

PARENTS' ESSENTIAL PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

AMERICAN READING COMPANY

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Strong vocabulary and home language development are predictors of academic success.

Parents whose first language is other than English, or who have had personally limited academic achievements, will most likely not be aware of their personal role in fostering these predictors of success.

Schools can foster meaningful home school interactions, without any material expense, when teachers of all grades assume the responsibility to send home prompts or questions to promote daily interactions between students and adults.

After informing parents, firmly and clearly, of the significant value of conversations in the home language, as well as of the possible dangers for their children when parents or caretakers relinquish their own role as educators, schools can ascertain that teachers see, as an essential aspect of their teaching, sending home questions and prompts that will facilitate continuing at home conversations about any subject presented that day in class.

The prompts would, of course, be age appropriate. For example, they can go from: *Who were your friends when you*

were my age? What did you do together? Did you ever fight or break up? How did you make up later? Did a friend ever got you in trouble? What would you be able to do for a friend? What would you expect a friend to do for you? To: What things should friends not ask of each other? What would you do if a friend asks you to do something inappropriate? What is the role of friendship in society? And all could ask: What is friendship for you? Or How would you complete the sentence: Friendship is...

It may take some time for all parents to become engaged in these activities, because schools have not traditionally recognized their importance. But, as students begin sharing in class some of the content of their home conversations, others will also want to share.

The questions and prompts can relate to any content discussed in class, even when the parents may not be familiar with the specific curricular content. It can become a topic of conversation at home, when students ask: *We are learning about this in class, do you know anything about it ...? Did you ever hear that...? What has been your experience with...? What would you do if...?*

All parents, regardless their socioeconomic or educational status, have knowledge and experiences that in most cases are unrecognized by schools, as well as the capacity to reason and share. Many work more than one job, or jobs at odd hours, that have an impact on the time they spend with their children. But the major reason why they relinquish the natural role of passing on their experiences and reflections is that they have received the message from society that there is little or no value on what they can share.

The time has come to revise a situation that has a detrimental effect on our students. Meaningful conversations at home will provide students not only with tools for academic success but will also contribute to build trust and bonding in the family, and become a foundation that can lead to preventing many of the negative behaviors that lead minority students to destructive conduct. When we look at those who have overcome difficult and unjust conditions we frequently find that their strength and positive sense of self was nurtured by the words and example of relatives or teachers. Let's make sure every child, every young person, has that nurturing.