

NEA: National Education Association

Great Public Schools for Every Child

President's Viewpoint

March 2005

Parents and Educators Team Up

'Parents and teachers are in the same difficult situation together, besieged by outside experts pointing out what we are supposedly doing wrong.'

—Dorothy Rich, Home and School Institute

As a veteran classroom teacher, I learned some hard-earned lessons. But none was more important than this: The better I got to know a student's parents, the better a teacher I became.

A child's education begins at home, not in the classroom, and certainly the home's powerful influence does not end when school begins. It is a force to be reckoned with, for good or ill, throughout a youngster's school career.

Every parent I've ever known wants his or her child to succeed—in school and in life. No parent has ever said to me, "Reg, I want my kid to fail." Just as no educator ever gets up in the morning and says: "I want my students to fail today." Parents and educators want the same thing: Our children and students to succeed. And when they do, both parents and educators alike are filled with pride.

Almost all parents today understand the importance of their child getting a good education, and it doesn't matter if the parents are highly educated or not. After all, the parents can see for themselves that the factory down the street—where a relatively uneducated young person once could go, land a well-paying union job, and work a lifetime—is closed. There's a padlock on the front gate, and those jobs are long gone.

Parents get it. But what many parents don't always get is how they can help their child succeed in school. And that's where we—Team NEA—come in. We can help. Which is why, since I have been President, NEA has stepped up its parental outreach efforts.

Working more closely than ever with the National PTA and grassroots organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, La Raza, and ACORN, we have prepared and distributed parent guides to school success, improving student achievement, reading, and math—in both English and Spanish. We've helped minority parents organize themselves into public school support groups. And we've transformed NEA's Read Across America from a one day event that celebrates Dr. Seuss's birthday and reading into a year-round program.

What's more, in partnership with the Home and School Institute's MegaSkills Education Center, NEA is training NEA local leaders and activists to become more effective parental involvement activists in their schools and districts.

Ask NEA members what they want, and they'll tell you: More parental involvement. Yes, parental involvement ranks right up there with smaller class sizes and improved student discipline at the top of our members' professional wish list.

But wishing for more parental involvement won't make it happen. Teachers and education support professionals must make it happen.

We need to connect with parents so they can see that we, like them, are dedicated to their children succeeding. And I think the message we, as educators, want to deliver to parents is that we can't replace you, we can't do it for you, but together, we can make a huge difference for your child.

In a recent radio broadcast to parents, I said: "If someone in your family is sick, you visit a doctor....If someone is in trouble, you consult a lawyer....And if you want your children to be successful, maybe it's time to visit their school."

Team NEA, we are serious about parental involvement. We're doing more than talking the talk, we're walking the walk. And I invite each and every one of you to join us on this walk. It's all about shared responsibility. We can't do it alone, and neither can the parents. But working together, watch out America! We'll educate the students and create a great public school for every child.

NEA President Reg Weaver