
A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, EDUCATION, AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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“Invest Now or Pay Later”

The most rewarding professional experiences I have had have been my work within the juvenile justice system and within the educational system. These two areas are more linked than many of us may want to admit.

As an example, there is an absolute correlation between juvenile delinquency and truancy. A child that is a habitual truant will be involved in the juvenile justice system as a result of committing delinquent acts that would be crimes if the child were an adult. Keeping our children engaged in the educational system would seem to be a reasonable means of reducing criminal activities of our youth and potentially reducing the number of individuals that will become recidivists as adults.

The reality of the educational environment today is the emphasis is on whether a teacher is considered “highly qualified.” If schools do not make adequate yearly progress as based on how a particular grade-year class did this year versus the grade class from the previous year, the teacher and the school are labeled a failure. The real question is who has failed the children.

A common denominator of children struggling in our schools and those having significant contacts with the juvenile justice system is a lack of parental involvement. The lack of parental involvement can be manifested in many different ways. Physical absence is an obvious means of not being involved. A more common way of avoiding involvement is by exhibiting an attitude it is the responsibility of the school to educate the children and to blame the educational professionals when something goes wrong. It is always someone else's fault.

A friend of mine, a kindergarten teacher, recently related a sad, but true story. During parent/teacher conferences the teacher indicated the child was having problems with color recognition. The teacher suggested to the parent to work with the child at home by holding up objects and to ask the child to tell the color. The parent's response was that she should not have to do this extra work because that is why the teacher was getting paid.

The parent failed to grasp that one gets out of the educational system what one puts in. If you are “too busy” to take a few minutes each day to read to or with your child or to show you care by being involved in the educational process, do not be surprised when the educational system “fails” your child. The next opportunity you will have to blame “the system” will occur fairly quickly. That opportunity will come when your child is standing before the judge.

The best laid plans of an educational professional can unravel if the lessons are not reinforced or, worse yet, contradicted at home. The best schools achieve because of parental involvement. Parents can invest some time in the educational process or we all end up paying in the end as the costs of our penal system spiral out of control. The value of education should be the primary life lesson we pass on to our children.

Brian Kunzi
Nevada KIDS COUNT Executive Committee
Office of the Nevada Attorney General