Article

The Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale: Initial Development and Validation

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Abstract

Parent engagement in schools is often precipitated by a thorough and genuine assessment of parents' needs, priorities, and perceptions of their children's schools. This study reports on the development and validation of the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) examined the factorial validity of the measure using cross-sectional survey data from 2,643 parents. In addition, a series of CFAs was conducted to explore the language invariance of the measurement model across Spanish and English versions of the scale. Predictive validity also was determined using correlational analyses. Results revealed that the five-item Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale is a brief, universal measure of parents' perceptions of their overall experiences with their children's schools. Schools, parents, and community members may use this measure to assess parents' needs and to advocate for necessary programmatic changes that serve parents and their children.

Policies and school improvement initiatives (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) increasingly call on schools to include parents and families in student learning, school-level decision-making, and regular operational activities. More so, schools need the meaningful engagement of parents[1] to achieve positive outcomes for their students. A critical first step in engaging parents is to gauge their needs, priorities, and perceptions of their children's schooling (Ball, 2014; Epstein, 1997). This study reports on the initial development and validation of a brief measure of parent perceptions of their experiences with their children's school. We conclude by indicating the ways in which schools and districts may use such a tool to enhance parent/caregiver engagement and improve academic outcomes.

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Benefits of Parent and Family Engagement in Schools

The importance of parent and family engagement in children's schooling is evident across conceptual models and empirical evidence. While scholars vary in their definitions of parent engagement, most describe the active involvement of parents in their children's learning. This may include school-based involvement, such as volunteering at events, meeting with teachers, or participating in school leadership teams. Parent engagement also includes the activities that parents engage in outside of school, such as helping with homework, providing learning opportunities during everyday tasks, or having candid conversations about educational expectations. Whole-child approaches to school improvement emphasize the importance of addressing non-academic components of family and child life that influence academic learning, such as basic needs, family stress, and household and community safety (Raspberry, Slade, Lohrmann, & Valois, 2015). Scholars also point to the importance of social capital in parent–school relationships. That is, parents who are more engaged in their children's schools have enhanced social capital (and often resource capital) that may assist in their children's learning and development (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

Empirical research supports these theoretical assumptions as parent engagement in schools is a critical factor in students' academic success and overall well-being. Specifically, students benefit from parent/family involvement in their academic performance, school engagement, and psychosocial development (Barnard, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sanders, 1998; Yun & Kusum, 2008). Furthermore, parent engagement may be particularly meaningful in addressing barriers to learning for our most vulnerable children. For example, Jeynes's (2015) meta-analysis of factors related to reducing the achievement gap identified the importance of parent/caregiver engagement for academic achievement among Black and Latino students. Parent engagement also benefits other components of school life that are important for academic growth, such as school climate (Muscott et al., 2008), disciplinary incidences and school safety (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), and parent–teacher relationships (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009).

Theoretical Models of Parent Engagement in Schools

Traditional models of parent engagement in schools focused on parents as volunteers, in which parent engagement was viewed as parents' contribution to the school. Joyce Epstein (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006) broadened the scholarship on parent engagement to include a vision of engagement that encompassed parents' school- and home-based contributions to their children's learning in addition to the school's intentional efforts to engage parents. Building on Epstein's contributions, new models emphasize two-way relationships between schools and families that are mutually beneficial (Henderson, 2007; Warren et al., 2009).

McKenna and Millen (2013) offered a marriage of previous conceptual models in their definition of parent engagement, which includes both parent voice and parent presence. Furthermore, McKenna and Millen found that parents' perceptions of schools as institutions are largely overlooked in existing models of parent engagement despite their findings and other studies noting that parents' perceptions of their children's school are related to their level of engagement (e.g., Griffith, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Parent Perceptions of Schools

Research has identified a number of factors that parents consider important for their children's schools. These include school safety, a welcoming environment, and perceived support for families (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003). In addition, researchers note that "family-friendliness" influences parents' perceptions of the school's

willingness to engage families (Baker et al., 2016). Parents' perceptions of belonging in the school community also may influence their willingness to engage with the school further, especially for parents who feel marginalized already (Baker et al., 2016; Reynolds, Crea, Medina, Degnan, & McRoy, 2015).

In some cases, there are disconnects across schools and parents in which each party feels that the other is uninterested in engagement. For instance, studies exploring parents' attitudes toward engagement in schools overwhelmingly support the notion that parents want to be involved in their children's learning and are in search of opportunities to do so, but that the school provides limited views of engagement that do not fit with parents/caregivers' real-life experiences (Baker et al., 2016). Still, teachers report that they are unsure whether parents want to be engaged in school-based involvement, citing difficulty with communication and frequency of contact as factors that indicate to teachers that parents/caregivers are uninterested (Lawson, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2015).

Assessing Parent Perceptions of School

Assessing parents' perceptions of the school environment is an essential component of most family engagement models (Epstein, 1997), as well as school improvement models (e.g., Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016), given the need for improved school–parent relationships and the importance of parent perceptions of school. Nevertheless, few measures of parents' perceptions are broad in scope and have practical utility for schools. Those that do exist tend to be lengthy (Bear, Yang, & Pasipanodya, 2015) or focused only on one particular component of parent perceptions, such as parent–teacher relationships (e.g., Vickers & Minke, 1995) or connectedness (Chen, Anderson, & Watkins, 2016). While these measures enhance researchers' ability to examine important factors related to school improvement and school–parent partnerships, they are more limited in practical use as schools only have limited time and resources to assess parents' perspectives. Thus, a more expansive measure is needed to assist schools in gathering data that provides a broad indicator of parent perceptions of school.

Measures of parent perceptions of school climate are one way schools and researchers have capitalized on more broad measures of parent perceptions that are readily available. Still, these measures are limited to specific components of school climate that vary considerably across scales. Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, and Gehlbach (2014) created and tested one of the only measures of parents' perceptions that offers a high-level view of school climate. This measure, however, does not include safety and the school's physical environment, both of which are important factors for parents in urban schools (Lawson, 2003). There are no measures of parent perspectives of overall experiences in their children's schools, and few measures of parent perspectives have been tested in Spanish-language versions. A broader, universal measure of parent perceptions of schools will help schools first identify areas of focus that may be explored further using other more targeted assessment tools and strategies. In this study, we considered the available research on parent perceptions of school to create a measure of parent perception of overall school experiences that included those factors evident in the existing literature.

Purpose

This study sought to develop and explore the initial psychometric properties associated with a broad measure of parent perceptions of school—the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale. A number of scholars and education agencies (e.g., Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006; United States Department of Education, 2007) highlight that parent perceptions should be included in comprehensive school assessments. It is important to include parents in this way as their perceptions aid in gaining a full understanding of school community. In addition,

parent and family engagement is a key component of overall school improvement; thus, schools need brief, accessible measures of parent perceptions to guide engagement initiatives.

Method

This study used cross-sectional survey data from 2,643 parents of elementary, middle, and high school youth as part of annual school improvement processes that included stakeholder perceptions. All data were collected with no identifiers using paper/pencil surveys or online surveys. This study was determined exempt from Institutional Review Board review by the authors' home institution. Data from two different samples were collected as part of a larger battery of tools used in two rural school districts in Ohio and one urban school district in Utah. Sample 1 was collected in both Ohio and Utah schools using an English only version of the measure. Sample 2 was collected in one Utah school district to assess the properties of the Spanish version of the measure among a diverse sample of parents.

Participants in Sample 1 included 1,248 (82.5% female, 16.5% male, 1.1% unknown) parents of students from around the state of Utah and Ohio. This included 1,002 mothers, 183 fathers, 16 grandmothers, one grandfather, 14 legal guardians (not parents), one foster parent, and five others (26 were unidentified). Only a small percentage of respondents indicated having not graduated from high school (3.4%). The remaining respondents indicated obtaining at least a high school diploma (33.3%), an associate's degree (16.6%), bachelor's degree (28.3%), master's degree (14.0%), or doctoral degree (2.2%). A small number of participants (2.1%) did not respond to the question about their educational attainment. The majority of the participants were White (89.2%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (5.0%), Asian (1.3%), Multiracial (0.8%), Black/African American (0.6%), Native Hawaiian (0.6%), American Indian/Alaska Native (0.6%), and 2.7% chose not to identify their race. Finally, 660 parents had children in elementary school (Grades K-5), 400 had children in middle school (Grades 6-8), and 188 had children in high school (Grades 9-12). All participants in Sample 1 completed the English-language version of the scale.

Data from Sample 2 included 1,395 (78% female, 20.5% male, 1.5% unknown) parents of elementary school (K-5) students in the state of Utah. Notably, schools in the second sample differed from Utah schools surveyed in the first sample. This included 1,100 mothers, 221 fathers, 22 grandmothers, eight grandfathers, 13 legal guardians (not parents), two foster parents, and 10 others. The majority of the respondents indicated having obtained at least a high school diploma (43.7%). The remaining respondents indicated completing an associate's degree (20.1%), bachelor's degree (15.6%), master's degree (2.5%), doctoral degree (1.0%), or having not completed high school (15.3%). The majority of the participants were White (49.4%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (40.0%), Multiracial (5.0%), Black/African American (1.7%), Asian (1.2%), and 2.7% chose not to identify their race. A total of 951 of the parents completed the scale in English, while 444 completed a Spanish-language version of the scale. The most notable differences between the two samples included the percentage of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher (Sample 1 = 44.5% vs. Sample 2 = 19.1%) and the percentage of Hispanic/Latino parents (Sample 1 = 5.0% and Sample 2 = 40.0%).

Measures

The Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI) at the Ohio State University developed the CAYCI–School Experience Surveys (CAYCI-SES) as evaluation tools used to inform school planning and improvement efforts for educators, school officials, and community stakeholders. The CAYCI-SES includes four survey versions: elementary school, middle/high school, teacher, and parent. Elementary and middle/high school surveys ask youth about their schools and supports for academic learning, youth development, and overall well-being. The teacher survey asks teachers, staff, and administrators about the school environment and local

community work to support student achievement. Finally, the parent survey asks parents about their children's learning and development and about their own involvement in their children's education and development. Together, the CAYCI-SES help schools and districts identify issues related to student learning (see http://cayci.osu.edu/).

Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale. The measure examined in this study was originally developed for teachers, schools, and districts to evaluate how parents broadly perceive their children's overall school climate and support for parents. Items on the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale were first developed by examining the current literature on parent engagement and school climate. Conceptually, the scale was developed and expected to reflect a one-factor model that represents broad-based perceptions of school climate and support for parents. Next, the scale was initially piloted to identify any items that did not fit or warranted modification. Each of these steps led to the development of a seven-item measure.

The Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale is a semantic differential scale, with a 7-point response format ranging from *negative* (1) to *positive* (7) perceptions or attitudes on the part of the parents or caregivers. The scale was developed in a semantic differential format to measure social attitudes and to reduce acquiescence bias, also known as the propensity to respond positively to items irrespective of their content (Friborg, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006). Seven-point semantic differential scales are advantageous because they allow neutrality and have enough gradation to provide meaningful data (Al-Hindawe, 1996). The measure included seven word pairs, each of which represented an item on the scale. Directions for the scale read, "In this section we ask that you rate your school on a scale defined by positive and negative word pairs. For each pair of words, fill in the circle where you think your school is on the line." An example item is, "(1) Is Dangerous–(7) Is Safe." Stems were developed in the present tense to assess how parents perceive the overall school climate and support for parents at the time of data collection. Prior to this study, the seven-item scale had not undergone rigorous psychometric evaluation. As such, we wanted to confirm the underlying factor structure of the scale using the two samples of parents and caregivers.

Additional measures from CAYCI-SES. Additional measures from CAYCI-SES were used for validation purposes. These measures assess specific components of parent engagement in schools, rather than provide a high-level universal measure of parent perceptions. First, the CAYCI-SES Perceived School Support for Parental/Caregiver Engagement Scale (Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, Iachini, & Ball, 2013a) consists of six items (α = .74) and measures interest, engagement, and enjoyment in learning and school and are rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item from this scale is, "The school asks parents for ideas about issues important to us and to our children." Second, the CAYCI-SES also contains the Experiences of Teacher and School Support Scale (Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, Iachini, & Ball, 2013b). The Experiences of Teacher and School Support Scale (α = .90) is a six-item measure of parent and caregiver perceptions of support provided by school staff and teachers. All items are rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item from this scale includes "In their interactions with students, all school staff act in ways that demonstrate the character qualities the school is trying to teach." Notably, participants in Samples 1 and 2 provided responses to the Experiences of Teacher and School Support Scale, but only participants in Sample 1 provided responses to the Perceived School Support for Parental/Caregiver Engagement Scale.

Overview of Data Analysis

Missing data. After initial examination of the data collected by schools utilizing the CAYCI-SES, a small amount of missing parent data in each dataset were identified (<1%). Given such a small number of cases included missing data, we used listwise deletion to remove cases with missing

items as future inferential analyses required nonmissing data. Listwise deletion excludes a case if any single value is missing.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We conducted a number of CFAs using LISREL 8.81 to provide factorial validity evidence for the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale. First, we tested the basic factor structure with the data from Sample 1. Next, we conducted a series of CFAs to test the language invariance of the factor structure with the data from Sample 2. In all model testing, we relied on multiple fit indices to evaluate the adequacy of the estimated models. An acceptable fit of a model was defined by the following: nonsignificant Satorra–Bentler (SB) χ^2 at $p < .05$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .08$, comparative fit index (CFI) $\geq .90$, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) $\geq .90$, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $\leq .08$, and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) $\geq .90$ (see Brown, 2006). We also examined the modification indices (MIs) to determine whether any local areas of strain were affecting the acceptability of the models.

Invariance testing. Once the overall factor structure of the model was established, a series of CFAs was conducted to explore the language invariance of the measurement model. Using steps outlined in Brown (2006), invariance testing follows a three-step sequence. First, we tested the CFA model in each group separately. Then, we tested for (a) configural invariance (i.e., equal factor structure across groups), (b) weak invariance (i.e., equal factor loadings), and then (c) strong invariance (i.e., equal item intercepts). Strong factor invariance is desired, yet weak invariance suggests a minimally acceptable level of factorial invariance (Brown, 2006). When evaluating the adequacy of specific invariance constraints explored in the data from Sample 2, we examined changes in CFI and the results of SB scaled difference in χ^2 test (SDCS; Satorra & Bentler, 1994) between the progressively constrained and baseline models. A change in CFI $\leq .01$ (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) and a nonsignificant SDCS served as our guidelines for determining the tenability of the proposed invariance constraints.

Reliability and predictive validity. The reliability and predictive validity of the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale were also examined. Scale reliability was explored using composite reliability which is obtained by combining all of the true score variances and covariances in the composite of indicator variables related to constructs, and by dividing this sum by the total variance in the composite (Peterson & Kim, 2013). Bagozzi and Yi (2012) suggested reliability standard of .70 or greater is a satisfactory composite reliability. The predictive validity of the scale was explored using bivariate correlations between the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale scores and (a) the CAYCI-SES Perceived School Support for Parental/Caregiver Engagement Scale and (b) the CAYCI-SES Experiences of Teacher and School Support Scale. Predictive validity was considered evident if the correlations produced significant positive relationships.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The distributional assumptions of the data were tested using PRELIS 2.20 (Scientific Software International, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). The univariate skewness and kurtosis values for Sample 1 ranged from −1.14 to −2.13 and 1.07 to 5.53, respectively. The univariate skewness and kurtosis values for Sample 2 ranged from −1.23 to −1.91 and 1.11 to 3.5, respectively. The tests for multivariate skewness and multivariate kurtosis were significant in both samples ($p < .01$). Given

Table 1. CFA Model Revision and Comparison—Sample 1 Data (*N* = 1,248).

Exclude	ML χ^2	SB χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CFI	TLI
None	182.87	82.03	14	.00	.06 [.05, .08]	.02	1.00	.99
Item 7	64.39	24.71	9	.00	.04 [.02, .06]	.02	1.00	1.00
Item 6	14.63	5.33	5	.38	.01 [.00, .04]	.01	1.00	1.00

Note. CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; ML χ^2 = maximum likelihood χ^2; SB χ^2 = Satorra–Bentler scaled χ^2; *df* = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

Table 2. Final CFA Model From Five-Item Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale, English and Spanish Versions.

Item (English)	Item (Spanish)	Factor loadings	Uniqueness	SMC
1. Is Dangerous–Is Safe	Es peligrosa - Es segura	.74	.45	.55
2. Doesn't care about families–Cares about families	No se preocupa por las familias - Se preocupa por las familias	.87	.25	.75
3. Is getting worse–Is improving	Está empeorando - Está mejorando	.86	.26	.74
4. Is unkind–Is friendly	Es poco amable - Es amigable	.90	.19	.81
5. Only helps a small group–Helps all students succeed	Solamente ayuda a un grupo pequeño - Ayuda a todos los estudiantes a ser exitosos	.84	.30	.70

Note. Factor loadings are completely standardized. CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; SMC = squared multiple correlation.

the nonnormality of the data, particularly the excessive kurtosis, we followed the recommendations of Brown (2006) and employed robust maximum likelihood estimation procedures.

Main Analyses

Overall factor structure. Our first step was to establish the adequacy of the overall factor structure of the proposed seven-item Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale using a CFA. The CFA model specified that the seven items loaded on a single latent factor. The factor loading for one item was set equal to 1 to establish a metric for the latent variable. The factor variance was freely estimated, as was the uniqueness for each item. No covariances between uniquenesses were modeled. Data were input using the asymptotic covariance matrix from Sample 1.

Results of the analyses are presented in Table 1. The overall fit of the model with all seven items to the data was reasonable based on the various fit indices (e.g., RMSEA = .06), although the SB χ^2 was significant. An examination of the MI, however, revealed that Item 7 was problematic. Therefore, we deleted this item and reran the CFA. Results of the six-item version of the scale fit the data reasonably well based on the fit indices (e.g., RMSEA = .04), but once again the SB χ^2 was significant and the MI indicated a problematic item—this time Item 6. We deleted this item and tested the factor structure once again with the five remaining items. As seen in Table 1, this model fit the data very well based on the fact that all of the fit indices were acceptable, the SB χ^2 was nonsignificant, and no areas of local strain were identified. Therefore, we moved forward with the five-item version of the scale. Table 2 presents the parameter estimates for this model. All items significantly (*p* < .05) loaded on the latent Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale, with completely standardized coefficients ranging from .74 to .90 and squared multiple correlations ranging from .55 to .81.

Table 3. Model Fit Statistics for Tests of Language Invariance—Sample 2 Data (*N* = 1,395).

Model tested	ML χ^2	SB χ^2	df	p	SDCS	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Pass?
Single-group solutions										
English (*n* = 951)	12.67	5.05	5	.41	—	.00	.01	1.00	1.00	—
Spanish (*n* = 444)	51.22	15.12	5	.01	—	.07	.02	1.00	.99	—
Measurement invariance										
Configural invariance	63.89	21.77	10	.02	—	.04	.02	1.00	1.00	—
Weak invariance	77.09	28.18	14	.01	5.90*	.04	.04	1.00	1.00	Yes
Strong invariance	155.52	66.20	18	.00	78.67	.06	.04	.99	.99	No

Note. ML χ^2 = maximum likelihood χ^2; SB χ^2 = Satorra–Bentler scaled χ^2; *df* = degrees of freedom; SDCS = scaled difference in χ^2 test statistic; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit indices; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.
*$p \leq 05$.

Language invariance. The next set of analyses was designed to provide evidence that the measurement properties remained constant across the English and Spanish versions of the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale. We followed the recommended steps outlined in Brown (2006): (a) testing the CFA model in each group separately, (b) testing for configural invariance (i.e., equal factor structure/form across groups), (c) testing for weak invariance (i.e., equal factor loadings across groups), and then (d) testing for strong invariance (i.e., equal item intercepts across groups). In all model testing, the five items were specified to load on a single latent Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences factor, and the factor loading for one of the items was set equal to 1 to establish a metric for the latent variable. The item used to set the metric was identical across the two language versions of the scale. The factor variance for each version was freely estimated, as was the uniqueness for each item. Data were input using the asymptotic covariance matrix from Sample 2.

A summary of results from the invariance testing is presented in Table 3. In the single-group solutions, the results showed that the data fit the model well in the English version based on all selected fit indices. The Spanish version also demonstrated reasonable fit based (e.g., RMSEA = .07, CFI = 1.00), although the SB χ^2 was significant. The test of the configural invariance of the scale revealed support for the two versions of the scale demonstrating equal form. Specifically, the fit indices indicated that the data fit this model well (e.g., RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .02, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00). Support was also found for the equality of the factor loadings in the weak invariance test. Specifically, there was no change in CFI when compared with the configural invariance model, and SDCS was nonsignificant. The results did not, however, support the conclusion that the language versions had invariant item intercepts. In this case, the change in CFI is equal to 1, and the SDCS was significant. Thus, despite the overall fit of this model being reasonable based on the various fit indices (e.g., RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04, CFI = .99, TLI = .99), the specific invariance tests lead us to conclude that the scales were only invariant at the factor loading level.

Reliability and predictive validity. The composite reliability for the five-item Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale was .93, which provided evidence of adequate reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Correlation analyses provide initial evidence of the predictive validity of the scale. Specifically, the scale showed significant positive relationships with the Perceived School Support for Parental/Caregiver Engagement Scale (Sample 1, *r* = .550) and the Experiences of Teacher and School Support Scale (Sample 1, *r* = .599; Sample 2, *r* = .427). Overall, results suggest that the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale scores function in the expected way relative to other self-report constructs.

Discussion

The Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale is a brief and universal measure of parents' perceptions of their children's schools that will aid school and district leaders in beginning to include parent voices in their improvement processes. The results of this study indicated that the five-item scale with one underlying factor may be a more psychometrically sound tool. We also found that the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale was invariant between the languages tested, and showed good overall predictive validity with similar self-report measures.

Implications for Practice

This measure may serve as a starting point for schools and districts that are beginning to address school–parent relationships. As indicated in the literature, parent perceptions of school likely influence their children's perceptions of school (Eccles, 2006). Thus, parent perceptions may point to additional areas of support that could improve the overall school climate and, in turn, influence student achievement. In addition, the scale points toward areas where the school is supporting and engaging families in positive ways. Identifying these areas of strength will help schools leverage parent support for programs and services that are identified as useful or effective. Still, schools and districts should not stop their assessment strategy after gaining information about parents' overall perceptions. This measure is intended to provide a high-level assessment of parent perceptions. Schools and districts should garner valuable information from this measure, but then probe deeper using additional, more targeted assessments that measure specific components of parent perceptions.

The language invariance identified in this study for the Spanish- and English-language versions of the scale is important to consider as well. Parent perceptions of school improvement (e.g., is improving or getting worse) may be telling, and differences among various parent sub-populations may be especially important for schools to capture. Historically, marginalized racial and ethnic or low-income parents are less likely to engage in their children's education in the traditional ways in which American schools expect (Ward et al., 2012). The scale is an initial and cost-effective tool to capture perceptions from Latino/Latina parents who may differ from the overall demographic of school staff and administrators.

Limitations and Implications for Research

Although this study addressed gaps in the available measures of parent–school perceptions, we examined parent perceptions with a sample of participants located in urban Utah and rural Ohio. Moreover, mothers were overrepresented in this sample, indicating that the results are largely mothers' perceptions of the school. We also recognize that the scale's title might suggest that it is relevant for parents only (rather than other types of guardians/caregivers), and perhaps participants interpreted the items with traditional notions of "parent" in mind. Additional studies should include larger and more purposefully diverse samples to enhance our understanding of the scale's utility among other populations.

The study also did not control for parents and caregivers nested in individual schools. Future research should account for nesting of parents within schools to determine any classroom- or grade-level effects of parent perceptions of overall school experiences. This is especially important as teacher–parent relationships are a key predictor of student engagement in school (Murray, 2009).

It will also be advantageous to continue the development of the measure in other languages. The increasing diversity of our schools and communities necessitates such research, especially

given the rapid rate of demographic change in American educational systems. Last, researchers also should continue to evaluate this tool's validity with other measures to determine its internal, external, and convergent validity.

Conclusion

Results indicated that the Parent Perceptions of Overall School Experiences Scale adequately assesses varying perceptions of parent overall school experiences, with support for the overall measure and the use of the measure among Latino/Latina parents. Implications include using the tool to inform school planning and improvement efforts, as well as to effectively support parents and students in schools. Parents play an important role in their children's learning and in the effectiveness of schools generally. Children's academic success and schools' overall improvement may be improved if researchers and school officials effectively utilize this measure to gain greater insight into the experiences of the parents in their schools.

Note

1. We use the term "parents" broadly to include all individuals providing care to children, including foster parents, grandparents, and other caregivers.

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