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Author J. Michael Hall with his wife, Sabra, and their sons, Jacob and Joshua

Strong Fathers as Strong Teachers: Supporting and Strengthening a Child's Education

J. Michael Hall

The scene is very familiar. Most of us have been in a public school cafeteria with white walls, tile floors, and drab, laminate-covered tables. These cafeterias usually have windows, are flooded with fluorescent lights, and, as if by federal law, have exposed stainless steel somewhere close to the kitchen. On one particular morning, one of these familiar cafeterias held more than 100 fathers and their children. There were book-laden backpacks everywhere, and most of those in attendance were in some stage of donut, juice, or coffee consumption.

One such dad-and-kid team consists of Juan and his daughter, Carmen. Juan is wearing a denim uniform shirt, a NASCAR cap, jeans, and dirty work boots. Carmen, a third grader, is dressed in her favorite outfit and smiling a huge, choco-

late-donut smile. She is almost completely off her cafeteria stool as she leans in as close as possible to her dad. Most mornings Juan, who pours concrete for a living, is already at the worksite by this time of the day. However, today Juan's job is to be at school for Carmen. Her smiles, giggles, and attention to her father are what let him know that being at school this morning is well worth the time spent away from the job. Another dad, Marvin, is sharing a donut with his son, Marvin Jr. Marvin is also in a uniform shirt and somewhat cleaner work boots. Marvin is normally in bed at this time of the morning after working all night loading trucks for a parcel delivery company. Junior is just as happy as Carmen and perhaps even happier since he doesn't live with his dad all the time. Marvin Sr. knows that this time with his son is more important than his much-needed sleep. Marvin also comes to school quite often to see Junior at lunch since his joint custody agreement and weekend work schedule limit the amount of time he can see his son.

This scene is played out over and over again in public schools all over the United States during the annual Dads and Donuts Day. Typically for this event, men are invited to come with their child to school one morning, eat a donut, have pictures taken, shake hands with the principal, deliver their children to the classroom, and then go to work to show off their new picture. As this event concludes, everybody leaves with a nice little "Kum Bah Yah" warm and fuzzy experience, yet many of the participants and hosts do not understand the unharnessed potential of what they have just witnessed.

The schools hosting these "donuts and dads" events are working tirelessly to educate children so they will have the necessary skills to become wage-earning, productive citizens in our democratic society. To educate children from a million different backgrounds with amazing emotional and cognitive challenges is an almost insurmountable task. Staff members at these schools spend an enormous amount of time wondering how to help these children reach the specified academic standards. The fathers who attend these events wonder how they, as fathers, will help their children reach their fullest potential.

The schools and fathers that come together in these pastry-based events seldom realize that if they would get better acquainted with each other they would exponentially increase the potential of the very children who keep them both up at night. This simple morning of donuts could actually be a catalyst in drastically improving home life for children and the academic bottom line for schools.

The described scenes have been a part of my everyday experience over the past few years. As a speaker and facilitator of fatherhood workshops, I have the privilege of actually being a part of bringing fathers into public and private schools, Head Starts, and early childhood programs three or four days a week throughout the school year. I see literally hundreds of fathers who look just like Marvin Sr. and Juan showing up at schools on any given day to support their children and the programs that are educating them. In these events I always see kids who are excited, fathers who are proud (and a bit scared), and schools that are instantly better off. As a former special education teacher and a "recovering" school principal, I have been part of several campuses where we failed to see or

tap into the incredible potential for kids that exists in truly involving fathers in the education of their children. Over the years, I have become a believer in this effort as I have had the opportunity to work with thousands and thousands of fathers who keep showing up at schools in large numbers in order to become a bigger part of their child's life and educational experience.

The thousands of real fathers I have encountered provide the basis for this chapter. Tremendous research on this subject is validated by all of these fathers who have entered their child's school and this very important discussion. These fathers, as men and parents, have shown us they bring a totally different set of skills and perspectives into the educational environment. This very different perspective can have a tremendous impact on the educational outcomes for their children. This chapter will focus on how fathers' involvement can complement and reinforce school efforts, the particular focus fathers can bring to supporting children's education, and the positive outcomes on a child's education when fathers are positively involved.

Schools and Fathers: Same Goals, Different Roles

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, there are 14,559 public school districts representing more than 94,000 school campuses in our country. Those public schools represent approximately 48 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary campuses. Those 48 million students are from 25.8 million married-couple families, eight million single-mother families, and 1.9 million single-father families.¹ Even though they may approach it differently, these schools and families are both in the business of helping the same 48 million children.

Fathers and schools play incredibly similar roles in the lives of children. Both care for children and are interested in their becoming independent and successful in the adult world. Fathers and schools both spend an incredible amount of time working to prepare children to possess the skills necessary to be successful. When they do their best work, both fathers and schools are involved in the same endeavor from different angles but working for the same outcomes.

How do schools, fathers, and mothers relate to each other in raising children and helping them become successful? As a parent, fathers play the role of the person "other than the mother" who is there to help the child grow and develop as a human being. Schools play the role of the institution "other than the family" that helps that same child grow and develop. Just as the child is born of one parent to actually be raised and nurtured *between* two parents, the same child comes from one family, regardless of family structure, to reside between the family and the school that work together to raise the child into competent adulthood. Fathers, mothers, and schools can interact to assist children in ways that overlap and are unique to each relationship.

Typically, mothers provide the "safe place" for children to be nurtured and cared for as they grow in life. Mothers are attentive to the security and well-being

of children and bring this focus to their efforts as parents. Although they also care about children's sense of security, many fathers play the role that encourages the child to push, explore, and take more risks in order to grow.² From these different perspectives, mothers and fathers work together in creating an atmosphere that nurtures a child's security while also encouraging initiative and independence. In a similar way, the family generally plays the role of establishing a safe place for the child, and the school often becomes the trusted entity outside the family to help children expand and grow away from the safety and confinement of the home. As fathers and mothers need to work cooperatively to create such an environment for children, the family system and the school need to work cooperatively to facilitate healthy learning and growth for children.

How do fathers and schools, in particular, share similar goals in their relationships with children? The father and the school are both in the job of preparing children to possess competencies to independently take on adult challenges in the world outside both the family and the school. In order to develop these competencies in children, fathers and schools pursue particular approaches that have much in common. Both fathers and schools:

- encourage children to explore, take risks, and push themselves in learning and growth,
- teach children to deal with the frustrations and challenges inherent in activities that challenge them and promote growth,
- set limits on a child's risk taking while providing room for appropriate and timely exploration, and
- provide various learning experiences (both safe and risky) that allow children to check their competencies in a real-world environment.

Fathers and schools simultaneously encourage, guide, and challenge children through various activities meant to help them learn and grow. The best schools and fathers also understand they not only have the job of providing challenges and learning experiences for the children under their charge but must also provide certain rites of passage that allow children to check themselves against real world standards and give them a feeling of tangible progress.

The entire process of going from one grade level to the next gives children the idea of accomplishment and progress. As children progress from grade to grade, fathers support those rites of passage by addressing such progress. Whereas a mom might say, "I can't believe my baby is a fourth grader!" the father might use that step to encourage further growth and tell the child, "Now that you are a big fourth grader, I'll bet you are ready to ride your bike to the park." A father may also set goals using those rites of passage by telling a child he or she can conquer some task like riding a bike, camping with friends in the backyard, or riding that ominous roller coaster by the time they are in a specific grade. Those grade-level demarcations that occur from fall to spring each school year are a huge impetus for goal setting in American culture. Parents and schools use both the age and the

grade level of the child to spur them on to further progress as well as set parameters for certain activities and behaviors.

The Father's Role in Education

As fathers take on a collaborative role with the school in teaching children, a father's role can be defined by certain qualities and behaviors associated with being a man and a father. Three key components of a father's role in the growth and learning of his children include the actual quality of being a man and a parent, his expectations regarding the future path for his children, and the way in which he teaches and engages his children through play and interaction. These elements help to define a father's role as a teacher of his children and a strong supporter of their formal and informal education.

Fathers, Masculinity, and Learning in the Outside World

Fathers exert a significant influence on children simply by virtue of their masculinity and the interactions they engage in that frame a child's encounters with the larger world. Fathers and mothers come to their experience with a child somewhat differently, in the beginning, simply by virtue of their gender.

From the time a child is conceived, it begins its life in the body of the mother (stop me if you have heard this before) and even from the moment of conception prepares to move away from the mother for the rest of his or her life. The father, who had a role in the conception of the child, primarily has only to wait and furnish support while the child is formed inside the mother. At the birth of the child, the mother typically has a very strong bond and a profound basis for a relationship with this child: it is *of* her and *from* her. Mother and child have spent a significant amount of time physically together that has contributed to this tremendous personal bond. It is arguable as well that the mother acts as she does and bonds as a parent because she is feminine and has gone through the incredible physical, chemical, emotional, and perhaps spiritual change of childbirth. The father has a more limited basis for his relationship with the child to begin with, as he has been waiting on the outside of the two bodies that were joined together.

Once a child is born of the mother, he or she begins in amazingly minute steps to move away from her. The child very literally starts his or her life at the actual physical core of the mother and then begins to grow, explore, and learn ever so slowly to be less dependent on the mother. Mothers are used to carefully nurturing a child since this has been part of their experience from the beginning of the child's conception. However, fathers have functioned on the outside of that relationship and thus enter the life of the child from the outside world. The father comes straight to the child and basically begins to help with the journey of becoming less dependent on the mother. It is a common part of a man's masculinity to help children face and encounter the outside world because they come from that world into a child's life. In a sense, they represent much of that world to a child and have a role in guiding children as they learn about the outside world.

Fathers and father figures are more likely to play rough with a child, take the child into the outside world, and envision a time when the child makes his or her way into the outside world as an independent adult. However, fathers do not necessarily have to “tug” on a child to bring him or her away from the mother. Unless the mother has an unhealthy grip on the child, it is very natural for the child to begin to move toward the world outside of the mother and explore it. Thus, a main job for fathers is to be the one who decides how far into the real world the child may go. He sets boundaries for the child and allows or perhaps even encourages the child to take risks within those same boundaries. He also typically sets the boundaries further out than mom would. Dr. Kyle Pruett of the Yale Child Study Center found that fathers are much more likely than mothers to encourage their children, regardless of gender, to explore the world around them.³ He and others also suggest fathers may support novelty-seeking behavior because the father himself is a novelty for the child just by being “not the mom.”⁴

One of the father’s most important, and perhaps easiest, jobs is to be another and hopefully the primary person the child can trust besides the mother. A father’s different perspective and natural tendencies as a male parent give him strength in his role as the one who helps a child move into the outside world. The differing tendencies of mothers and fathers as parents allow them to assist children in broader ways as they work together. These tendencies do not dramatically change once men and women become parents and, if used in complementary tandem, can help parents become more effective as a team when they use these masculine and feminine traits in their parenting. To describe parenting traits as feminine and masculine may ruffle the feathers of some who falsely believe people with mostly masculine or feminine traits can parent androgynously. If boys and girls are different and men and women are different, then surely fathers and mothers are different and can work together in ways that are both complementary and effective for the children they are to raise.

The influence of a father’s masculinity and perspective is important for both sons and daughters as they grow up. Boys and girls may spend their early years with a mother and father who are both involved but then enter the environment of the public elementary school, which is primarily populated by females. Continuing interaction with fathers and other men, who may express different worldviews and ways of dealing with both the child and the outside world, allow children to experience other viewpoints and ways of interacting with the world around them. For example, a father’s actions and reactions to his environment can teach a child how to deal with stressful situations, new people, and new environments from a male perspective. Both male and female children benefit from seeing this diversity of approaches because it can help them understand themselves as well as the opposite gender. According to scholar Norma Radin,⁵ just by being “Dad” (masculine and different from a mother), a man possesses tremendous teaching potential.

Typically, fathers (and men in general) are expected to live in the “real world” and help children to prepare for it. This is, for good or ill, one of the

expectations associated with masculinity and being a man. For women, there are expectations associated with being the center of home life for children. Even though a majority of women in the United States work outside the home, their children often still see that work as a “visit” to the outside world from their place as the center of the home and family life. Even though moms work hard as professionals, their children still look to them to be that center of the universe in the home and to take care of all of their many needs after they come through the door at the end of a work day. It is a role that children associate with mothers because mothers have met their needs since birth and before. To a child, a mother exerts the gravitational pull of mothering that is, in its essence, based on caregiving and meeting their needs because that has been the child’s experience. The key point here is that children may look to mothers and fathers for differing types of experience, and this has implications for how fathers and mothers relate to and interact with their children.

To observe how a father’s masculinity plays a role in his parenting, you simply have to watch the reaction of children when a father enters the door at the end of his workday. Many times children will approach or even “attack” the father, and then the children or father will try to activate each other through some sort of physical contact—it might be hugs, high fives, or a new wrestling move. Outside of the physical interaction, children typically want to know what he *did* outside the home that day. He may cook supper on a consistent basis or take care of other household needs for his children, but they want to know what happened “out there” and how he reacted to it. The father can enter from a high-powered, influential job or back-breaking manual labor, but regardless of socioeconomic status he is seen as a representative of the outside world to his children. Children want to see how their father reacts to the outside world, to see both how he does things and why he interacts with them the way he does.

When a father brings the outside world into his home for his children, so they can experience it through his eyes, it gives him strength as a teacher. Since children are naturally headed into the real world, they want to know how to deal with it. A father’s role as the bridge for his children to the larger world provides him with both a huge opportunity and responsibility. It is a responsibility to help his children develop skills to deal with the real world they will inherit someday. It is also an opportunity to validate the reasons for working hard in school: the world that challenges him every day is more easily navigated by those with an appropriate education.

Many of the fathers I encounter in schools and Head Start programs during a “Bring Your Dad to School Day,” a “Math Morning,” or a “Dad and Kid Reading Day” are hard-working men who are proud of the blood, sweat, and tears they put into supporting their families. However, even as they encourage and teach their children to possess a strong hands-on work ethic, they are also usually the first person to articulate the benefits of gaining an education that will allow their children to choose the type of work they will do to support themselves. Fathers are very quick to emphasize the idea that the children must support themselves. The

vision they cast for their children regarding the importance of gaining a good education plays a tremendous role in the future success of their children.

Fathers as Visionaries for Their Children

Fathers enter a child's life from outside the sphere of the mother. Fathers thus take on the role of one who prepares a child for life outside that same sphere. A father tends to look at a child not only as a small, helpless human being but also as one who will not always be helpless and small. Fathers have expectations for their newborn babies as well as tangible hopes and dreams for the child and adult they will become. Even as a father may dream of his child becoming a sports star or astronaut, he also envisions the type of toddler he wants this newborn to become. For example, he may envision his child as a bright-eyed baby, an inquisitive toddler, an early reader, a high school honor student, or a successful, educated adult. Fathers who become active and engaged in the life of their young child usually do so because of a vision they have developed for their child. This vision may change as time passes, but by simply having a vision the father begins to develop in his role as the one most likely to help that child flesh out that vision.

A father's vision for a child is usually infused with a variety of expectations. This vision and the related expectations are also what help children understand how their interaction with their father actually works. A father's expectations for his child are what furnish structure to his interactions with his child. For example, a father may help a daughter study for a social studies exam because he knows she needs to develop the willingness and discipline to study for many future exams. Or a father might encourage a child to keep practicing on the basketball court in the driveway because he envisions the time his son or daughter will be in a game and need the skill to make a lay-up. Because fathers hold and set expectations for their children as adults, their actions as fathers are determined in some part by how it will affect the child's future outcome.

The vision a father has for his children can powerfully affect their education. To help children succeed, a father's mindset and expectations should not be based so much on particular future occurrences as on what type of person their child will become. Should children try to do well on a spelling test? Of course, but fathers often focus less on what will happen to their child and are more concerned about how their child will react if certain things happen. In other words, success on the spelling test is not as important to the father as is the success of achievement that comes through hard work and preparation. The father knows a good spelling grade is helpful in the child's future but real life success is not determined by grades so much as acquired skill and experience. Having expectations about how the child will *be* instead of what the child will *do* makes the father a strong influence on the child's education. Because he cannot predict what will happen to his children, he works to prepare them to have the character and skills that will make them successful on their own both in school and in the unpredictable real world.

Fathers' expectations that their children will become competent also become apparent to children when their fathers are active and engaged in their lives. As

fathers express this expectation, it lets children know they are seen as competent and they hold a special place in the future. This knowledge helps children persevere in challenging academic situations because they begin to understand they are not only capable of handling the challenge but, if they persevere through it, they will be rewarded in the future. Fathers who have high expectations for their children's educational efforts and actively assist them tend to have children who do much better educationally.

Fathers as Teachers through Play

Play is perhaps the primary method of learning that children use to encounter the outside world in their early years. Research and observation has shown us that, because of their masculine nature, fathers interact with their children in a more playful manner. They tend to encourage children to explore.⁶ This playful and sometimes rough style of interaction is seen by some as second-class parenting because it is different from the interaction most mothers have with their children. However, from the time their children are very small, fathers want to *do* something with their child. The father-child interaction is exactly that—*interactive*. It is active, engaged involvement between two people.

Fathers tend to engage and activate a child through play even at young ages. As the child grows and the father gains caregiving competencies, play becomes a little rougher and more unpredictable. This rough-and-tumble play not only is a way for children and fathers to make deep personal connections but also allows the father to gain confidence to take the child out into the further expanses of the neighborhood and community. Play is the vehicle that engaged fathers use to teach children about their own abilities and about what the child will someday be able to do. When children “win” or “conquer” the dad in physical play, they learn they truly have abilities. When children “lose” or “falter” against the old man, they can also develop the idea that, as capable as they are, they still need more skills and help. Fathers need to balance the amount of success and frustration children must handle in any given “teachable moment.” These moments may include pulling themselves up on the couch, walking across the room, their first solo bike ride, or even conquering quadratic formulas. Play allows fathers to better control the laboratory that helps children learn to deal with the frustration and anxiety that accompany true learning. Play interaction is not the only way fathers engage a child, but it is a way for fathers to teach their children to fulfill the expectations fathers have set for them. A father who expects his child to be physically and emotionally resilient will allow a child to take certain risks and play in this rougher manner while also providing the guidance and support needed along the way.

In many of my educational workshops, I describe a scenario in which a child is running across the front yard and trips and skins his or her knee on the sidewalk. I ask the participants what would happen if only the mother were in the yard at the time. Almost to the person, they respond that surely the mother would run (or sprint like the Six Million Dollar Man) to respond to and care for the child. I then describe to many folks who are nodding their heads that moms typically not

only respond to the child but clean the wound, apply antibacterial spray and a cartoon-character bandage, and then apply a kiss and an ice cream bar. Once all this is done, then the child stops crying because he or she is comforted.

In this same workshop, I describe the same scenario with the same child skinning the same knee, but this time the father is in the yard. Again almost to the person, they respond that the father would respond by encouraging the child thus: "Get up! You are fine." Though this story is humorous, it resonates with most parents. Because fathers expect their child will be a resilient adult, they expect that same child can and should be resilient right now! I reassure the workshop participants that fathers will attend to a child's needs but may not necessarily use antibacterial ointment (unless you count WD-40) or a bandage (unless you count duct tape). However, fathers will many times use humor to diffuse the child's anxiety and pain. Mothers would often think this is cruel except for the fact that most children will respond to it if the father has already been engaged with the child.

The point is that children need to be nurtured and cared for by either the mother or father when they experience physical and emotional pain, and sometimes when they are experiencing pain they need to be encouraged to endure it. Fathers are much more likely than mothers to help the child endure minor pains. For children to be resilient in an academic setting that can be painful both physically (remember dodgeball?) and emotionally (remember junior high?), the father needs to play with his child and view that play as an optimal teaching opportunity. My experience as a middle school principal taught me that fathers who did not interact (through play or caregiving) with their child at an early age often did not have enough connection with their child to help them navigate math class, reading problems, lunchroom traumas, or most of the trials and tribulations that come with pre-adolescence and the teen years. Too often, the child who has not been taught by the father through play does not know how to deal with adverse conditions that often accompany gaining an education in a building of 400 or 500 other children. Additionally, the father who has not played with his child has not had the opportunity to be taught by both the child and the fatherhood experience how to help the child as he or she faces minor and major adversities.

Why Fathers Count in the Education of Their Children

Although a discussion of fatherly traits that are required for the positive development of our children is necessary, it is also critical to see why those traits make a difference in the education of our children. The father's own masculinity and engagement with his child, high or low expectations of his child, and ability to teach and challenge through play are three important traits in helping children become educated learners. When fathers become involved in the daily lives and education of their child, they can make a huge difference in the outcomes for that child. Long observation, anecdotal information, and a strong and growing body of research evidence over a period of almost 50 years confirm the value of fathers' involvement in the education of their children. Researchers have done a tremen-

dous amount of work to show us how fathers continue to count in the education of their children. To illustrate, I have chosen to highlight a few key research findings regarding the influence of father involvement on school readiness, academic performance in the classroom, and social behavior.

Children Are Ready for School

Being ready and able to enter the classroom, participate in school, and relate to other children is important for a child's educational beginning. Research on children and school readiness has illustrated some of the following points:

- Children of involved fathers tend to have a greater tolerance for stress and frustration. They are able to be one of many in a classroom, deal with not being the center of the universe, maintain their focus on their class work, and have the confidence to work on their own.⁷
- Children with fathers who are more active in their play initiation and give less immediate support in the face of frustration are more competent in being adaptive and solving problems.⁸
- When fathers are involved in the early life of children (18 months to three years of age), children are less likely to have separation anxiety from the mother or the father when they begin school.⁹

Children Perform Better in the Classroom

How do children perform academically when their fathers strive to be involved and engaged with them? Research findings suggest father involvement is a real and powerful factor in improving children's classroom performance:

- Boys who have nurturing fathers score higher on intelligence tests than do boys with less involved fathers.¹⁰
- Preschoolers with involved fathers have stronger verbal skills than those with less involved fathers.¹¹
- Children with positively engaged fathers have a higher cognitive competency on standardized intellectual assessments.¹²
- Girls who have a close, warm relationship with their father have a stronger competence in mathematics.¹³
- Children whose fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to do well academically and enjoy school and less likely to have ever repeated a grade or been expelled than children whose fathers are less involved in their schools.¹⁴
- Children whose fathers share meals with them, spend leisure time with them, or help them with reading or homework do significantly better academically than children whose fathers do not.¹⁵
- Students with highly involved fathers have a more positive perception of their academic ability, which results in higher grades in secondary school.¹⁶

- Boys with highly involved fathers in their life receive superior grades and perform a year above their expected age level on achievement tests.¹⁷
- Fathers who support their children in less conventional ways have daughters who are more successful in school, work, and career and sons who eventually achieve more academically and in their careers than do children with less supportive fathers.¹⁸

Children Are Better Behaved

A child's educational experience is as much about social learning and growth as about learning to read, write, and do math. Research on child behavior in school settings shows father involvement is also a positive influence in this area:

- Father involvement correlates with fewer behavior problems exhibited by children, and this holds after controlling for the level of maternal involvement.¹⁹
- When both boys and girls are reared with engaged fathers, they demonstrate "a greater ability to take initiative and evidence self-control."²⁰
- For predicting a child's self esteem, it is sustained contact with the father that matters more for sons but physical affection from fathers that matters more for daughters.²¹
- The higher a child rates acceptance by his or her father, the higher teachers rate the child on social competence and positive conduct.²²
- Children who have fathers who regularly engage them in physical play are more likely to be socially popular with their peers than children whose fathers do not engage them in this type of play.²³

Fathers' involvement with children strengthens the support system for children in their preparation for school, performance in academic situations, and social behavior with their peers and other adults.

Conclusion

We could fill several volumes with stories about what great dads do to help their children get the education they want them to have. However, once we understand the *why* of fathers, we begin to better understand how we can lead fathers into being even more effective in the lives of their children. As indicated by research and observation, fathers play a very important role in the development of their children. However, we have to understand further that, due to their unique contributions, fathers' involvement is absolutely essential for children to reach their highest potential in education.

My organization, Strong Fathers–Strong Families, provides facilitation for school-based father and child interactive events. One of our most effective events is what we simply call "Bring Your Dad to School Day." I explain to people that this event is like the aforementioned Dads and Donuts Day on steroids. While the traditional Dads and Donuts Day events are always well attended, this version, in

which we tell fathers there will be a workshop, are many times better attended than previous events. School administrators and teachers are amazed that many fathers will take time out of their workday to be at school to attend a workshop. The consistently high attendance is a testament to the fact that fathers around the country care for their children and will be involved if they are *invited*. Many of these workshops are at least two hours long, and although campus staff members predict the fathers won't stay that long, fathers consistently tell us in our evaluations they wish it were longer. It has been our experience that this willingness to be involved can have a *huge* impact on the school culture and student outcomes if schools and families will take advantage of the concern they *both* have for the children at stake.

While we invite fathers into the school and feed them a donut, we also take them a step further into the actual classroom to observe their children in their "natural" school habitat. Even though I am sure teachers are on their best behavior, we ask that fathers get a chance to see what happens on a regular school day. When these fathers visit the classroom, they gain a better understanding of what is expected of their children, how they are being taught to meet those expectations, and what their children and the teacher encounter in a given school day. After fathers are able to observe for a while, we pull them out to discuss what they saw in the classroom. They are amazed at the high level of academics being presented in the classroom, they are typically amazed at their child's abilities, and they are also concerned about the level of work that is being asked of their child. Once we describe the world into which their child will go upon graduation, they begin to set their resolve to do an even better job of helping their child gain an education.

In follow-up activities and interviews, we have found that fathers have gone home and begun to check the homework every night, taken over the job of helping their child review for tests, and become very involved in the various special projects that are sent home. Every father I have talked to has spoken of a better relationship with his child, a better rapport with his child's teacher, and an improvement made by his child in some academic area such as test scores, homework completion, or getting assignments from school to home and vice versa. Fathers have proudly told us about a child making the honor roll for the first time or making great improvement on report cards since they have become more involved. Fathers of children whose behavior was not up to par prior to their involvement have consistently reported that their children's behavior has improved since they have become more involved in their children's school. When we have involved fathers in the schools in a positive manner, we have also found that teachers are more receptive to involvement by both mothers and fathers and mention the same positive changes the fathers have described.

One of the reasons I presently work with schools to increase father involvement is that I saw what a difference it made when I was a teacher and administrator. Children with actively engaged fathers were always better behaved and had high levels of academic achievement. The inverse was also true that children who struggled the most with academic and behavior issues came from fatherless homes or a home where father and mother lived in chaos with their children.

As a father of two boys, I also know that I have a big impact on how well my sons do in class. By setting high expectations, checking on their classroom progress, and helping with class projects, I have seen my children maintain a high level of academic success. My wife, who is a third grade teacher, plays a huge role in their education as well, but I have seen the difference when I do not hold up my end of the bargain. I also see the confidence level of my sons change when I speak of their great abilities, and they have an even stronger resolve to do well when I inform them of how those abilities will help them achieve whatever they wish in the world outside our home and their school.

There is tremendous scientific and anecdotal data to confirm that a father's involvement in the education of his child is imperative to that child's success. When a family and a school work together to prepare a child to become an educated, productive adult, the father can assume a very powerful role in that child's education. By simply being male, being the masculine parent that is very different from the mother, and being a representative of the outside world, a father helps a child reach the fullest potential possible with the education he or she has received. Schools are dealing with a myriad of challenges as standards are constantly being raised while the traditional structures that have supported children and families have consistently been eroding. In order to develop an appropriately trained workforce for an ever-changing world economy, schools are scrambling to do more work with less time and money. It has been known for several years that children with parents involved in their education do better in school. However, schools have failed to do a good job of involving those families in order to improve student outcomes. The time and money would be well spent bringing families into the school as partners. An even more focused approach to exponentially improving social and academic outcomes for students would be to strengthen the role of fathers within the home, on the school campus, and invariably within the life of the child. Time and money would not only be well spent in such an effort but would pay dividends in human, social, and financial capital tenfold. If we will commit to such a worthy effort, our children, homes, and communities will be all the stronger for the effort.

Endnotes

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