

## Research shows parental involvement in school leads to better grades, behavior

For parents, fall means getting children committed to their studies, but it's also the ideal time for parents to make commitments to their child's school.

Studies show that parental involvement in a child's school and learning is key to a child's success and contributes to fewer behavioral problems, better performance in school and a greater chance of high school graduation.

"Education is like a puzzle," said Dianna Bartles, a fifth-grade teacher in Ohio and a Disney Teacher Award honoree, "and the parents are such an important piece of that puzzle.

"You can always tell when a parent is taking an interest in a child's assignments and talking to the child about what is going on at school.

"Even very shy students like to say 'My mom said' or 'My dad told me,'" Bartles said.

"Students carry words from their parents as precious gems to be used in class discussion and conversations."

Parents who are involved with their schools can better monitor classroom activities and coordinate their efforts with teachers. Research suggests that the teachers of students with highly involved parents tend to give greater attention to those students, and to identify learning problems at an earlier age.

"Lack of parent involvement in reading or helping with homework puts children at a disadvantage," said Dara Feldman, a kindergarten teacher in Maryland named the Outstanding Elementary School Teacher of the Year by the Disney Teacher Awards.

"Often, parents of young children don't know how important it is to read and talk to their children.

"It's not that they are bad parents, they just don't know how important that is to their child's language development," she said. "Those kids come to school less prepared."

The following are suggestions from top educators for ways parents can get involved in their children's learning:

- **Volunteer at school.**

Teachers are always in need of chaperones, field trip drivers, guest speakers and classroom assistants.

Every parent has a talent they can use to help the class learn.

"I deliberately poll the parents to see what level of involvement they can provide," said David Vixie, a middle school teacher in California and the 2005 Disney Teacher of the Year.

"Can they drive, build, make phone calls, provide supplies for simulations or field trips, be presenters on topics of curriculum?" he asked.

"I invite them to participate."

- **Keep in contact with the teacher.**

Parents who stay informed by talking regularly with teachers have children who excel in class and have fewer discipline problems, said Disney honoree Roberta Patterson of California.

Parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings are the traditional ways to keep in contact, but regular e-mail conversation is a convenient and effective way to keep in touch.

- **Do homework together.**

Working together is a great way to make sure a child is learning and a chance to spend some time together.

Parents shouldn't be intimidated if an older child is learning something they don't understand — they can have the child teach it to them.

Several Disney honorees say that having students teach a difficult concept is one of the best ways for them to learn it themselves.

- **Be a role model.**

If parents want children to value reading and studying, they should not only read to their young children, but let their older children see them reading and learning about new things.

"You don't have to be a perfect parent, but children are like clay, molded by the people around them," said Bartles.

"A child who sees a parent reading a book and laughing aloud will learn that reading can be entertaining.

"A child who sees a parent reading the newspaper and commenting on articles will see that reading can be informative," she said.

"Give me a parent who keeps a journal, and I'll show you a student with a built-in desire to write."

- **Attend meetings and events.**

In addition to regular parent-teacher and PTA meetings, many schools offer special nights for parents and their children.

Events planned in Feldman's school this year include math and reading nights, computer family nights, study circles and even parenting seminars focusing on important topics like Internet safety and stress management.

Teachers and families recognize that time is often a challenge for everyone.

"Our greatest obstacle to successful parental involvement is not getting people interested," said Feldman, who also serves as the family outreach coordinator for her diverse school. "It's finding time for all of us to coordinate and plan events and time for the parents to attend.

"Some of the families in my school are working two or three jobs, so they are exhausted."

Teachers agree with the research on the importance of having parents involved with their schools.

In a recent online survey of Disney Teacher Award winners from the past 15 years, more than 40 percent of those who responded indicated that more parental involvement is one of the top two things that will most improve education in the United States.

In explaining their preference for more parental involvement, the survey respondents suggested that greater support from parents and the community would make education a high priority.

One respondent said, "If every family valued education and let their children know that, there would be a completely different attitude towards education."

"Parents are their child's first teachers and should never stop playing that role," said Terry Wick, vice president of Disney Worldwide Outreach.

"As an organization, we make sure to honor teachers every year, but we want to make sure that parents also understand the indispensable role they play in their child's education.

"The classroom is just one learning environment — young people are learning all day, every day," Wick said.

### **Disney Teacher Awards**

The Disney Teacher Awards generally receive more than 150,000 nominations each year.

Although the nomination period for the 2006 Disney Teacher Awards recently ended, more information about the award is available at [www.disneyhand.com](http://www.disneyhand.com).

Since 1989, Disney has presented the Disney Teacher Awards, honoring representatives of the teaching profession who construct learning environments where students and teachers alike explore, imagine and engage in a variety of stimulating ideas and experiences.

The Disney Teacher Awards are part of DisneyHand, worldwide outreach for The Walt Disney Company.

DisneyHand is dedicated to making the wishes of families and children a reality through public service initiatives, community outreach and volunteerism in the areas of compassion, learning, the arts and the environment.