



Chicken soup helps soothe a common cold.
A bandage helps mend a minor injury.
Sometimes, families need a little more to make it better.



SEARCH detnews.com

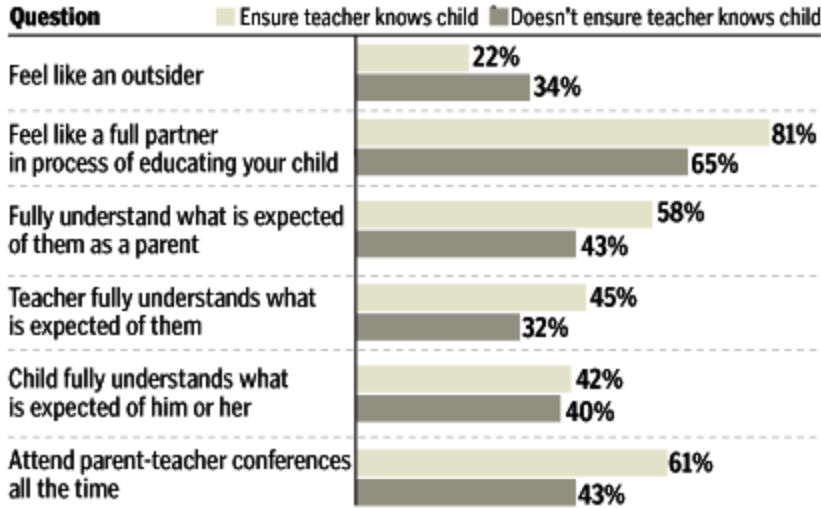
Search input field

- Home Page
Essentials
CyberSurveys
Forums
Photo Galleries
Weather
Horoscope
Lottery
Giveaways
Crossword
Advanced Search
Contact Us
Autos
Autos Insider
Drive
- Car Reviews
- Latest Deals
- Model Reports
Joyrides
Business
Business
Money & Life
Careers
- Find a Job
Real Estate
- Find a Home

Sunday, November 14, 2004

Parental involvement

A poll of 638 school parents in Michigan finds differences between those who say they ensure the teacher knows their child and those who don't.



Margin of error: Plus-minus 4%
Source: EPIC-MRA

The Detroit News

Previous Story Next Story

Marketpla

- Browse
New & U
Employr
Homes c
Shop Or

Home Del

- Start ho
Renew s
Custom

Editorials

- Editorial Sunday, No
Many pa at school
Mideast after Arafat
Non-mili get state fo
Republic court Michi
Fight de whether vo morality pl
Gonzale Hispanics r inroads
Michiga stick with I
Council Stalling on Bonds
Canada Auto Trade
Warren : Firefighters Proposal
Election moral interj
State wc creates lon
Don't Sl: Foreign Stu
Editorial
Ramada Muslim spi
Arafat's dispute abc
Palestin Should Die
Letters:
Other Vc

Many parents are truants at school

New study finds that teachers and parents aren't doing a good enough job of talking to each other.

By Nolan Finley / The Detroit News



Most problems that separate us can be solved with good, honest communication.

Nowhere is that more true than in the public schools, where teachers and parents find themselves talking either at

each other or past each other, but too rarely to each other.

That's the finding of a survey of parental attitudes about teachers and schools to be released Monday. Paid for by the Michigan Education Association and other education groups, the survey by EPIC-MRA attempted

More reports

- Poll: Michigan parents less involved
Click here starting Monday, Nov. 15, 2004, to See the complete poll results, cross tabs and sample responses.
10 tips to prepare for a parent-teacher conference.
Start early to get kids mentally and physically ready for kindergarten, middle or high school.
Battling the ghosts of

[Motor Sports](#)  
[Outdoors](#)  
[More Sports](#)  
[Scoreboards](#)  
[Entertainment](#)  
[Rant/Rave](#)  
[Events](#)  
[- Event Finder](#)  
[- State Fair](#)  
[Movies/TV/DVD](#)  
[- Movie Finder](#)  
[- TV Listings](#)  
[Eats & Drinks](#)  
[- Restaurants](#)  
[- Wine Report](#)  
[Books](#)  
[CD Reviews](#)  
[Escapes](#)  
[Casino Guide](#)  
[Michigan's Best](#)  
[Living](#)  
[Lifestyle](#)  
[Homestyle](#)  
[Fitness](#)  
[Forums](#)  
[News Talk](#)  
[Faith Talk](#)  
[Autos Talk](#)  
[Wings Talk](#)  
[Lions Talk](#)  
[Pistons Talk](#)  
[Tigers Talk](#)  
[Big 10 Talk](#)  
[High Schools](#)  
[Movie Talk](#)  
[Tech Talk](#)  
[Weblogs](#)  
[Politics Blog](#)  
[Pistons Blog](#)  
[Tigers Blog](#)  
[Lions Blog](#)  
[Big 10 Blog](#)  
[Rant/Rave](#)

to mine parents for information on how involved they feel in their child's education.

What it found was a serious disconnect between parents and teachers, who ought to be partners in educating children but too often are adversaries.

Nearly a quarter of parents say they haven't taken the time to make sure teachers know everything they should about their child. About the same number rarely, if ever, attend parent-teacher conferences. These parents send their kids off to school in the morning and welcome them home at night, and leave everything in between to the professionals.

"If you do that, you won't get near the education for your child that someone else will who is engaged with the school," says Brian Taylor, director of Partnership for Learning, a Lansing-based non-profit that seeks to connect schools to the community. "If you want your child to excel, you have to build a relationship with the teacher."

That the MEA was a major sponsor of the study might give it a cover-your-backside feel.

Teachers are weary of being blamed for all of the problems of the public schools and would like to foist more of the responsibility onto parents.

But to its credit, the union acknowledges that teachers and schools aren't doing enough to welcome in reluctant parents.

"We're not going to get 100 percent proficiency until we reach the parents who aren't raising their hands right now, who aren't coming in," says Margaret Trimer-Hartley, spokesperson for the teacher union. "If you look at the lowest 25 percent of achievers in classrooms, we never see their parents. The parents we most need at conferences we never see. We are saying we in education need to rethink how we engage these problems. We own this issue and we will be fixing this issue."

The union plans training for teachers in how to engage parents who don't seem to be interested, and for parents who feel intimidated by the schools.

A generation ago, if you came home with a note from the teacher pinned to the back of your shirt, the seat of your pants got pretty well wore out.

Too often today, parents are acting as defense attorneys for their children, rather than allies of the educators. They automatically side with their children and go after the teachers and principals, and frequently with the threat of litigation.

Taylor says that has helped create an environment in schools in which every word between parents and teachers is guarded and calculated to reduce friction. So parents don't always hear what they need to hear from teachers, and vice-versa. The study found that teachers are more forthcoming about academic problems than they are with behavior problems.

[school years past.](#)  
[▶ Advice from all-star teachers.](#)

## School tips

How parents can become involved in their child's education:

\* Introduce yourself to the teacher and indicate the best way to give you information (by phone, e-mails, etc.).

\* Write a note or e-mail to the teacher to see how your child is doing.

Source: Michigan Congress of Parents, Teachers and Students

[▶ Comment on this story](#)  
[▶ Send this story to a friend](#)  
[▶ Get Home Delivery](#)

- [Public u Michigan's](#)
- [Educatio connected : succeed](#)
- [Ashcrof Needs Res Constitutio](#)
- [Ficano S Fake Badge](#)
- [Warren : Gives Taxp](#)
- [Private e state reside](#)
- [Using In continues r](#)
- [Election conflicting](#)
- [Lansing more value](#)
- [Bush ne election hu](#)

---

Copy  
 The I  
 Use of this  
 agreemen  
 Service (up

"Teachers now teach defensively," Taylor says. "They say they treat all children the same, but they are more willing to go out on a limb for a kid when they know they have the backing of the parent. And they are more thorough in enforcing discipline as well."

Trimer-Hartley says the study shows that those parents who communicate with the schools have a higher level of success and satisfaction, and a greater sense of belonging to the school community.

"Relationships are critical to success," she says. "You have to feel as a parent and educator that you can bring the truth to the table and not be attacked or criticized."

Taylor suggests all parents make regular visits to the classroom, ask pointed questions about their child's performance and behavior, and share with the teacher any and all personal information that may help the teacher better understand the child.

For teachers, he says, it is essential to be brutally honest with parents, as well as to ask parents the pertinent questions about the child.

Money is important in building a better school system. Superior teacher training and performance is also vital. As is testing children to make sure they are absorbing the lessons that are being delivered.

But most important is building a culture of education in a community, and that starts in the home.

If students see their parents don't care enough to drop by the school and talk to their teacher, to make sure homework gets done and books get read, the child won't either. All the money, training and tests in the world won't overcome parental indifference.

In the end, no one has a greater stake in defeating that indifference than the teachers and schools themselves. With this study, educators finally may be zeroing in on the real problem with the public schools.

*Nolan Finley is editorial page editor of The Detroit News. Reach him at [nfinley@detnews.com](mailto:nfinley@detnews.com) or (313) 222-2064. Watch Nolan Finley at 2 p.m. Sunday and 5:30 p.m. Friday on "Am I Right?" on WTVS-TV (Channel 56).*

[▶ Previous Story](#)   [▶ Next Story](#)