

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

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Is it possible for students to experience joy and excitement in the world of education? Can we create a working relationship between the home and the school that makes students want to go to school, ready and eager to participate in the learning environment of education?

For children to have this kind of enjoyable and rich experience in education, it takes more than the good efforts of educators in the classroom. Children are active participants in different worlds—home, first of all, and then church and school as well. Not one of these worlds can be an island, cut off from the others. Each affects the others. In this article, I will focus on the working relationship between home and school, even while acknowledging that a vibrant relationship between home and church as well as a good cooperation between church and school are likewise important for the overall development of children.

As a parent of five children, I believe my children can have a wonderful school experience. I also recognize that I play a vital role in making this a reality. Furthermore, as I take my parental role seriously, I realize my influence is not limited to my family, but it also has the potential to spread throughout the school.

Children typically spend six hours of every weekday in the classroom. Parents can easily assume it is all up to the school to bring the right mix of joy, excitement, and rigor to the educational experience. But parents can boost the educational experience of their children by active involvement in the school. I'm not advocating "helicopter parenting" where parents hover over the child and don't trust the child out of their sight. Rather, I'm suggesting involvement such as open communication with teachers, volunteering in the classroom, and stopping by to observe the educational experience. This kind of involvement communicates to students

and teachers alike that parents care about the education of their children.

In addition, I offer the following practical ideas for how to get the most from your child's education.

Provide Nutritious Food

A nutritious breakfast is a good way to start your child's day. In fact, many nutritionists consider breakfast the most important meal of the day. And for a snack, your child might ask for sweets or pastries, but Twinkies just don't have the sustaining power of protein. Consider packing veggies (such as carrots), a homemade granola bar, cheese, or other sources of protein.

Provide for Adequate Sleep

When weekend schedules at home are significantly different from weekday schedules, students can suffer from Monday blues. I think the start of the work week should be celebrated. We were created to work (even in the Garden of Eden), and we get no hint from the Scripture that Mondays should be the worst day of the week. That idea comes from a culture formed by upside down values, and it is promoted by everyone from Garfield to Hollywood. If we buy into the idea that work is dull and the best life is late-night play, we will see the effects on our students Monday morning. Teachers struggle to maintain a joyful classroom environment when students struggle with a case of weekend drowsiness. Parents can help students enjoy the classroom by maintaining schedules that include adequate sleep every day of the week.

Don't Take Vacations During the School Year

While it may not feel like a big deal to have your children missing from school, your children's presence is actually very important. Students who take vacations during the school year affect classroom

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and school culture. Think of the effect on other students when glowing reports from the Bahamas filter back from freshly-tanned students. As you might guess, no matter how scintillating the mathematics teacher might be, math simply can't compete with snorkeling.

Absences are unavoidable at times, and teachers know that. They want to work with you. However, schools schedule vacation time during holidays, spring breaks, and three months of summer; and parents can demonstrate their commitment to their children's education by taking advantage of those breaks and protecting regular school attendance.

Americans seem to thrive on the next adrenalin rush, and that can come from a one-day outing to a week-long, full-blown vacation. Parents give a gift to their children when they teach and demonstrate the value of sticking to the daily routines of life and being people others can count on. In the long run, children are better served by learning habits of faithfulness than by jumping for the next amazing experience.

Monitor Your Child's Homework

Believe it or not, homework is not given to terrorize families or to make family life difficult. Parents who practice healthy involvement in the education of their children will hold their children accountable for their use of time at school.

Consider this exchange:

Parent: "Why do you have homework tonight?"

Child: "I don't know. I just have a lot of homework. The teacher makes us work too hard."

Parent: "Did you make good use of your study time today?"

Child: "Oh yeah. Well sometimes I wasn't doing as much as I could have, but I didn't really feel like working."

(Parent calls teacher.) Parent: "Mr. Teacher, we're wondering if our son has homework because of the amount assigned or if he's not making good use of his time."

You might be surprised by what you learn from the teacher.

When you do need to help your child with homework, he learns best when you require him to do the work and find the answers, rather than just giving him the answers. Certainly it is necessary to explain things a child doesn't understand, but create space for him to learn and get the full benefit from assignments. If you discover that the work seems excessive, communicate directly with your child's teacher.

Talk With Your Child About School

Tune in to what is happening at school. Avoid general questions such as "How was your day?" (a question that will likely result in the likewise general response, "Fine"). Take an interest in specific activities and subjects. "What games did you play in recess today? What book is your teacher reading during story hour? How did the test in Bible class go? Did you do any experiments in science?"

Communicating with your children about what happens in school demonstrates to your family that learning is an important part of growing up. It also provides an opportunity for your children to talk about questions or relationship problems they are having. When open communication is a norm at an early age, it is far easier to continue communicating with your children as they move through adolescence.

Maintain a Positive Attitude Toward Learning

The attitude of parents toward learning is formative for a child's attitude toward learning. This can be either disconcerting or wonderful. If parents think school is a necessary evil, children are much less likely to give themselves to the learning process. When parents are excited about what children are learning in school and when they actively pursue learning at home, children view learning as an necessary part of good living.

Some things a child learns in school are more directly tied to everyday life than other things. When a child learns about a displaced people group, he can pray for the group or give toward relief efforts. When he is asked to learn the periodic table or to work out algebraic equations, however, he may protest, "I'll never use that stuff!" At that point it won't be helpful if a parent makes similar remarks: "My teacher let us skip that." Or, "My grandpa died of that." Far better to recognize that God has made an amazing world for us to explore, and learning is an adventure that broadens our understanding of God's world.

An openness to the joy of learning and a willingness to participate in activities that aren't as personally enjoyable prepare children for much that they will face all through life. It isn't necessarily exhilarating for some people to attend church members' meetings or to learn how to change diapers or to care for a sick neighbor. As we nurture healthy attitudes in our children toward involvement and participation in school, we are nurturing the attitudes that will enable them to participate in home life and church life in years to come.

Conclusion

The home and school must work together if the educational experience is to be enjoyable and rich. Parents can energize the school experience for their children through involvement, strong relationships, and healthy attitudes.

Having been in education for twenty years, I have been privileged to watch firsthand the educational trends and developments among conservative Anabaptists. While I desire increased vision for Christian education, I am blessed by the attention being given to the education of our children. I am inspired when I consider the potential of the home, church, and school working together for the training of the next generation.

Parents, you play a leading role in the shaping of this generation. Your teachers want to partner with you to equip the next generation for a lifetime of humble service to God and others. Let's work together for sake of Christ and His church!