

Chalkboard

By

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I want to say “Thank You” to the parents who came to school for our first Parent-Teacher Conference this year which was held on September 23, 2004 from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. I offer this expression of gratitude for two reasons. The first is almost laughable; and I stress “almost”. A paragraph found within Arkansas Code Annotated 6-15-1702 “Parental Involvement Plan” requires the school district to “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”. The humor I find is the idea that a parent being involved in their child’s education can be legislated with a “Thank You” notice in the newspaper. Maybe it is only my own perspective, which I have heard labeled as flippant, but I find the idea of being legally forced to say thanks for something, which is obviously inherent to being a good parent, to be funny.

For the second and what I believe to be the real reason, I say “Thank You” not because I have to but because I want to. A.C.A. 6-15-1702’s intent and rationale is good. It is good because parents should be involved in their children’s education. I will even go a step further and say that parents should be involved in their children’s lives.

For a child in elementary school that idea is relatively easy to implement; most of those children rarely go out without some adult being present. Middle School years are harder as the child’s social life begins to bloom. After that the parental knowledge curve begins to wane as the immediate family becomes somewhat displaced by the “not a child but not an adult’s” need for acceptance of friends. Legal driving age can be both a blessing and a curse for parents of some adolescents.

So simple but so true is the fact that without knowledge of what is happening in your child’s life you cannot offer parental interventions when your child’s educational, social, and yes even spiritual life takes a wrong fork in the road of life. I would wager that every person reading this can, with a little reflection, bring to memory some twists and turns that you could have used some guidance from someone who had already passed that way. It certainly should not be an alien thought to believe that your children need that guidance from you from time to time.

Do your children want you to be involved in their lives? Ask your kindergarteners that while you are reading a story at bedtime. Ask your ten-year old that question as you are tossing a ball in the back yard. Ask your eighth grader that from the bleachers of the Thursday night football game. Ask your fourteen-year-old daughter that in the aisles of the mall.

Go ahead and ask your older high school aged students. You may get an emphatic “No” but ask anyway. But if you do get that “No”, go ahead and be involved in your older child’s life anyway. It may be when they are 20, or it may be never, before they tell you it was important to them. If it’s never, then “So what”? Your job is to help them avoid situations where there are no “do-overs”. Right?

Here may or may not be a radical truth for some readers- you do not need your child’s permission to perform your duties as a parent. You do not have to feel loved and appreciated all the time to do your job as a parent.

If you have read to this point and are beginning to feel like I am writing as a model of good parental involvement and am seeking some accolade, then you can stop feeling that way. I am not. Like any parent I did some things that I believe were the right things to do with my sons. But I can also look back and see many things I should have and could have done better- much better.

No, rather I write to you from being a jr. high teacher, a high school principal, a jr. high principal, an assistant superintendent, and a superintendent during the last 29 or so years and having the privilege of working at some level with the children that parents have entrusted in to the school’s care.

With that said, you may feel free to etch this last thought in concrete. The most valuable gift that you can give your child to ensure their success and well being in life is the time you spend involved in their lives now- in school and out. That’s a hard job but somebody has to do it.