ATTRIBUTING FACTORS THAT LEAD PARENTS TO

CHOOSE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLING FOR THEIR ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

College of Health & Human Services

Widener University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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Center for Education

March 28, 2024

Widener University
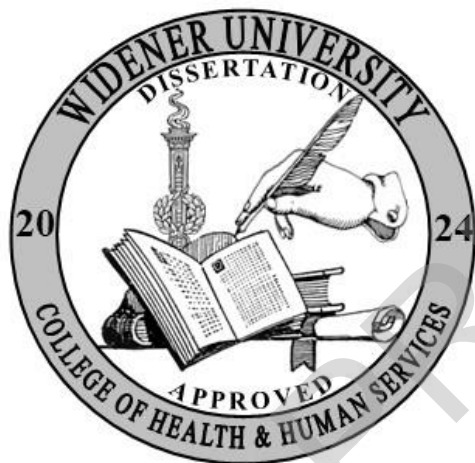## College of Health and Human Services
Center for Education

Dissertation Approval

Title of Dissertation: Attributing Factors That Led Parents to Choose Residential Schooling For Their Elementary Aged Children

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Dedication Page

This work is dedicated to my husband, Tyler, whose unwavering support, and love have been my anchor throughout this journey. To my son, Tucker, and my daughters, Taylor, and Taryn, who are my constant source of inspiration and joy. To my mother, who instilled in me the determination to persevere. Your strength and resilience are the pillars upon which I stand. To my late father, who taught me the value of challenging work, the importance of giving my best effort in all that I do and modeling for me the importance of being a servant leader. To my brother, both my sister-in-law's, and my mother and father-in-law, thank you for your support and encouragement. Your belief in me has been a driving force in my pursuit of this achievement. And to my dearest friends, who have stood by me, supported me, and accepted me for who I am. Your friendship has been a beacon of light in the most challenging times. This journey would not have been possible without each one of you. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, whose unwavering support and guidance has been invaluable throughout this journey. Your expertise, patience, and encouragement have been a beacon of light guiding me through the challenges of this process. To my family and friends, your faith in me has been a source of strength and motivation. Your constant encouragement and belief in my abilities pushed me to persevere, even when the journey seemed insurmountable. I am deeply grateful for your love and support. The journey to complete this dissertation has been long and fraught with many challenges. However, the unwavering support from everyone around me has made this journey worthwhile. I am deeply grateful for your belief in me and your constant encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank all who have supported me in any respect during the project's completion. Your support has provided a foundation for my academic, social, and emotional growth.

Abstract

This dissertation presents a qualitative study exploring the motivations behind parents' and guardians' decisions to enroll and maintain their elementary-aged children in a residential school setting. The study identified three key factors influencing these decisions: the pursuit of non-financial stability, the desire for reputable education, and the need for financial support.

The research revealed that stability extends beyond financial aspects, with families seeking a secure, consistent, and nurturing environment that provides emotional, social, and physical stability. The choice of a residential school often stems from perceived inadequacies in the education available within home districts, with the elementary years recognized as critical for establishing a solid foundation in core subjects. Financial support is another significant factor, alleviating financial pressures and enabling families to enhance their overall quality of life. The study also highlights the crucial role of grandparents and single parents in the decision-making process. Faced with age-related challenges and the dual responsibilities of work and parenting, these individuals often experience heightened financial stress. Their decisions, deeply rooted in a commitment to stability, nurturing, and academic enrichment, demonstrate the importance of the choices and seriousness in making this decision made by parents or guardians.

In conclusion, the decision to continue enrollment in a residential school is based on a combination of factors, including the desire for a stable environment, the pursuit of quality education, the school's positive reputation, and the financial stability offered by the residential school model. This understanding is vital for educators and researchers in elementary education within residential settings, shedding light on family motivations and emphasizing the need to foster effective educational partnerships and environments that cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of students in residential schools. The evolving role of parents in their child's

education and the positive correlation between parent-school community connections and student academic growth further underline the significance of these findings. The study employed interviews with families who have chosen a residential school for their child's elementary education to gather data. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on elementary education in residential settings, providing valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of a child's journey through life. Elementary age education and the home environment play a pivotal role in the development of a child's foundational skills (Dong, et al., 2020). Elementary education provides children with opportunities to interact with peers, helping them learn social norms, understand emotions, and develop empathy. The home environment reinforces these skills through family interactions. Both school and home environments contribute to character development. Schools often have programs that promote values like honesty, respect, and responsibility. At home, parents and caregivers' model and reinforce these values. Elementary education introduces children to concepts like deadlines, responsibility, and teamwork. These experiences help develop a strong work ethic. At home, chores and responsibilities can further reinforce these skills. Teachers in elementary schools use various strategies to make learning engaging and fun, which can instill a love for learning. At home, parents can nurture this by providing resources and opportunities for learning. Elementary education lays the groundwork for academic skills. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught, and children are introduced to subjects like science and social studies. The home environment can support this through activities like reading together or exploring science-based activities.

Both elementary age education and the home environment are critical as they complement each other in fostering a child's overall development. They provide the necessary experiences and opportunities for children to develop foundational skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. The educational system needs to continually evolve its practices to meet the ever-changing needs of our population. In this day, school is no longer a place where students attend to be educated solely on the content within specific subjects. For example, the experience for a student in a school setting may include social and emotional content, exposure to future

career opportunities and support to meet the basic needs of their everyday life. Therefore, schools are evolving and the partnership between parents and schools is gaining greater importance in the important connection between the two in supporting each student's individual needs (Epstein, 1984).

A parent's involvement in their child's education has shown to impact their child's academic success (Knisely, 2011). For this reason, emphasis is put on the relationships between schools and families to form a school community that works together to support the child's education. One study found that parents were only receptive to the information a teacher was sharing about their child's academic or social and emotional progress if there was a relationship intact prior to these information sharing meetings (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Educational researchers have been increasingly focusing on the impact of parental involvement on a child's school success. They've found that children tend to do better when their parents actively support their education (Epstein, 1984). However, the definition of parental involvement varies across different schools. For instance, Knisely (2011) describes it as parents asking about homework, communicating with teachers about their child's performance, and supporting their educational journey. Lawson (2003) further expands this definition to include the nature of communication between parents and schools. This highlights the multifaceted nature of parental involvement and its crucial role in a child's education. It also highlights the need for schools to foster strong parent-school relationships and provide clear guidelines for parental engagement to enhance student success.

For parents to actively engage in their child's educational journey, it is imperative that they have ready access to institutions that offer high-quality educational services. Regrettably, equitable access to such institutions remains an unresolved issue within our nation. The concept

of school choice emerges as a potential solution, affording parents the agency to act as discerning educational consumers by selecting institutions that best meet their child's needs, even if these institutions are located beyond their immediate residential vicinity. This notion of school choice has gained substantial traction, with 47 states alongside the District of Columbia implementing policies to facilitate such choices for families as of 2019 (Jochim et al., 2019).

Subsequently, parental involvement in schooling has evolved over recent years by putting them in the role as an educational consumer. Initially during the 1990s, school choice focused on families residing in urban settings (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). As a result, the inequalities between schools became more apparent to families as they were introduced to school choices in neighboring schools. In time, individuals began advocating for school choice, and better educational opportunities for families that were confined to poor performing urban setting schools (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). Increased individuals began to conclude that it is necessary for education to be accessible to everyone. Every individual is entitled to a high-quality education. However, research is telling us that this access is not equitable from one community to the next (Lee, 2016). The impact is particularly felt across social class differences, socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as rural and urban locations (Ekaette et al., 2019). For this reason, parents can take their role as an educational consumer another step farther through the exploration of sending their child to a residential setting for their elementary through high school education. Boarding schools are another avenue of school choice that provides families access to quality education.

The issue of access to quality education is not only apparent in the United States, but also across many other countries. For example, in Nigeria, studies have identified factors such as location, social economic status, and even the quality of the infrastructure that impact enrollment

in schools from one community to the next (Ekaette et al., 2019). Likewise, in the 1940s, Israel began utilizing the boarding school model to provide care and education for children who were left orphaned due to being separated from their parents during the Holocaust (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Because of the positive life changing outcomes of orphaned children through the utilization of a residential setting, there is continued use of boarding schools throughout Israel (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Peled-Laskov and his colleagues were able to conduct research with students who attended a residential school in Israel for their elementary through high school years. The researchers attributed the students' post graduate success in life, such as holding respectable jobs, and raising stable families, to their enrollment at a residential school rather than being raised and educated in their home setting (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Additional research concluded that boarding schools do provide a positive environment for students through the types of academic and emotional support available to them during their attendance at the school (Murphy et al., 2017).

Today, parents have more choices than ever in selecting schools that best meet their children's unique needs and family circumstances (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This might involve choosing schools far from home due to ongoing disparities in access to quality education. As of 2021, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported 130,029 K-12 public and private schools in the U.S. Yet, when it comes to residential schooling options, the choices are significantly fewer. The Association of Boarding Schools reported only about 300 boarding schools in operation in 2020, across both public and private sectors. This stark contrast highlights the need for more diverse and accessible residential schooling options to cater to the varied needs of families and students. It also underscores the importance of policies and initiatives aimed at reducing educational disparities and expanding school choices.

As we see, boarding schools provide a setting to children in need of an alternative framework from home, removing them from situations of physical or emotional neglect, or social and academic deprivation (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). The focus of this study will be to examine what motivates a parent to send their child to a K-12 residential school rather than attend a public or private school in their home community. The study will also examine what attributes of a residential school parents identify as reasons why they continue their child's enrollment at the institution. Specifically, the research will examine what factors of the home, school and community influences support a parent's decision to continue their child's enrollment in a residential setting.

Problem

More families are taking advantage of their power of being an educational consumer. For example, as of 2019, forty-seven states nationwide allow families to enroll their child in a public school not designated as their assigned neighborhood school (Jochim et al., 2019). The aim of school choice is to offer families, who may not reside in areas with top-tier schools, the chance to send their child to a more preferred educational institution (Jochim et al., 2019). In some instances, families need to take their ability to be an educational consumer to a different level and seek educational opportunities outside of the schools offered to them through the public sector via school choice and as a result, these families may begin to examine residential schools to meet the needs of their child. However, for residential schools to provide a learning environment that supports their child's individual needs academically, socially, and emotionally, these institutions need to understand what makes the boarding school environment successful from the perspective of the parent who is sending their child to that environment (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019).

Purpose

  With a growing number of states in the United States allowing families to enroll their children in public schools outside their assigned neighborhoods, there arises a need to understand the motivations and considerations driving parents towards alternative educational models, such as residential schooling. This qualitative study's purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of why parents choose residential school as the model for their child's education. Specifically, the study will explore the rationale of parents who make the choice to send their child away from home to residential school and what attributes of that school support the parents in deciding to keep their child in that setting for their educational experience. The rationale for the research is grounded in the importance of elementary students beginning their educational journey in a setting that meets their academic and social and emotional needs. Through interviews with parents of currently enrolled children of residential schools, the study will be able to gain insight on attributes of what can make for a successful setting for a student to be educated in a residential setting. Ultimately, understanding the characteristics that attract a parent to make the choice to send their child to a residential school will enhance the knowledge base for these schools to better serve more students, and partner with parents in the child's educational journey.

Research Questions

  This qualitative study will investigate what influences parents to make the decision to send their children away from the home setting for their educational experience by attending a residential school. In addition, the study will examine which attributing factors of the residential school influence parents to retain their students in the residential school setting each year.

1. What factors influence a parent's or guardian's choice to send their elementary aged child to a residential school setting?

2. What characteristics about the residential school do parents or guardians identify as important to continue their elementary aged child's enrollment in the residential school?

Significance

Parents can expand their role as educational consumers by investigating residential schools. At this time, the reasons for parents sending their child to a residential school have not been extensively researched in the United States (Vigar-Ellis, 2013). However, boarding schools have been utilized in many other countries and parents in those countries may send their child away for school due to tradition, out of necessity or purely as their own personal choice (Vigar-Ellis, 2013). For example, a study in Israel identified that children attend residential schools due to difficult living conditions at home, physical and emotional neglect, and social and academic deprivation (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Currently, most research in the United States on school choice has been limited to private, charter or cyber schools (Villavicencio, 2013). In some situations, residential and boarding schools are a valuable resource for families, and this study will help identify how residential schools can support school choice for families beyond neighborhood schools. In addition, there is limited research available identifying how residential schools can support families to provide a high-quality education for their elementary aged children. In addition, the research will benefit residential schools in understanding what parents' value and need to have their child continue their enrollment in a residential setting for their elementary school years.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research is based on Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995). Epstein's research on parental involvement in a child's education is highly utilized regarding research of this subject (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Epstein's three

spheres of influence, families, schools, and community are brought closer together in overlapping spheres, as they collaborate and work towards the common goal of providing a high-quality education for a child to succeed. Epstein defined parental involvement through six constructs: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1992). For this study in particular, the research will focus on what features of the home and school create the situation where a parent decides to send their elementary age child to a residential setting for their education and keep them enrolled there for their elementary years of schooling.

Figure 1

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence
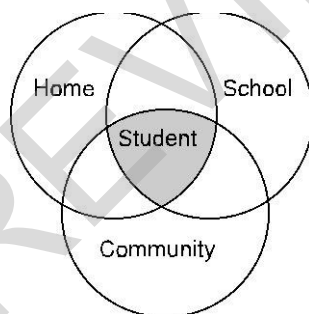
Home   School

Student

Community

Figure 1 is a pictorial representation that illustrates the spheres of influence collaborating to support the education of a student. The figure represents the influences and contexts that support a student's education, home, school, and community. For instance, when the three circles or influences work in silos, the result is that the circles are pushed farther apart. When the circles are separated, it is an illustration that the influences are working in silos and not overlapping with each other, or the student is are not benefiting and growing as a learner (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Conversely, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence asserts that students learn

more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support a student's learning and development (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

The research conducted in this study will examine from the parent (home) perspective, what factors of the schoolwork with them to create the ideal overlap of the spheres to support their child's education. It is important to understand that the size of overlap represents the strength of the partnership between the three influences: home, school, and community (Pansiri & Bulawa, 2013). A larger overlap represents frequent family-school-community communication, evidence of responding to one another's needs. In contrast, a minimal overlap represents when family-school-community has truly little communication and mutual planning. There is never a complete overlap, as each influence always maintains their own unique function in supporting a child's growth. In conclusion, the study's focus will be to understand how residential schools can utilize Epstein's spheres of influences; home, school, and community, together to support a student's growth. The goal of the study is to utilize Epstein's framework to gain a greater understanding of what factors of the school, community and home create a proper balance between each other to optimize the residential school setting as a choice for parents to educate their child.

Aside from the three spheres of influence, Epstein extended the meaning of his overlapping spheres of influence by identifying two views that impact the functioning of the three spheres: the external view and the internal view. The external view models how the unique experiences, philosophies and practices of families, schools, and the community impact family participation in their child's learning (Dove et al., 2018). The internal view model shows how the interpersonal relationships between school personnel and the parents can influence a family's participation and engagement in their child's learning. Epstein's theory identifies the importance

of schools, families, and communities to share the responsibility for socialization of the child (Yamauchi et al., 2017). The goal is for the three spheres to function at the appropriately needed level together, creating a family-friendly school, with the main goal of partnerships to support students learning and social development (Constantino, 2003). As such, Epstein's Spheres of Influence serves as the framework for this study to support how a home, school and community collaborate to support the growth of a child in the residential school setting.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in this study.

Access: Availability and accessibility to adequate supply in the identified market (Fortney et al., 2000).

Collaborating with the community: Parents utilizing community resources to enhance their child's learning progress (Epstein, 1992).

Communicating: Meaningful dialogue between parents and educators about a child's strengths and areas of need academically and socially and emotionally for it to be classified as parental involvement (Ringenberg et al., 2005).

Community: A group of individuals who live together and interact with each other in a shared residential space (Epstein, 1992).

Decision-making: A parent being involved in two types of decisions, ones involving their individual student and ones that impact the entire student body (Epstein, 1992).

High Quality Education: An educational setting that maximizes the length of the school day for rigorous instruction taught by qualified teachers who balance a nurturing and structured classroom environment and prioritize building strong relationships with parents and students (Pianta et al., 2016).

Learning at home: A parent supporting their child with homework and feedback and encouragement directly correlated to their progress (Epstein, 1992).

Custodial Guardians: The parent who is given physical or legal custody of a child by court order (2018).

Parents: The term in this paper signifies not only biological parents, but guardians and other family members who serve as parental figures and who make decisions about a child's schooling (Villavicencio, 2013).

Parenting: The home environment created to foster a child's cognitive development (Epstein, 1992).

Residential School: A school where students reside in housing provided by the school during the period that school is in session (Zachariah & Joshua, 2016).

School choice: Policy that gives parents the opportunity to send their child to a school outside their assigned neighborhood school (Jochim et al., 2019).

Spheres of Influence: A model that focuses on the interaction and communication, or partnerships, among families, schools, and the community to bring the three closer together. This theory was developed by Joyce Epstein and her collaborators in the early 1990s (Epstein, 1992).

Volunteering: A parent supporting a school event or activity through their presence in person (Epstein, 1992).

Chapter Summary

A high-quality education is critical in building the foundation of a child's future. A key factor in a student having access to a high-quality education is parental involvement; however, parental involvement in their child's education can be reflected in many ways. This study focused on parents using school choice by sending their child away from home to attend school

in a residential setting, to provide them access to a high-quality education. Through interviews with parents, this study investigated what led a parent to make the ultimate choice of sending their child away for school and keep them enrolled in that institution throughout their elementary school years. In conclusion, the research from this study provided insight from parents' points of view that sending their child to a residential school provided their child with the access to a high-quality education through the collaboration of home, school, and community.