



Executive Summary

Title:

Engaging with Parents of Multilingual Children: Exploring Multilingual Parents' Perceptions about Their Children's Early Care and Education Program and Their Decision-Making about Enrollment and Attendance

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Abstract of study (include research questions and design):

This study was designed around two primary goals using a mixed-methods approach. The first goal was to examine the reliability and validity of a survey designed for parents of young multilingual children in early care and education (ECE) programs. The survey was administered in English or Spanish to parents of multilingual children enrolled in Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) programs during the 2018-2019 school year. Survey results were used to address two research questions: (1) What is the dimensional (factor) structure of the Language Learning in your Child's Program parent survey? and (2) How are parent responses on each survey dimension associated with children's program attendance? Exploratory factor analysis was used to address the first research question and correlational analysis was used for the second. The second goal of the study was to explore parents' perceptions of children's language learning and development and decision-making around enrollment and attendance in a MMSD 4K program. Survey and interview data were used to address the following two research questions: (3) What are parents' perceptions about how their child's ECE program: (a) supports language learning and development; (b) incorporates families' cultures into classroom routines and practices; and (c) engages parents as partners in children's language learning and development? and (4) In what ways, if any, do parents' perceptions about their child's ECE program appear to inform decisions about their child's initial ECE enrollment and ongoing attendance? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents who had children enrolled in 4K during the 2019-2020 school year. Interview data and qualitative survey data were coded to identify themes.

Major findings:

Two reliable factors found: Relationships with Families and Utilizing Families' Language, Culture, and Funds of Knowledge as Resource and Supportive Classroom Learning Environment

The first one, Relationships with Families and Utilizing Families' Language, Culture, and Funds of Knowledge as Resource (coefficient $\alpha = .95$), focused on communication between staff and parents and

included staff efforts to engage with families' language and cultures. The second factor, Supportive Classroom Learning Environment (coefficient $\alpha = .93$), consists of staff efforts to include and support children in routines and learning experiences in the classroom.

Parent perceptions of language development in programs was not associated with attendance rates.

The average attendance rate for children was .94 ($SD = 0.05$). We found no significant relationship between Relationships with Families and Utilizing Families' Language, Culture, and Funds of Knowledge as a Resource and children's attendance rates ($r(181) = -.03$, $p = .66$) or Supportive Classroom Learning Environment and attendance ($r(181) = -.10$, $p = .19$). These correlations indicate that parent perceptions of language learning in their children's programs were not linked to program attendance.

Parents believe it is important to promote and support families' home languages and cultures

Interview participants expressed strong beliefs and values about language and culture. In particular, all expressed how it is important to them that their children maintain their families' home language and have opportunities to learn more than one language.

4K programs need more resources to better support home languages other than Spanish

Survey respondents indicate a desire for resources to support children whose home language is not Spanish. Respondents commented on the need for classroom materials and instructional support.

4K programs need to do more to promote and support cultural diversity

Survey responses indicate that parents do not feel they are invited to share their cultural knowledge and resources with the class. Interview data reveal that parents are invited to volunteer or attend cultural events, but not invited to contribute in more significant ways (e.g., share cultural knowledge).

4K programs need more two-way, home-school communication around language

Interview data show a lack of two-way communication, which is essential to engaging parents as partners in their child's early care and education. In general, parents spoke positively about home-school communication with 4K staff. However, it appears that more often than not the communication was coming from the school to the home, and not vice versa. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of communication around children's learning and language development.

Parents' decision-making around enrollment in MMSD 4K was informed by a variety of factors.

The interviews explored parents' decision-making around enrollment. Only three parents identified the availability of 4K in Spanish as a primary reason for enrolling their child in an MMSD 4K program.

Parents' perceptions of the 4K program play little to no role in children's ongoing attendance

Interview participants reported that their children are rarely absent. Parents expressed that they want their children to attend school regularly. Reasons shared during the interviews for keeping children home from school include illness, attending appointments, and travel with family.

Implications of findings for MMSD policy or practice and future research:

- Enhance communication outreach efforts used to promote how 4K programs support multilingual children by learning from families, clarifying the intent of bilingual 4K programs, and going beyond written outreach efforts
- Maintain a balance between in-person and electronic communication with multilingual families by challenging assumptions of families' preferred or accessible methods of communication and by differentiating approaches to communication with families
- Address missed opportunities for engaging parents as partners in children's language development by gaining a better understanding of practices used by educators to engage with multilingual families and by building staff capacity through professional development