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Parental involvement in education

By Darvesh Karim



There is a question which always arises in the minds of parents, teachers and the administration of schools — “Why is there a need for parents to be involved in school life as it is after all the child who attends the school, and not the parents?”

It is a well understood and researched fact that when parents involve themselves in their children`s education, the learning positively of the children relates to higher achievements. So, the more intensively parents are involved in their children`s learning, the more beneficial are the achievements and their effects with a long-lasting impact.

There are strong indications that the most effective forms of parental involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities. Programmes which directly involve parents with their children like helping them with their reading, writing, homework, etc., while tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by the teachers, show particularly impressive results.

Likewise, any activity which provides parents the opportunity to take part in decision making about school programmes is also a form of involvement. This may include being a school board member, a participant on a parent advisory committee or a local school improvement council, or an active member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Areas/programmes in which parents can help to make decisions include goal setting, development and implementation of programme activities, assessment, personnel decisions and fund allocations, etc.

However, the area of parental involvement in daily educational activities has been one of the most controversial issues. Some parents would like to play a more active role in this type of involvement, whereas most school administrators and teachers exhibit great reluctance to encourage parents to become partners in governance and they assume it an unnecessary interference and hindrance to the smooth functioning of schools.

Therefore, it is very much critical to remove the misconceptions parents, school administration and teachers may have about one another's motives, attitudes, intentions and abilities. So, it is important to create such an atmosphere that these stakeholders may sit together by keeping the students achievements a top priority in their views. It is important for schools to arrange conversation programmes for parents at all times. They need to be aware that they are not only being approached to communicate the weaknesses of their child and the problems of the school, but also for the fun and other aspects as well.

If the aforesaid form of parental involvement is accepted and initiated then it may lead to the growth of parents' ability to serve as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children with the potential for long-lasting influence, as the direct involvement of parents in their children's learning positively relates to higher achievements and long-lasting impact. Furthermore, this kind of parental involvement in education through interaction with their children and their schools may increase the parents' own individual skills as well as confidence thus turning them into improved role models for their children. On the other hand, this involvement may see more parents serving as advocates and promoters for the schools, throughout the community and area.

To practically implement this form of parental involvement, initially, schools have to repeatedly communicate the message to parents that their involvement and support makes a great deal of difference in their children's school performance, and that they need not be highly educated with much time on their hands to involve themselves in their children's academic progress.

If this encouragement and involvement is initiated from the time the children first entered school, making the parents aware of their child's initial development, then it will have a long-lasting impact, because parents, too, would have passed on information about the child to his or her teachers, which will allow them to build on the attitude, skills and knowledge attained already.

Besides giving encouragement, schools should manage programmes to teach parents activities such as reading to their children, which will surely increase the children's interest in learning. They should also develop programmes, orientations and training for the parents, which should all include a focus on parental involvement in instruction — conducting learning activities with children at home, assisting with homework, and monitoring and encouraging the learning activities of their children.

Secondly, it is a huge responsibility of schools to make special efforts to engage the parents of disadvantaged students, who stand out to benefit the most from parents' participation in their learning, but whose parents are often found to be reluctant to become involved. But schools have to continuously emphasize that parents are partners of the school and that their involvement is needed and much valued.

Concluding this paper I must say that the benefits of parental involvement in education are of many folds. Parental involvement is a combination of commitment, trust between the stakeholders and active participation on the part of the parents while on the part of the school welcoming behaviour, assuming parents as school partners and to ready sharing and accepting parents` active participation and initiating parental awareness programmes. This partnership will surely lead to a successful school in terms of improved students achievements and outcomes and improved institutional capacity, which used to be the major objective of establishing a school.

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