

Involved parents: The Hidden Resource in Their Children's Education

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Although parents conscientiously send their children off to school every day and expect them to do well, they can add an important extra ingredient that will boost their children's success. Parent participation is the ingredient that makes the difference. Parents' active involvement with their child's education at home and in school brings great rewards and has a significant impact on their children's lives. According to research studies, the children of involved parents:

- are absent less frequently
- behave better
- do better academically from pre-school through high school
- go farther in school
- go to better schools

Research also shows that a home environment that encourages learning is even more important than parents' income, education level, or cultural background. By actively participating in their child's education at home and in school, parents send some critical messages to their child; they're demonstrating their interest in his/her activities and reinforcing the idea that school is important.

Becoming involved—laying the groundwork in the elementary school years

The reality is that some parents have more time than others to become involved, but it's important for even very busy parents to examine their priorities and carve out some time, even if it's brief. Some schools are working out more flexible schedules so that working parents have more options. The National Education Association recommends some specific ways for parents to become more involved in their child's education.

At home:

- Read to your child—reading aloud is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success
- Discuss the books and stories you read to your child
- Help your child organize his/her time
- Limit television viewing on school nights
- Talk to your child regularly about what's going on in school
- Check homework every night

At school: Meet with a teacher or other school staff member to determine where, when and how help is needed and where your interests fit in. Volunteer time. Parents can:

- Be a classroom helper
- Tutor or read with individual children
- Assist children with special needs
- Help in special labs, such as computer or science
- Plan and work in fundraising
- Plan and accompany classes on field trips
- Assist coaches at sporting events
- Help out with arts and crafts workshops
- Assist with a special interest club or drama group
- Speak to classes about your career or special expertise
- Help write press releases, local news articles
- Work as library assistant; help with story time

The possibilities are endless.

- Vote in school board elections - know what the candidates stand for
- Participate in parent-teacher associations and school decisions
- Help your school set challenging academic standards
- Become an advocate for better education in your community and province.

Staying involved – the middle and high school years

In adolescence children become more independent and usually don't want their parents in school. In middle and high school students have to deal with more courses and more teachers in a more impersonal way, so parent involvement, although less direct, is still critical. Parents can participate in events at school, monitor homework, provide experiences and materials that supplement course work, and help children with organizational strategies. Parents can influence

their children's academic progress by encouragement, reinforcement and modeling. Children learn from their parents' own learning style and activities such as discussions, newspapers and other reading materials, television habits and other quests for information and knowledge.

How parent involvement pays off

When parents contribute effort and time, they have the opportunity to interact with teachers, administrators and other parents. They can learn first-hand about the daily activities and the social culture of the school, both of which help them understand what their child's school is like.

The child and the school both benefit, and parents serve as role models as they demonstrate the importance of community participation. In addition to improving academic progress, parent involvement pays off in other significant ways. Numerous studies have shown that parent involvement is a protective factor against adolescent tobacco use, depression, eating disorders, academic achievement, and other problems. By staying involved with their child and teenager, parents can be a source of support, create a climate for discussing tough issues and serve as a role model for responsible and empathic behavior.

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