

Hanlon's Razor

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Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity

What works is work!

~ Parents ~ Students First & Most Important Teacher

It may be an old cliché, but it is true – parents are students' first and most important teachers. Students most successful in secondary schools, middle and high school, have parents that stay engaged in their education. Staying engaged does not require you to be at the school volunteering time, although that would be nice. It means being cognizant of school expectations, being involved in decision-making, and following through.

Teachers, administrators and support staff are there to help your sons and daughters succeed, to excel. For the most part these educators come in early, stay late, spend their own money on materials and supplies, and as your kids have homework, teachers and administrators have lesson plans to develop, papers to grade, and school functions to attend after school hours for little or no compensation except for the satisfaction of the job itself. It's not an easy job dealing with approximately 200 students per day.

What can parents do to help? The most successful parents plan out their student's education. They have a sense of what their students would like to do so they work backward from their kid's goals. Based on their interests, they identify possible majors for college, identify trade schools, colleges and universities that offer that major, determine entrance requirements; high school course requirements, grade point average, rank in class upon graduation, ACT/SAT score, and the extra curricular activities needed for entrance and scholarship.

Thoughtful parents know that decisions made in 7th grade will impact opportunities as a senior in high school. For instance, if a student would like to take calculus in high school, they have to decide in 7th grade to take algebra in 8th grade or that's probably not going to happen. In order to take algebra in 8th, 6th grade students and their parents should make sure their kids enroll in pre algebra in 7th grade. They then map out the courses and sequences that these courses must be taken for each year. These decisions require early planning.

Planning is one thing, implementing is another. Making the transition from elementary to middle school can be pretty threatening. Going from one class of 35 students with one teacher to six classes of 35 students with six teachers with differing expectations is in itself a cause of excitement and alarm. Transitioning from junior high to high school is tough too. Just the size of the facility and the student population can be daunting for

most 14 year olds entering high school. Then they have to settle in, try to make new friends, and join the activities outlined in the educational plan. Adding to this, teachers have greater expectations of high school students. And each day the class work, homework, quizzes, tests, and projects are worth points that lead to grades that are recorded for a lifetime on transcripts. Transcripts that can either open the doors to institutions of higher learning and scholarships or ruin a good educational plan.

To make the plan work, the parents seeing the most successes are parents who know courses the students are enrolled, they also know the teachers by name. They have read each course expectations sheet; class time, student notes, amount of homework, know how their kids will earn their grades, know where and when their kids can get assistance if needed. If they have any concerns, they have called and spoken to the teacher(s).

Then the fun really begins for parents. Now they must ensure their kids are befriending like minded kids with similar aspirations, they have to carefully and gradually expand their freedoms, and be more wary because the kids are mature enough to be on their own a greater amount of time.

Planning has to take place at home as well. It's helpful if dinner is scheduled at a consistent time so the kids can identify time to study every night. Parents have to make sure there is an uncluttered space to study that is quiet and void of distractions. That means the television might have to be turned off for a couple of hours. The kids with the highest grades not only are held to higher expectations by their parents, their parents hold themselves to higher expectations by making sure the kids are not only completing their homework assignments, they are also studying. These parents often check to see homework is completed, look at the kids notebooks to ensure the students are taking good notes, but they will also ask their kids what they learned that day, ask them to explain it, and sometimes ask them to demonstrate mastery of a skill – in other words show them they can do it. They also know when tests and quizzes are scheduled.

These parents also know if there kids come home with no homework, no graded quizzes or tests, then something is probably amiss and they need to call school to find out why - immediately.

I am asked on a regular basis why some kids are more successful than others in school. Well, upon investigation we find the schools offer pretty much the same courses, same textbooks, same expectations, same grading scales, and same facilities, etc. What's different for many students is their home life, their parental involvement, their parental expectations, and their willingness to follow through to ensure their kids are getting the absolute most out of their educations.

The parents of the most successful students in school know their kids will only get out of education what they put into it. K-12 education is a long-term investment. Parents can't study for their children any more than their teachers can. Parents can set the kids up for success, teachers can provide the opportunities, the students still have to do the work.

