

Parents' Engagement in Their Child's Education Is Important

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Years ago, many of us who were active PTA members and officers in our schools and at the council and state district level were excited to hear that schools would be required to report their efforts to engage parents in their children's education. When the report cards first appeared we were very disappointed to find no mention of any facts other than test scores.

Every study ever undertaken has found that parent involvement in a student's education directly affects academic achievement. Parents reading with their children, overseeing homework, looking through all the papers in the backpack, and asking about what happened in school today say to their children that school is important and worthwhile.

Here I am, quite a few years later, serving as the State Board of Education representative on the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council. This dedicated group of volunteers, parents from all over the state, took time off from work to drive to Columbus to spend a day discussing parent involvement/engagement. Which term is best? What does it mean? How can schools ask parents to come to school? What must school administrators and teachers do to assure parents can be involved at many levels in the school and their children's education?

Why is this discussion taking place? Dr. Susan Tave Zelman, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, has asked this advisory council to help draft a state parent involvement policy to be adopted by the State Board of Education in 2007.

All the questions and discussion over what can be required of schools, what must be left to local control, what parents can be expected to do and how we change attitudes reminded me again of the hope we PTA parents felt all those years ago when we thought parent involvement was going to be considered important enough to require that the efforts be reported.

Some parents were plainly frustrated that their schools made it difficult to be involved; offering only daytime conferences, never returning phone calls, refusing to discuss school wide problems with groups of concerned parents. Other parents expressed dismay over parents' refusal to get their children to school on time, or at all, their neglect of keeping the school notified of the correct home phone number, and parents' disdain for school rules and requirements. Can it all be balanced? Can we write a policy that will help create a partnership between home and school that will meet our students' needs?

The efforts to define terms, recognize mandates and any costs they add to school budgets, and to balance the need for parent involvement to raise academic achievement with busy families, the demands on teachers, and the needs of children has just begun. It is a difficult and complex effort that will take more e-mails and meetings to develop. Won't it be interesting to see what the final recommendation is?

The Federal No Child Left Behind law will require significant involvement of parents if all children are going to be at least proficient. It is so important that families and schools work together to help all students achieve success in school. I am pleased to be a part of the effort in Ohio.

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