

What happens Before and After School Affects Achievement: For Better or for Worse

When a child arrives at school, it is assumed that he or she is ready to learn and is willing and able to work hard. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way. Often, very capable students have poor records when it comes to academic achievement – and a closer look at the factors outside of school which can influence a student's success may show why.

Before children begin school, parents can help them develop the background skills they will need. Simply reading to children, talking to them and listening to what they have to say appear to have the most positive influence on their success in school. Encouraging hobbies and individual interests – while monitoring the amount and type of television programs watched – can also be important in guiding children's intellectual development before and after they enter school.

In addition, when planning family outings or vacations, parents should consider taking their children to

museums, libraries, government institutions, and places of historical significance, as well as attending various cultural activities. These activities should be accompanied by discussions about the educational significance of what the child is seeing and experiencing.

Another factor which can affect school achievement is that, due to two-income families as well as single parents who work, it is likely that a significant part of the child's day will be spent not with one or both parents, but with a child care worker. In fact, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founder of the National Parenting Association, notes that over the last thirty years, children have lost approximately 12 hours of parental time a week. Therefore, it is extremely important that parents pay close attention to the child care arrangements that they make for their children, as those who are selected will undoubtedly influence the skills, values, and life experiences of the child. In addition,

parents need to realize that, even though adolescents may be able to physically take care of themselves, they still need adult supervision outside of school. Confirming this need, Hewlett states that, as a group, “‘home alone’ children are twice as likely to drink alcohol and take drugs as children who are under the supervision of adults after school.”

Adolescents face other factors which can affect their achievement in school, including part-time jobs and more responsibility in the home. What is more, children of all ages are now taking part in numerous extracurricular activities. These activities can all play an important role in the development of good work habits and can help children build the foundation of skills they will need to achieve success and satisfaction in school and beyond. For adolescents, a carefully selected part-time job or volunteer activity that does not require excessive time can provide a chance to learn and apply good work habits. The income obtained from a part-time job gives parents an opportunity to work with their teenagers regarding “real-life” money management. However, it is important

for children to realize that their primary goal at this stage in life is to obtain a quality education – and that a part-time job or other extracurricular activity must be viewed as secondary.

According to Herbert Walberg, a noted educational researcher, children who understand the importance of education and who value hard work and responsibility tend to achieve more academically and experience fewer discipline problems than children without these values. Parents who model the concept of hard work in their lives, point out the responsibilities of daily living, and emphasize the importance of an education provide their children with a positive example to follow.

Above all, it is important that children do not feel left alone to handle the things outside of school which may be affecting their achievement in school. Please contact your school to find out more about how you can help children overcome the many obstacles to learning that they may encounter before and after school.