Parent’s Involvement: The Missing Link?

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Parental Involvement: The Missing Link?

I am a strong believer that parents should be involved in their children’s education. In WRA 135: Public Life In America, we go to Averill Elementary School once a week as a class and give third graders one-on-one help with writing. I am also in TE 250 and go to Pattengill Middle School once a week and tutor a small group of sixth grade students for an hour, and observe out of the classroom for an additional hour. Even though I am only with these children once a week, I have a pretty good idea of whose parents are involved in their child’s education and whose are not. “Parent involvement in their child’s education is proven to produce higher grades, test scores, graduation rates, better attendance, increased motivation, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol, and fewer instances of violent behavior” (Michigan Department of Education). Parental involvement is the contributing factor to many children’s education in regards to their attendance, discipline and determination towards school.

I agree that parental involvement dramatically effects a child’s education in a positive manner. I observe students at Pattengill and Averill that are examples of this. At Averill, you can tell which students have parents that are involved in their education, who provide help when needed, and who teach the importance of learning, good behavior, and hard work.

Being involved in their children’s education can range from attending parent teacher conferences, being a member of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), or helping their student with homework. All of these different ways that parents can be involved are important and very beneficial to their child’s education. “Research shows students achieve more in school when their parents are engaged in their education” (White). Many times it is hard for working parents to be involved in the Parent Teacher Organizations or volunteer at school because they cannot afford to take off work. Talking to their children during dinner about their day, controlling how
much TV they watch, making them do educational activities after school, and/or frequently emailing their teacher to see how they are doing is beneficial! Parents must understand that they are their children’s first and best teacher and they need to make time for their children and be involved. Any involvement is better than no involvement at all.

Some people think teachers are the only ingredient to a child’s success, but what these people are missing is the parent is actually the most important part in that success. Children’s parents or guardians are the ones that are with them for the majority of the time. “School age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and holidays) outside of school” (Michigan Department of Education). Compare that with the six to seven hours a day the children spend at school with their teachers. Parents are likely to be role models for their children because they are the people with whom they spend most of their time. “Parents are the most important partner in a child's education and schools can reap large dividends by capitalizing on their support” (McDermott, and Rothenberg). There are many benefits to being involved in your child’s life. “When parents are involved in their child’s life they are less likely to use drugs and alcohol and to be depressed” (Michigan Department of Education). This statistic should be enough for them to get involved in their children’s education!

Statistics show that parental involvement in urban children’s education is dramatically lower than that of suburban children.

The data revealed that teachers are frustrated with a lack of parental involvement in literacy activities at home and at school. Parents, however, expressed distrust toward the local elementary school because they felt the faculty has been biased against African American and Latino children and their families. Consequently, the parents said they deliberately decided not to participate in school activities (McDermott, and Rothenberg).
If the parents didn’t have parental involvement in their education and/or had a negative schooling experience they frequently don’t know how to be involved in their child’s education. This unfortunately becomes a dangerous cycle because their children are less likely to do well in school without their support. “Low-income families often perceive themselves as outside the school system and feel it is the school's responsibility to do the teaching” (McDermott, and Rothenberg). Whether or not the parents are involved in their child’s education isn’t all the parents’ fault. Some schools invite the involvement of parents stronger than others. It is a lot easier for parents to become involved if schools plan specific activities that involve the parents and frequently try to communicate with them. In many cases the schools automatically think that they aren’t going to have any parental interest and don’t try to plan activities involving them.

The schools are taking away from the children’s education if they are not planning activities trying to involve the parents. It is the school’s responsibility to make the parents of the children feel welcomed and appreciated. The goal is to make the school and the families in it like a community so that learning is going on both at the school and at home. “Another reason why low-income urban parents resist involvement in school activities is because of the cultural and communication differences between teacher and families” (McDermott, and Rothenberg).

Unfortunately, low-income urban children have less parental involvement in their lives when they are the ones that need it the most.

Suburban schools with upper class families see more involvement from parents in their children’s education because “middle class families feel that they should collaborate with school efforts” (McDermott, and Rothenberg). Middle class families can usually communicate much better with teachers than urban families because they are a lot like each other. Teaching is considered a middle class job and there usually isn’t cultural and communication differences
between middle class parents and teachers.

One example of this at Averill is a girl that said her parents read to her all of the time and that she has tons of books at home. This girl can write better, read better, and is more determined to get work done than the kids without the parental involvement. When asked to write her own story she immediately started writing and didn’t finish until the time was up. She was determined to write as much as she could. She even wrote a story at home and brought it to show us the next week. Compare this to another girl that always talks about movies that she watched at home and says her mom works a lot. She cannot read or write as well, and isn’t very determined to get work done. When she was asked to write the first story she was very hesitant on what to write about. She misspelled a lot of words and didn’t have the urge to write very much, she was content with half a page. One of the reasons that their isn’t much parental involvement in her education may be because she only lives with her mom and her mom has to work a lot of hours to support them financially; therefore, she does not have a lot of time to focus on supporting her daughter in her education. Not having the parental involvement in her life is one of the reasons that she doesn’t perform as well in school.

This is also the case at Pattengill. The difference at Pattengill is that a majority of the students there live in one parent households, with extended family members, or in foster homes. This can make the chance of them having parental involved in their education slim. I work with a certain group of students when I am at Pattengill and a couple of the girls in the group don’t listen when directions are given, it is like they are in their own worlds. Their teacher will tell the kids to go get a book, their folder, and begin working on a certain page and the girls will just sit there conversing with each other. They have to be specifically told one by one before they will actually listen. The reasons these girls don’t respect the teacher is probably because they don’t
have positive authority figures at home to respect. When the girls actually try to begin the assignment they are always asking me what the answer is and not wanting to actually learn it. It shows that their parents are not involved because their behavior is poor and the determination to learn in school just isn’t there.

Another example from my group at Pattengill is a boy that gets suspended frequently for fighting. This made me think that his parents are probably not very involved in his life. If he had more positive parental involvement in his life his behavior would improve. It was revealed to me that this boy lives with his elderly grandmother that doesn’t have any rules in the house because she cannot enforce them. This might explain why he never does any of his work. The reason that he doesn’t put in much effort is because he has never had to follow any rules or put in any effort because there are no consequences at home if he doesn’t. As a result, he doesn’t do well in school, but he seems to think, that it is because he is dumb. When I tell him what he is supposed to do he will make a little bit of an effort but it is not high quality work. He just scribbles down some writing that is barely legible and calls it good. He doesn’t take pride in producing good work. In other words, he couldn’t care less. If he had a positive parental influence, and encouragement, he would be more willing to try his best because he knows he will be rewarded.

Attendance is a big problem at Pattengill. A lot of students there live with people that allow them to stay home whenever they want and another large amount of students decide to just skip school behind their guardians backs. I observe the office secretaries for one hour each week at Pattengill for my Teaching Education class. They have tons of parents calling their children in sick, but sometimes they wonder if they are actually sick, if they just wanted to stay home, or if the parental guardians didn’t want to or couldn’t take them to school. There are also a lot of
instances where a teacher will call to tell the office that a certain student is never here and ask for the security guards to look for them. Children might think that they don’t, but the teachers realize when the child is absent for their class, but comes later in the day. When the teachers notice that students are repeatedly truant, they try to change this with the help of the parents, but when the parental influences that the children have at home aren’t willing to help; there isn’t much they can do. The kids don’t understand that when they are home, they aren’t learning and are missing valuable lessons that will help them later on in their education. The kids need to understand how important school really is and the effects of them being absent.

As I was researching my topic I came across ways that schools are trying to improve parent involvement. One idea I came across was one that Terry Ehrich came up with. He wanted to come up with a better way to begin the school year that was kind of like a holiday that would welcome parents, get them involved, and keep them involved. “He created the First Day Foundation to help schools organize their own First Day of School Holiday. Educators who start the year by inviting parents to participate in First Day activities report substantial increases in parental involvement during the year, Ehrich said” (Dunne). North Bennington Graded School in North Bennington, Vermont, is one of the schools that participate in the First Day of School Holiday. The children make signs and posters with their parents at the beginning of the day, have a parade through town, and then end the day with a picnic. This is a great idea to get parents involved. The school says that they estimate that eighty to ninety percent of parents participate. Eighty to ninety percent is an extremely high percentage and it is great that this many parents are involved! If parents feel welcomed and feel like they are appreciated for being involved from the beginning, they are more likely to continue. The only problem with this is that many parents work and they can’t take off work to go to their child’s first day of school.
Employers need to do what Ehrich is doing, which is giving his employees two days off with pay so that they can go to their children’s schools and volunteer. Realistically, this is never going to happen. All companies are not going to give their employees two days off whenever they want to go to their children’s school, but it is a good idea (Dunne).

The statistics of parents that attend school functions are staggering. “Most or all parents attend school open house events in 72 percent of schools that have a low concentration of poverty compared with only 28 percent of schools with a high poverty concentration” (Dunne). The statistics for schools with high and low minority concentrations shows as well.

Schools with high minority enrollments also tend to have low parent attendance at school functions: About 30 percent of schools with high minority concentrations report most or all parents attend school functions, compared with about 63 percent of schools with low minority enrollments (Dunne).

Parental involvement in children’s education is important for all ages, whether they are a third grader, sixth grader, or even in high school. For many children parental involvement is the missing link to their educational success. If a parent is involved from an early age and makes education a positive experience for them, then they are at a greater chance of wanting to learn. On the contrary, if a parent is not involved in a child’s education and doesn’t make learning a positive experience, there is a high chance that they will develop negative feelings towards wanting to excel, which could eventually lead to them giving up. As Jane D. Hull said, “At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents” (Hull).
References


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