

American Education Week Column  
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by Scott DiMauro

“Daddy, look what I can do!” My daughter beamed with pride on a recent evening, eager to show me what she had learned in school earlier that day. Her excitement over discovering how to read and spell words that rhyme with “cat”, in addition to the innumerable other skills she has developed in just ten weeks in the classroom, has given me a new perspective on public education. Sure, as a teacher in the public schools for the past twelve years, I’ve always believed that what I do in the classroom is important. I’ve reveled in watching my students succeed and agonized when they’ve failed. But this year it’s different. Our children are our most precious gifts, and now school has more meaning on a personal level than it ever did before. It was not until this year, when my wife and I became the parents of a new kindergarten student in the Worthington Schools, that we fully comprehended the power of the public school to make such a profound impact on the lives of children. Nor did we completely grasp what a difference an active home-school partnership can make in ensuring their success.

Before our eyes, in a manner that has been thoughtfully planned and carefully nurtured by her teacher, our five-year old is learning reading skills that will serve as the foundation upon which all her future learning will depend, and she is doing so with unbridled enthusiasm. “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire,” penned William Butler Yeats. The great poet must have been thinking of the interaction between our daughter, her classmates, and their teacher when he made that observation.

Our job as educators is to foster in each of our students that enthusiasm for learning from the time our students come into our schools as little tykes to the time they leave as young adults. Teachers, parents and the community can work together to make this happen, and there is plenty of evidence that we’re making progress in this regard. Minimally, students who are enthusiastic about learning attend school and perform well. At the national level, a greater percentage of students is staying in school, graduating from high school, entering college, and earning degrees than ever before in our history. In our own school district, one labeled “excellent” for the past three years in a row on the state report card, examples of student achievement abound. From outstanding attendance and graduation rates to high standardized test scores to award-winning performances in the arts and on the athletic fields, we do not need to look far to see Worthington students enthusiastic about school and achieving success.

Yet much work remains to be done. If we are truly to make public schools great for every child, we must continue to set high standards and provide the aligned accountability measures and resources necessary to meet them. Knowing that students need the active involvement of their families in order to achieve success, we must also engage parents and the entire community as partners in this effort.

As we mark the 83<sup>rd</sup> commemoration of American Education Week, the Worthington Education Association invites you to partner with our members across the district to help ensure that the promise of “Great Public Schools for Every Child” is met.

If you are the parent of a school-age child, here are a few ways that your active participation will help ensure your child's success:

- Reading to your child
- Checking homework every night
- Discussing your children's progress with teachers
- Limiting television viewing on school nights
- Volunteering in a school building
- Becoming informed on educational issues and voting in elections

Or, it can be as simple as asking your children, "How was school today?" But ask every day. That will send your children the clear message that their schoolwork is important to you and you expect them to learn.

Research has demonstrated that the family makes critical contributions to student achievement from pre-school through high school. Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters. When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically, and the fire of learning is kindled.

It is not only parents and teachers whose engagement in the school system is needed. All members of the community, even if they don't have children in schools, can contribute their time, experience, and love of learning by volunteering in the schools and working with our students. The quality of life of our entire community depends on a thriving public education system that actively engages all members of this community in its work, as well as in making decisions about setting expectations and providing the resources necessary to meet them.

We are all equal and essential partners in education—teachers, parents, educational support professionals, administrators, the Board of Education, and the greater community. By working together, we can help ensure that all children are given the same opportunity to succeed that my own child is receiving. It is by working together that we will be able to keep the promise of a great public school for *every* child.

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