



Dropout Prevention and Youth with Disabilities: Strategies for parents of middle 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 middle school

The transition from elementary school to middle school can be difficult for many students and their families. Nationally, by eighth grade, 20 percent of all students with disabilities and 40 percent of Hispanic students with disabilities have dropped out (Williams Bost, 2004). It is important that parents be aware of the risk factors for school dropout and seek help if they see repeated risky behaviors. These include:

- skipping school,
- failing classes,
- discipline problems, or
- being involved in illegal activities.

Below are some tips for parents of middle school students with disabilities:

- Let your child know that you value his or her education as important to his or her future.
- Set aside time every day for homework, even if your child doesn't have any.
- Make sure that your child completes homework. Find out if your school district has a "homework hotline" that your child can call for help when studying at home.
- Limit the time for video games or television to no more than one or two hours each day.
- Talk to your child about school problems and achievements every day.

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- Help your child use problem-solving skills in difficult situations at home and at school.
 - Notice and praise good behavior.
 - Know your child's friends and their families.
 - Let teachers know that you want to be contacted immediately (and by what method) if your child has problems with homework or behavior.
 - If your child is struggling, seek help as soon as possible. Parents and other adults can reduce the likelihood of dropout if they take steps to help youth cope with their problems.

Many parents who were actively involved in the education of their children at the elementary school level become less involved when their children reach middle school (National Committee for Citizens in Education, n.d.). However, family involvement is as important as ever. Increased family engagement at the middle school level can help make earning a high school diploma, going on to further education, and achieving a dream job a reality.