

DADS GETTING INVOLVED IN KIDS' SCHOOLS

Fathers making an extra effort to stress education in home

By Dallas Duncan • June 18, 2011



Chad believes staying involved in his daughter's Emily, 16 and Haley, 11, schools and daughters helped them succeed. Chad also has a son Harley, who is 11.

A generation ago, mothers were the ones who came to parent-teacher conferences, who diligently appeared at Parent-Teacher Organization meetings, who brought cupcakes for birthdays and holiday parties for their children's classmates to enjoy.

But this is the 21st century, and things are changing.

"When fathers are involved, school gets better," said Kyle Pruett, a clinical professor of child psychiatry at Yale University. "It's led to changes we've seen subtly across the country."

Pruett conducted a national survey of 1,000 fathers to determine the top 10 areas of their children's welfare they were most invested in. Education ranked fourth, regardless of income, race or ethnicity.

"This is a significant finding," Pruett said. "There's been quite a bit of data ... showing math scores are better for girls and literacy rates are better for boys. They stay in school longer."

Gainesville resident Chad, the Lawrenceville account manager for J & L Landscaping, said being involved in school helped his three children — Emily and Cameron, 16, and Haley, 11, students at Johnson High, Hart County High and South Hall Middle — succeed.

"Me and my wife married in 2003 and I immediately became part of the PTO at Jones Elementary," Chad said. "I was Booster Club president and council chairman. I felt like if I showed interest in their education, they'd get more out of it."

Chad was one of few fathers actively participating in school activities when he first got to Jones.

"I was at the school at least three times a week," he said. "I think people saw me and a lot of other fathers started joining and coming to eat lunch with their kids."

Hall County principals said fathers participating in activities is nothing new to the district.

Top 10 areas of fathers' focus on children's welfare

- Providing basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter
- Providing and maintaining a safe home environment
- Giving financial support
- Ensuring children have a good education
- Teaching children to respect their mothers
- Providing health care
- Supporting their children's mothers
- Telling their children they love them
- Understanding and relating to their children's problems
- Spending quality time with their children

Father's footsteps lead to kitchen as local cookbook author nurtures body and spirit

"I don't know that I've seen an increase because it's been good participation since the beginning," said Spout Springs Elementary Principal Steve McDaniel.

David Moody, Hall County Schools director of elementary education and principal at World Language Academy, said elementary-age children generally have more fathers participating than do other ages.

"Schools do a good job to hold events conscious of families with dual parents working," he said. "We try to do things in the evenings and after work hours."

More paternal participation is also evident in Gainesville schools.

"(Fathers) are the ones who drop the kids off, who walk them to class," said Gainesville Exploration Academy Principal Priscilla Collins. "When we communicate, we are typically communicating with the fathers."

Collins said mothers are always around as well, but the amount of paternal involvement in her school is "amazing" compared to what she knew growing up.

Gainesville City Schools Superintendent Merrienne Dyer said she sees a lot of father figures in the schools, including grandfathers

and Boys & Girls Clubs staff members.

"We love it when dads come to a parent conference," New Holland Core Knowledge Academy Principal Pam Wood said. "We have dads who come and eat lunch with their children on a daily basis."

Wood said New Holland always has a lot of parental participation, and added teachers schedule conferences on the parents' schedules to best accommodate them.

Pruett said this was something all schools should consider to make themselves "father-friendly."

"The job (of fatherhood) has become much more complex and bigger in the past 20 years," he said. "When you poll men, they feel not only interest in but responsibility for making their kids' education work."

It's not only biological fathers who feel this responsibility, but father figures as well.

"Children have a sense of value for fathers or father figures," Pruet said. "For children who don't have fathers around, mothers should be encouraged to include whoever the father figure is so the child will not be stigmatized."

Chad said Jones Elementary had a parent- and father-friendly atmosphere.

“(Principal) Hank Ramey would make sure to shake your hand,” he said. “He asked questions about what parents would like and he got the board to do more, I guess you’d say father-friendly activities at fairs, like fishing and sports stuff.”

Chad’s parents had a less-active role in his education, which is something he told himself he would not do to his children.

He thinks other fathers and father figures should do the same.

“Take a day off work and go to the school to see your kids,” he said. “If your kids see you at school and showing an interest, they’ll want to do more and better to impress you.”