

# Fastbreak For Fathers

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**a monthly e-mail to help you be the kind of dad your child needs you to be.**

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by Rich Batten, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Douglas County  
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**In this issue: *Dads involvement in children's learning***

## OBSERVATIONS

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According to the U. S. Census Bureau 53.8 million students are projected to enroll in our nation's elementary and high schools this fall. I claim four of those students. Since my youngest child is in a year around school system, we have already attended our first parents' night for the new academic year. One down, three more to go . . . actually I look forward to getting to know my children's teachers and the school administration. My job allows me the flexibility to spend time in my children's school, but even if it didn't, I would do everything I could to be involved. I have learned that, as a father, my involvement with my child's education is important . . . more important than most dads think.



A report published by the U.S. Department of Education succinctly summarizes the research by stating, "Research has shown that **fathers**, no matter what their income or cultural background, can **play a critical role in their children's education**. When fathers are involved, their children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact." (*A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning*, available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/calltocommit/fathers.pdf>)

It is important to be involved with your child's learning both at home (working with your child on homework and special projects, reading, establishing a daily routine, discussing the days events etc.) and at school by participating in field trips, teacher conferences back to school nights, extracurricular activities, or even assisting the teacher if needed – for instance, one semester I helped with spelling tests on Fridays. This type of involvement sends the message to your child that school is important to you, and by extension that it should be important to him.

You may not have been the best student as a youth or understand the "new math," but you can still come alongside of your child as an encourager, advocate and champion when it comes to learning. I'm convinced, by both experience and research, that in years to come both of you will be glad you were engaged in your child's schooling.

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## IDEAS

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If your experience is the same as mine, you probably have trouble **getting your child to talk about what's happening in school**. I have a daughter and three sons. Two of my children love to talk about their day at school. The other two consistently respond with such words as "stuff," "boring stuff," "I don't know," "nothin," . . . you get the picture.

Leanne Sponsel, a licensed family educator with the Mounds View School District in St. Paul, Minnesota and a faculty member at Northwestern College suggests the following ideas as openers for communicating with your child about their day at school:

- Choose a time to talk when your child is comfortable. Some children are fountains of information right after school; others wait until dinner or bedtime to share their stories.
- Try not to ask every day. As much as we want to know what is happening, it can turn irritating to be asked daily.
- Try asking unusual questions. *"How was school?"* rarely gets much of an answer. Try something like, *"Did anything strange happen at school today?"*
- Change the venue and ask about one of your child's friend's days. Telling what happened to someone else can be easier, and less threatening, than talking about yourself.
- As a parent you can help your child "place" herself back into the school day by saying, *"Remember when you got into your room and everyone found a seat? What happened after that?"* or *"I remember that your teacher said you do the calendar and chart the weather. And I think projects are after that. Did it go that way today?"*

Source: Leanne M. Sponsel, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate, St. Paul, MN for Family Information Services, Mpls., MN ©2004. Reprinted with permission.

Visit these websites for **ideas on developing dads programs in your school**:

- **Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students)** [www.watchdogs.net](http://www.watchdogs.net). Fathers, stepfathers, and grandfathers are asked to spend at least one day at school volunteering as security monitors, reading mentors, sports referees, listening ears, or for whatever needs to be done to plant seeds of success in the lives of children.
- **The Sparta Fatherhood Initiative (Sparta, Illinois)** Donuts with Dad, Picnic with Pop, Dogs with Dads, Pancakes with Pop . . . you get the idea. This is a great site to spark some creative thoughts of father child activities associated with school. [www.sparta.k12.il.us/SID/Fatherhood/fatherhood1.htm#fatherhoodteam](http://www.sparta.k12.il.us/SID/Fatherhood/fatherhood1.htm#fatherhoodteam)

## RESEARCH

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An interesting *snapshot* of **fathers' involvement with school** is presented in The Department of Education's report *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status* (For this and other reports by the National Center for Educational Statistics go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/search.asp?searchcat=subjectindex&L1=135&L2=0>). Data was taken from the 1996 National Household Education Survey - a large, nationally representative sample of students in grades 1 through 12. Since this data was collected at a single point in time it cannot be used to establish causal connections between parental involvement and student outcomes. It can only suggest such connections and leave it to studies based on longitudinal data to examine the associations more closely.

High school involvement was defined as participating in at least three of four school activities that most schools typically offer: attending a general school meeting; a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference; a school or class event; or volunteering at school. Low school involvement is participating in none or only one such activity. Highlights from the study include the following:

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- Fathers' involvement in school is associated with a higher likelihood of students getting mostly A's. This is true for fathers in two-biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families.
- Students living in father-only families are the most likely of all students to have highly involved fathers—46 percent of such students have fathers who are highly involved in their schools.
- Fathers' involvement in two-biological-parent families is associated with a lower likelihood of students ever repeating a grade.
- Students are more likely to get mostly A's and are less likely to have ever repeated a grade or to have ever been suspended or expelled if their nonresident fathers have some involvement in their schools. Similarly, students are more likely to get mostly A's if their nonresident mothers have participated in one activity in the last year.

Source: U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*, NCES 2001-032, by Christine Winqvist Nord and Jerry West. Washington, DC: 2001.

## CONNECTIONS (specific to Douglas County Colorado)

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**Father Fraternity** – (Parker Adventist Hospital) Classes for new dads. Call 303.269.4390 for more information and to register.

**Sky Ridge Dads** – (Sky Ridge Medical Center) Classes for new dads. Call 720.225.2229 for more information and to register.

**The Parent University** – (Douglas County School District) Parenting classes. Call 303.387.0128 for current course schedule.

**"You can't be the kind of dad that you want to be. You can't be the kind of dad that you wanted to have. You've got to be the kind of dad that your child needs you to be."**  
**-Roland Warren, The National Fatherhood Initiative**

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**Fastbreak for Fathers** is a publication of the *Douglas County FatherWork Connection*, a countywide, research-based, fathering education and advocacy initiative committed to increasing the probability of every child in Douglas County Colorado being intimately connected to an involved, responsible and loving father or father figure.

**The Douglas County FatherWork Connection is facilitated by  
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