

The Influence of Home on School Success

In our annual Parent Institute/NAESP scientific survey, we ask more than 20,000 education leaders to identify topics so important to children's school success that parents need to receive more information about them. The 2004 results are in, and one of the most critical topics again is the influence of home on school success.

Principals, teachers, researchers, and early childhood education experts all agree that parents are children's first and most influential teachers. But as every principal can attest, many parents have not received this message or recognized their obligation—and opportunity—to assure students' success. The beginning of the school year is the best time to remind parents of their key role in helping children learn.

Q. How can I convince parents that they are powerful teachers of their children?

A: Point out that children are learning all the time, everywhere. Use examples. For instance, parents can teach young children their home addresses, phone numbers, how to dial 911, and safe ways to cross the street. They probably already know “cool” words, which TV shows to watch, or how to use the VCR and DVD player—all with no formal instruction. The point is to get parents to understand that children don't just learn while they're in school. They learn constantly at home.

Q. What percentage of the child's waking hours, from birth to high school, are spent at home and at school?

A: Do the math:

- Assume kids sleep eight hours a day.
- 24 hours a day minus eight sleeping hours = 16 waking hours a day;
- 365 days a year × 18 years = 6,570 days; and
- 6,570 days × 16 waking hours = 105,120 waking hours by age 18.
- The average child spends six hours a day at school for 180 school days a year;
- 180 school days × six hours per day = 1,080 hours per school year;
- 1,080 hours × 13 school years = 14,040 school hours; and



■ 14,040 school hours divided by 105,120 waking hours = 13.36 percent of waking hours are spent in school by age 18.

That means 86.64 percent of children's time is spent *out of school, mainly at home.*

Q. Once I can show that children spend most of their waking hours at home, how can I persuade parents to use this time to teach important things?

A: Help them to see how many opportunities there are to help children learn at home:

- Urge parents to let children see them reading, whether it's books, magazines, newspapers, or catalogs, and to talk to the children about what they are reading.
- Suggest that parents and children try reading together a book or article of the child's choosing, and then talking about it.
 - Encourage parents to include children in everyday projects. Ordinary activities like washing the car, making salad for dinner, working together on a computer spreadsheet, or shopping for a gift for grandma's birthday are packed with learning opportunities.
 - Recommend that parents get their children involved in family history. Genealogical research is one of the most popular Internet activities and something that children and family members can do together whenever they have a little time. Learning about their family can have a profound effect on children, teaching them history and building pride, respect, and cultural understanding in ways that schools cannot equal.

Schools are largely responsible for students' academic learning, but children learn some of their most important lessons at home—lessons that families teach best. What they learn at home provides an essential foundation on which schools can build. Without it, neither students nor schools can reach their full potential. Now is the time to remind parents of their indispensable influence. ■

John H. Wherry is president of The Parent Institute in Fairfax, Virginia. His e-mail address is jhw@parent-institute.com.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information on this and other parent involvement issues, visit www.parent-institute.com.