Do You Have a Parent Involvement Disconnect?

See how well this describes the parent involvement program at your school:

- Overall, you have developed a solid relationship between home and school.
- Parent participation at conferences and parent organization meetings is no less than it has been in recent years.
- When teachers request assistance from parents, they usually get it.
- Your school sends home regular notes, newsletters, and other materials that help parents support education and their children’s school success.
- Parents generally seem comfortable with their children’s teachers.
- Home and school communication, while not perfect, is working well.
- Parent involvement can be improved, but the school’s efforts are paying off.

If that description fits, I congratulate you, urge you to keep up the good work...and strongly suggest that you keep reading! Despite your current parent involvement efforts, you may still have a “parent involvement disconnect.” But you be the judge.

As part of ongoing research at The Parent Institute, we recently conducted separate surveys of educators and parents about parent involvement. We asked both groups: Which of the following do you feel are the most important things parents can do at home to help their children do better in school?

Participants were asked to rate 25 parent involvement options, and some of the results are startling (see box).

Don’t get me wrong. Each of the 25 options was something worthwhile for parents to do with their children. Indeed, we based the list on what education leaders had told us over many years. What surprised me was the striking difference between educators’ and parents’ priorities.

While educators said the number one thing parents can do at home is “Read to your child every day and have your child read to you,” parents ranked that no higher than 15. There was a similar disconnect when educators ranked “discipline at home” number 4, while parents ranked it number 11. Parents believed that the most important thing they can do at home is to “Talk to your child and pay attention to what your child says to you.” Yet, educators ranked that number 10.

What’s wrong with this picture?

My concern is that parents’ busy and grueling schedules leave minimal time for encouraging learning at home. How can you convince them to spend the precious moments they have with their children on activities you believe produce the best results?

Here’s what I suggest:

1. **Give parents and staff identical surveys** to see if your school has a parent involvement disconnect. Create your own response choices—or send an e-mail to the address below requesting the “Helping Children Do Better in School” survey. I’ll send you the camera-ready survey instrument we used, which you can copy and distribute.

2. **With your staff, choose three or four priorities** from the survey list. Feature them in parent newsletters, memos, conferences, and meetings. Repeat them and repeat them.

The potential of parent involvement cannot be overemphasized. Thankfully, the vast majority of parents want to be helpful. It’s time to address the disconnect and tell parents how they can help the most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Survey Options:</th>
<th>Educators’ Ranking</th>
<th>Parents’ Ranking</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Read to your child every day and have your child read to you.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employ firm, fair, and consistent discipline at home.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Talk about school every day and make sure your child knows you think it is important.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Make sure your child is required to live with the consequences of his or her actions.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Talk to your child and pay attention to what your child says to you.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Help your child develop homework routines.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
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For additional information on this and other parent-involvement issues, visit www.parent-institute.com.
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