

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2015-98

Monday, October 19, 2015

Contact: Tom McCarthy, DPI Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

Families: First teachers, best allies in educating all children

A guest editorial by State Superintendent Tony Evers

How do educators latch on to the power of parents so we can close achievement gaps and ensure all of our students are ready for the next steps in their education, careers, and life? One answer is to build relationships.

But what does that mean and how is it done? Over the course of several months, my Parent Advisory Council looked deeply at research and best practices on family and community engagement. I so value their time and effort. These dedicated parents, grandparents, and community members built off of the work of the [Promoting Excellence for All](#) initiative and made a number of recommendations. Perhaps foremost is the advice to respect families as experts on their children. Think about that. Parents love and teach their kids from their first moments. Between birth and age 18, children spend about 12 percent of their time at school, but much more with their parents; their first teachers.

Not only are parents experts on their kids, I have never met a parent who didn't want the best for their child. Now, knowing what that "best" is can sometimes be difficult. That is where communications can help. From the reserved child who may need help making a friend or speaking up in class, to the extrovert who has to practice taking turns and letting others lead, to a child with special needs who may require an Individualized Education Program, teachers must enlist parents and guardians as partners in their children's education. That means talking to each other and talking more frequently than one annual parent teacher conference.

Wisconsin recently received a grant to train school staff members as Academic-Parent Teams to improve communications and build relationships among teachers and parents. Additionally, some recent research indicates that brief, weekly communication delivered via e-mail, text, telephone, or voice mail on how a student is doing or what families can do to support learning at home can have a profound impact on student achievement.

Communication is powerful.

The council also recommended that schools and educators recognize and build on the diverse cultures and family strengths that their students bring to the classroom. They stressed that families need multiple ways to support

(more)

their children’s learning. Finally, schools must connect families with community resources that prepare every child to be college and career ready. It’s about building relationships.

The how of these activities is as different as each school building. Some successful schools use conferences early in the school year to let parents educate the teacher on their child’s strengths and areas for improvement. Others use a school messaging system to support teacher and parent communications. Still others have frequent before- and after-school gatherings to make school a welcoming place or ask families to share a cultural food or tradition so all can learn about what makes each child unique.

These results-tested strategies are part of our Department of Public Instruction resources gathered online to support family and community engagement. I encourage all educators to visit the Promoting Excellence for All website, <http://dpi.wi.gov/excforall>, to consider what they can do to help parents help their kids be successful in school. We’ve also pulled together several topics specifically for families and students. Our new Families and Students portal can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/families-students>.

We have much work to do to fulfill the goal of Agenda 2017. We want every child to graduate ready for college and career. As educators and families work together to build relationships that work, we can do it.

###

WEBSITES: Promoting Excellence for All: Family and Community Engagement
<http://dpi.wi.gov/excforall/family-and-community-engagement>
Families and Students: <http://dpi.wi.gov/families-students>

NOTES: A high resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/news/contacts-resources>. This editorial is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_98.pdf.