



Performance-*based*
Standards



The Impact of Family Involvement on Youths' Success

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Project Description

Performance-based Standards (PbS) integrates research-based practices into the daily operations of juvenile justice agencies, facilities and residential care providers. PbS provides a uniform data collection and reporting tool that illustrates the positive impact of data-driven services on youths, staff and families. In 2012, PbS launched the first national family standards initiative to strengthen and support relationships between incarcerated youths, their families, and facility staff. The PbS Family-Youth Initiative (FYI) develops best practices for meaningful facility-family relationships, in order to engage families in the rehabilitation and re-entry process of their children. To this end, the PbS Family Survey monitors the experiences of families whose youth are involved in the juvenile justice system. The Family Survey creates a system of dynamic feedback between youth facilities and the families with whom they work for the continued improvement of best practices to support families.

The PbS Family Survey for Corrections Settings is administered anonymously to family members of youth incarcerated in corrections facilities. Family members complete the survey close to the time that their youth is leaving the facility, so it serves as a reflection of the family's experiences. Since 2012, surveys for correction sites have been collected biannually over six month periods (November 1-April 30 and May 1 through October 31). Data for the present report represent the most recent wave of data collection (April 2015). Fifty-nine facilities participated, with between 1 and 74 familial respondents per facility ($M = 15.66$ families per facility). The present report focuses on two critical outcomes for incarcerated youth: educational growth, and familial preparedness for reintegration into the home.

Education Within the Facility

A guiding principle of the juvenile justice system is to protect the youth under the system's care. This includes providing a quality education within facilities for youth who are removed from their typical school context. Falling behind in school during incarceration may increase a youth's likelihood of dropout (Sweeten, 2006). Indeed, a quality correctional education is critical for a youth's successful transition into society. A correctional education may represent the last opportunity for some incarcerated youth to acquire academic and vocational skills, which directly impact their employment opportunities upon release (Foley, 2001). Parents play an important role in the academic success of their children in typical school contexts (Hill & Tyson, 2009). It is critical that this same parental support be carried forward through a youth's schooling in corrections settings. A promising means of ensuring that youths maintain the benefits of parental support in their education within the facility is through open lines of communication between the facility and the youth's parents regarding his or her educational progress.



Results

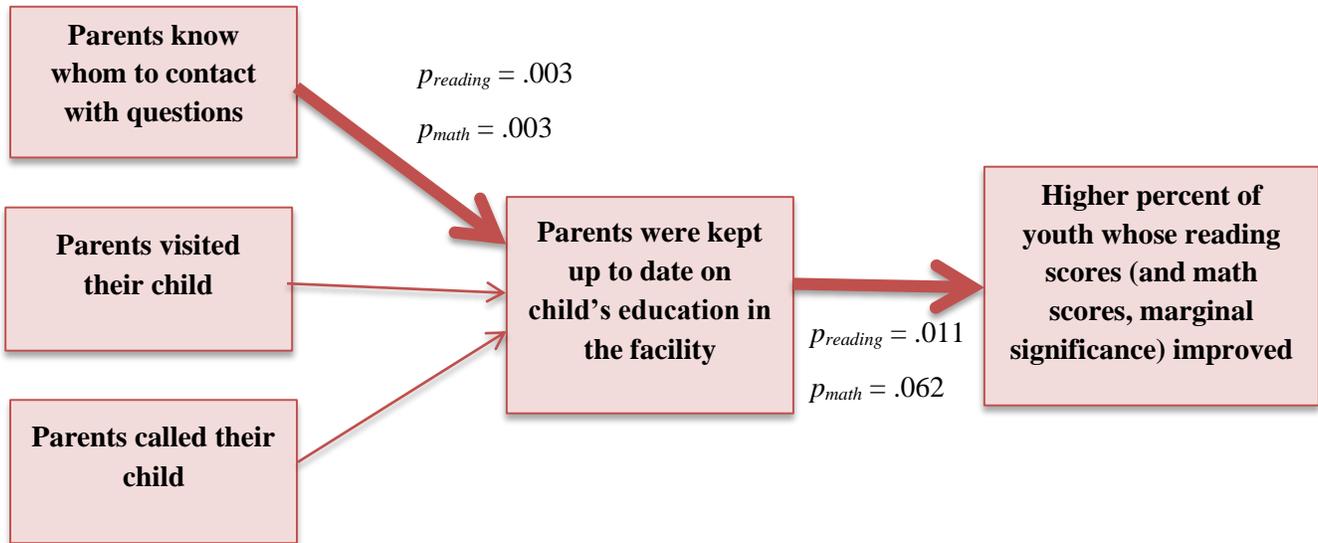
Facilities reported the percent of youth incarcerated for more than 6 months whose reading and math scores increased between admission and discharge from the facility. Across participating facilities, an average of 59.13% ($SD = 29.32$) of youth experienced an increase in math scores, and 57.45% ($SD = 28.32$) of youth experienced an increase in reading scores between the beginning and end of their time in the facility.

In order to test the degree to which parents were included in their child's facility educational progress, parents were asked whether they were kept up to date on their child's education within the facility. Most families ($M = 87.39\%$, $SD = 17.15$) indicated that they were kept up to date. An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression indicated that parents who reported that they knew whom to contact within the facility with questions about their child's wellbeing were more likely to be kept up to date on their child's educational progress ($F(3, 555) = 4.27$, $p = .005$, $r^2 = .189$). There was no association between parents' visits and calls to their child and their knowledge of their child's educational progress. This implies that open channels of communication between the facility and the family are associated with parents' knowledge of their child's educational progress, above and beyond information about their child's education that they could receive by speaking to their child directly during visits or phone calls.

A recursive Structural Equation Model was identified to examine patterns among parental engagement and youths' education within the facility (see Model 1). The model displayed excellent fit for both reading scores ($X^2(3) = 1.24$, $p = .743$, $RMSEA < .001$, $CFI = 1.000$) and math scores ($X^2(3) = 2.03$, $p = .566$, $RMSEA < .001$, $CFI = 1.000$). First, parents' knowledge of whom to contact with questions about their children's wellbeing, visits to see their children, and telephone calls to their children were held constant. The model suggests that facilities in which parents were kept up to date on their child's education had more youth whose reading scores improved over the course of their time in the facility ($p = .011$). The same pattern was evident for math scores, although the finding was marginally significant ($p = .062$).



Model 1. Pathways Associated with Improved Reading and Math Scores



Note: Bold lines indicate statistically significant paths where $p < .05$.

Treatment Plans and Preparedness for Reintegration

Reintegration following incarceration is a challenge for adults; the issue is compounded among adolescents, who are still developmentally immature and rely heavily on the support of their parents (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). As youths transition back to their homes after release from a corrections facility, it is critical that they receive social support from their families (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio, 2001). It is equally as important that the youth's family feel prepared for his or her return home. Although reentry programs that engage family members are associated with greater transition success and stability (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Abrams, 2007), family involvement and preparedness following a youth's release have been unfortunately lacking (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). One means of increasing family member's preparedness for a youth's reintegration is by involving family members in the earlier stages of the youth's treatment plan within the facility.



Results

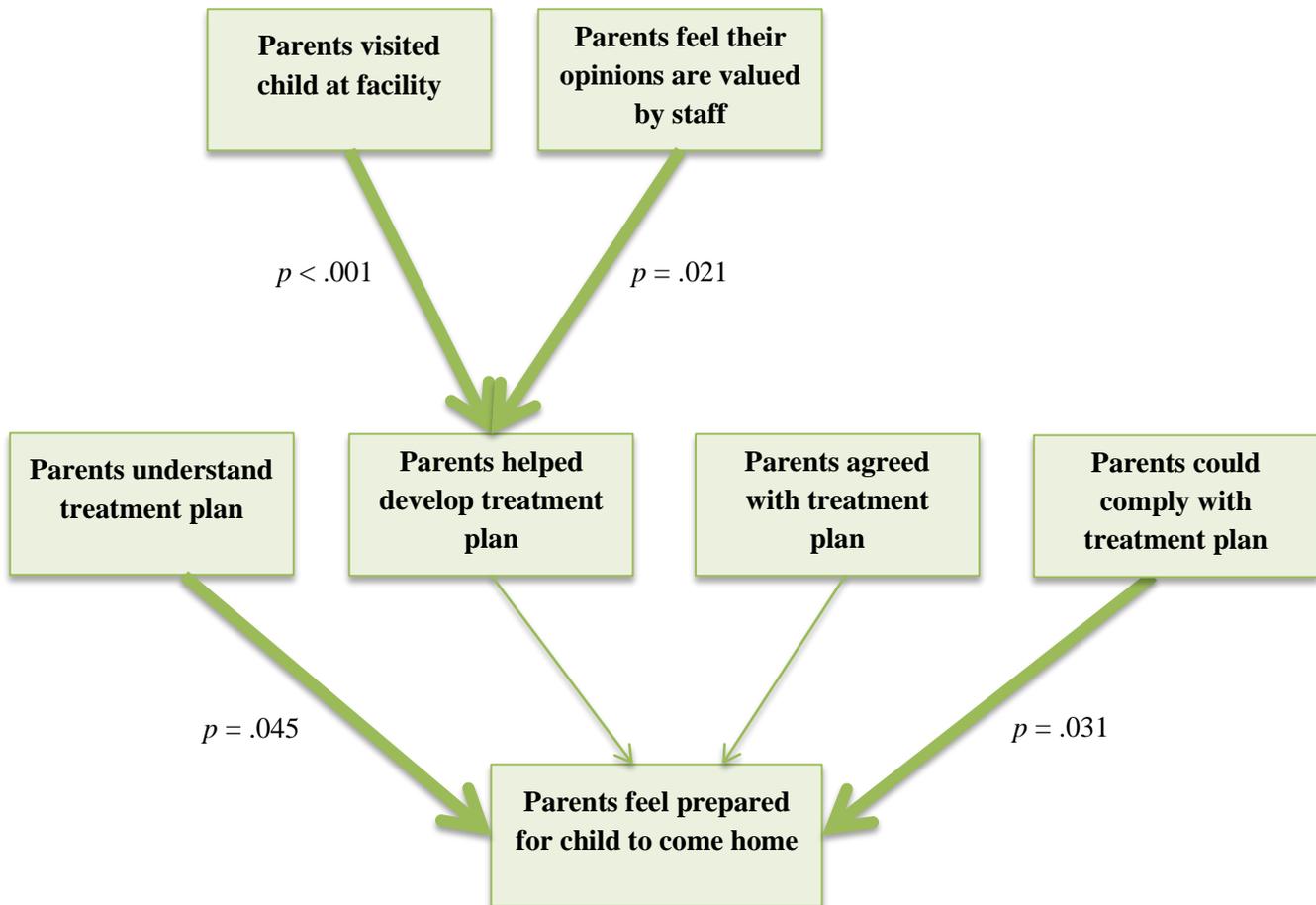
Parents were asked how prepared they felt for their child to return home, using a 4-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 4= Strongly agree). On average, parents felt moderately prepared for their child to come home ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .42$). Parents were also asked whether or not they had participated in the development of their child's treatment plan. Approximately three quarters of participants ($M = 75.99\%$, $SD = .25$) had helped to develop their child's treatment plan. In order to determine which parents were more likely to have helped with the treatment plan, OLS regression analyses were conducted. Results revealed that those parents who had visited their child in the facility and those parents who felt that their opinions were valued by facility staff were more likely to have helped develop their child's treatment plan ($F(2, 56) = 9.65$, $p_{visits} < .001$, $p_{staff} < .037$, $r^2 = .256$).

However, helping to develop their child's treatment plan does not guarantee that a parent understands, agrees with, or can comply with, the final treatment plan. To account for this, parents additionally reported whether they understood their child's treatment plan, agreed with the plan, and felt that they could comply with their child's treatment plan, using a 4-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 4= Strongly agree). Most parents understood ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .35$) and agreed with their child's treatment plan ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .31$), and felt that they could comply with the treatment plan ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .32$).

Structural Equation Modeling (see Model 2) was used to examine the associations among these variables. The recursive model displayed acceptable fit given the sample size ($\chi^2(4) = 8.31$, $p = .081$, $RMSEA < .135$, $CFI = .861$). Results revealed that parents who visited their children and who felt their opinions were valued by staff and who had visited their child were more likely to help develop their children's treatment plan. However, parents felt most prepared for their child to return home when they understood the treatment plan and felt that they could comply with it successfully, regardless of whether or not they agreed with the plan.



Model 2. Pathways Associated with Familial Reintegration Preparedness



Note: Bold lines indicate statistically significant paths where $p < .05$.

Implications and Conclusions

The results of the April 2015 PbS Family Survey have several important implications for practitioners in youth corrections. First, model 1 suggests that more youths' reading and math scores improved during their time in the facility if their parents were kept up to date on their education. Open communication between facility and parents may play a pivotal role in keeping parents updated on their child's education, as facilities in which parents knew whom to contact about their child were the same facilities that provided updates on their child's educational progress.



Model 2 suggests that parents feel most prepared for their child to come home when they have understood their child's treatment plan, and feel that they can comply with the treatment plan. Parents are most likely to be involved in developing their child's treatment plan when they can visit their child at the facility and they feel that the staff value their opinions. These results suggest that a simple way to engage parents in their child's treatment plan is by making it easy for them to visit the facility, and creating an environment in which their voices are heard and respected. Furthermore, by taking steps to ensure that parents both understand and feel prepared to comply with their child's treatment plan, facilities can alleviate parents' stress about their child's homecoming.

Educational growth within the facility and preparedness for reintegration are critical for ensuring a youths' transition to a gainful, prosocial future. Facilities are encouraged to involve families in a youth's care by creating bi-directional channels of communication, facilitating visits, respecting parents' input into their child's care, and engaging parents in the treatment plan process.

References

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About the Author and PbS Data Access

Caitlin Cavanagh, MA, is a doctoral candidate in the department of Psychology and Social Behavior at the University of California, Irvine. Her program of research seeks to produce developmentally sound research that can improve how the juvenile justice system interfaces with youths and their families.

PbS invites researchers to use PbS data to help the field better understand and assess practices used in residential facilities and programs. PbS can provide aggregated data for correction, detention, assessment and community-based programs with all identifying information removed to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality promised to participants. The PbS database includes qualitative data (youth, staff and family survey responses, averaging a total of about 17,000 surveys each collection period) and quantitative data (youth records, incident and administrative information, totaling about 12,000 completed surveys each data collection). Participants report the data twice year, every April and October. An application and instructions to access the data is available on the PbS website at <http://pbstandards.org/resources/index/272>.

