U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PARENT POWER

BUILD THE BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

Parent Power

Build the Bridge to Success

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Communications and Outreach

2010

U.S. Department of Education
Arne Duncan
Secretary

Office of Communications and Outreach
Peter Cunningham
Assistant Secretary

June 2010

This report is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach, *Parent Power: Build the Bridge to Success*, Washington, D.C., 2010.

To obtain copies of this report:

Write to ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 22207, Alexandria, VA 22304.

Or **fax** your request to 703-605-6794.

Or **e-mail** your request to edpubs@inet.ed.gov

Or **call** in your request toll free to 1-877-433-7827 (1-877-4-ED-PUBS). Those who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) or a teletypewriter (TTY) should call 1-877-576-7734. If 877 service is not available in your area, call 1-800-872-5327 (1-800-USA-LEARN).

Or **order online** at http://edpubs.gov.

This publication is also available on the Department's Web site at http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/parentpower/index.html

On request, this publication is available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print or computer diskette. For more information, contact the Department's Alternate Format Center at 202-260-0852 or 202-260-0818.

Parent Power: Build the Bridge to Success

To parents, we can't tell our kids to do well in school and then fail to support them when they get home. You can't just contract out parenting. For our kids to excel, we have to accept our responsibility to help them learn. That means putting away the Xbox and putting our kids to bed at a reasonable hour. It means attending those parent-teacher conferences and reading to our children and helping them with their homework.

—President Barack Obama, July 17, 2009

President Obama has a cradle-to-career plan to reform our nation's schools. He also is calling on parents to take responsibility for their child's success. His vision includes the belief that all children can and will succeed, and that parents are the bridge to this success. You as the parent, guardian or caregiver can help your child by connecting with his or her school to find out what's needed to ensure success and how you can help reach that goal. Studies of successful schools report that parent involvement is a major factor in their outcomes, including closing the achievement gap between various groups of students. With his vision, the president is asking that you make education a priority and a legacy for your family.

How can you accomplish this? By adopting the following principles and taking the steps indicated for each age group, you will be able to help your child learn at each step of the way and ensure success in school and in life.

Be responsible.

Accept your role as the parent and make education a priority in your home.

Be committed.

Once you have begun to work with your child, continue doing so throughout the year.

Be positive.

Praise goes a long way with children, especially with those who struggle in school. Provide positive feedback.

Be patient.

Show your child that you care through your commitment and encouragement.

Be attentive.

Stop your child immediately when bad behavior appears. Show him or her what to do and provide an opportunity to do it correctly. Discipline should be appropriate and consistent.

Be precise.

Provide clear and direct instructions.

Be mindful of mistakes.

Record your child's performance. Look over all the work your child brings home from school and keep it in a folder. Help him or her correct any errors.

Be results-oriented.

Gather information on how your child is performing in school. Keep notes of conferences with teachers, request progress reports and carefully read report cards and achievement test results. Ask questions about these results.

Be diligent.

Work from the beginning to the end of the year with your child and the teacher.

Be innovative.

Keep learning lively and dynamic.

BE THERE.

Just be there for your child–to answer questions, to listen, to give advice, to encourage and to speak positively about his or her life. Be there to support your child whenever needed.

PRESCHOOL

Ensure That Your Child Is Ready to Learn

Make sure your child's:

- Physical needs are met with a healthy diet, enough sleep and rest, exercise and good medical care;
- Social and emotional needs are met;
- Confidence, independence and cooperation skills are built;
- Discipline is appropriate and consistent;
- Play is stimulating;
- Questions are answered;
- Caregiver or preschool teacher has books to read to your child and does read to your child every day; and
- Day is filled with different learning activities.

You also can be part of your child's educational experience by teaching and reinforcing the skills your child needs and enhancing those taught in the classroom. Using the following checklists, you can help your child be a successful student from preschool through high school.

Know what your preschooler needs.

Babies need:

- Loving parents or caregivers who respond to their cries or noises;
- To feel safe and comfortable;
- To hear and make sounds;
- To move around;
- To be able to play in safe areas; and
- To play with safe toys.

Toddlers need:

- Activities that allow them to use their muscles;
- To experience their senses and develop language skills;
- To work with their hands;
- To learn to do things for themselves;
- To play with other children;
- To continue to learn about their movements;
- To build their vocabulary;
- To learn about their surroundings; and
- Opportunities to make choices within limits that you set.

Introduce babies and toddlers (birth to 2 years) to language.

- Talk to your baby or toddler often. Talk to your infant during feeding; look at family photographs and tell your child about the pictures; or tell the baby what you see out the window—a bird, bus, cars.
- Show your baby things, name them and talk about them.
- Encourage babbling or your toddler's trying to say words.
- Sing songs and read nursery rhymes.
- Read aloud each day, even if it's just for a short time.
- Have your child handle books—books made especially for babies or toddlers, such as interactive books (lift-the-flap or touch-and-feel). This will help your child with motor skills and language development.

Introduce young children (3-5 years) to language.

- Talk to your young child often and encourage your child to speak by asking questions and talking about what happened during the day.
- Show your child new things, making sure you name them, and teach your child new words every day.

Every child is different. Know your child's unique talents, skills, abilities and special needs. Children can enjoy learning and possess a healthy curiosity. Take advantage of learning opportunities. Use the checklist as a guide to lead your child to success.

- Read aloud each day, even if it is just for a short time.
- Teach your child the alphabet.
- Check your local public library for books made especially for 3- to 5-year-olds.

4- and 5-year-olds need:

- More books, games and songs;
- Chances to do science, math and art activities;
- To build their self-reliance and language skills; and
- To become aware of the world and people around them.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Lead Your Child on the Path to Success

Before the school year begins, find out about the school your child will attend.

- Visit the school.
- Visit a classroom in the school.
- Get a copy of the school's parent involvement plan.
- Volunteer, for example, to be a room parent, organize a winter coat drive, help out on test day or be a reading coach.
- Ask the principal for the school's report card.

Communicate with teachers.

- Find out the best time to contact them by telephone.
- Ask for the teacher's e-mail address.
- Find out about Web sites where teachers may list class notes and homework assignments.

Parent-teacher conferences are important.

- Be prepared to listen, talk and take notes.
- Write out your questions before you meet with the teacher.
- Ask for specific information about your child's work and progress.
- Review what the teacher has told you and follow up by talking with your child.
- Check back with the teacher regularly to see how things are going as the year progresses.

Know that counselors:

- Can help if there are problems at home, such as divorce or illness, which could affect your child's schoolwork;
- Have information about achievement tests and can explain what the results mean; and
- Can tell you what tutoring services are available.

Make sure your child continues to read.

- Set a special time each day for reading aloud together.
- Encourage your child to read to you when he or she is ready.
- Let your child see you enjoying reading.
- Use audio books that you and your child can listen to together and have your child follow along with the written words in the printed book.
- Play communication games with your child, such as Scrabble or Pictionary, which involve words and explaining what they mean.
- Practice day-to-day reading and writing, such as following a recipe or writing a note.
- Continue to check with the teacher and the pediatrician about your child's language development.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Be There for Your Child in the Formative Years

Transitioning

- Help your child transition from elementary to middle school.
- Discuss the concerns he or she may have before starting middle school, such as learning from many teachers, getting to class on time, finding his or her locker, getting on the right bus, knowing where the cafeteria is, navigating crowded hallways and doing more homework.
- Talk to your child about the physical and social changes and the social pressures that often occur in the middle school years.

Parental involvement

- Communicate often with your child, the teachers, and the principal, vice principal or both.
- Visit the school. Be knowledgeable about the place where your child learns.

The middle school years are a time of transition: emotional, physical, social and academic. Your support and involvement are essential at this stage of your child's growth. Research shows that pre-teens do better in school when their parents are involved in their lives.

You may want to ask the following questions of your child's teachers:

- Is there a transition program for students leaving elementary school and entering middle or junior high school?
- Are counselors available who can help your child transition to middle school?
- Are teachers and principals accessible to parents?
- When are the parents' nights, sports and art events, and other times when parents are invited to visit the school?
- When can parents volunteer at the school?

- Help your child organize a schedule.
- Help your child set goals with a time limit for completing particular tasks.
- Listen to what your child tells you and is really saying between the lines. Be sensitive to any fears your child might have. Sometimes it is helpful to reserve comments and actions until you have facts about a situation and know how your child thinks and feels about it.
- Discuss peer pressure.
- Communication is the key to being helpful to your child in the pre-teen years.
- Welcome and get to know your child's friends.
- Become aware of physical and emotional changes in your child.

Reading in the middle school years

Reading is an important part of the middle school years. Many of the subjects your child studies in middle school involve much more reading than in elementary school. Check with your child's school counselor to see what your child's reading level is. If your child reads below grade level, check with the school to see what additional reading programs are available to help improve your child's skills.

Looking to the future

Help your child focus on preparing academically for high school and college. Encourage your child to take challenging classes. You may want to ask your child's teachers these questions:

- Will the classes your child takes help him or her be competitive in college and the work world?
- Is your child having trouble in any classes?
- What tutoring programs are available?

- ✔ Does your child have good study habits? Does he or she read what is necessary to complete an assignment? hand in assignments on time? prepare ahead of time for assignments and tests instead of cramming at the last minute?
- ✔ Does your child have the supplies needed to complete assignments?

Preparing financially for college

The U.S. Department of Education has a resource to help you determine the financial commitments you will need to make for your child's education beyond high school. The FAFSA4Caster, at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov, can help you calculate college costs before your child applies to college. And, when your child is ready to apply for financial aid, we make it easier for you to learn how much financial support is available to your family and how to apply for aid.

May
DELL
DELL

HIGH SCHOOL

Get Your Child Ready for Work and for Life

Serve as your child's best coach and mentor.

- Foster your child's independence, and continue to be aware of and support your child's studies and after-school activities.
- Continue to stay involved with the school as your child progresses through high school.

Know what your high school child needs to succeed.

- Look for programs designed to help students succeed in college and in a career–those that teach study skills, provide tutoring to enhance skills and knowledge and help students choose the right courses to succeed.
- Provide structure. Show your child how to manage time for studies, activities, friends and family.

Keep on reading.

- Continue to make sure your child is reading.
- Buy or make available books in which your child may have an interest. Students who have more reading materials available to them read more and do better in school.

High school is the training ground for college and work. Help prepare your child for college by encouraging him or her to take challenging courses, such as English, math (in particular algebra I and II, but also geometry, trigonometry, and calculus), foreign language, science (biology, chemistry and physics, for example) and history or social studies. To help prepare your child for work, you and your child should meet with the school guidance counselor to choose the best courses based on your child's career interests.

Partner with teachers and counselors.

- Get to know your child's teachers and counselors.
- Continue to attend open houses or parent nights at school to meet your child's teachers.
- Request parent-teacher conferences when you think they are needed.

Communicate with teachers.

- Find out the best time to contact them by telephone.
- Ask for teachers' e-mail addresses so you may contact them outside of school hours, as teachers are usually not available during school hours.
- Find out about Web sites where teachers may list class notes and homework assignments.

Know that counselors:

- Handle class registration and schedules;
- Can help if there are problems at home, such as divorce or illness, which could affect your child's school work;
- Have checklists of how to apply to college and where to get college financial aid; and
- Can tell you when college entrance exams are given, especially the SAT and the American College Test (ACT).

Consider safety.

- Pay attention to your child's behavior and friends.
- Tell your child to leave valuables at home and to keep belongings locked up, as theft is the most common school crime.
- Be aware if your child's grades drop or if your child is sad or angry.
- Talk to your child about any concerns you may have.
- Consult with counselors, social workers, school psychologists or others trained in and helpful with solving adolescents' problems.

Stay involved with the school.

Be informed through your school's parent-teacher organization and the school newsletter or Web site. Continue to be an advocate for your child and other students in the process.

Tips on paying for college

Loans, grants and work-study aid are available for low-income students through the Federal Student Aid program. The maximum Pell Grant award for the 2010–11 award year is $5,550.

When your child turns 18

Be aware that when your child turns 18 years old or enters a college or university at any age, the rights under the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (*FERPA*) transfer from you to your child. You may become informed about this law at http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html.

Resources

The following resources for parents are available from the U.S. government and other organizations.

General Education Information
U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov
1-800-USA-LEARN (toll free)

Resources for Parents
Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs)
http://www.taalliance.org

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC)
http://www.nationalpirc.org

Help With Homework or School Projects
Free Resources for Educational Excellence
http://www.free.ed.gov

Schools
Public and private schools, colleges and libraries
http://www.nces.ed.gov/globallocator

Reading
National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)
http://www.nifl.gov/

Preschool
Ready to Learn TV
www.pbs.org/readytolearn

High School
Federal student financial aid
www.fafsa.ed.gov

Postsecondary Education
www.college.gov

Local Resources for After-school, Tutoring and Mentoring Programs
Contact your libraries, neighborhood churches, sororities and fraternities, and organizations, such as your local National Urban League, 100 Black Men, YMCA and YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, for such services as computer access, literacy programs and educational activities.

No government policy will make any difference unless we also hold ourselves more accountable as parents—because government, no matter how wise or efficient, cannot turn off the TV or put away the video games. Teachers, no matter how dedicated or effective, cannot make sure your child leaves for school on time and does their homework when they get back at night. These are things only a parent can do. These are things that our parents must do.
—President Barack Obama

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

www.ed.gov