

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #24: Bonding to School

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they care about their school.

54%

of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.*

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Bonding to school" is one of five commitment-to-learning assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

School Staying Power

What's the difference between those who drop out of school and those who stay? Researchers Laurence Steinberg, Bradford Brown, Sanford Dornbusch, and Christopher Cross have identified three factors that cause young people to feel disconnected from their schools. They are

- disinterest,
- boredom, and
- lack of connection.

Those who stay in school and do well have the opposite experience. They like it there. They have people who enjoy seeing them every day and who miss them when they're absent. They have families and friends who are proud of what they do there. They have fun and enjoy learning at school; they are stimulated and challenged. Their school is accessible to parents and people of color. In essence, school is a good place for them to be.

Are these the better-funded schools? Not necessarily. "The real reason for the failure of our schools lies not in absent dollars, but in our own willingness to sit around in despair," writes Mary Susan Miller, Ph.D., in *Save Our Schools*. "Tucked away in pockets throughout the country are schools in which wonderful things are happening. Pennies from heaven haven't rained into their budgets, but they have found ways to work around the shortfall."

Miller suggests that parents can make a big difference in improving schools and making them caring places for young people. "Let's face it, schools have a lot more parents than teachers and administrators," she says. "If you think your child isn't getting the education



your child deserves, sound your voice and flex your muscle through an organized parent group. You'd be amazed at how parents have turned schools around."

time together

Three ways to help your child bond to school:

1. Set up a school bulletin board in a prominent place in your home. Hang up the school calendar and school notices. Meet once a month to choose which school activities to attend as a family.
2. Call the school and see if you can subscribe to the school newspaper through the mail. When it arrives, read and discuss it with your child.
3. Make supportive signs for big events.

5 Ways to Show the School You Care

- 1 **With your child:**
 1. Make "care packages" for teachers, janitors, the principal, and others who work at the school. Include treats, notes of appreciation, and other small symbols of care.
 2. Show up at conferences.
 3. Think of ways to boost school spirit. One idea is to hold a contest for creating a school slogan or designing a school symbol.
 4. Write thank-you notes, leave voice-mail messages, or send email notes when you're pleased about something at your child's school.
 5. Send a note to teachers the first week of school. In it, tell them about your child and explain that you want to be involved.

talk together

- Questions to discuss with your child:
- Overall, do you care about your school? Why or why not?
 - What makes you proudest of your school?
 - How could you help make your school a better place for all young people?

Talk and Share

Part of bonding to school involves knowing that someone in school cares about you. Tell your child about one adult and one peer in your school that cared about you when you were in school. Ask your child which adults and which friends at school he or she likes best and why.

Liking School

If your child does not like school, ask her or him why. Help your child work to solve the problem, so he or she is more able to enjoy school.

More Help for Parents

Boxed In and Bored. This report examines how many middle schools fail young people and what good middle schools do right. (Published by Search Institute, www.search-institute.org; 800-888-7828.)

Final Word

"All the research on dropout prevention can be boiled down to one thing: Young people are more likely to stay in school and do well if they like it there."

—Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., researcher and author of *Boxed In and Bored*

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