



How to advocate for your child's school success

Preparing your child for school doesn't simply mean ensuring that they have a healthy breakfast and lunch. It also means advocating for them to ensure that they receive the type of support needed to be successful. Advocacy includes reading to your child, assisting them with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences and staying in communication with the school. A parent's advocacy is the most likely factor to shape a child's attitude toward academic achievement. You also become your child's advocate by working with the school to identify the unique kinds of support that your child needs. This tip sheet contains some simple suggestions to get you started and encouragement to keep up the good work you are already doing.

CONNECTING WITH TEACHERS

- **Build good relations from the start.** Don't wait for an issue to emerge to introduce yourself to your child's teacher. Make an appointment to chat with the teacher early in the school year.
- **Maintain communication throughout the year.** Raising a concern will be easier and less confrontational if open communication has already been established.
- **Give positive feedback.** Consider dropping a friendly e-mail or phone call when you observe something that is noteworthy.
- **Offer your support.** Volunteering in the classroom or chaperoning a class trip will help you to get to know the teacher better, as well as allow you to observe your child at school, firsthand.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR CHILD

- **Talk to your child about school.** Intentionally start conversations about what your child likes and dislikes about school. Understanding your child's point of view is essential to helping them.
- **Make learning fun at home.** This reinforces the importance of learning as a family value. Your child could have a great teacher and still struggle with school work if they aren't encouraged to be curious at home.
- **Get support from others.** Talking to other people with children who have similar difficulties may give you ideas and tips that you can use. Learn about the supports and services in your child's school and community. Use what you learn, to engage your child positively.

Resources:

"Be Your Child's Advocate." scholastic.com 2011

"The role of the parent advocate in education: A grounded theory approach." Kim F. Fields, University of Southern California. ProQuest, 2006

RESPONDING TO A CHALLENGE

- **If a problem occurs, first seek to understand.** It is critical to collect all of the facts and clarify the problem before weighing in. Does this problem involve other children? If so, consider involving other parents in this process. Trust your own judgment and move forward, but also make sure that you learn about all of the information available.
- **Develop possible solutions.** This sets a positive tone indicating you want to work in partnership with the school to resolve the problem; you're not merely complaining, but offering constructive ideas.
- **Begin with the teacher, where possible.** In most cases, an informal chat with the classroom teacher should be the first step in addressing any issue. The guidance counselor and school psychologist are also helpful in-school resources. The principal is the next step.
- **Stay level-headed.** Being involved in a process where other people have opinions about your child can be very emotional. You will be most helpful to your child, if you hear everyone out and express yourself calmly and clearly.
- **Keep a record.** Document all of your communications, so that you are both on the same page about expectations and can speak accurately about who said what and when.

WHEN ATTENDING A SCHOOL MEETING

- **Bring a record of your communications.** Having a written document may make the school take your concerns more seriously. The document should contain a list of your issues, potential solutions and questions. The tone should reflect your desire to work positively and in partnership with the school.
- **Avoid the blame game.** Conversations about your child are very personal for you. When you are feeling sensitive and talking with teachers and school administrators who may be very busy, it is easy to understand how discussions can become frustrating for all. For the best results, try to keep your cool and keep in mind that ultimately everyone involved wants what's best for your child.
- **Define the next step.** Clarify the next steps at the end of the meeting. Identify who will be responsible for each step. Agree on dates for achieving the steps that you agree on. This can keep the meeting from being merely a gripe session and increases the likelihood of a positive outcome. Leave a copy of your written document with the teacher.

Never forget, you are responsible for the education of your child. You are the only constant from P1 through to college. There are no guarantees that any educational system will ensure your child's educational success so ultimately; it's your responsibility. Your child's future happiness may depend on it.

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.