



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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Student, Parent and Teacher Engagement

Summer vacation is coming to a close, and Kentucky students are heading back to school, refreshed and ready to learn new skills and challenge themselves to achieve at higher levels in the 2012-13 school year.

Rigorous curriculum, data-driven instruction, high-quality teachers and strong school leadership all play a role in increasing student achievement. But student engagement, as research has shown, is also critical in improving student outcomes.

Quite simply, engaged students are more likely to perform well academically. They invest in their learning, devote time to their studies and persist despite challenges and obstacles. They participate and care about the quality of their work beyond grades. They are committed because they see their studies have significance beyond the classroom.

Achieving positive engagement and positive learning results in Kentucky schools, however, does not just fall to students. It is a collaborative effort that hinges on the involvement of school leaders, teachers, parents and community members.

Teachers are key players in fostering student engagement. They work directly with students and typically are the most influential persons in a student's educational experience. Creating a culture of high expectations and excellence, developing and delivering challenging, interactive and relevant lessons and activities, and being encouraging and supportive to students are all ways in which teachers can foster student engagement in the classroom.

Parents and guardians also play a pivotal role in student success through engagement. Schools must break down any barriers that impede family involvement in a child's education and work diligently to increase interaction between adults and students at school and at home. Schools and teachers can do this by creating a welcoming and inviting environment at the school for parents, providing opportunities for parents to collaborate with the school and/or teachers to identify and support student needs, and keeping the lines of communication open. If done thoughtfully and intentionally, cultivating solid family engagement is well worth the time invested.

Parents should realize that they do not have to be present in the classroom during the school day to be involved in their child's learning; they can offer substantial support from home by reinforcing the importance of taking school seriously, attending classes and completing homework. They also can work with the school or their child's teacher to identify tasks they could complete at home after work hours that would be helpful. In addition, parents can and should monitor their child's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and use it to engage in conversations with their child about school work, goal-setting and college and career aspirations.

According to our Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning ([TELL](#)) Kentucky working conditions survey, educators say one of the most important components for successful schools is parent and volunteer engagement in support of teachers and their schools. As we analyzed the data from low-performing schools, in particular, and compared student learning outcomes with parent and volunteer engagement, we found strong correlations -- the greater the engagement, the greater the student success.

So my message this week is simple: Get involved in our schools. It makes a difference. In fact, it is critical to the change we are working for in our schools here in Kentucky.

Certainly, we appreciate everything our communities have and are doing to support Kentucky schools. But there is always room for more. As we begin the 2012-13 school year, I call on everyone – school leaders, teachers, parents and community members – to find ways to increase engagement in our schools. Doing so will not only ensure our students are ready for college and careers, but also help transform our schools and keep Kentucky competitive in the global marketplace.

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