



*Chicken soup helps soothe a common cold.
A bandage helps mend a minor injury.
Sometimes, families need a little more to make it better.*



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Sunday, November 14, 2004

Poll: Michigan parents less involved

Great Lakes survey places state last in communication with children's school.

By Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

Michigan parents communicate the least with teachers, raise the fewest questions about their children's education and have the lowest confidence in the quality of their kids' education among parents in six Great Lakes states, according to a survey released today.

The poll, commissioned by the Your Child coalition, surveyed 1,700 parents in Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Minnesota about parents' involvement with their children's teachers - a relationship educators say is vital to student success.

The study found that one in four parents in the region doesn't make time to get involved in his or her child's education because, parents say, they don't have enough time. But the parents said they pay for it later with higher levels of frustration related to education.

The survey, conducted by EPIC-MRA, shows that more work needs to be done to make sure parents are not left out of their child's education, said Margaret Trimer-Hartley of the Michigan Education Association and a member of Your Child, which is made up of several education and family organizations.

"We are doing our best to find solutions and engage those parents we have been unable to reach so far," said Trimer-Hartley, communications director for the association. "If any parent falls through the cracks, it's likely their child will also fall through the cracks."

Roseville parent Tina Coury-Pietrykowski, 33, prides herself on being

Tips for time-strapped parents

Got five minutes?

* Introduce yourself to the teacher. Indicate how to get in touch with you.

* Write a note to see how your child is doing.

* Let the teacher know about out-of-school factors affecting your child.

Got 10 minutes?

* Share your child's strengths, talents and interests with the teacher.

* Read classroom and school newsletters.

* Visit the school Web site.

Got 15 minutes?

* Share your family's culture, values and parenting practices with the teacher.

* Talk with your child's teacher about how to support learning at home.

* Attend parent-teacher conferences with specific questions you'd like to ask.

Got 30 minutes or more?

* Read and know your school's handbook.

* Work with teachers and administrators to develop a parent communication policy.

* Attend school board or education-related meetings and ask questions.

Source: Your Child coalition

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involved in her children's education - she attends field trips and participates in other school activities. Many of the other parents, she said, don't have time to get that involved.

"My school is a low-income school, and you have a lot of single parents who work all day, come home and have to play the role of mother, father, mentor, homework helper and babysitter," said Coury-Pietrykowski, the mother of three children. "In our school, you've got parents who are always involved and then you've got parents who you've never seen."

And too often, the parents who never show up are the ones needed at school activities the most, teachers say.

"Parents are the absolute key to their children's success," said Karen Sears, a special education teacher at Dearborn's Bryant Middle School.

There are little things parents can do to make a lasting impact on a child, Sears said.

They can turn off the TV, create a quiet space for homework, go over the student's assignment, or even just have breakfast ready in the morning.

The importance of parental involvement is simple, educators say. Studies consistently show that students whose parents are involved in their education are more successful in school. And student success is needed if schools are to meet the federal No Child Left Behind standards, which require all schools to achieve 100 percent proficiency, which in Michigan means all students must pass the state MEAP test by 2014, Trimer-Hartley said.

That goal won't be reached if one-quarter of Michigan parents are detached from their child's education and don't do the bare minimum of helping teachers get to know their child, Trimer-Hartley said.

The Your Child survey asked parents if they've done anything to help their child's teacher get to know their child, such as informing the teacher of their child's strengths and weaknesses and likes and dislikes.

Parents who responded "yes" were more likely to attend parent teacher conferences, belong to the PTO or PTA and have positive communication with school staff than parents who answered "no."

The survey also found that parents who don't interact with their child's teacher are more likely to be male and have less than a college degree and less likely to have done well on testing when they were in school.

Parents need to know that it's OK to make initial contact with the teacher and be proactive about their child's education, said Donna Oser, administrative director of Michigan Parent Teacher Student Association, one of the groups that commissioned the study.

Parents don't think twice to tell teachers about allergies or medication their child must take, but some shy away from telling them their child's learning habits, she said.

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The survey is the second commissioned by Your Child. The first found that the older kids get, the less involved parents are - even though teachers still want parents around, according to the poll of 1,000 Michigan teachers and 1,000 parents in April to gauge how well the two groups communicate.

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