



Making PLRD Connections

Small schools preparing students for big futures

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MAKING THE GRADE: TALK IT OUT

Jackie Irwin

You don't need to buy extras to provide your child with a head start in the academic world.

That sound you heard is the educational toy department of stores around the world groaning.

Nope, money isn't necessary to give your child a leg up, but there are things you can do to help boost your child's natural abilities.

One of the biggest boosts you can do according to UCLA's School of Public Health is simply talk.

Adult-child two way conversations boosts language development, which has been connected to all the other subjects your child might develop an interest in during their academic career.

By talking with your child you give them a chance to take words on a test drive, as well as boosting their self esteem by showing that you care about their thoughts and opinions.

Those positive feelings help them develop their confidence in the long run, which will go far towards standing up for

themselves, their interests and their own education by asking for help or stating their own case. So do you just babble the day away to your toddler? You could, but working in counting, numbers, and rhymes can help children boost

their math skills without them even being aware of it.

As kids get older parents can help by talking to their children, not only discussing their child's day with them, but also in finding out how they are doing, what they want to do as they get older, and connecting it with their day to day routine.

"They don't need to breathe down the child's neck, but ask questions to see how it's going," agreed one Altario student. Parents can also keep track of their kid's assignments and make sure they get in on time, noted two Berry Creek students.

"To help me succeed, my parents ask if I have any homework, and if I have home work I don't know what to do my parents will help me."

TIPS TO GET YOUR KID TALKING

- Ask nonjudgmental questions that require real answers. "What was the best thing about school today?" or "How did the soccer game go at recess?" will get you a lot further than "How was school today?"

Questions that begin with "Why" often make kids defensive; "Why did you wear that?" won't work nearly as well as "What do you think most of the kids will be wearing on the field trip?"

- If you make an overture and are greeted with something hurtful -- disdain, sarcasm, or blankness -- try not to respond with anger. Instead, show your vulnerability and hurt. Say "Ouch!" and turn away.

Your child will almost certainly feel badly about having hurt you, especially since you haven't aroused their ire by attacking back.

- Stay available. Most kids don't keep an agenda and bring things up at a scheduled meeting. And nothing makes them clam up faster than pressing them to talk. Kids talk when something is up for them, particularly if you've proven yourself to be a good listener. If you act like the information they have is a gem you need, they often won't be able to resist that power and will become even more tight-fisted about sharing!

-- tips provided by ahaparenting.com

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PARTNERING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

DR. NEUMEIER,
SUPERINTENDENT

Overall PLRD enjoys very strong school-family relationships. Our students come from homes where parents are involved and care about their children, they are interested in their children's learning and wellbeing, and they model positive values that demonstrate what it means to be a responsible citizen and community member.

This relationship is part of the rural advantage that we can capitalize on and upon which we can continue to improve our schools. That being said, what remains for us to work on is to tweak this strong foundation to ensure that our home-school relationships are well focused on strong academic success for every student.

We know that parents are the prime educators in their children's lives. The influence parents have over their children's success in school is significant.

Positive parenting and strong school-parent partnerships are a major focus for PLRD this school year because when parents and schools cooperate, collaborate, and support each other, children learn and they succeed.

What makes for a strong parent/school partnership?

When each partner in a relationship does his/her part to build and strengthen the relationship then we achieve the goals and outcomes we set out to achieve.

When parents ensure that their children are properly cared for-- clothed, nurtured, and fed and rested-- that their lives are structured

and include opportunities to play, to take part in chores, and to study and learn at home then children come to school ready to learn.

Likewise, when teachers use their knowledge and skills to make good decisions about a child's learning needs, when they utilize proper formative assessment practices and are well planned and present engaging relevant learning activities for their students, then children typically do well in school.

How can parents best support a child's learning in school?

I think that regular, dependable communication between the school and the home are important for supporting student learning. Schools use agendas and newsletters, they call home to inform parents of student success and challenges, and they regularly report student learning outcomes during reporting periods and in-between as deemed necessary.

Parents can watch for these communications, and can demonstrate to their children that they are interested in their children's education. When children see that their parents expect them to work hard and do their part, and that mom and dad are interested in their education, then they will try harder to do well in school.

When I was a young fellow, my mother made it very clear to her eight children that she expected us to do well in school, to do our part, cooperate with our teachers and to solve our own problems with the adults in the school. Together with my father, she made sure that we were properly fed and clothed, that we had our school supplies as

required, and that we had time for play and sleep.

We were required to do chores and take part in family life, but we were also enrolled in such activities as hockey, music lessons, and ball. We were expected to do homework and to come home with report cards that reflected a good effort in school.

My father would review our times tables with us and he would have us read and decipher poetry and other stories and articles of personal interest to him.

It wasn't so much that he read poetry or stories, what was most important was that dad took time to talk with us and impress upon us the importance of learning no matter what area of interest we had.

Don't misunderstand me. My childhood was not always rosy by a long shot. We had struggles as a family like most families do. We were not the Norman Rockwell family of fiction and Walt Disney. We were flesh and bone with financial challenges, family struggles, and conflict.

But what was most important was that our parents never wavered in their expectation that we do well in school and that we take personal responsibility for our learning. They wanted a better future for their children, and they were accepting nothing less than the best we could do.

They weren't always there for us, and they didn't always provide us with what we wanted, but they gave us much of what we needed.

Every one of their eight children succeeded in school and went on to successfully complete some form of post-secondary study.

I am forever indebted to my parents for taking the time required to invest in their children so that we could enjoy successful lives and go on to raise families in like manner.

What is PLRD's Healthy Interactions Initiative?

The Healthy Interactions initiative, a program supported by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), establishes that when there are problems to be resolved between students and staff, or families and schools that we have a helpful process for solving these problems.

The Healthy Interactions process is intended to model for children that there are appropriate ways to problem solve and to attend to concerns, and can be a useful tool for parents in PLRD.

According to our Healthy Interactions program all schools and staff are expected to develop relationships with students, parents, and families that are based upon trust, reliability, and mutual respect.

When these relationships are in place, and a concern arises, problems can be solved by going first to the person with whom one has the concern. For parents this usually means their child's teacher.

If we engage with each other from a position of mutual support rather than anger and mistrust, then we can easily solve problems and resolve misunderstandings that when left unresolved can result in destructive relationships that impede a student's success in school.

Many studies show that when parents and teachers work together to model how to solve problems, and that when they support each other, children learn and do well.

To learn more about the Healthy Interactions Initiative visit the ATA website and enter the program into the search bar.

There are newsletters from previous years on this site, which can be useful for parents as well as PLRD staff.

How else can parents support their child's learning?

There are many ways really. When parents model active learning by reading and engaging in learning activities themselves, they demonstrate for their children that life-long learning is exciting and interesting, and that learning contributes to our overall wellbeing. Many studies demonstrate that people who are educated or who educate themselves tend to enjoy healthy, long lives.

Reading with children, and reading for your own interests are important aspects of improving a child's learning trajectory.

Doing puzzles and solving problems together, playing with children, involving children in organized sports and other activities like dance and gymnastics, and exposing them to the arts -- such as theatre, museums and art galleries -- taking them on family vacations, and spending quality time with your children by focusing on their sense of security and demonstrating unconditional love for children are all ways that parents can support academic success in school.

Dr. Neumeier, do you have any final thoughts on the importance of the school/home relationship?

I think what is most important is to remember that when children

are not doing well, it is seldom about the children; it is usually about the adults in their lives, both in school and at home.

Supportive, caring, nurturing adults (teachers and parents) who are self-disciplined, who model respect and dependability, who solve problems appropriately, and who have high expectations of our youth provide children with the necessary tools they need for succeeding in school. Parents and teachers, the home and the school, are responsible to provide children with the nurturing and care necessary so that children can focus on being children and on learning how to be responsible, ethical young people who have confidence, who are willing to risk-take and learn, and who are able to achieve intended schooling outcomes.

If we want our children to respect others, we have to respect them. If we want them to work hard in their studies, we have to model a good work ethic and life long learning, if we want them to live healthy lives, we have to demonstrate for them that we are trying our best to live such lives ourselves.

As teachers and parents, and other influential adults in children's lives what we say is less important than what we do. Quality teaching makes the biggest in-school difference to a student's opportunity to learn.

Quality parenting makes the biggest out-of-school difference to a child's success in school.

In the end, there is really nothing better than good teaching and good parenting when it comes to improving children's learning outcomes in school.

EAT UP**Jackie Irwin**

In 2012 the Toronto District School Board set out to prove what we all know, hungry kids don't learn well.

Predictably the study found what most would expect to see: Grade 7 and 8 students who ate a healthy breakfast at school "achieved or exceeded provincial reading standards by a rate 10 per cent higher than those who did not have breakfast," the school board said in a news release.

According to the study, 78 per cent of students who ate breakfast on most days were on-track for graduation compared to 61 per cent of students who ate breakfast only on a few days or not at all.

It's not surprising that students in PLRD already know the importance of breakfast however.

One Altario student noted that "ensuring students have a healthy breakfast so that the child can go to school ready to learn" was the most important thing a parent could do to help their child achieve academic success.

Simple breakfast ideas

* Eggs

* Fruit smoothies

* Fruit parfaits

* French toast, waffles, or

pancakes made with whole grains

* Hot cereals like oatmeal with dried fruit

and / or nuts on top

* Bananas and peanut butter

* Cottage cheese and fruit

* Whole-wheat toast with pea-

nut or

almond

butter

**VETERAN STUDENTS SOAK IN WISDOM**

Dr. Eva Olsson, a Holocaust Survivor, spoke to students and staff at Gus Wetter School in Castor on Oct. 1. Grade 6-9 students from Veteran were privileged to be given the opportunity to attend the presentation. Olsson was born on October 28, 1924 in Szatmar, Hungary, one of six children in a poor Hasidic family. On May 15, 1944, she and her family were taken away in boxcars to Auschwitz-Birkenau, part of what we now know as the Holocaust. She used her life experiences, primarily in the Holocaust, to illustrate the power of hate and the importance of standing up against forces of racism, bigotry and intolerance.

Her message resonated deeply with the students and staff. It was a moving experience as we listened to her share her story of courage and survival.

"Your internal strength to survive this tragedy leaves me in amazement of how you did it. You are seen in the eyes of many, including me, as a hero," noted one Veteran student.

Olsson's talk was an easy fit for Veteran, which parents describe as "an open door school. You are always welcome."

Her message to treat others humanely is echoed in Veteran's superb volunteer base, which includes parents, grandparents, community members, returning Senior High students and visiting teachers who help with a variety of school events and programs such as hot lunch, jr. chefs, reading buddies, field trips, weekly healthy fruit snacks, coaches and spectators at the sports events.

"This school is definitely the village raising a child," noted a parent.

Olsson's talk helped bring home to Veteran students just how well communication and words can help or hinder their life, not just academically, but in the world overall.

"I have taken your messages and tried to incorporate them in my life as much as I can: telling my parents I love them, treating everyone the same because we are all human, never saying hate because it is a killer, to never give up hope, do not take anything for granted, do not be a bystander and to share your story so that it doesn't happen again," added another.

To be a part of Veteran's volunteer base that daily helps reinforce messages like Olsson's, contact the school at 403-575-3915.