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Parental Involvement and Level of Parent Satisfaction in a Summer Enrichment Program

Leslie Rae Danner
lesraedan@gmail.com

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION IN A
SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

A Program Evaluation submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist

School Psychology

By
Leslie Rae Danner

Dr. Sandra S. Stroebel, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Stephen L. O'Keefe
Dr. Fred Jay Krieg

Marshall University
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Abstract

The current study was conducted to determine which variable of parental involvement was the best predictor of parental satisfaction in the 2011 Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program. Data of parental involvement and level of parent satisfaction was collected using a survey format. A prediction equation analysis using a linear regression was calculated and results indicated that parents feeling involved was a significant variable in satisfaction. An independent samples t-test determined that there was no significant difference between parents' actual participation in services and satisfaction. A linear regression determined the levels of involvement in activities were not a predictor of satisfaction. Further analyses of data revealed participation in direct services are powerful when predicting program satisfaction. Also, when parents find participation services helpful they are more satisfied with the program.

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Chapter One: Parental Involvement and Level of Parent Satisfaction in a Summer Enrichment Program

Summer Enrichment programs around the country have been implementing various strategies to reach their goals for children; the question remains, what methods are beneficial and most effective. Utilizing a program evaluation offers specific and relevant information. In turn, this information benefits children and creates an increased level of satisfaction among parents. The Summer Enrichment program offers parents opportunity for involvement. It is this involvement that has become a strong variable in the prediction of parental satisfaction with the program.

Characteristics of an Effective Summer Program

For a summer program to be successful certain program components should be considered. For example, effective programs provide students with small group as well as one on one instruction (Cuddapah, Masci, Smallwood, & Holland, 2008). Effective programs determine the specific skills individual students are having difficulty with and tailor lessons to meet those skill deficits (Buchanan, 2007; Cuddapah, et. al, 2008). Hands-on activities and games are provided in a positive classroom atmosphere to help promote learning and are active components to a program (Buchanan, 2007). In addition to the structure of the program, Buchanan (2007) found a critical component to be the teachers who make the school a warm welcoming place for children.

Bell and Carrillo (2007) examined numerous summer program models and found nine characteristics for effective summer programs. The first characteristic is the intentional focus on accelerated learning. For programs to accelerate learning successfully, instruction should not repeat the traditional school year methods. Instead

academic learning should be intertwined with enrichment activities. The second characteristic is a firm commitment to youth development. Meaningful relationships in the life of a young person are at the core of youth development beliefs. The third characteristic is a proactive approach to summer learning. Programs with a proactive approach focus on results that help close the achievement gap. Strong and empowering leadership is the fourth characteristic that promotes an effective summer program. Staff should feel supported, have access to tools and resources, and feel competent to handle any problems that may occur. The fifth characteristic is advanced collaborative planning, a process that offers stakeholders a voice. Sixth includes extensive opportunities for staff development; relevant to the program and provided before the start of the program. The seventh characteristic is strategic partnerships. The mission and vision of each organization should be enhanced by the partnership. A clear focus, sustainability, and cost effectiveness is the eighth characteristic. Cost effectiveness, the relationship between financial costs and program results, is an important part of sustainability, the ability to meet current needs while planning for the future needs of a program. The ninth, and final characteristic that promotes effectiveness in a summer program is a strict approach to program evaluation. The process of program evaluation should include a continual collection of feedback, measurement of progress, and commitment to program improvement (Bell and Carrillo, 2007).

An essential component of effective summer programs that Bell and Carrillo (2007) did not address in their nine characteristics is the involvement of parents. Similar to Bell and Carrillo (2007), Johnson (2000) found accelerated learning, proactive approaches, and strategic partnerships important characteristics, but he also found that the

involvement of parents was a necessary attribute in making a successful summer program. Undoubtedly, parents serve as the first, longest-lasting, and most important teacher in their children's lives and are the number one motivator for summer program participation (Johnson, 2000).

Program Evaluation Measured by Parent Satisfaction

A program evaluation is a measurement of a program's outcomes and a comparison of those outcomes with expected or preferred results for that particular program (Webb, 2000). As described by Webb, the necessary art of program assessment has several purposes. The first purpose is to establish whether a given approach had the intended effect and achieved its objectives. The second purpose of program evaluation is to provide measurable data to support the continuation of the program and promote improvement. Another purpose is to identify unanticipated side effects that may point to a solution or understanding of a related issue (Webb, 2000). Programs committed to enhancement gather feedback, measure growth, report outcomes, and work to expand the quality of their services using measurement techniques such as surveys, academic assessment, and observation (Bell & Carrillo, 2007).

Parent satisfaction has been found to be an indispensable element of program evaluations in education (Bell & Carrillo, 2007). It is imperative to collect parent satisfaction data for several reasons as recognized in the literature. First, parents know their children well and have the main role of guiding their child's development (Ratzon, Zabaneh-Tannas, Ben-Hamo, & Bart, 2009). Second, parent satisfaction or dissatisfaction can be used to improve a program's services (Bell & Carrillo, 2007). Third, programs may have the opportunity to involve parents by including them in the decision making

process as an outcome of evaluation efforts (Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holburn, 1990). Finally, parents can influence other community organizations as to the effectiveness of a program i.e. funding agencies (Feuerstein, 2000).

In efforts to explain perception of satisfaction, researchers in marketing have established satisfaction as a multifaceted interaction between present and past experiences, expectations, quality, services offered and availability of services, cost, meeting participant's needs, and recommendations of family and friends (Olson, 1999). In education, research outcomes have echoed marketing research results on parent satisfaction. Reviews of educational studies have indicated the following factors that influence parent satisfaction: feeling valued in the education process, student success, safety of the students, parental involvement within the school, fulfilling a parent's expectations, teacher's attitudes, and transportation services (Feuerstein, 2000; Johnson, 2000). In addition, researchers found that satisfied parents are also those who have good communication with their child's school and are aware of their child's experiences (Fogle and Jones, 2006; Saint-Laurent and Fournier, 1993).

Levels of parent satisfaction in a summer enrichment program were measured in a study of the Detroit Michigan Public Schools. The Extended School Year Program of the Detroit public schools was designed to show that expanding the school year would yield corresponding fluctuations in student achievement as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Green, 1998). The Extended School Year was a 3-year summer program beginning in the summer of 1995 and concluding in the summer of 1997 involving a total of 16 schools; elementary, middle, and high schools participated. Achievement data were analyzed to assess

program effect and survey data were collected from teachers, parents, and students. The following results were indicated: 1) achievement test results suggested a positive effect on scores for Grade 4 students in reading, 2) 75% of teachers, parents, and students believed the program amplified students' skills, 3) 77% of parents specified they would like to see the program continue, 4) 78% of students indicated they were not content with the program which resulted in poor attendance for reasons including physically hot environment due to lack of air conditioning, summer vacations, lack of interest, and lack of parental support (Green, 1998). Recommendations for program development included: improved communication of program objectives and greater involvement of parents.

Parental Involvement as a Predictor of Parent Satisfaction

Parent's participation in education has been a theme of interest for many years now and growing literature suggests that parental involvement does have a positive influence on children's learning and accomplishment in school. Increasing involvement of parents in their children's education has come not only through lawmaking, but through acknowledgment that parents have familiarity about their child's strengths and weaknesses (Jinnah & Walters, 2008).

The importance of family involvement in education has been well documented. Researchers have claimed that parent involvement in their children's early education increases self confidence in their parenting and their understanding of proper educational practices which expands children's education outcomes, especially literacy, as well as improves parental obligation to schooling (Jinnah & Walters, 2008). Parental involvement has been associated with high achievement levels, lower high school dropout rates, fewer years spent in special education, and greater social competence (Jinnah & Walters, 2008).

Further research also indicates parental involvement improves student's attitudes towards school, homework habits, attendance, and overall academic achievement (Feuerstein, 2000).

While the importance of parental involvement has been well documented the relationship between involvement and parental satisfaction is less clear. A study completed by LaForett and Mendez (2010) measured parental involvement and satisfaction within an early childhood intervention program. Low income parents (N=203) of Head Start children participated in a short-term longitudinal study which examined parental involvement. In this study, parental involvement was defined as a mother's involvement in home and school based activities as well as interactions with her child's teacher. In this case, higher levels of parental involvement and parent-teacher interactions predicted optimal satisfaction with Head Start Services. Following this research, teacher trainings were put into practice to recognize unique needs involved in working to establish home school connections (LaForett & Mendez, 2010). More extensive research is needed to further evaluate the relationship between levels of parental involvement as a predictor of program satisfaction.

Stimulating Parental Involvement

Developing a clear definition of parental involvement in schools is not easy because it is such a multifaceted concept. Successful summer programs can encourage parent involvement in an assortment of ways including, providing parents with information about their child's direct education; inviting parents to events and field trips; offering classes or trainings on a variety of topics; creating take-home activities to be completed as a family; and recruiting parents as volunteers or hiring them as employees

(Johnson, 2000). Feuerstein (2000) also identified several categories that could define parental involvement, such as, the parents selecting the educational institution their child attends, sitting in on school councils where they are expected to take part in the decision making process, direct involvement in the classroom, and communication relating to student progress, school rules, and student behavior.

Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program

Parental involvement is an important component of the Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program (MUSEP). This is a five-week summer enrichment program for K-12 students, upholds many of the characteristics that literature has shown to make an effective program. For example, the Summer Enrichment Program provides small-group as well as one-on-one instruction, tailors lessons to meet specific skill deficits, provides an activity-based experience in a positive classroom atmosphere, creates meaningful relationships with students, has a consistent approach to program evaluation and parent satisfaction, and offers opportunities for parental involvement.

The MUSEP also offers an invaluable hands-on training experience for graduate students; including those enrolled in areas of Special Education, School Counseling, School Psychology, and Reading Education. The program's facility includes a director, site principal, and field supervisors and the classrooms contain low student-teacher ratios, multi-aged students, students with diverse abilities, and a full inclusion of students with special needs. Graduate education students are encouraged to use effective, researched-based methods in all areas of the classroom as well as follow a collaborative teaching model (Krieg, Meikamp, O'Keefe, & Stroebel, 2006).

The program provides opportunities for parents to become acquainted with their child's education. In 2011, the School Psychology students encouraged parental involvement in a variety of ways. Parent consultations were offered to parents seeking change in their child's behavior, development, or academics. Individual conferences were offered to parents whose children received psychological assessments. Group parent training sessions were also conducted on the following topics: Parenting with Love and Logic, Modeling Healthy Eating Choices, The ABC's of Discipline, Social Networking Privacy Concerns, Victims and Perpetrators of Bullying. Parents were also invited to participate in a satisfaction survey as part of a program evaluation.

Program Evaluations of Parent Satisfaction with MUSEP

Parent satisfaction has been a tool to evaluate the MUSEP for almost ten years. In 2003, Lattimore identified through 40 parent surveys that the biggest predictor of parent satisfaction was perceived care by staff toward children. Lattimore (2003) also reported no differences in levels of satisfaction between parents of students with disabilities and parents of students without disabilities. Moreover, levels of satisfaction were unaffected by perceived student achievement and parent involvement. Lattimore (2003) identified levels of parent involvement as (a) no involvement, (b) giving and receiving information and (c) having control over decisions, although, Lattimore (2003) failed to define the variables involved with in each of these levels.

This study was revisited by Wartenburg in 2005 with a purpose to replicate and test the research findings. When defining parental involvement Wartenburg (2005) directs to Question 13 on the parent survey, "I have participated in some activities with my child at school." Like the 2003 Lattimore study, Wartenburg's 2005 study also found no significant relationship between parent satisfaction and student achievement as well as

no significance between parent satisfaction and parental involvement. Again, Wartenburg (2005) also failed to define the components of parental involvement. Different from Lattimore's (2003) findings, Wartenburg (2005) found the best predictor of parent satisfaction was the response to the question "I would recommend the Summer Enrichment Program to other parents."

Pulliam revisited this study in 2006. Pulliam (2006) sought to examine the level of parent satisfaction with MUSEP and compare that to the level of parent satisfaction at the students' local schools. Pulliam (2006) identified through 20 parent surveys that parents were more satisfied with the summer program than the local school their child attended. Pulliam (2006) found that the best predictor of parent satisfaction was the response to the question "My child was safe at school." Pulliam (2006) further investigated the level of parent's satisfaction between the two programs as it related to parental involvement. Pulliam (2006) defined levels of parent involvement as (a) no involvement, (b) giving and receiving information and (c) having control over decisions. Pulliam (2006) found that parents who had medium participation (giving and receiving information) in the summer program had high satisfaction with their local school program and with MUSEP. Overall, parents who had some level of involvement were more satisfied than parents who had less levels of involvement.

In 2009, Legg replicated the three previous studies (Lattimore, 2003; Wartenburg, 2005; Pulliam, 2006) to determine which variables were most closely related to parent satisfaction with MUSEP. The four variables were 1) parent level of involvement, 2) child recipient of reading tutoring, 3) level of academic progress, 4) and parent satisfaction with staff (Legg, 2009). Data was collected and examined using 111 surveys from parents of children who attended the summer program in 2007 and 2008. Legg (2009) found the child's

level of academic progress was not significant therefore, conducted a follow up study removing this insignificant variable. The most significant variable was the level of parental involvement ($p=.001$) followed by satisfaction with staff ($p=.002$) and then child recipient of reading tutoring ($p=.031$) (Legg, 2009).

Although not all literature determined parental involvement as the best predictor of parent satisfaction, earlier studies did not clearly define what constituted parental involvement. While, the most current findings by Pulliam (2006) and Legg (2009) indicate that parents who participate have higher levels of satisfaction with the MUSEP. This study will further examine parental involvement to determine what types of involvement are more closely aligned with parental satisfaction. Parental involvement is measured through different levels including parents perceived involvement in the program and parents direct participation in one or more the following activities: consultative services, individual conferences to review child's psychological evaluation, and parent trainings.

Chapter Two: Methods

Statement of Problem

The present study analyzed parent surveys from the 2011 MUSEP. The purpose of the study was to determine which variables of involvement are more closely related to parental satisfaction in the MUSEP. Hypothesis one: parents who reported they were involved were more satisfied with the program. Hypothesis two: parents who participated in program services (consultative services, individual conferences to review child's psychological evaluation, and parent trainings) were more satisfied with the program. Hypothesis three: higher levels of participation in program services will predict greater parental satisfaction. Hypothesis four: parents who found the program services helpful were more satisfied than those who did not.

Participants

Participants of this study were the primary care givers of children whom attended the MUSEP during the summer of 2011. There were a total of 112 parents contacted representing 150 children. A total of 99 parents participated in the satisfaction survey for the 2011 MUSEP.

Instrumentation

A review of the previous surveys led to the modification of the current survey used. There were several changes made to the past surveys. First, the questions were re-organized and all questions regarding similar topics were grouped together. Second, irrelevant items were removed, and in contrast, 4 items were added which were specific to the current research. Lastly, 3 item questions were either reworded or combined. The current survey included a total of 22 questions. It was comprised of 18 Likert type questions. The sum of the first 15 served as the total measure of satisfaction and the

dependent variable in this study. The survey also included three multiple choice questions, two of which directly addressed the variables related to parental involvement and served as independent variables in this study. As well as one open ended question giving parents an opportunity to provide suggestions for program improvement (See Appendix A).

An analysis of internal consistency was conducted on the dependent variable and yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .928 indicating a reliable measure.

Procedure

Two weeks after the completion of the program, surveys were emailed to parents. The surveys were accompanied by a cover letter to explain the purpose of the survey, directions on how to complete the survey, and a statement concerning the participants' confidentiality. Six weeks later, the survey was sent again by e-mail. Four months after the completion of the program, parents who did not electronically complete the survey or those who did not have email addresses were given an opportunity to complete the survey over the telephone. Survey data was entered electronically using Survey Monkey.

Chapter Three: Results

Fifteen questions were grouped together to determine overall satisfaction with the 2011 MUSEP. These questions served as the dependent variable. The variables for the independent measure were defined twice; feeling involved and actual participation in offered services.

Overall Satisfaction: The Dependent Measure

A total of 99 surveys were completed for the 2011 summer enrichment program. Questions included in the dependent variable were added together for a sum of overall satisfaction with a range of 15-75. The overall satisfaction for the 2011 summer enrichment program yielded a mean of 65.0 indicating strong satisfaction.

Feeling Involved: The First Independent Measure

Hypothesis one. A linear regression was conducted with the independent variable, Question 16) “as a parent I felt involved in my child’s program”. The R^2 value of .383 for the linear equation indicated that parent’s perceived involvement explains 38.3% of the total satisfaction. These finding support the hypothesis that parental involvement is a predictor of program satisfaction.

Participation in Services: The Second Independent Measure

Hypothesis two. Parents who participated in program services were more satisfied with the program; results did not support this hypothesis. An independent samples t-test was calculated comparing the mean score of parents who reported participating in the services offered during the summer program to the mean score of parents who reported not participating in the services offered during the summer program. No significant difference was found. The mean of the parents who reported they

participated ($m=63.91$, $sd=11.28$) was not significantly different from the mean of parents who reported not participating ($m=64.44$, $sd=8.84$).

Hypothesis three. Results indicated that higher levels of participation in program services are not a predictor of satisfaction. A linear regression was conducted with the independent variable, Question 19) “I participated in the following (check all that apply): Parent Training Sessions, Meeting with staff about the problem I am having with my child, Parent Conference to review my child’s Psychological Evaluation, I did not participate”. Variables of indirect services were removed during calculation indicating they had no effect on satisfaction; higher levels of participation were not a factor in satisfaction. The R^2 value of .110 for the linear equation indicated that parents involvement in direct services only explains 10% of the total satisfaction; a modest, but positive result.

Hypothesis four. When parents found offered services helpful they were more satisfied with the program. A Linear Regression was also conducted with the independent variable, Question 20) “I found the following services to be helpful (check all that apply): Parent Training Sessions, Meeting with staff about the problem I am having with my child, Parent Conference to review my child’s Psychological Evaluation, N/A”. The R^2 value of .134 for the linear equation indicated that when parents found the offered services helpful it accounted for 13% of the total satisfaction, again a modest, but positive result.

Chapter Four: Discussion

The purpose of the study was to determine which variables within parental involvement were more closely related to program satisfaction with in the MUSEP. This study, congruent with previous program evaluations, indicated a high level of parent satisfaction with the MUSEP.

Feeling Involved: The First Independent Measure

Parent's perceived involvement was found to be a significant variable in program satisfaction. This is consistent with findings from previous studies Legg, 2009; Pulliam, 2006. Parents who reported they felt involved with the program were more satisfied.

Participation in Services: The Second Independent Measure

Parent's actual involvement was not found to be a significant variable in program satisfaction. Results of hypothesis two indicated that parents reported feeling involved even though they did not meet the programs criteria of involvement. These are new findings with in the evaluation of the summer program. Pulliam (2006) defined levels of parent involvement as (a) no involvement, (b) giving and receiving information and (c) having control over decisions. Pulliam (2006) found that parents who had medium participation (giving and receiving information) in the summer program had high satisfaction with MUSEP. Hypothesis three aimed to further investigate Pulliam's 2006 findings, defining levels of involvement as (a) participation in a single offered service, (b) participation in two of the offered services, or (c) participation in all three of the offered services. Results of hypothesis three indicated that the level of involvement was not a predictor of program satisfaction. In fact, a further analysis of the data indicated it was the type of involvement, whether direct or indirect, that was a predictor of satisfaction. Again, Pulliam (2006) identified a medium level of involvement as giving and receiving information, which is a

direct service, and therefore linked to the current findings. Direct services contribute to parental satisfaction in the summer enrichment program.

Results of hypothesis four indicated that those parents who indicated the services offered as helpful were more satisfied. This was also a new finding to the evaluation of the MUSEP. Although the results were modest, finding the services offered helpful was a significant variable when predicting parent satisfaction with the program.

Limitations

There was a specific flaw within the survey portion of this study. The surveys ending questions (Question 19, Question 20, and Question 21) had the option of “check all that apply”. When all variables are included within the same question they are not independent of each other. For future use of the survey, questions should be reworded into a Yes/No format forcing independent responses and more useful data for analysis.

Since some parents completed the survey online immediately following the program and others completed the survey via telephone four months following the completion of the program, a difference in responses could be a limitation to this study. An additional analysis comparing the two groups was conducted. An independent samples t-test was calculated comparing the mean score of parents who immediately completed the survey online to the mean score of parents completed the survey via telephone four months following the completion of the program. No significant difference was found. The mean of the parents who immediately responded via e-mail ($m=64.84$, $sd=9.21$) was not significantly different from the mean of parents who responded four months later via telephone ($m=65.13$, $sd=8.76$).

Recommendations for Future Program Evaluations of the MUSEP

Identifying the obstacles that may prevent parents from directly participating in the summer program may be beneficial. Obstacles to participation might include: work hours, language barriers, single parenthood, inadequate transportation, and easily accessible information (Sullivan, 2003). Identifying the obstacles within the MUSEP may lead to the development of strategies to overcome those obstacles, with hopes to create more opportunities for parental involvement.

There are many ways a program can include parental involvement. One example of a creative and direct way to involve parents is having them read or do other literacy activities for 15-30 minutes when they pick up or drop their children off at the summer program (Johnson, 2000). Having literacy as a participation option not only seems beneficial to the program, but to the parents and students as well. This involvement activity may also open the door for carrying literacy into the home environment where it may otherwise be nonexistent. Another way to directly involve parents is to have them be an active part of the programs administrative team. Parents may have useful ideas on marketing techniques to attract more children to the program, how to make the program more convenient for parents, and ideas on meeting the needs of the community more fully (Johnson, 2000).

Future evaluations of MUSEP may want to look more closely into the frequencies of communication between staff and parents and perceived involvement with the program. Direct communication between parents and staff, such as giving and receiving information through progress reports, may be the link to parents feeling involved. It is also suggested future program evaluations confirm the validity of the survey; did those

who report satisfaction with the 2011 summer program re-enroll their child for the 2012 summer program.

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APPENDIX A

Summer 2011 Enrichment Program Parent Survey

Please circle your responses to the following questions. All responses will remain confidential and your effort is greatly appreciated.

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. My child enjoyed participating in the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I am pleased with how staff worked with my child during the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. My child was safe at school. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. The staff in the program truly cared about my child. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. The staff took prompt action when problems occurred. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Staff were willing to talk to me if I had any concerns/suggestions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. My child's teachers seemed to make learning exciting and fun. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. My child has benefited from the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. My child has improved his/her ability to get along with other children. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I noticed an improvement in my child's behavior. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. My child improved in reading skills during the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. My child improved in math skills during the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I am satisfied with the program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. I would like my child to attend the Summer Enrichment Program again. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. I would recommend the Summer Enrichment Program to other parents. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. As a parent I felt I was involved in my child's program. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I was aware of the parent training sessions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. The parent training sessions were helpful. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. I participated in the following... (check all that apply) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Training Sessions | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting with staff about the problem/issue I am having with my child | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Conference to review my child's Psychological Evaluation | |
| 20. I found the following services to be helpful... (check all that apply) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Training Sessions | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting with staff about the problem/issue I am having with my child | |

- Parent Conference to review my child's Psychological Evaluation

21. My child did not complete (attended 5 or less days) the program because... (check all that apply)

- I was dissatisfied with the program/ the program did not meet my expectations
- I had too many other obligations/commitments
- My child refused to return
- The location was problematic
- Other: Please explain reason

22. In order to improve the program, I would suggest:
