

Education

Parents can help children avoid poor grades

Parents ready to push the panic button because of a child's poor academic performance can learn to anticipate school problems before they become serious issues, according to Ernie Hartzog, director of the Northeast Portland Sylvan Learning Center.

"Taking positive steps early--before a learning deficiency becomes a problem or before a child loses interest in school because he is not sufficiently challenged--can make all the difference," Hartzog said.

Precautionary measures can include enrichment courses designed to expand learning and challenge interest.

"Many times parents wait until well into the school year, when teachers or counselors send home warnings," said Hartzog. "By then they are forced to hold their breath, hoping the child will be able to stay abreast of the class's progress."

Today, nearly 24 million children in the U.S. need supplemental education. Among North Americans, 79 million are classified as functionally illiterate and require supplemental education to improve skills, job prospects and their quality of life.

Public and private schools and supplemental education providers, such as Sylvan Learning Centers, offer remediation and enrichment to students of all ages who seek to build - or build upon - basic skills.

When searching for a supplemental education provider, Hartzog recommends the experience be as orderly and well-planned as possible. The program upon which a parent decides should complement the entire education process.

"A careful program of supplemental education tells a child that his learning needs are important year-round - a far more positive approach than giving glaring attention to problems and slipping grades at report card time," Hartzog said.

The Northeast Portland Sylvan Learning Center, located at 4300 N.E. Fremont Street, #150, is part of the worldwide network of more than 600 Sylvan Learning and Technology Centers. It provides individualized supplemental educational services to students at all skill levels from kindergarten through adulthood. Sylvan's focus is on building a strong foundation of academic skills upon which students can build a lifetime of success.

Outfitting students for academic success

BY HUGH B. PRICE, NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE PRESIDENT

It's the middle of the summer, the air is thick with heat, and most of us are thinking more of the beaches than schools.

But I've just read a new book which has brought the educational future of our children--particularly those in public schools that are predominantly black and Hispanic--back to the center of my consciousness.

This book, *The Right To Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*, is, with well-documented evidence and clear, forceful prose, urgently sounding an alarm America must heed.

Its author, Professor Linda Darling-Hammond, of Columbia University's Teachers College, says that we must act now to fix the future of millions of poor and minority school children.

That is, we must act now in order to ensure that they get the kind of schooling which enables them to build their own future as productive members of society.

The kind of schooling is critical for them and us all in this new era when, as Darling-Hammond puts it, "perhaps even the survival of nations and people [is] so tightly tied to their ability to learn. Consequently, our future depends now, as never before,

on our ability to teach."

The importance of the blueprint that Darling-Hammond presents for doing that seems to be reinforced with every fresh news story about the tight connection now between the quality of schooling our children receive and their chances of finding decent jobs.

For example, a recent study found that today's high school graduates aren't as prepared to enter the workforce as they think.

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The study, sponsored by Amway and Junior Achievement, whose programs seek to acquaint young people with the business world, determined that 90% of graduating high school seniors feel they're prepared to enter the workforce directly.

However, only 51 percent of employers--those doing the hiring--feel that way. Nearly 6 out of 10 employers say that the high school graduates they see lack such fundamental skills as the ability to write adequately.

One contribution of *The Right to Learn* is that it describes where such

a mismatch begins and how its effect intensifies over time. It stems from the inequality which is "deeply embedded in the American schooling system"--an inequality that first shows itself in school districts' sharply unequal access to adequate revenues.

These great disparities in revenues disproportionately harm poor and minority pupils because they're concentrated in the rural and urban school districts with the smallest tax base. These school districts--with some

Those conditions are the same that exist as a matter of course for the overwhelming majority of schoolchildren from affluent families and from white families.

That is to say, if the schools these children attend have teachers well prepared in the subject they teach and in effective methods of teaching.

If the schools they attend offer courses which stimulate their curiosity, and ambition and self-confidence.

And if the schools they attend are properly outfitted for teaching--well-supplied with up-to-date textbooks and computers and other teaching materials, with small-ish enrollments that produce the right kind of student-teacher ratios.

While it is true that the solutions to the problems of school failure and inequality will require a major re-vamping of the nation's system of schooling, Linda Darling-Hammond would be the first to say that those of us at the local-school level cannot merely wait for that to occur.

We know what works. We must exercise the will and the determination to bring it about. We--educators, parents, elected officials, community leaders and taxpayers--must commit ourselves to improving the schools neighborhood by neighborhood if necessary.

"At risk" students thrive in Catholic schools

Lawmakers who want to know what works in education should focus their attention on the astonishing success of Catholic schools -- especially their work with "at-risk" inner-city, minority children -- a Heritage Foundation education specialist said today.

According to Education Policy analyst Nina Shokraii, "An abundance of recent research comparing public, private and religious schools shows that Catholic schools improve not only test scores and graduation rates for these children -- which the public school have abandoned as uneducable -- but also their future economic prospects, all at a substantially lower cost."

Some examples: A 1995 study revealed that attending a Catholic high school raised the probability of finishing high school and entering college for inner-city children by 17 percentage points. Another 1995 study showed that Catholic schooling reduced the odds of dropping out by at least 10 percent compared with public schools.

Even more surprising was a 1996 study showing that competition from Catholic schools actually raised the academic performance of surrounding public schools, bolstering the argument in favor of school choice plans as a way to improve overall educational performance.

In fact, Congress is now considering three separate bills with provisions that would allow disadvantaged parents to send their children to schools of their choice -- public, private or parochial. "The Community

Renewal Act, the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997, and various school-choice provisions of the Safe and Affordable Schools Act for the first time would allow low-income, inner-city children to receive a quality education at a reasonable price," according to Shokraii.

"Thanks to the growing body of research supporting Catholic school education, Congress can be certain that inner-city children would benefit from these measures. Congress has the opportunity, over the next year, to give tens of thousands of America's most disadvantaged children a much brighter future."

Shokraii has assembled a survey of long-range studies, all demonstrating the clear superiority of Catholic schools in improving grades, standardized test scores, dropout and graduation rates, college attendance and future wage gains. A study this year has found that African-American and Hispanic students attending urban Catholic schools were more than twice as likely to graduate from college as their counterparts in public schools (27 percent vs. 11 percent, respectively).

It also found that the probability that inner-city students would graduate from high school increased from 62 percent to at least 88 percent when those students were placed in a Catholic secondary school. And when compared with their public school counterparts, minority students in urban Catholic schools can expect roughly 8 percent higher wages in the future.

Class helps people plan a career

An in-depth "Career and Life Planning" course is being offered on Wednesday evenings, 6-9:30 p.m., from now to Aug. 27, for those who are in the process of choosing or changing careers. The three-credit course is designed to help students through the process of choosing or changing careers through instruction in personal and career assessment, as well as decision-making skills.

Those interested should register for "Career and Life Planning" (HD 208-80) in the Office of Admissions and Records. A \$15 fee is charged in addition to tuition. For more information about the course, call the Advising and Counseling Center at (503) 667-7315.

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