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CI 893

Instructional Leadership:

Professionalism and Collaboration

February 24, 2016

Parent Involvement Reflection

Parent involvement is an integral part of a child's educational process. Because of this, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has developed 10 “truths” about parents. These truths help create a firm partnership between schools and families. This paper is a reflection on these statements.

**1. All parents have hopes and goals for their children.**

Last night I was speaking with a lady who attends the FAST program with her two grandsons. We were discussing her upcoming move to Colorado. She is leaving this town she has called “home” for many years to go live with her daughter. While speaking with her, I noticed her eyes. They had a sad gleam in them, but also contentment. She told me that all she wanted in this life was for her kids and grandkids to be happy. At that moment, Joyce had never looked more beautiful. Her hopes and dreams for her children were coming to fruition, and she was helping with that process. You could see it in her eyes how happy she was at that moment, even though she was sad to be leaving her home.

No matter what their station in life, parents want better for their children. I could see this in Joyce's face last night, and I see it in so many other parents I come into contact with. The exception to this statement, however, would be those parents who abuse and neglect their children. Too many kids are being treated poorly in their homes. The parents of these children cannot possibly have hopes and goals for their children, unless it is to get rid of them, which is more of a selfish hope for themselves.

**2. Parents differ in their abilities and/or resources to help their children reach those goals.**

Parents of lower economic status have fewer resources in which to help their children reach their goals. They usually have less life experiences to glean from, and they have had less opportunities in life to be successful. Some of these parents have experienced abuse from their parents, which has shown them a wrong form of parenting and hindered their ability to have confidence in changing the course of their lives for the better.

**3. The parent is the central contributor to a child's education.**

The parent is the first “teacher” a child will ever receive. Learning begins at an early age. I believe children can begin to learn right from wrong as early as six months old. For example, when a child is around the age of six months, he may discover his mom's glasses. He reaches for them and pulls them off her face. If the mother allows the child to continue that action with no repercussion, the child learns it is okay to continue that behavior. If, however, the mom reprimands the child and does not allow him to continue, he will learn that behavior is not acceptable.

Parents continue to contribute to their children's education through the toddler years, preschool years, up through high school, and even into young adulthood. I believe even now I am indirectly receiving an education from my parents.

**4. Parent involvement must be seen as a legitimate element of education and deserves equal emphasis with elements such as school improvement and evaluation.**

I believe if parents are involved in a child's education, the child is more likely to succeed. If the child does not have the support of his parents, he will not be motivated to do as well in school. I think that without parental support in the home, students will not be encouraged to do their homework. Parents can also help a child learn to respect their teachers, which will benefit the child, educator, and other students in his class.

**5. Parent involvement is an ongoing process, not a series of events.**

A child will be with his parents throughout his entire school career. Teachers, however, change yearly. Because of this, the process must be ongoing.

**6. Parent involvement requires a shared vision, policy, and framework for planning programs and practices that are connected to student learning.**

If parents are not invested in the process and do not believe in the vision of the school, they will not be motivated to participate in the programs. If, however, they support the vision and are sold out for what the school is doing, they will want to be involved and will even push for more involvement.

**7. Many barriers to parent involvement are found within school practices, attitudes, and assumptions.**

I think sometimes teachers feel parents will just get in the way if they are involved with the school. Teachers are also afraid the parents will overstep their bounds and “tell them how to do their job” or “give students the answers.” Because of this, parents are not invited to be a part of the classroom. This may be the case, but that is why these programs are necessary. Parents need to be taught how to be involved so they can be seen as an asset to the teacher, not a hindrance.

**8. Successful parent involvement programs help families guide their children's learning from preschool through high school.**

As mentioned above, parents are a part of their children's lives for their entire school career. They need to be the motivators, the ones pushing their children to do their best and apply themselves. With the school's help, they can better know how to encourage their children. The programs schools offer should not only benefit the school, but also the family as a whole.

**9. Families from diverse backgrounds have their own set of norms and experiences that often influence their relationship with schools.**

Different cultures have different views of the value of education. The same goes for families with differing economic statuses. From my experience, for example, when I taught in Garden City, the people there, predominately Mexican in my school, placed a high value on their children receiving a quality education. In my current town, however, many of the lower income families just want someone to take care of their children during the day. Because of these differing values, these families view the school and its purpose very differently.

**10. Parents are more likely to become involved when**

* **They understand that they *should* be involved.**
* **They feel *capable* of making a contribution.**
* **They feel *invited* by the school and their children.**

I think a lot of the problem with parents today is that they simply do not know any better. Their decisions and willingness to be involved in the school are made out of ignorance. If the school can educate these parents on the importance of their involvement, the parents will be more likely to want to be a part of their child's learning process.

In conclusion, I believe the PTA has hit the nail on the head with these 10 truths. Parents today need to be taught how to be involved with their child's education. Building a good rapport with them, making them feel wanted, and guiding them in this process will benefit the school, the family, and most importantly, the child.