

Taking a Closer Look: My Child's Academic Success

By: U.S. Department of Education

Work with your child's teacher and school to keep the lines of communication open.

Partner with the teacher to enhance the academic success and social well being of your child. Attend parent-teacher meetings and stay informed about your child's academic progress. Discuss with your child's teacher what you can do at home to help your child. Go on field trips with your child's class and volunteer to help the teacher in the classroom, on the playground or at special events.

Talk with your child daily about school. Ask your child what he or she learned that day. Ask how the day went, and ask about your child's friends. Review your child's homework each evening, and consult homework Web sites if available. Be sure that your child completes all of his or her assignments.

Be a positive voice for your child

Remember, teachers, principals and others who work for the school are there to help you. Be a voice for your child. That is your right. Also, work with the school to make sure your child's needs are being met. Becoming a voice for your child makes you an advocate.

As a parent, you are the advocate who speaks out for your child and the one who supports your child, not just financially but also emotionally, socially and academically.

Who knows your child better than you do? The teacher may know many things about your son or daughter, but the things that happen at home or have happened in your child's life, only you know. You can voice your concerns and your dreams for your child. You are the adult best able to help your child succeed. By so doing, you become your

child's strongest supporter.

Under federal law, you have certain rights related to information that the school has about your child. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the school must notify parents each year that they are allowed to see their children's education records; they can seek to change inaccurate information in the records; and they must provide consent for the school to disclose personally identifiable information from their children's education records, except under certain circumstances. For more information about FERPA, see "Examples of Resources."

If a problem comes up

If your child is having some problems with schoolwork, talk to him or her about the problem. Talk to the teacher, too. Meet with the teacher at a time that is convenient for you, the teacher and the school principal or vice principal. You may want to write a note, send an e-mail, telephone or visit the school in person to make an appointment. When you contact the school, explain to the staff person that you want to make an appointment to see the teacher, and thank the person for his or her help.

Be prepared for the meeting. Write down your notes and questions ahead of time. Discuss with the teacher what he or she can do to help. Ask how you may assist in helping your child. Remember to ask the teacher where you might get additional resources. Take careful notes. After the meeting, be sure to explain to your child what he or she may need to do to improve the situation or take advantage of help that is available. Check with the teacher in a few days to see if the situation has changed.

Here are some questions to consider when trying to solve a problem with your child.

Help for you

- Have you attended parent-teacher conferences at school?
- What is the best time to go to the school?
- What is the best way to approach a particular teacher or principal?

Help for a social problem

- What seems to be wrong with your child?

- Is your child disruptive in class?
- Has a situation come up at home or at school that is a problem for your child?
- Is the teacher aware of the problem or situation?
- Is the teacher aware of the needs of your child?
- Is your child afraid to go to school?
- Is your child being treated fairly?
- Does your child need to change his or her seat?

Help for an academic problem

- Is your child doing his or her homework?
- If your child needs additional help, what do you want the teacher to do?
- Does the school have a tutoring program?
- Do you suspect that your child may have a disability?
- If so, have you requested that your child be evaluated?

Parental involvement and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly No Child Left Behind) requires Title I schools to extend a hand to parents to become involved by encouraging:

- Parental involvement in Title I schools;
- Parent participation in school planning; Parent contribution to policy development;
- Building parents' skills and parenting training;
- Parent feedback on the quality of the school; and
- Meetings with parents on a regular basis.
- Research has shown that higher student achievement can result when:
 - Parents and families support their children's learning at home and in school.
 - Parents and families stay involved throughout their children's education.
 - Schools create programs that support families in guiding their children's education.

Case studies

Here are some schools where parental involvement made a difference.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School is a predominantly African-American school in a section of Boston, Mass., where 66 percent of the children who enter are reading one or more grade levels below the norm. In 1999, a team of educators proposed a charter college preparatory program for a middle school in the poverty-ridden Roxbury neighborhood. The coeducational school emphasizes a rigorous curriculum, character development and family involvement. Roxbury Prep invites family involvement by requiring parents to sign a "Family and School Contract" at the beginning of each school year. By signing this document, parents agree to communicate with their children's teachers every two weeks. In 2003, Roxbury Prep's Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores were the highest of any predominantly African-American school in Massachusetts on sixth- and eighth-grade math and eighth-grade science exams, and second best on sixth-through-eighth-grade English exams. An impressive 82 percent of seventh-grade students scored "advanced" or "proficient" on the English exam. On the 2006 eighth-grade math test, Roxbury Prep outperformed every school district in the entire state of Massachusetts. While test scores have risen, so have graduation rates.

How was this accomplished?

- Parents were expected to be involved and committed.
- Parent-teacher communication was strong and frequent.
- The curriculum was rigorous.
- Teachers had the approach that all students could succeed.

Viers Mill Elementary School

Each day, Viers Mill Elementary School in Silver Spring, Md., welcomes students from 44 countries who speak 32 languages. Of the 658 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, 54 percent are Hispanic, 22 percent African-American, 14 percent white, 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. Even with the challenges of diversity and language, an achievement gap hardly exists, and the school has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress. Scores on standardized tests have gone up: in one year, the percentage of students scoring proficient/advanced on the Maryland School Assessment increased from 60.2 to 76.7 percent in reading and 79 to 85.3 percent in mathematics.

Once a month, the school holds a "Family Learning Night." Students who attend with their parents are escorted to classrooms for reading activities with teachers. Their parents remain for a parent-teacher association meeting and a training session on techniques to use when reading with their children. Then, the students, bringing books with them, join their parents and read together. The books, which students may keep and take home, come from the school's Title I Family Involvement Fund.

What else has the school done to involve parents?

- Translators were provided at meetings for parents who do not speak English;
- The computer laboratory and media center, where families worked together on language arts activities, homework and accessing information on the Internet, were kept open after school;
- Once a week, students were given a parent bulletin to take home;
- Individual Student Progress Reports were sent to parents at the midpoint of each marking period; and
- A frequently updated Web site provided families with announcements about upcoming events, school projects and activities.