

# Chalkboard

By

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“It takes many brush strokes to paint the portrait of a child”. In the regular legislative session of 2003, Act 603 was passed mandating that parents should always have the right to monitor the progress of the artwork.

The new law in part spells out, “The General Assembly recognizes: (1) That a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire time the child spends in school; (2) To support the goal of the schools to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners; (3) That although parents are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they are an integral component of a school's ability to provide for the educational success of their children; (4) That engaging parents is essential to improve student achievement; and (5) That schools should foster and support active parental involvement.”

During the 11 years that I have been your superintendent, I have observed that the Gentry Public School District, in general, has not required a law to practice the obvious common sense tenets of this law. This is not to say that there have not been times when doing so was painful to both school employees and parents involved in certain situations. Even so, it has always been my personal belief, during the 28 years of my sojourn in education, that if a parent ever has the right to behave irrationally that right is imbued in matters where the parent feels his or her child is being mistreated. Fortunately, 9 of 10 parents to darken my doorway come with an open mind and want to resolve problems rather than coming to add logs to the fire.

Necessary or not, the law goes on to say, “The parental involvement program in each school shall: (1) Involve parents of students at all grade levels in a variety of roles; (2) Be comprehensive and coordinated in nature; (3)(A) Recognize that communication between home and school should be regular, two-way, and meaningful. (B) To encourage communication with parents the school shall prepare family kits, appropriate for the age and grade of the child, describing: (i) The school's parental involvement program; (ii) The recommended role of the parent, student, teacher, and school; (iii) Ways for the parents to become involved in the school and his or her child's education; (iv) Activities planed throughout the school year to encourage parental involvement; (v) A system to allow the parents and teachers to communicate in a regular, two-way, and meaningful manner with

the child's teacher and the school principal. (C) To encourage communication with parents, the school shall schedule no less than two (2) parent-teacher conferences per school year. (D) The school may plan and engage in other activities determined by the school to be beneficial to encourage communication with parents; (4)(A) Promote and support responsible parenting. (B) To promote and support responsible parenting, the school shall: (i) Purchase parenting books, magazines and other informative material regarding responsible parenting through the school library, advertise the current selection, and give parents an opportunity to borrow the materials for review; (ii) Publish a notice in the local newspaper at the end of each school year honoring parents who attend all parent-teacher conferences scheduled by the school; (iii) Create parent centers; and (iv) Plan and engage in other activities determined by the school to be beneficial to promoting and supporting responsible parenting; (5)(A) Acknowledge that parents play an integral role in assisting student learning. (B) To help parents in assisting students, the school shall: (i) Schedule regular "Parents Make the Difference" evenings where parents are given a report on the state of the school and an overview of: (a) What students will be learning; (b) How students will be assessed; (c) What parents should expect for their child's education; and (d) How parents can assist and make a difference in his or her child's education; and (ii) Engage in other activities determined by the school to help parents assist in his or her child's learning; (6)(A) Welcome parents in the school and seek parental support and assistance. (B) To welcome parents in the school, the school shall: (i) Not have any school policies or procedures that would discourage a parent from visiting the school, specifically including: (a) Policies requiring parents to pick-up his or her child outside the school building each day; and (b) Policies prohibiting the parents from visiting a child's classrooms during school events; (ii) Publish a volunteer resource book, listing the interests and availability of volunteers for school staff members' use, specifically including: (a) Survey parents regarding their interests, so volunteer work will be meaningful; (b) Determine how frequently a volunteer would like to participate, including the option of just one (1) time per year; (c) Include options for those who are available to help at home; (d) Use the resource book to help match school needs with volunteer interests; (iii) Print statements attesting to the school district's commitment to parental involvement and distribute the statements to parents of student; and (iv) Engage in other activities determined by the school to welcome parents in the school; (7)(A) Recognize that a parent is a full partner in the decisions that affect his or her child and family. (B) To encourage parents to participate as full partners in the decisions that affect

his or her child and family, the school shall: (i) Frequently publish the school's process for resolving parental concerns, including how to define the problem, whom to approach first, and how to develop solutions; (ii) Sponsor seminars to inform the parents of high school students about how to be involved in the decisions affecting course election, career planning, and preparation for post-secondary opportunities; and (iii) Engage in other activities that the school determines will encourage parents to participate as full partners in the decisions that affect his or her child and family; (8)(A) Recognize that community resources strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning; (B) To take advantage of community resources the school shall: (i) Contact alumni from the school to create an alumni advisory commission to provide advice and guidance for school improvement; (ii) Develop paycheck size cards with tips for how parents can foster their child's success and contact employers about including the cards with employee paychecks; and (iii) Engage in other activities that the school determines will use community resources to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning; and (9) Support the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of the program to involve parents in the decisions and practices of the school district, using to the degree possible, the components listed in this section. (c)(1) The principal of each school in a district shall designate one (1) certified staff member that is willing to serve as a parent facilitator to organize meaningful training for staff and parents promoting and encouraging a welcoming atmosphere to parental involvement in the school and to undertake efforts to ensure that parental participation is recognized as an asset to the school. (2) The certified staff serving as a parental facilitator shall receive supplement pay for the assigned duties as required by law.”

I hope you made it to the bottom of this article. There are a lot of “do’s” yet left to do both by us and by you as Gentry’s Parent Involvement plan takes shape.

The bottom line is that now both common sense and law allow and require you to take an active role in the portrait of your child’s education. Or even more simply, “We are the painter you have contracted...you have a right and obligation to both assist and judge the quality of our work.”