PACER CENTER

ACTION INFORMATION SHEETS

Dropout Prevention and Youth with Disabilities:
Strategies for Parents of High School Students

Family Involvement is Important

Family involvement is a very important contributor to a child staying in school. The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement is how much his or her family encourages learning. In addition to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, daily conversations about school performance and daily encouragement to work hard and do well are important ways that parents can be involved in their child's education. When families are involved, their children are more likely to:

- earn high grade-point averages,
- score better on tests or rating scales,
- enroll in more challenging classes,
- earn more credits,
- attend school regularly,
- have positive attitudes about school,
- graduate from high school,
- enroll in postsecondary programs, and
- refrain from destructive activities such as alcohol and drug use and violence

Source: National Parent Teacher Association, 2001

Helping Students Succeed in High School

Most people would agree that the more education a student acquires, the better his or her chances for a successful future. Current dropout prevention research has identified the following tips that parents can use to help their child stay in school.

- Maintain frequent contact with your child's teachers, regular education and special education, throughout high school.
- Monitor school attendance. If your child is skipping school, it may be a warning sign that he/she is having trouble. Talk with school staff immediately.
- Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities and employment. It will help him or her to develop positive relationships and have success outside the classroom setting. Many schools provide after-school and summer programs to build new interests. Encourage your child to participate in at least one extra-curricular activity at school or with other students. The activities can help your child feel part of the group, important to the school, and more motivated. Students with disabilities have a right to be included.
- Help your child explore career options that interest him or her and the education needed to be successful in those careers. Make sure your child has transition assessments that include career interests and options.
- Let your child know that individuals who earn a high school diploma are likely to earn twice as much each year compared to those who don't have a diploma or equivalency.
- Help your child establish graduation as their academic priority.
- Identify postsecondary goals. The most important questions to ask are: What interests your child? What is your child good at? Postsecondary technical training or two-year community college programs are appropriate paths to meeting employment goals for some students with disabilities. If attending a four-year college is the way to reach a career goal, put steps in place to make this happen.

Parents do have a powerful influence over whether their children finish high school. The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement is the extent to which families encourage learning and communicate high expectations for the student's education and future career.

Source: Partnering with Parents in Dropout Prevention, Leuchovius, 2006

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