what my kids tell me, but I wish that I knew [the teacher] and I knew what her curriculum was and what they were doing.

Another parent made the following suggestion:

I don’t think it’s a terrible idea that the PE teachers send home, even a school-wide email saying, “This is what we’re working on this week in PE: We’re teaching the kids how to play tennis.” And you know, encourage the parents to build on those skills at home, or something like that. Once a week, I think that’s a great idea.

Additionally, another parent stated the following:

I just think that if we got a little bit more of what is going on like, “This time we are doing...”, you know, whatever they are doing or whatever curriculum they are hitting every quarter, because I know they probably plan that out ahead of time. Just letting us know or you notice your kids wanting to practice basketball more or soccer more or whatever it is they are learning, you know that they are maybe doing that in P.E., because they want to do that at home now or they want to do it more on their own instead of just in P.E.

This is not to say that the teachers in this district are not providing this information to the parents. According to some teachers and the district coordinator, they are. However, many times, if the parent does not receive this information via their preferred form of communication, they miss it. This is why plenty of consistent teacher-to-parent communication that includes a variety of ways to connect parents to the teacher and program is beneficial. The more connected a parent feels, the stronger sense of a partnership they feel in reaching a common goal—the welfare, growth, and education of their child. Parents become loyal advocates of the program when the teacher demonstrates their intentions of involving the parent in their commitment of enhancing their child’s health and well-being. When the focus is on the child, teacher-to-parent communication can become a strong tool in positively affecting parents’ perceptions of the program.

The preferred form of teacher-to-parent communication varies from parent to parent. Many parents reported preferring email. Some preferred text messages. Others preferred phone calls. Of course, communicating with parents through their preferred form of communication is most effective. Nevertheless, this strategy is an unfair expectation of PE teachers who see hundreds of students each week.

Using a variety of communication methods periodically, however, is a reasonable and beneficial technique for parent communication. A teacher may include a small segment in the school's monthly newsletter informing parents what activities, lessons, or unit is approaching. Maybe a flyer is sent home with the children the day before the new unit reminding parents what materials are needed for the unit. At the end of the unit the teacher may follow-up in a bulk email referring to the school newsletter segment, thanking parents for helping their children be prepared for the unit by sending them with the required materials listed on the flyer, sharing how the unit went, and asking parents for their feedback regarding the unit or inquiring what their children shared with them about the lessons. This may sound like a lot of work for a teacher, but connecting with all parents through bulk communication through a few different ways seems a lot more feasible than trying to reach each parent individually through their preferred form of communication. One parent shared the following statement regarding her feelings toward the communication efforts made by her child's PE teacher:

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

Asking for feedback in an email makes it simple for the parent to push the reply button and immediately share what is on their mind—positive, neutral, or constructive. Many teachers now use a text messaging program which sends out a bulk text message to all parents who opt for this form of communication. A teacher may use this method to inform or remind parents about upcoming activities or events, or items students should be prepared with on certain days. Many

schools now use comparable programs that send out voice messages via bulk phone calls. However, when simple questions need to be answered or individual requests need attention, individual phone calls are very personable, and some parents expressed this preference. Regardless of the multiple options technology offers teachers these days, some parents still enjoy the classic tangible note home. One parent shared her appreciation for this simple form:

I love the idea of the old fashion positive note home because it's a physical thing. Its reinforcing. Kids can be like, "Wow, my teacher thought of me." I think there's a balance there as to what your purpose is, who you're trying to get to.

The point is, when teachers have hundreds of students, being able to communicate with each parent through their preferred method of communication is impractical. However, by using a variety of communication methods on a regular basis, teachers are able to reach more parents, make more connections, and spawn a stronger impact on the perceptions of their program.

Theme 5: Program Transparency

Parents tend to feel more positive about a program that is welcoming, open, and inviting. With these aspects present, parents experience a stronger sense of belonging. This sense of belonging acts as a motivator for parents to be more active and involved in their child's educational experience. However, even if a parent's participation or involvement does not increase, merely having a simple awareness of the fact that the door is always open and parents are always welcome creates a sense of trust. This is described by parents who shared their observations of teacher practices that illustrate the impact these practices have on their perceptions:

It is kind of an open door policy with PE. I've been invited to participate by going to my child's PE class, invited to track & field days and an annual holiday Reindeer Run,

invited to 4 square and jump rope tournaments....the list goes on! Any activity the PE department sponsors, parents are always invited and encouraged to participate.

This feeling of transparency is created early in this district through parent nights described by one parent who said:

When they are in Kindergarten, they have... They tell you leave all your other kids at home. So, they want it to be very focused on just that child being able to show you what they do. They take us through how a P.E. class would go. The little kids are really excited to show us that they know, how to follow the directions, stuff like that. They demonstrated a few of their activities and then they had us do some activities with them—encouraging that active relationship with your kid, which I really liked. It was fun. And honestly, it did remind me, “Oh play with them! Have fun with them in this way!” Yeah. It was good.

This notion of being inviting and transparent may have been stated most clearly by this parent’s comment:

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

Creating a transparent program communicates to the parents that the teacher has nothing to hide; the teacher has enough confidence in the program that he/she wants the parents to see the benefits it provides for their children. Teachers from this district seem determined to show parents what their program consists of, especially when parents cling to negative perceptions of

PE from their own childhood experiences. One teacher displayed his proactive approach to such a challenge in the following statement:

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

They're like, "Holy cow, this is different!"

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

Most parents want to be involved. However, the majority of them do not feel comfortable initiating that involvement. They are waiting for an invitation. The PE teachers in the district seem to be aware of the hesitation and misperceptions parents may feel if they are not invited to be involved or connected with in some way. One teacher shared the following idea:

I think the big thing is just being open, being out there. When I walk around campus, I try to make contact with parents I see and introduce myself. It's hard when you have 600 students. It's hard as a specialist. You don't get to know the families the same as a classroom teacher does. So, you kind of have to go more out of your way to include parents and send things home and create opportunities for parents to get involved and learn about the program. Otherwise, a lot of them think, "Oh it's P.E. It's like it was when I went through." I think it's important to educate them about how P.E. has changed—especially the ones that didn't have good experiences—because there are a lot of parents that went through when it was all fitness testing and, "We are going to watch everyone do pull ups." And people who weren't good at that don't like P.E. So, it's about educating

that it's different and that everyone can be successful. We want everyone to come have fun and be active and healthy and everyone can do it.

Also, when asked what advice parents would give a new PE teacher, a couple of parents related the following advice to their own experience with their child's class:

Just making sure that parents know that they have open door communication and that they're welcome to come participate in the class. I've definitely done that before. Rope climbing days, those are my favorite. I drop in on that. So, just making sure that the PE teachers are very upfront and like, "Hey! We're here! Come check in on us anytime you want."

The comments and advice of these parents support the idea that when teachers create an open and trustful relationship with parents, these relationships enhance the parents' feelings of connectedness. The more connected a parent feels with an organized, effective program, the stronger their perceptions of the program grow, which in turn increases their support.

Theme 6: Well-Structured, Organized Program

It does not do much good to connect parents to a program that is poorly structured or unorganized. According to parents, in order to positively affect their perceptions of the program, the program itself must have structure and organization, and that is exactly how these parents described this district-wide PE program. After being asked why she likes the program so much, one parent replied with the following statement:

Well, look around. They always have some organized kind of P.E. activity going on, whether it be stations or organized play of games for kickball or hockey or whatever. I mean, it's always organized. It's not just come in and run around here; let's go play on

the playground for 30 minutes or whatever. They're always very organized in what they do.

Another parent shared her view of the program:

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

However, the teachers revealed that the program organization is more than merely structured lesson plans. Prepared material and planning goes into every aspect of the program, from the year's curriculum scope and sequence to the posted objective for each day's lessons. One teacher shared the following:

We've got our objective wall that has to be refreshed every single week on what we're doing. So, as they walk in kids can say, "That's what we're learning today."

After being asked how this district-wide PE program has changed her perception of PE in general, one parent divulged the following:

Well, I feel like I have a greater appreciation for the purpose of PE and what they're trying to accomplish. I think before that; 'Oh, it's just for fun, it's just to get exercise.' But being more involved, I see how it's more about the overall emotional, mental, and physical growth. I think, whether [the kids] are working together as a team and learning, or talking about learning to deal with disappointment and whether or not they win or lose; there's just a broader purpose in the PE program.

Although they shared a variety of reasons as to why they believed the program is so successful, many parents were unaware that this success is consistent throughout the entire district. Unless they had experience in others schools within the district, parents presumed that their school was special or unique due to the extreme efforts of the PE teachers that are housed there. This is best illustrated by the following parent's description of the program at her child's school:

[This school] has the most organized and well run PE program I can imagine. I am incredibly pleased with our program. I feel like our school has wonderful PE teachers who offer a great variety of what they do in PE. My children come home talking about what they learned or how far they got each week with the goals that they are trying to accomplish in PE. If it means run for a longer distance or climbing the rope higher, I feel like the PE program is a lot more involved then when I was in school. They have found more ways to incorporate making PE fun!

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

Although the PE teachers are recognizably highly trained, professional models of effective PE practitioners, prior research of the program and recent interviews with current PE practitioners in the district revealed that the true backbone of this successful and sustainable district PE model is the role of the Elementary PE District Coordinator. The current district coordinator has been working with the district for seventeen years. Prior to her employment in

this position, the previous Elementary PE District Coordinator retired after twenty-six years of service. Both of them believed strongly in teacher accountability. The current district coordinator holds every PE teacher accountable for keeping regular parent communication logs, attending professional development training meetings, maintaining a quality website, conducting annual PE demonstration nights, keeping parents informed through regularly distributed newsletters, inviting parents to attend PE classes, providing regular student progress reports and other district-wide assessments, submitting assessment data to the district, writing grants, and many more program enhancing responsibilities. Two teachers in the district shared the motivation this accountability provides for them:

Teacher B: [The PE district coordinator] is a huge advocate. [She] requires contact with parents on a weekly basis.

Teacher A: We have to turn in our Positive Phone Call log.

Teacher B: So, she pushes that, and then she's always giving reminders, and we get together as a whole PE staff once a month.

Teacher A: The third Wednesday of every month. And there she's constantly reminding us. And then we're able to speak with our other PE teachers around the district to see what works for them or what they're doing as well.

Teacher B: And if she ever drops in on my lesson, she wants to see stuff. She wants to see, "Hey let me see your phone log."

Teacher A: Yeah, she'll come to the office while we're teaching and just go through our things to make sure that we're on top of it.

Teacher B: I'm telling ya, if you don't do it—those who do it out of fear—they don't get it. Because if you do it, it just improves what you're doing as a PE teacher... Any

teacher! I don't think it's just strictly in PE. I think it's any teacher in education across the board. You talk to parents, you're going to see huge improvement and help.

On top of that, she applies for and maintains numerous grants herself which have provided the schools with the latest research and technology in equipment such as pedometers, a golf program, new tennis equipment, the creation of a comprehensive healthy school and community program, and more. She also nourishes a strong partnership with the nearby university. The university contributes to the professional development of the teachers, places student teachers, and provides high quality graduates for hire. On top of all of this, the teachers' curriculum scope and sequence, four-part lesson plans, and assessments are all systematized and regularly updated by the district coordinator. Besides being well organized, the district PE coordinator also consistently updates and improves the curriculum and professional development sessions on proper delivery of the updated curriculum. One teacher summed up this idea well by sharing:

Golf has been a new one that's been added since I've been teaching. [The district coordinator] worked with [a company] to get all the schools golf equipment and training in-services on how to teach it safely and do stuff. Bowling. She's worked with [another company] to get us the lanes and equipment for bowling and curriculum for teaching that. We have also done a lot more with pedometers and utilizing different technologies and things in class.

All of the busy work (e.g., curriculum development, lesson enhancements, assessment formation, equipment purchases) that usually prevents teachers from being more present and involved in building relationships and conducting extra-curricular activities or events that enrich their programs is taken care of by the PE district coordinator in this district. With the support of the district coordinator in breaking down the barriers that usually impede the efforts of PE teachers

in building and sustaining a strong program, the PE teachers are free to focus on quality teaching; professional development; building strong relationships with parents, students, and community; and strengthening the perceptions and support of their program with effective advocacy practices. One teacher summarizes the impact PE District Coordinator's role has on a successful and sustainable PE program with this statement: "If we didn't have a [PE District Coordinator] though, it wouldn't work the way it works. You have to have someone who's passionate about... and does what she does!"

Conclusion

In accordance to Cuban's third assumption of change relating to whether the 'planned changes' of the program's advocacy practices required by teachers using the SSPE model in this study ultimately lead to perceived improvements that add to its dynamic stability, twenty parents interviewed for this study conveyed varying degrees of positive perceptions toward a district-wide elementary PE program that has been identified by prior studies as being successful and sustainable for decades. After extensive data analysis, the researchers came up with four key implications that seem to most impact these apparent positive perceptions parents have towards this district-wide PE program, which in turn recognizably lead to increased support and program stability. These four implications include the importance of (a) building relationships, (b) keeping open lines of communication, (c) program transparency, and (d) the role of the PE district coordinator. We will conclude by highlighting these four implications.

Most progressive educators have long embraced the fundamental idea that teachers who take the time to build relationships with their students have a knowledge about them that will not only enhance their ability to teach them, but also increase the students' willingness to be taught.

However, this idea does not stop with the students. Building strong relationships with parents helps parents better appreciate the intentions of the teacher and her goals for their children.

The process of building effective relationships includes developing ample open channels of communication. Through these channels teachers will strengthen parent connections by providing plenty of information regarding their children. This information should not only include what their child will be learning and when, and what information is needed to help their child be best prepared for what is to come; it should also include feedback about the progression of their child, particularly positive feedback. Not only should every child receive motivating positive feedback, the parents should hear it too. This pleasant form of communication is most beneficial early on because it opens the ears and hearts of parents straightaway.

However, in order to win someone's heart, trust must be present. One of the best ways to gain the trust of others is through transparency. When it is evident to parents that teachers believe enough in their program to make it open and available to the parents at all times, and proud enough of their curriculum to invite them to come see what it contains, parents trust that the teachers have nothing to hide and assume good things are happening. Taken even a step further, when teachers invite parents to be a part of the lessons, events, and activities, parents tend to acquire a sense of ownership. It is very difficult to feel a part of something great and not provide loyalty and support in some way.

Since such relationships, communication, and powerful programs that merit transparency take plenty of effort, passion, and time to develop, many PE teachers may question how one can manage such a feat and still accomplish all of the additional tasks most physical educators must endure as they attempt to break down common barriers that continually hinder their progress. They don't—at least in this district. Many of these overwhelming responsibilities are nonexistent

in the SSPE model due to the existence of a proficient and effective full-time district PE coordinator. Besides relieving the PE teachers of common overlying onuses and program barriers, the District PE Coordinator also heightens teacher effectiveness and motivation by holding them accountable and providing them with the ongoing professional development and support needed to win the hearts of the community through regular program advocacy practices. This alleviation provided by the District PE Coordinator allows teachers, who Prusak et al. (2010) believe is the most important part of the SSPE model, to focus on what should be their top priorities, teaching and advocacy. Apparently, the existence of this crucial role makes an enormous difference in the program's success and sustainability.

Along with the current parent perceptions revealed in this study, the District PE Coordinator bore prior evidence of positive parent perceptions and shared her belief that this positive perception has led to the strong program support that exists. She specifically stated the following:

The community's perception of what we do *must* be good, because we get positive quality service surveys; and if it wasn't, the superintendents and the board members would not keep this [PE program] around. Neighboring districts have all cut back PE. We are the only district that still has two PEs for every grade level, K-6, per week. Most of them are now one [class a week] for forty minutes, but it's not the same, as you know. Two years ago [a neighboring city] totally cut [PE]. But they had nine-hundred kids leave the district and go to charters and some other things. So, they brought PE back. They were only once a week to begin with, but it made an impact. So, we're doing good things.

Implications for Further Research

Since this study was conducted at the elementary school level, further research is needed to explore whether the factors identified to influence the perceptions of parents apply at the middle and high school levels as well. Since the PE program researched in this study was specifically developed and designed for the elementary level, and the secondary PE programs are directed by a separate district PE coordinator with an independent philosophy and dissimilar program history, studying the parent's perceptions of the PE programs in the district's middle schools or high schools may help pinpoint the effects the SSPE model has on parent perceptions and support. Such studies may also shed light on whether similar or different factors influence parent perceptions and program support at different school levels.

Given that all 20 parents who participated in this study reported positive perceptions toward the district-wide elementary PE program, further research is needed to explore and compare the parent perceptions from other districts with the absence of a successful and sustainable PE program. Researching districts in which the teachers are not held accountable for a variety of regular advocacy practices, or where program promotion is not a high priority, may substantiate the relationship between advocacy practices and parent perceptions of a PE program. A study of parent perceptions in a district with distinct practices may add weight to the factors identified by parent participants of this study.

This study also identified the role of the District Elementary PE Coordinator as a crucial component to the success and sustainability of this district-wide PE program. Further research identifying the knowledge, skills, responsibilities and leadership qualities of a successful district coordinator would be beneficial in creating more successful and sustainable PE programs. Although this study did not focus on the types of relationships that exist among the district PE

coordinator and the teachers in the district, it is interesting to note that a philosophy of accountability, partnership, and collaboration exists. According to Krasnow (1990),

The ecology of the school has a profound effect on the sense of control, empowerment, and motivation of teachers. Creating schools that are positive learning environments for children may have to start with the creation of positive work environments for teachers.

(p.31)

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APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Systemic Success in Physical Education

At the time Siedentop and Lock (1997) were labeling Physical Education (PE) as a “systemic failure”, researchers started focusing efforts on studying rare, successful PE programs. Several subsequent studies led to constructive discoveries including one such finding of a district in the southwestern United States that not only displayed success, but also dynamic stability and sustainability. Multiple studies were conducted on this atypical PE program in an attempt to study its mysterious inner workings. One of these studies, conducted by Pennington, Prusak, and Wilkinson (2014), exposed the history and making of the novel Systemic Success in Physical Education (SSPE) model still fervently practiced by this district. It revealed the process in which this district has successfully found a way to go against national trends in the profession by removing most barriers that prevent physical educators from developing or nourishing a successful PE program district wide. The program began in 1972, when two doctoral students who had developed a K-6 PE curriculum took jobs at a university and nearby school district-- which, coincidentally, had just completed a needs assessment isolating their top necessity as quality K-6 PE—to implement a district-wide PE program partnered with a nearby university. Through dedication, determination and perseverance, the founders gradually built a successful and sustainable program based on heavy collaboration and accountability.

In an attempt to better understand the making of SSPE from a business perspective, this three year, qualitative study was conducted using Collins’ (2001) framework *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t* to determine whether the SSPE model had connections to his three stage process of transition—disciplined people, disciplined thought, disciplined action—found in the famous business model which explores why some businesses

succeed while others do not (Pennington et al., 2014). In-depth and follow-up interviews, field notes, observations, insights, hunches, and debriefing sessions were conducted with 39 participants who were selected based on the extended period of time or key involvement with the SSPE district. The observations included 60 minute unannounced visits to 30 PE specialists in the four different socioeconomic areas in the district and attendance at six district in-services. Forty-five minute to two-hour formal interviews took place with 11 of the participants including two district coordinators, the district superintendent, two PETE (Physical Education Teaching Education) professors, and two elementary principals. In order to familiarize these 11 participants with the dialect and concepts that would be discussed in the interviews, each one was given a copy of the booklet *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (Collins, 2005) before the interview process. After warm-up and background questions, interviewees were asked further questions that were associated with the three stages and key concepts offered by Collins (2001) about the roles and responsibilities of key persons in the SSPE model. Follow-up questions and follow-up interviews allowed researchers to probe for deeper understanding of participant responses. After data analysis, researchers found many direct parallels and additional insights including extensions of this framework's metaphors and analogies. Some of these connections include disciplined people at the level five leadership tier, including characteristics of visionaries with professional vision and passion in addition to personal humility who have the ability to get the right people on board; disciplined thought, for instance, the ability to confront brutal facts (i.e. historical barriers); and disciplined action, such as practices that create a culture of discipline. The findings of this study provide a pioneered way for PE practitioners and PETE programs to undertake, with the guidance of the SSPE model, what Siedentop and Locke (1997) hoped for—collaborated sustained success (Pennington et al, 2014).

The inner workings of SSPE were first investigated in a five-year descriptive, qualitative design case study by Prusak et al (2010) in which researchers used field notes from 200 hours of observation and interviews of four teachers, one district PE coordinator, two principals, and the Physical Education Teaching Education professor from the partnering university to guide them in examining key components that explain the program's sustained success. Forty-five minute to two hour interviews consisted of identical open-ended questions pertaining to Siedentop and Locke's (1997) recommendations for district-university partnership, Cuban's (1992) curriculum change and stability framework, and items that may contribute to a successful PE program. After some warm-up and background questions, specific questions relating to the roles and responsibilities of key persons in the district were inquired (Prusak et al. (2010). Follow-up questions led to further understanding of the responses received. After the analysis of interview transcriptions, follow-up interviews were held for further clarification and additional information specific to roles of the professors at the partnering district and their perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Each of the eight participants were formally interviewed twice over a two year period and then had between one and four additional follow-up interviews within the next three years of the study. Emerging themes were categorized by contrasting and comparing units of information extracted from raw data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1980). These initial themes and categories and their connections with each other were identified and refined through ongoing group discussions. The collaborative workings of this program, driven by a system of accountability measures that were revealed through the data analysis, were then constructed into a model to guide and manage the curriculum change process in K-6 PE.

Prusak et al. (2010) use Cuban's (1992) curriculum change and stability framework to examine how this program has accomplished SSPE by achieving the three critical elements that

Siedentop and Locke (1997) believe are needed in order to make a difference in PE. These three elements include quality PE in schools, effective PE teacher education programs, and a working relationship between the two. The program provides the means for a model which guides and manages the curriculum change process in K-6 PE. This SSPE model is comprised of four key components including supporting themes and subthemes that frame the center of the model—systemic success. These four components consist of (a) mandated district wide PE curriculum and methodologies, (b) district coordinator roles in the removing of barriers, acting as gate-keeper, and putting a public face on the program, (c) partnership between the school district and the local university and (d) ongoing professional development for teachers, all of which are driven by regular collaboration and accountability measures (Prusak et al., 2010).

The first key component, District-Wide Physical Education, controls internal and external perceptions that may influence PE curriculum, methodologies and language. The establishment of a mandated curriculum, common methodologies, and a common language both at the university and its partner district levels, help maintain continuity by creating a strong unity between PE teachers, the district, and the partnering university through shared accountability (Prusak et al, 2010). The success of this mandated curriculum, common methodologies, and common language was validated in a study of the perceptions and attitudes of students in the program toward PE by Prusak et al. (2014). This mixed-methods approach, grounded in the attitude theory, explored the perceptions of 277 fifth and sixth grade students from four schools that were selected to assure a representative sampling of students. The students studied attended schools within the district's PE program for a minimum of three years. Through surveys, focus groups, and individual follow-up interviews, researchers found that the majority of students expressed positive attitudes toward PE. Researchers mentioned that even the least-positive

responders were more positive than negative in their attitudes toward PE (Prusak et al, 2014).

Aspects that researchers found attributed to the students' positive perceptions and attitudes included enjoyment, opportunities to socialize with friends, the chance to release their energy, breaks away from mundane classroom activities, teacher engagement, and teacher management strategies. Students' intentions to stay physically active throughout their lives was another positive finding revealed in the study. Additionally, researchers not only witnessed consistency in the common curriculum, methodologies, and language displayed at the schools observed, but also found steady positive attitudes at all schools across a wide spectrum of socioeconomic status and gender, including no significant differences evident in gender or ethnicity. The positive perceptions and attitudes toward PE expressed by the students in this program, due to the quality curriculum and teacher practices, were possible through elements of this first key component of SSPE—District-Wide Physical Education—and support the suggestion that district-wide success is possible.

Consistent advocacy practices are also included in these mandated methodologies required of the district's PE teachers for the purpose of building beneficial channels of communication with the community, specifically parents. These open channels of communication invite feedback, which can help teacher's awareness of perceptions toward the program, increase feelings of trust between parents and teachers, and promote parent and community involvement. This first key concept is supported and upheld through mandatory monthly in-service training sessions which provide teachers with innovative professional development. Just as the study of student perceptions provided evidence of the success of the mandated curriculum and common language embedded in the first key component of the SSPE model, a study on parent perceptions may add beneficial insight to the effectiveness of the

advocacy practices employed in the model.

The accountability of the district is underlined in the second key component: the Role of the District Coordinator. The district coordinator's job includes the removal of barriers on behalf of the teachers, the performance of a gate-keeper function, and putting a public face on the program (Prusak et al., 2010). It is also the district coordinator who ensures that advantageous advocacy practices are a part of teacher accountability, which becomes a much more manageable task for teachers once most of the usual barriers are no longer deterrents of focus. These advocacy practices also help prevent the development of new barriers, which, in turn, adds to the sustainability of the program. The coordinator also ensures that only high quality teachers are hired in the district, of which over 75% are recruited from the partnering university in the district (Prusak et al., 2010). The district/university collaboration can be profitable in the training and instillation of universal advocacy practices as early as pre-service years, thus significantly increasing effective implementation of such practices in service years. Furthermore, successful public relations develop more meaningful connections with university collaborators and create strong support from teachers, parents, children, and other aspects of the community, which, in turn, contributes to the program's stability (Prusak et al., 2010).

The responsibilities of the partnering university, which add external support to this collaboration, are highlighted in key component three: University-District Partnership. These responsibilities include teacher preparation, common curriculum and methodologies, and providing professional development. The curriculum taught to both pre-service and in-service teachers, *Dynamic Physical Education* by Pangrazi (2001), was created by the professor of this district's partnering university and consists of an assemblage of structured cognitive and affective lessons, motor development activities, and games (Prusak et al., 2010). The scope and

sequence of the curriculum is also outlined on a calendar and given to all in-service teachers at the beginning of the school year. Each month a set of lessons are taught to teachers at monthly in-service meetings, which are also digitally recorded and stored for new and experienced teachers to access when needed. This university-district camaraderie and enforcement of a unified curriculum ensures that the preparation information taught to teachers actually applies to the “real world” of teaching, making the transition from preparation to practice a successful one. Additionally, the ongoing professional development provided by the university allows for a two-way benefit: teachers are continually provided with the latest research in best teaching practices and the university is provided with valuable feedback as to how those practices really work in the schools (Prusak et al., 2010).

Subsequently, the fourth key component in the SSPE model is on-going, frequent professional development. This final key component has four faucets which also augment the program’s collaboration and accountability. These include on-going monthly in-service, interactive exchange of ideas, accountability for participation, and district evaluations. Prusak et al. (2010) believes that the ongoing support from both the district and the university add to the value and culture of the PE teacher, which is the most important part of the SSPE model. Knowing this gives the teachers a greater sense of confidence and self-worth, which in turn leads to the improvement of their teaching abilities and greater devotion to program goals.

According to Prusak et al.(2010), not only does this model give a framework for universities, districts, and teachers to create a successful PE program, but the sustainability that is evident in this district gives hope to the PE field with its display of success in the ability to deal with change from any source, establish mutual accountability, create a stable and sustainable tradition, and overcome classic failings. This dynamic stability displayed in the key

elements of the SSPE model may be evidence of a series of what Cuban (1992) would refer to as bargained responses to change seeking, internal and external forces (Prusak et al., 2010).

Cuban's Change and Stability Framework

Cuban's Curriculum Change and Stability Framework (1992) analyzes these external and internal forces that influence curriculum throughout his planned and unplanned continuum. He introduces his framework by revealing three assumptions of change mentioned prior. The first assumption implies that change is good—growth, progress, and improvement are all wrapped in a shiny package. However, change can affect a program, curriculum, or institution in both positive or negative ways, and an awareness of these affects, through careful monitoring and evaluation, can help direct proper reactions, necessary modifications, and redirections. Multiple studies have examined the effects of the changes brought about by SSPE, which have undoubtedly been positive (e.g. program sustainability, strong collaboration, dynamic curriculum development, and positive attitudes of teachers and students [Prusak, et al., 2010; Prusak et al., 2014]). The program's effective advocacy practices may be another strength to add to the list of positive changes that have enhanced to the program's dynamic stability and sustainability.

Cuban's second assumption suggests that change is divorced from stability. This assumption certainly does not hold true in the case of SSPE. Although SSPE has sustained continuity, many changes have taken place over the forty years of its stable existence, which Prusak et al. defines as dynamic stability (2014). Some examples of changes implemented into the program using the SSPE model include the use of pedometers for physical activity assessment, numerous curricular activities, and the installation and use of the bouldering walls in each elementary school. Teacher required advocacy practices implemented by the district coordinator for the purpose of enhancing sustainability of the program through increased support

and awareness (e.g. positive phone logs, demonstration nights, track nights, quarterly newsletters) are additional examples of changes that have occurred in SSPE.

Prusak et al. takes this idea of stability even a step farther by proposing that there are, in fact, two forms of stability—stagnant stability and dynamic stability—which help to elucidate the torpor of many PE programs (2014). In other words, stability can be either good or bad. If a stable entity is impervious to sought-after advances, it stagnates and becomes obstinate. Many PE programs, for instance, end up stuck in this stagnant but stable state due to common PE barriers that prevent them from attaining the progress needed to achieve the dynamic stability. These barriers, such as a lack of professional development, unmanageable/oversized classes, inefficient funds needed for equipment, etc., seem to only begin to dissolve once adequate program support is established.

The third assumption infers that once planned change is adopted, improvements occur—which alludes to the purpose of this study: to explore whether the advocacy practices employed by the SSPE model do, in fact, influence the perceptions parents have regarding the PE program.

Cuban continues by constructing the different types of change into the form of a continuum with externally imposed changes on one end, negotiated change in the middle, and internal/voluntary change on the other end. External changes would include those that shake up districts and schools, such as demographic, cultural, political, social and economic changes. To accommodate this form of change, some officials validate the enforced changes and act quickly to implement new policies, similar to the immediate acceptance of a proposal for the implementation of a quality PE program in the district in southwestern United States after the 1972 needs assessment revealing the need of a quality PE program that led to the development of SSPE; whereas others question, eventually act, but attempt to preserve the way things are in the

process. Negotiated change usually includes a lot of bargaining and compromise between individuals and groups. This change originates in schools and results from natural conflicts that occur within state, district, and local systems over value differences in education. Decreasing these value differences through carefully formulated advocacy practices which create an awareness of the benefits and significance of a program or curriculum may prevent negotiated changes from taking a negative toll on a program.

Voluntary changes are planned designs and blueprints that policy makers and practitioners create to initiate, adopt, and implement into practice in their attempts to plan for new occurring issues in the school and community or respond resourcefully to existing problems, also resembling the action taken back in 1972 by policy makers in the district in the southwestern United States after analyzing feedback from a needs assessment revealing the number one need in the district as a quality PE program (Pennington et al., 2014) in addition to advocacy practices that have been implemented into the SSPE model since it's formation to help maintain the successful dynamic stability and sustainability the model has flourished throughout the years. This continuum of change implies that most sources of change come from outside of schools, nevertheless policy-makers, administrators, and practitioners have some influence over how they respond to these types of change.

Cuban goes on to differentiate between two different forms of planned change: Incremental and fundamental. He defines incremental change, or first order change, as attempts to repair policy deficiencies through deliberate efforts to improve the system that already exists. In other words, it is an effort to make what exists more efficient without upsetting basic organizational structures. Examples of incremental changes made to the SSPE model may be the use of additional advocacy practice requirements put in place for PE teachers by the district

coordinator in order to build positive relationships with parents in the community, such as quarterly newsletters, model lesson demonstration nights held for parents each semester, and track and field parent nights (D. Pangrazi, Personal Communication, Sept. 28, 2013).

Alternatively, fundamental changes, or second order changes, seek to rework the entire constructs of an organization's policies and practices because of strong dissatisfaction with present arrangements. As with the history and implementation of SSPE (Pennington et al. 2014) due to the dissatisfaction of the lack of a quality PE program discovered back in 1972 through a district needs assessment, new goals, structures, and roles are introduced through fundamental changes that convert familiar ways of carrying out responsibilities into innovative solutions.

Cuban's three common assumptions of change, continuum of different forms of change, and distinction between incremental and fundamental forms of planned change, together form his framework for understanding change in schools. He acknowledges the fact that most changes are probably a combination of these notions and vary in degree. His framework supports the strong relationship between schools and society while recognizing that society is one of the main external forces for change in public schools. Consequently, practitioners and policymakers create classrooms, schools, and districts that detect and prepare for the escalation of these outside pressures in order to sustain continuity, just as the key elements of SSPE protect the stability of a quality PE program against common barriers that have hindered the success of PE in schools for decades. Prusak et al. (2010) state the following:

When the key components have ongoing, successful interactions, interdependence and mutual accountability, changes that are externally mandated or internally originated are (a) examined, (b) processed, and (c) rejected or assimilated without threat to the stability of the systemic success. The dynamic stability of the SSPE model is the result of a

thriving, vital situation whose underlying structure is not threatened with change whether internal or external. In effect, the momentum of the SSPE model is preserved by the dynamic stability it has achieved. (p. 103)

One of the ways that Cuban believes schools maintain their continuity is by establishing internal routines that detect for noise in their immediate surroundings and procedures that handle such disturbances. He uses warning systems that are embedded in procedures as an example of the routines that many school boards follow in listening to parents at public meeting, superintendents informally meeting with students, teachers, and parents, and periodic surveys of citizen opinion, such as the advocacy practices embedded in the SSPE model that encourage and invite open channels of communication between parents, teachers, and district coordinators. Although Cuban continues to emphasize the safe holds that schools maintain in order to withstand the effects that regular fads in educational history have on continuity, he singles out one group that can change the intended and taught curricula all by itself—aroused, angry parents. While discussing determinants of change in curriculum, Cuban states, “No superintendent or school board can safely ignore the sporadic flash flood of hot anger that sweeps over a school system when community values are ignored.” (p. 231) With this strong influence on change, and his belief that goals and functions of schooling are the primary determinant for curricular stability, Cuban reveals that, in order to maintain continuity, organizations attempt to satisfy what their constituencies believe is proper for schools by retaining the endorsement of their community. This again mirrors the beginning of the SSPE model through the needs assessment feedback collected back in 1972 from the community requesting a quality PE program, and follows its continued advocacy practices to the present time.

Parent Perceptions

Although studies providing a connection between *effective* advocacy practices and *positive* parent perceptions have not yet surfaced, there have been studies demonstrating the *negative* effects that unsuccessful or nonexistent advocacy practices have on parent perceptions. One particular study by Deborah A. Sheehy (2006) provided evidence that disproved the common belief of many physical educators averring that students will accurately communicate information to their parents if teachers deliver a quality PE program, undermining the importance of effective teacher/school-parent communication. Sheehy studied the perceptions of 27 parents of fifth grade PE students who attended Sunny Brook Elementary through formal, open-ended interviews with parents, teachers, and the principal, field observations, documents analysis of formal school policies, and informal conversations with participants who attended school events. The purpose of the study was to determine which modes of communication parents used to form their perceptions of the physical education program. This physical education program was reported as one that taught a developmentally and instructionally appropriate K-6 curriculum and used teaching methods that encouraged a positive learning environment, maximum participation, appropriate skill and concept practice time, success for every student, cognitive understanding, and student self-discipline and self-direction. However, the program did not incorporate regular advocacy practices (Sheehy, 2006). In fact, the only parent communication reported by the teacher besides parent teacher conferences, permission slips, and responses to parent inquiries was an initial note sent home that informed them of days on which their child would be participating in PE and expectations for appropriate attire and behavior in the gym.

Results of the study support three main conclusions (Sheehy, 2006). First, most parents were unable to provide detailed information about their child's physical education program. The

information that they were able to provide was communicated through their child's perceptions of the program, which many parents considered to be a reliable and trustworthy source. Second, parents tended to use their own experiences in PE to fill in the gaps of information and unknown details regarding their child's PE program. This was particularly true of parents who attended the same elementary school as their child, in that assumptions were made that the program was exactly the same and no changes or adjustments had been implemented since their enrollment. Third, according to parent perceptions, the importance of the subject of PE placed by the school was marginalized due to several specific, subtle internal signals such as the difference in the school's grading system between academic and elective classes, the omission of the subject of PE in the Parent Teacher Organization's list of way that parents could become involved at Sunny Brook, and the amount and type of communication the parents received from their student's PE teacher in contrast to other subjects.

Implications in this study include the fact that, due to the pressures that physical educators are usually under to deliver a quality program within the political and economic limitations of schools, they may discount the opportunity to establish and maintain open channels of communication that lead to positive relationships with parents, assuming that an effectively delivered curriculum under quality classroom practice will be enough. Also, the lack of effective advocacy practices not only enhances the marginal position held by the PE program at Sunny Brook Elementary, but also helps parent-supported initiatives recurring in the community to eliminate PE from the curriculum altogether (Sheehy, 2006). Consequently, physical educators need to assume the responsibility of creating an awareness of the significance and benefits of their subject through regular advocacy practices, particularly with the parents of their students, if they expect to harvest successful, sustainable programs.

Based on Cuban's framework for curricular change and sustainability (1992) and the belief that parents can impact both education policy and the particular nature of the school attended by their children in both positive and negative ways (Sheehy, 2006), the advocacy practices required from teachers in SSPE, which hold them accountable in maintaining open communications and positive relationships with parents, may be a strong contributing factor for the SSPE model's sustainability throughout the years. Likewise, parent perceptions of the PE program using the SSPE model may be an effective indicator as to whether the advocacy practices embedded in the model are beneficial in creating the positive relationships that contribute to its sustainability.

Some of the strategies adopted by the district coordinator using the SSPE model for the purpose of building positive relationships with parents include keeping a positive phone call log book with required minimum entries, creation and disbursement of four annual newsletters, several parent PE demonstration/curriculum presentations, and several evening track and field play days (D. Pangrazi, Personal Communication, Sept. 28, 2013). All of these efforts are in addition to parent/teacher conference meetings held twice a year. Couched as triangulation to support data, this study will not only investigate the particulars of these and other advocacy practices nested in the SSPE model, it will examine the perceptions of teachers and the district coordinator relating to the methods, outcomes, and feelings of preparedness pertaining to the task of carrying out these efforts along with their views relating to changes that have taken place in the program, reactions to external and internal forces, and the program's current stability.

In addition to studying the teacher and coordinator perceptions of the SSPE model and its practices, researchers will further establish trustworthiness by exploring the extent of professional development relevant to advocacy practices that takes place during the preparation

of pre-service teachers at the districts partnering university. Although several studies have examined the history (Pennignton et al., 2014), framework (Prusak et al., 2010), and student perceptions of SSPE (Prusak et al., 2014) due to the nature of its success and sustainability, the perceptions that parents have towards the physical education program, which may reflect the influence of advocacy efforts engrained in the components of the model, have yet to be identified. For this reason, this study will examine the perceptions of parents whose children participate in a district PE program which uses the SSPE model and explore possible connections, if any, that those perceptions have to advocacy practices used to create program sustainability through positive parent relationships and support.

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Online Survey Consent

Parent perceptions of their child's physical education program

Consent to be a Research Subject

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Rachel Griffiths. I am a Teacher Education (PETE) graduate student at Brigham Young University. I am currently working on my master's thesis under the direction of Dr. Todd Pennington, from the department of Teacher Education. I am writing to invite all parents of fifth and sixth graders in the district to participate in a survey about your perceptions of your child's physical education program.

I invite you to complete the survey that should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes of your time. You will not be paid for being in this study; however, the survey will be available for two weeks. At the completion of the survey you will be asked if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview lasting approximately 20 minutes as a part of your child's PE demonstration to parents night. You will be asked for your contact information in order for us to contact you to schedule the follow-up interview details. Those parents who volunteer to participate in and complete the follow-up interview will receive a \$25 gift card to a local eating establishment. This survey and follow-up interview involves minimal risk to you. The findings, however, may benefit your child's and the district elementary PE programs.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer for any reason. We will be happy to answer any

questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem you may contact Rachel Griffiths at rachel.griffiths@canyonsdistrict.org, or my advisor, Todd Pennington PhD at: todd.pennington@byu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the IRB Administrator at A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu; (801) 422-1461. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. This study has also been approved by [the school district], all of its elementary schools, and its Principals.

The completion of this survey implies your consent to participate. If you choose to participate, please click on the link below within two weeks.

Survey Link: https://byu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8phfy4ubjs3hJK5

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Rachel Griffiths

Interview Consent

Parent perceptions of their child's physical education program

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Rachel Griffiths, graduate student, and Todd Pennington, Ph.D., at Brigham Young University to explore parents of 5th & 6th graders perceptions of their child's PE program. You were selected to participate because you indicated on the online survey that you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Procedures

The parents of 5th & 6th graders in [the] School District in Mesa Arizona all received an email inviting them to participate in an online survey regarding their perceptions of their child's physical education program. If they choose to participate in the survey they will have clicked on the link provided in the email and completed a 15 question survey. At the end of the survey you indicated you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview. In the follow-up interview you will be asked to answer 10-15 questions. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes and will be audiotaped. Questions will focus on your own views about and feelings toward your child's physical education experience.

Risks/Discomforts

In this study there are minimal risks typical of parents that have children participating in elementary physical education. You may possibly feel emotional discomfort when answering interview questions about personal beliefs, perceptions, or experiences you and/or your child had in the school's physical education program.

Benefits

It is hoped that there will be some direct benefits to parents as they reflect on their child's physical education experience and the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback to the physical education program. It is hoped that

researchers will learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of the physical education program and feedback can be given for possible modifications to be made to enhance the experience for future elementary age children.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of participants will be achieved by using outside interviewers from the Teacher Education Department at Brigham Young University who are not associated with the Mesa School District and its associated elementary school physical education programs. Identification numbers instead of names will be used on the interview transcripts. Data from the interviews will be transcribed and kept on the researchers' password-protected computer at work. The researchers will be the only people to have access to the data during the data analysis process. The data will be stored until the results of the study are published, and then will be destroyed.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Todd Pennington, Ph.D, at 422-2335, todd_pennington@byu.edu.

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact IRB Administrator, Brigham Young University, A-285 ASB Campus Drive; Provo, UT 84602; 801-422-1461; irb@byu.edu.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Key for Cuban's Curriculum Change and Stability Framework Components

External influences (EI)

Negotiated change (NC)

Voluntary/internal change

Incremental change (IC)

Fundamental change (FC)

Internal routines (IR)

SSPE Advocacy Survey (Parents)

If you have more than one child in elementary school, please relate all questions to your oldest elementary child.

1. What is the name of your child's elementary school?
2. What is the grade level of your oldest elementary child?
3. How many years has your oldest elementary child been attending this school?
4. What are your perceptions of your child's elementary school PE program? (EI)
5. Have your perceptions changed as a result of your child's participation in his/her elementary school program? (IR)
6. What factors do you feel have shaped your perceptions of the program (i.e. newsletters, parent nights, phone calls, other forms of communication, etc.)? (IR)
7. What efforts, if any, do you notice your child's PE teacher makes in keeping you informed regarding the program?(IR)
8. How do you feel these efforts, or lack thereof, impact your perceptions of the program? (IR)
9. Have you ever provided any feedback concerning your child's PE experience (toward his/her teacher, school administration, school district, etc.)? If so, how do you feel your concerns were addressed? (NC)
10. Have you ever been contacted directly by your child's PE teacher? If so, what was the nature of the experience (good behavior, upcoming events, concerns, etc.)? (IC)
11. Have you participated in a district-wide needs assessment regarding the needs of your child's education in the district (survey via hard copy or electronic)? (FC)

12. Are there clear opportunities inviting you to share your opinions regarding your child's school PE experience? If so, please share examples. (NC)
13. Have you been invited and/or participated in an event sponsored by your child's PE program? If so, please explain. (IC)
14. Are there any issues or trends in society that you feel your child's PE program should address? If so, please explain. (EI)
15. Are there any issues or trends in society that you feel the PE program is currently addressing? If so, please explain. (IR)

SSPE Advocacy Survey (K-6 Elementary PE Teachers)

1. How long have you been teaching as an elementary teacher in this district?
2. What are the expected responsibilities of elementary PE teachers in the district when it comes to reaching out to students' parents? (IR)
3. Have you received any professional development or training related to meeting these expectations since becoming a teacher in this district? (IC)
4. In your teacher preparation program, were you adequately trained to be able to fulfill these requirements in reaching out to parents? (IC)
5. Do you feel these expectations are effective in the PE program and gaining parent support? Why or why not? (IR)
6. Have there been any external influences (i.e. national, state, legislative, societal, research, etc.) that have brought about changes in your PE program? If so, how have these changes been brought about by the district, your school, etc.? (FC, EI)
7. Have you ever been approached by parents who have expressed concerns regarding the PE program? If so, what changes, if any, occurred as a result of these concerns? (NC)

SSPE Advocacy Survey (District PE Coordinator)

1. How long have you been the District PE Coordinator in this district?
2. What current regular advocacy practices are expected by elementary PE teachers in the district? (IR, IC)
3. Which of these practices do you believe would affect parent perceptions? (IR, IC)
4. Are the K-6 Elementary PE teachers in the district trained to implement these practices? (IC)
5. What changes, if any, related to advocacy and K-6 Elementary PE teacher responsibilities have taken place within the district-wide PE program in the last few years? (IC)
6. Do you feel these changes have made a positive or negative impact on the program? (IC)
7. How do you respond or react to external forces (such as legislation, research, society, etc.) that may influence the elementary PE program? (EI)
8. What opportunities do you provide that invite parents to express concerns related to the PE program? (NC)

SSPE Advocacy Survey (University PETE faculty)

1. What advocacy skills and/or practices are taught in your PETE program? (IC, IR)
2. What advocacy skills and/or practices are your undergraduate PETE students taught that are directly related to creating and maintaining parent support and involvement in their future career as a PE teacher? (IC, IR)
3. Can you share an example of an assignment in the undergraduate PETE coursework that would demonstrate their abilities related to creating and/or maintaining parental support for their future PE program? (IC, IR)