





THE PARENT PROJECT® IN THE JUVENILE & DOMESTIC RELATIONS DISTRICT COURT

FINAL REPORT

Fairfax County
Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court
Fairfax, VA 22033
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Introduction

The Parent Project[®] was established in 1987 thanks to the combined efforts of a law enforcement officer, an adult educator, and a clinical psychologist (Stolz 2010)¹. This 10- to 16-week program is designed to act as a “behavior-modification-based parenting program for self- and system-referred parents of at-risk or out-of-control youth” (2). Fry and colleagues (2003) state the program targets parents who have children involved in drugs, alcohol use, violence, and/or poor attendance records in school. Specifically, the Parent Project[®] targets ways parents interact with and handle their children by providing strategies such as positive consequences to improve their relationships with their children (Fry et al., 2003). The program attempts to improve parental control and challenge parents to change the way they interact with their children. The Parent Project[®] focuses on behavior modification and the structured curriculum provides parents a supportive environment conducive to effective strategies and insight into predictable interventions that strengthen the child/parent relationship (Stolz 2010; Fry et al. 2003).

The main objectives of the Parent Project[®] include enhancing parenting skills related to connecting with youth and regulating youth behavior (Stolz 2010; Savaya & Waysman, 2005). These objectives go hand in hand with the theory of parental support and the argument that strong parental support has a significant correlation to decreasing antisocial behavior and increasing school success (Barber et al., 2005). Research suggests that high levels of parental behavioral control is one of the main supportive factors in implementing an effective intervention plan for parents (Barber et al, 2005). One of the main desired outcomes is to reduce youth antisocial behavior as well as improve school attendance and achievement. Structured around core beliefs, the Parent Project[®] provides parents with knowledge of practical applications and skills that improve child/parent relations and reach the desired outcomes of the youth (See Appendix A for the Parent Project[®] Logic Model).

Within the realm of practical applications, the group facilitators teach the parents the 5Ws, Spot Check, and Child’s List (Stolz, 2010; Fry et al., 2003). The parents are instructed to use the 5 Ws, “Who, What, When, Where, and Why” in relation to their child’s activities. Facilitators encourage parents to “spot check” their children during the week and report back to the group. Stolz (2010) defines a “spot check” as checking in on the adolescent to determine whether or not they are doing what they claim to be doing. Additionally, facilitators encourage parents to create a “Child’s List.” The Child’s List acts as an organizational tool listing activities the child enjoys and that can be used as rewards in response to positive behavior (Stolz, 2010).

The Parent Project[®] group for Fairfax County was held in four sections, one at the Fairfax Courthouse and three at outlying probation service units (North, East, South). Many of the parents came directly from work and the meetings were facilitated by two intake officers. Sixty-six parents attended the weekly class. Dinner was provided every week which seemed to be well received by the parents and decreased the stress of getting to the class right after work. The parents paid \$50 at the start of the program and if they successfully completed the

¹ For full coverage on the national resources, visit www.parentproject.com

program, they would get their money back. This method was also used as an incentive to get the parents to come back every week.

Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the parent group, facilitators requested parents complete a profile document as well as a pre- and post-group survey. The profile captured the parents' demographics which included race, sex, education level, and income level. The parents were also asked to describe their children and the relationship with those children. Sixty-two out of 66 parents completed the profile form. If a couple was married or co-parenting, both parties were asked to complete separate forms.

Researchers developed survey questions based on past Parent Project[®] group surveys found at the www.parentproject.com website as well as questions from surveys used by other local agencies implementing the Parent Project[®] (i.e. Fairfax County Public Schools) curriculum. The pre-group survey was handed out to the parents during the first meeting and parents completed the post-group survey the last day of the class or via email if they were unable to attend.

The pre-group survey addressed questions related to the relationship between the parent and child which included "how well do the parents know their children" and "I recognize my child for the good things he/she does." The post-group survey addressed the same questions and an analysis was completed to compare responses.

To assess whether or not parents felt they were more knowledgeable after finishing the Parent Project[®] class, mean scores for each question were compared. In addition, a paired t-test analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to test for statistically significant differences between scores. The paired t-test is structured to compare the responses to each question on the surveys and can determine whether parents experienced a change from the beginning of the class to the end of the class.

Findings

Demographics²

Sixty-two parents participated in the group and completed profile forms. Many parents were white (74%), female (74%); married (65%) and had an income level of more than \$100,000 (54%). Table 1 presents a summary of the demographics for the group participants.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants (N=62)		
	N	%
Gender		
Male	16	26%
Female	46	74%

² Not all parents responded to every question so N will not always equal the total number of participants.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants (N=62)			
	N	%	
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	3	5%	
Black	6	10%	
Hispanic	5	8%	
White	45	74%	
Other	2	3%	
Relationship Status			
Divorced	10	17%	
Married	39	65%	
Single	9	15%	
Widower	2	3%	
Income Level			
Under \$25,000	1	2%	
\$25,000-\$49,000	9	15%	
\$50,000-\$74,999	9	15%	
\$75,000-\$100,000	8	14%	
More than \$100,000	32	54%	

Parents were also asked to describe the child that brought them to the group (See Table 2). The majority of children were described as White (67%) and between the ages of 16 and 17 (54%) with an individualized education plan (IEP) (64%).

Table 2: Demographics of Child					
	N	%		N	%
Race/Ethnicity			Court Involved		
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	5%	Not Court Involved	9	17%
Black	8	14%	Met with Intake Officer	16	30%
Hispanic	6	10%	On Diversion	6	11%
White	39	67%	Waiting for Hearing	10	19%
Other	2	3%	On Probation	13	24%
Age			IEP		
12 & Under	1	2%	Yes	37	64%
13 to 15	16	32%	No	21	36%
16 to 17	22	44%			
18 & Older	11	22%			

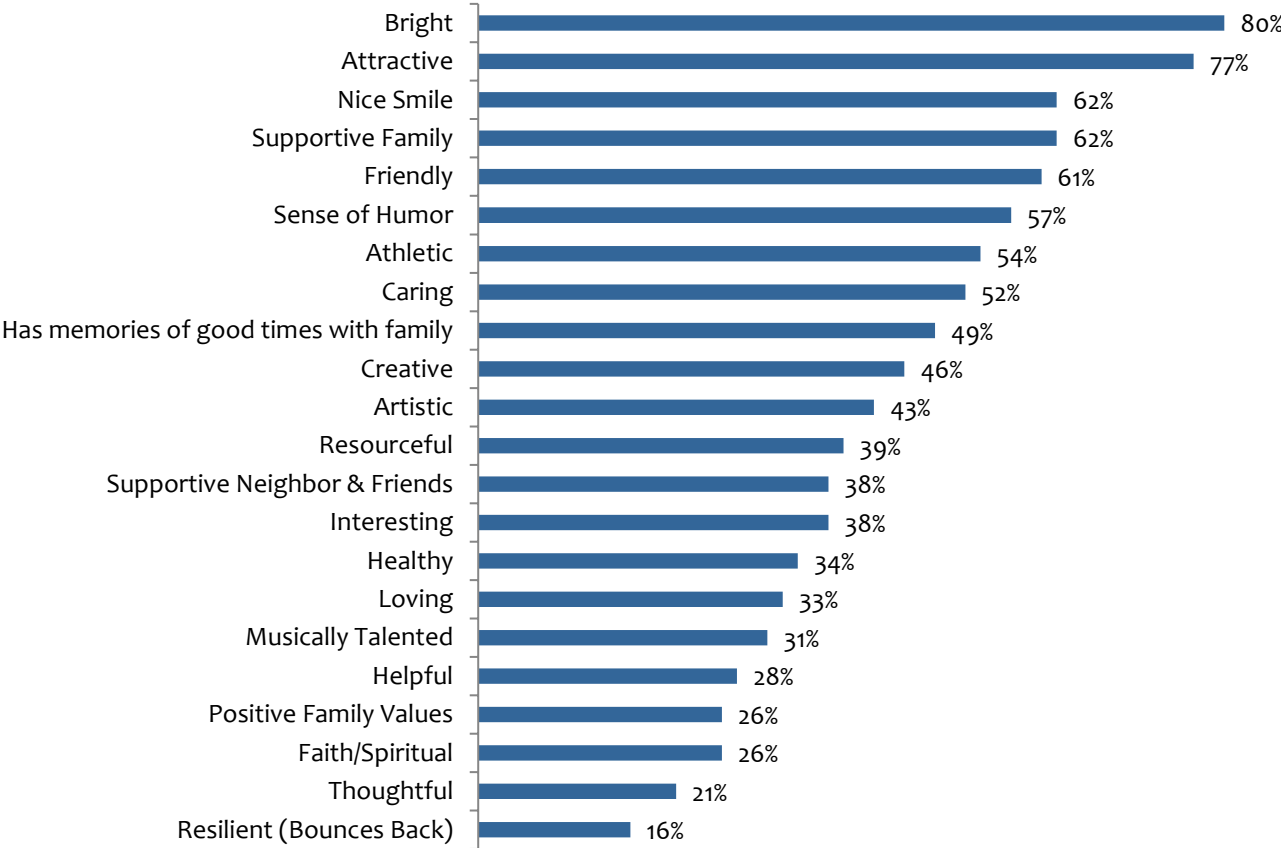
Parents were also asked if their child had a mental health diagnosis. Fifty-one percent of parents indicated their child had a diagnosis of ADHD and depression as well as several other diagnoses (see Table 3).

	N	%
ADHD	31	51%
Anxiety	25	41%
Depression	31	51%
Conduct Disorder	6	10%
Bipolar Disorder	10	16%
ODD	16	26%
PTSD	3	5%

Youth Characteristics

Parents were asked to select positive attributes exhibited by their child. Parents could select as many as they wanted. Figure 1 provides an overview of all the positive attributes parents selected to describe their child.

Figure 1: Postive Attributes of Youth



Parents were asked to identify behaviors their child engaged in over the past 6 months. Sixty-one percent of the parents revealed that their child has been depressed about 2-5 times and over 28 percent of parents recorded that their child had been depressed every day or often within the past six months. The majority of parents stated that every day or often, their child

talked back or argued with them (59%) and violated their house rules (60%). About 49 percent of the parents shared that their child disregarded their wishes either every day or very often in the past six months.

		Everyday	Often	2-5 times	Once	Never
Mental Health	Seems depressed	19%	9%	61%	4%	7%
	Has a Potential Eating Disorder	4%	4%	16%	2%	75%
	Made Suicide Threats	0%	0%	38%	21%	41%
	Made Suicide Attempts	0%	0%	4%	19%	77%
	Injures Self	0%	5%	13%	11%	71%
	Disregards Parents' Wishes	38%	11%	44%	4%	4%
Risky Behavior	"Talks back"/Argues	42%	17%	41%	0%	0%
	Violates House Rules	43%	17%	38%	2%	0%
	Threatened to Run Away	7%	4%	44%	15%	31%
	Physically Fights Parents	5%	2%	21%	22%	50%
	Has Used Alcohol/Drugs	6%	20%	39%	13%	22%
	Cruel or Sadistic with Siblings/Pets	4%	0%	16%	7%	73%
	Has Run Away from Home	5%	0%	24%	15%	56%
	Has Overdosed on Drugs	0%	0%	5%	14%	80%
Has Been Involved with a Gang	0%	0%	4%	0%	96%	
School	Has Discipline Problems at School	9%	7%	46%	19%	19%
	Skipped School	5%	13%	54%	7%	21%
	Suspended from School	0%	2%	35%	19%	44%
	Expelled from School	0%	0%	5%	16%	79%
Legal System	Has Been Stopped by Police	0%	7%	36%	13%	45%
	Has a Probation Officer	0%	21%	7%	21%	50%
	Has Gone Before an Intake Officer	2%	5%	25%	40%	28%
	Has Gone Before a Judge	0%	4%	24%	24%	49%
	Sent to Shelter Care or JDC	2%	4%	11%	23%	61%

Most of the parents (65%) stated that their child used alcohol at least two to five times in the past six months and 14 percent shared that their child overdosed on drugs at least once in the past six months. The majority of parents claimed their child had never overdosed on drugs (80%). Nearly all parents (96%) reported that their child had never been involved with a gang and reported that 45 percent of the children had never been stopped by police.

Pre- & Post-Group Survey Results

There were 27 questions asked on both the pre- and post-group surveys. The mean responses for all questions are provided in Table 5. All but one mean score increased between the pre- and post-group surveys indicating an increase in knowledge in almost all areas. Twenty-two of the 27 questions have statistically significant differences meaning that the program had an effect on the participants and the change in scores is more than just chance.

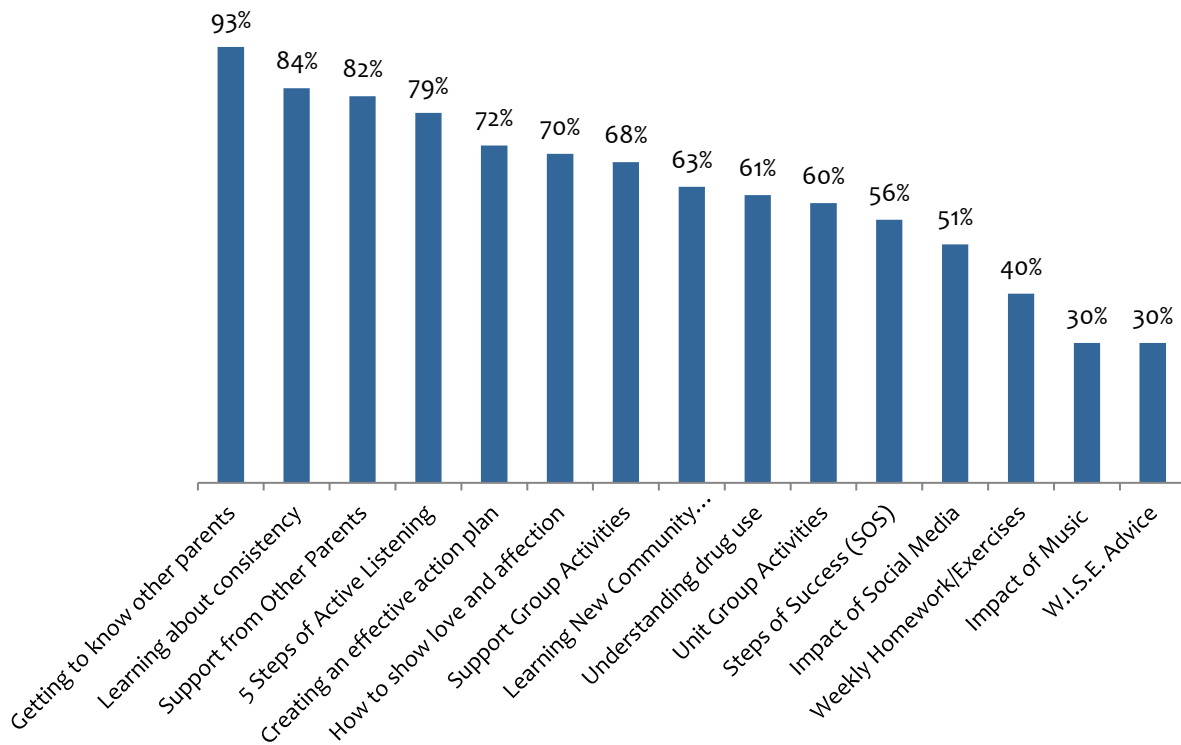
Survey Question	Pre	Post	
Q1. I know the difference between a compliant and a strong-willed child.	4.11	4.70	*
Q2. I understand why short-term consequences are more effective than long-term consequences for teenagers.	3.81	4.63	*
Q3. I am able to monitor my child's media consumption in a productive and healthy way.	2.45	3.25	*
Q4. I feel that it is important my child knows I love him or her.	4.66	4.90	*
Q5. I express love for my child in an obvious way every day.	3.79	4.14	*
Q6. I enjoy doing things with my child.	3.75	4.00	*
Q7. I recognize my child for the good things he/she does.	3.84	4.16	*
Q8. I use appropriate short-term consequences if my child needs to be corrected.	3.21	3.71	*
Q9. I reward my child for positive things he/she accomplishes.	3.64	4.00	*
Q10. I know how to address concerns with my child about his or her behavior.	2.91	3.88	*
Q11. I know how to talk to my child about romantic relationships.	3.19	3.77	*
Q12. I know how to speak to my child about a difficult subject.	3.38	3.90	*
Q13. It makes me feel better after talking over my worries with my child.	2.91	3.72	*
Q14. I am involved in my child's education.	3.1	4.24	*
Q15. I am able to monitor my child's homework completion.	2.63	3.27	*
Q16. I speak to my child about the importance of education.	4.66	4.62	
Q17. How well do you really know where your child goes at night?	3.64	3.75	
Q18. How well do you really know where your child is after school?	3.51	3.67	
Q19. How well do you really know what your child spends money on?	3.18	3.41	*
Q20. How well do you really know how your child spends his/her free time?	3.38	3.50	
Q21. How well do you really know who your child's friends are?	3.13	3.35	*
Q22. I know what physical signs to look for to detect drug or alcohol use.	3.36	4.98	
Q23. I know what to do if I believe my child is using drugs and/or alcohol.	3.09	4.24	*
Q24. I know what to do if I learn my child is involved with a gang.	2.49	4.04	*
Q25. I know what to do if I believe my child is hanging out with "bad" kids.	2.72	3.91	*
Q26. You have the support needed to be a good parent?	3.37	4.13	*
Q27. Confident in your parenting skills?	3.13	3.80	*

*Difference between means is statistically significant

Post-Group Findings & Comments

On the post-group survey, parents had the opportunity to share their thoughts about how they felt the group went and how well they were satisfied with the curriculum. Parents were given the opportunity to select activities they found most useful. Results are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Percent of Information Parents Found Most Helpful



Parents were encouraged to select all that apply and the majority of parents responded positively to getting to know other parents in the same situation with 93 percent of parents finding this the most useful part of the Parent Project®. The parents also thought that learning about consistency (84%) and having support from other parents (82%). Parents (79%) found the 5-steps of active listening activity and creating an effective action plan (72%) were useful as well.

In addition to endorsing activities they found useful, parents were asked to provide open-ended feedback about what they liked best. Fifty-four people provided responses, which further supported the endorsements noted above. The majority of parents specifically drew attention to liking the support of being around people going through same issues. For example, one parent said that the *“interaction with other parents going through the same thing and some of the different things they implemented”* was the best part. Other responses echoed this feeling, *“One on one with other parents,”* and *“Interaction with other parents going through the same thing and some of the different things they [facilitators] implemented.”*

In addition to being around other parents, many parents noted the *“caring facilitators who made themselves available outside of the meetings if needed”* as the best part. Parents appeared to value how facilitators ran the class and provided valuable insight, *“Effective moderators, case studies, real world discussion.”*

Finally, when asked what they liked best, a large number of parents highlighted learning about resources and other information. One parent noted, "*Learning about my child's actions and how I can show more love.*" Others stated, "*Learning new tools,*" "*Actionable advice,*" and "*Learning and sharing.*"

Overall parents appeared to have positive responses to the Parent Project® group with 100 percent sharing they felt they had learned new and useful information in this training. All parents stated they were very satisfied with the training and said the Parent Project® has been good for their family. Additionally, all parents said that the quality of the service provided by the staff was either good or excellent and all would recommend the program to other parents.

When asked what they would like to see change about the program, three main themes emerged: earlier intervention with the program, class days/times, and specific additions to the content. Forty-two people provided responses.

Earlier Intervention

As illustrated, all parents responded favorably towards the program and felt it had been beneficial. But when asked about potential changes to the program, five responders mentioned the program beginning earlier in youth's lives. One parent stated, "*Begin at 11-12 years old, teen [is] too late.*" Parents felt the program could greatly benefit kids at a younger age and be a strong preventative measure. For example, one person stated "*Offer to parents of younger kids and before court involvement.*"

Program Class Days/Times

Another area of change frequently mentioned by parents was the meeting days and times of the class. A few specifically noted a later start would have been helpful, "*Later start, even 6:30,*" and "*Was somewhat early for me, [the] 6PM start time.*" Other parents believed other days would be helpful, stating "*Hoping this session could be [at] the end of the week.*" Lastly, one parent wished the program was "*More widely available.*"

Content Additions

A few parents believed the program could benefit from specific content additions. One parent stated, "*Adding in a bit more about how a mental health diagnosis impacts any of these things.*" As parents indicated with the profile form, over half of their children had been diagnosed with depression, this is an area where more support is needed. In addition to mental health information, another parent noted it would be helpful if the program "*talk[ed] more about aggressive behavior.*" Finally, two parents mentioned they would like to see additional presentations, both live, "*Have someone come from a cell phone company or phone security consultant*" and video, "*Perhaps video presentation from founder and discussion versus slide by slide.*"

Finally, parents were asked "How important is it to provide dinner during future Parent Project classes?" nearly all (96%) of parents said it was either important or very important. Open-ended feedback further explained that the provided dinner was "*Very nice since we race from work,*" and helpful because "*Time is a crunch, also good socialization.*"

Discussion

The goal of this study was to evaluate The Parent Project® in terms of helping parents in the Fairfax County area. To date, two evaluations of the program have evaluated the effectiveness. Both Stolz et al. (2010) and Dumas et al. (2015) found evidence of improved parental practices and self-efficacy. The current evaluation expands on previous literature by highlighting parents of court-involved youth, with 83% of participating parents reporting their child had been involved with the court in some capacity.

Throughout this ten-week course, parents responded positively to the new ideas and information presented by the facilitators. Many found a support system with other parents who were going through similar situations. In fact, getting to know other parents was the top endorsed element.

The data from the pre- and post-group analysis suggests the program improved parental knowledge in areas such as knowing how to speak to their child about difficult topics and monitoring their behavior. The greatest improvements occurred with "I know what to do if I believe my child is hanging out with 'bad' kids," "I know what to do if I learn my child is involved with a gang," and "I know what physical signs to look for to detect drug or alcohol use." The latter is especially encouraging as research shows increased parental monitoring (Luther & Goldstein, 2008) correlates to decreases in alcohol use, which can decrease the likelihood of engaging in risky behavior such as delinquent acts (Goldberg, Halpern-Felsehr, & Millstein, 2002).

Parents appeared enthusiastic and supportive of the Parent Project® during the final class and 100 percent of the parents claimed they would recommend this program to other parents. Parents also stated that they strongly wished this program was widely available to all parents.

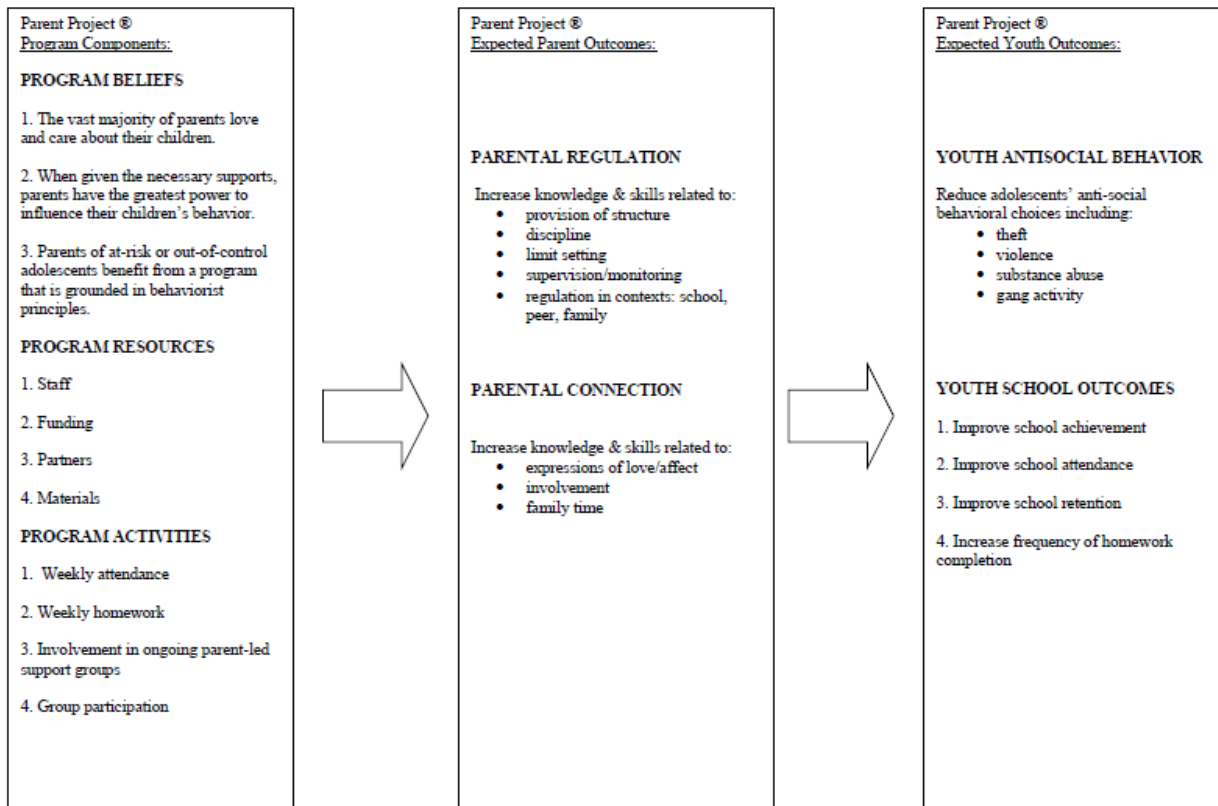
While the program appears positive and influential, nearly three-quarters (74%) of participants were White and 54% of participants stated their household income was over \$100,000. This limits the ability to generalize conclusions to the Fairfax community at large. This demographic limitation has been present in other evaluations of The Parent Project (Dumas et al., 2015). Future evaluations should evaluate the program with a more diverse sample to obtain a more complete picture of the program's potential impact.

In conclusion, this evaluation furthers the promising research on the efficacy of The Parent Project® by working with mostly court-involved families. Due to the overwhelming positive response and feedback, the program may prove to be a valuable tool for parents struggling to engage with their children and monitor behavior.

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Appendix A: Parent Project® Logic Model (Stolz 2010)





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