Superintendent’s Corner
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As the district has shared in various issues of “Breaking News”, research has consistently shown that parental involvement in children’s lives is the most important and crucial mechanism to success. From ensuring that children are well rested and well fed to believing that education is a worthwhile endeavor, parents set the stage for the work that educational professionals do while children are at school. I’ve also noted over the years that schools only have children for a very small portion of their life from birth to 18. Even for children who attend a year of preschool and then continue with education until graduation at age 18, schools have children for less than 10% of all the available time over those years. Even if we factor out an average of 8 hours of sleep per night, then parents, family, and the community still have about 7 times the interaction with children than do schools.

As we move midway into the holiday season in a society that relies heavily upon consumption to drive the economy, many are wondering what they should give their children this year. May I suggest that the best gift is time with the adults in their lives - but not just any type of time. Research over many years points to several important constants. Among these are the earlier the involvement starts, the greater the impact on children’s success and that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home.

What does this involvement and engagement look like? Studies suggest that parents who read to their children, have books available, take trips, guide TV watching, and provide stimulating experiences contribute to student achievement. Specifically, research has shown common traits among families whose children are doing well in school. Among these are (1) establishing a daily family routine; (2) monitoring out-of-school activities; (3) modeling the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work; (4) expressing high, but reasonable expectations for achievement; (5) encouraging children’s development and progress in school; and (6) encouraging reading, writing, and discussions among family members. All of these factors can be implemented in ways that best fit with a family’s circumstances, but the common key is that adults are actively engaged with children, take responsibility for actively guiding their child’s activities, and provide explicit guidelines and expectations for positive growth.

Why should we be so involved as parents, guardians, or even community members? Surveys have shown that 86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve schools and that a lack of parental involvement is the biggest problem facing public schools. Years of research has shown that involved students have (1) higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates; (2) better school attendance; (3) increased motivation and better self-esteem; (4) lower rates of suspension; (5) decreased use of drugs and alcohol; and (6) fewer instances of violent behavior. In fact, family participation in education was twice as predictive of students’ academic success as family socioeconomic status. It is not surprising that the most consistent predictors of children’s academic achievement and social
adjustment are parent expectations about a child’s academic attainment, along with parents of high-achieving students setting higher standards for their children’s educational activities than parents of low-achieving students.

This ‘present’ to our children has a great return on investment and will pay dividends for years to come. It’s never too late to give of yourself and therefore avoid some of the angst in realizing how fast children grow up and become adults with their own lives. As so many have pointed out, adults have a responsibility to ensure that children reach their potential. Let me end with Carl Jung’s words as a reminder, “Children are educated by what the grown-up is and not by his talk.”