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Individual Leadership Project

How Can I motivate parents to become more involved with their children’s education?

In today’s society, education is becoming more divers and more complex fewer of our students (and our teachers) fitting into traditional monolingual monocultural school molds (Panferov p. 112). In other words, there is no one language being spoken in our schools and no single culture that creates schools’ atmosphere. The diversity creates many factors or barriers that inhibit adequate yearly growth that is being strictly monitored in schools, due to No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers are being challenged not only to support their students in making the adequate growth that is mandated by the public education school system, but also faces challenges in closing the gaps that that students lack in order to be up to par with the states’ education standards.

 The school that I am currently teaching for undergoes that criticism and ridicule, due to not making yearly adequate growth. We have a huge diverse population both culturally and economically. One of many issues we face at my school is the lack of parent involvement. It is a huge belief amongst educators that increased parent involvement can improve students achievement and, subsequently, the importance of parent support has been emphasized in discussions about the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and middle-class children (Drummond & Stipek p. 197). This belief has been a constant complaint of mine because it is one of the issues that are impeding my students’ growth. It is constantly on my mind that only if parents provided assistance and positive feedback to their child’s learning experience. I feel parent involvement is a major gap that prevents my students to academically and behaviorally succeed in the classroom.

 As a result I decided to further research this issue of parent involvement. I researched ten articles that provided efficient amount of facts that helped me further understand the barriers many of my families face and the reasons for lack of parent involvement. I also gathered strategies that can assist me and other teachers to help fill in this gap to help benefit our students.

 In the article Low-Income Parents’ Beliefs about Their Role in Children’s Academic Learning, it conducted telephone interviews or home visits to 234 low-income African-American, Caucasian, and Latino parents. Parents rated the importance of helping their second and third grade children in reading, math, and homework of knowing what their children are learning (Drummond & Stipek p. 178). Parents were also questioned whether they had taught their child in math and reading and read with their child in the past week (Drummon & Stipek p. 178). “They also answered open-ended questions about the type of help they deemed appropriate (Drummond & Stipek p. 178).”

 Drummond and Stipek found that parents did not rate the importance of involvement the same in all four areas: math, homework, reading, and knowing what the child is learning. The ratings for math and reading were not significantly different in the second grade, but in the third grade there was a significant difference between reading and math. Reading was taught more by parents verses math. The reason for the significant difference between reading and math in third grade is because parents are reluctant to help, due to the inability of knowing the material or their children do not ask for their help. Based on children’s achievement, the lower the achievement level of a student in reading; the higher the parents rated the importance of helping them learn to read (Drummond & Stipek p. 204). Parents also rated the importance of involvement higher when a teacher recommended that they help (Drummond & Stipek p. 205). Some parents stated that that their insufficiency in providing help was because they felt their child knows more about reading than they do, and as mentioned before, in math the parents may have never learned the material or know their child’s math curriculum. Some parents also commented that they feel their child needs to do their work on their own, or their child never requests for help. Parents offered suggestions that they should start taking the initiative by meeting with their child’s teacher and obtaining the information from the teacher, they can find out directly from their child, or look through their child’s homework.

 Overall, the article found that the majority of parents value the involvement in their children’s learning. It is important that schools help assist their parents to act on their beliefs of the importance of facilitating their children’s success in school. “Findings suggest that even a difference of one grade can affect parent perceptions about involvement and that teachers may need to be more encouraging and explicit about involving parents as children advance through the grades (Drummond & Stripek p. 209).” Also the growth of self-sufficiency that teachers promote or desired by children may also contribute to the decline (Drummond & Stripek p. 209). Lastly, the low education level of many parents inhibits their willingness or ability to help their children. Parents reported that if teachers advise them on how to help their children in reading and math, they would do more if shown effective learning activities to conduct at home (Drummond & Stripek p. 210). It is important that teachers and schools are explicit and consistent when providing parents information to help their children who are low achieving.

 In my next article, Homelessness, Poverty, and Children’s Literacy Development, researched the affects homelessness on children’s academic development. Since many of my students were affected by the recent tornado, they have had huge changes in their home lives. Some families are now considered homeless and are living in hotels. In order to support the students and their parents’ involvement with their education, it was suggested that teachers provide materials that can go home and stay at home. A school in the Bronx, New York provides one-to-one tutoring, homework assistance and theme-based educational activities to fast-track student learning (Walker-Dalhouse p. 85). They also encourages parent involvement through learning contracts, participation in family literacy workshops, field trips, and staff support to attend parent-teacher conferences (Walk-Dalhouse p. 85). “Inviting parents to create self-portraits that reflect their assets, needs, and successes or to keep reflective journals to share during conferences can support educational partnership, build parent confidence and competence in helping their children, and foster ongoing communication (Walk-Dalhouse p. 85).

 The article Increasing ELL Parental Involvement in Our Schools: Learning from the Parents, compared two parents by their experiences with schools, their personal view of literacy, and how the home environment might support school literacy and academic success (Panferow p. 106). The Pavlov family immigrated from Russia. Both parents are well educated. The father worked as an accountant in Russia, and the mother taught Russian literature in middle school. They moved to an area in the United States that consist of a community that speaks Russian. The family speaks Russian at home and with their circle of friends. Their children have separate rooms and have a desk in their rooms to use to complete their homework. The Omar family immigrated from Somalia. The mother has secondary education and had worked in a financial department for the government (Panferow p. 107). The family lived in a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to the United States. The Omar’s, like the Pavlov’s, live in a community that speak Somali. They live in a small two-level apartment in a housing project. The children do not have desks, but rather study at the kitchen table or in the living room sprawled across couches in the middle of commotion of the household (Panferow p. 108).

 The Pavlov’s experienced success with their children’s academic success due to their involvement and creating a structured and positive learning environment at their home, as for the Omar’s, their mother did not experience much success due to her lack of English proficiency and the chaos within her home. Therefore, the home school gap can develop when school learning is not reinforced at home (Panferow p. 109). The barriers the Omar children face in their school success are due to the limit access to books and technology, structured study time, and regular reading and writing exposure (Panferow p. 109). “It is important that families’ homes should specifically be supportive for developing second language literacy skills, reading and writing exposure in the home is crucial, as building literacy in the home, in turn, supports school literacy, which is essential to academic success (Panferow p. 109).” There was a significant difference between the Pavlov and Omar’s school communication and involvement. The Pavlov’s would constantly receive positive feedback from their children’s teachers, as for the Omar’s it was constantly negative either towards academic performance or behavior.

 In all, the article suggested that schools that successfully help ELL parents navigate challenges offer both two-way communications and parental guidance for effecting positive home support of school pursuits (Panferow p. 111). It is important to mix the negatives and the positives of the students when communicating with parents, and in particular communicate in the parents’ first language. Creating an interview with the parents to find the best modes of communication for them can be helpful. It also was suggested pairing up a new parent with a buddy parent to help guide them with the communication systems. Teachers can educate the parents on how to help their children academically. “Lastly, as teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators, learning the stories of our ELL students and their parents will increase parental involvement and enrich the educational experience for all (Panferow p. 112).”

 Welcoming Schools: Small Changes that can make a Big Difference, gave efficient insight on how to make the school community welcoming to all families. A classroom teacher creates a sign that welcomes her visitors in four languages, which creates a welcoming feeling for her parents. “When families feel welcomed in schools and participate actively in children’s education, children’s attendance, interest, motivation, general achievement, and reading achievement improve (Padak & Rasinski p. 294).” In order for families to become actively involved in their children’s school, they must feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what their children are doing in school (Padak & Rasinski p. 294). Communication best be effectively administered between teachers and parents. The article provided examples of how to create a welcoming atmosphere to parents. The examples will be included with on my overall procedure on creating effective parent involvement.

 It is evident that teachers must create a learning environment that is both welcoming and positive for students and their parents. The classrooms are now linguistically and culturally diverse. In order for teachers to meet the needs of all their teachers, parent involvement is one of the pieces that helps create schools success for their students. My plan is to take my research and present it to my faculty. Many of us are subjected in creating a negative attitude to our parents’ and their view of their children’s education. Based on my research, it is evident that low-income parents value education as a route to economic and social mobility (Drummond & Stipek p. 198). The judgment my colleagues and I have towards many of our parents caring about their children’s education is most likely false.

 Therefore, I am going to challenge myself and my colleagues to consider taking action and follow some techniques that can help close the gap between parent involvement and their children’s academic growth. The techniques I am going to consider are: to take the time be in depth with parents on what they are doing at home to help their children academically and reinforce parents’ interest in helping their child, become consistent and committed in communicating with parents about children’s learning incorporate positives along with negatives, send home detailed newsletters that describes what is going to be covered in class and how parents can help their children master the material, give directions to parents or meet with parents on how to model strategies for children, explain to parents the difference between assisting their child in completing work and telling their child the answers, and send home materials such as games so parents can play with their children.

 School wide, I would like to create book clubs and math clubs that involve children and parents can enable school personnel to encourage and model practices that parents can use in the home and at club meetings (Drummond & Stripek p. 211). I would like to create a questionnaire to find out what parents need to know to be involved more actively in their children’s learning. I feel that parents are waiting for the push of putting their beliefs in their children’s education into practice. Creating a welcoming environment where parents feel comfortable enough to share their struggles and their hopes for their children’s future can help aid in creating more active parent involvement. Teachers should build more of a friendship with parents. Based on my experiences, when I create a friendship and trusting relationship with my parents the success of their children’s academics and behavior improve tremendously. School and home is a team. It is important as a school community to create a strong team that will help enable stronger success in their children. Using the techniques I have mentioned, is one start in creating a strong team. Overall, I am intrigued and motivating in putting forth my researched techniques and find the impacts it has on creating a parent involved community.

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