

## **Parents at the heart of academic success**

### **What do studies prove ?**

Parents, rejoice: many studies<sup>1</sup> highlight the essential role of parents in the educational success of their children. It is above all a positive image of the school which once transmitted and cultivated, seems to pay off in terms of motivation and academic success.

Apart from this factor, the style of education also plays an important role. Thus Steinberg and his team<sup>2</sup> conclude that regardless of their ethnic background, adolescents raised by warm and firm parents (democratic style) generally perform better in school than their peers from authoritarian or permissive homes. According to a study<sup>3</sup> conducted by Pierrette Bouchard, professor-researcher on educational success at the University of Laval, it appears that it's more crucial for the parents to focus on a regular dialogue within the family, than on grades or on school reports. The same study also highlights other features which successful students have in common:

- presence of sustained effort
- eagerness to learn
- awareness of the importance of academic success for the future
- perseverance
- organisational skills
- autonomy
- motivation

This list shows how important it is that the parents, as well as the high school, support the young person as much as possible, in order to evoke a desire for learning and to help them develop the qualities needed to succeed.

## Parents-school partnership

Another important factor is the contact parents have with their child's school. Parents who are engaged in and take responsibility for the school's activities, have a better knowledge and understanding of the actions carried out by the school. Therefore, they are able to provide their child with the support needed to accomplish those activities outside school.<sup>4</sup>

The parents' involvement is favourably influenced by the school's policy which considers parents as fully-fledged partners. Furthermore, the teachers' openness to cooperate with the parents has a higher impact on their involvement, than their linguistic origin or socio-economic status.<sup>5</sup>

Given the tremendous impact of this "family-school partnership", Joyce Epstein of the Johns Hopkins University<sup>6</sup> has developed a framework programme to involve parents in the school's activities. It includes the following six aspects:

- Parent-school communication must be transparent, flexible and effective: it is a two-way street. The high school must also take into account the linguistic knowledge of the parents and organise a simultaneous translation if necessary.
- Parenting skills are encouraged and supported by the high school. The school must offer evening information sessions on everything related to adolescence: school orientation, health and nutrition, support measures etc.
- Parents have their say in decisions affecting young children.
- Parents are encouraged to support the school by volunteering. For instance, they can participate in the school's activities and projects, or help out by offering their professional skills.
- Parents show interest in their child's education and their learning at home.
- The school should also inform and encourage parents to make use of all the available resources. These can include assistance with studies (help with homework or learning for a test), academic orientation or individual monitoring.

Being interested in their child's education implies that the parents listen to them and encourage them. However this is not about helping the child to the point of having practically done the homework for them.

These six aspects highlight that parental involvement takes a variety of forms, both at home and at school. The family and the school should be able to communicate every day if necessary. In this sense, information and communication technologies make life easier for us.

As parents, we have to face the realities of everyday life, both private and professional. A busy life, the language factor, the educational background, a single-parent family situation, a remote place of residence ... are all factors that can limit the parents' availability. The school has to take all of this into account and offer young people support measures and personalised assistance when needed. In this context, the role of our *School Counselling and Psychology Service* (SPOS) – now called the *Department of Psychology and Academic Support* (SePAS Service psycho-social et d'accompagnement scolaires) – is essential. SePAS is a listening center and a place of expertise. It acts as a mediator between the classroom and the home or as a facilitator to establish links with other support structures.

Parents and the school pursue a common goal: good academic training and the well-being of the youth. Note that the well-being of the youth is a holistic concept. As the *World Health Organisation*<sup>7</sup> has pointed out, it is not enough for the young person to be in good physical health. To feel good about oneself, a whole set of other mental, moral, cognitive, affective and social characteristics must be added. There is no doubt that a close relationship between “parents and high school” and a genuine “culture of shared responsibility” can only be beneficial to the young person's development.

Gaston Ternes, 2011 and 2018

### **5 practical tips for parents of 12 and 15-year-olds**

- **Show interest in their school career.** Listen to your child talk about their daily life in class, both in terms of school subjects and extracurricular activities or commitments. Find out about the homework that needs to be done and take part in the activities and initiatives proposed by the school.
- **Establish daily routines for homework :** plan a convenient, mostly quiet, place for your child to study. If possible, be available to answer their questions.
- **Emphasise the importance of education.** In particular, make them understand that this is a long-term investment that will open doors to vocational training and professions of their choice.
- **Discuss future projects.** What are the personal interests of young people, what excites them, what are their favourite subjects? These exchanges promote a better self-image and young people will be more motivated and willing to invest in their education.
- **Set a good example :** Research shows that adults who continue educating themselves at home by reading, create a space where documentation is accessible, which in turn has a positive influence on their child's academic success.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Booth, Dunn, 1996 ; Eccles, Harold, 1996, p. 3-34 ; Epstein, 1986, p. 277-294 ; OCDE : *Les parents partenaires de l'école*, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Steinberg, 1992, p. 1266-1281

<sup>3</sup> [www.ctreq.qc.ca](http://www.ctreq.qc.ca) [Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec] ; Bouchard, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1994

<sup>5</sup> Dauber, Epstein, 1993, p. 53-71 ; Epstein, 1986, p. 277-294

<sup>6</sup> Epstein, 2001

<sup>7</sup> Organisation mondiale de la Santé, Health Promotion: A Discussion Document on the Concept of Principles, Genève, 1984

