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Tell our kids what back to school really means

DELAWARE VOICE

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If we believe that our children are the future and that we must prepare them to be productive, just and thoughtful citizens of the 21st century, then we must agree that educating our children is everyone's responsibility.

Of course, parents are responsible. Of course, educators are responsible. And our children are even responsible.

But the homeowner who has no children in school but wants to be sure that the community thrives also has a role. Community-based organizations that support children and their families have a role. The congregations that nurture the spiritual well-being of our community have a role. Our elected officials, civic leaders and board members have a role. We hope you will join our Back to School Weekend activities this weekend.

Back to School Weekend is based on the concept that educating our children is a long-term investment, and each one of us is a valued shareholder. We must each support, guide, celebrate, nurture and advocate for the children in our community.

For children to succeed, they need to know that the adults in their lives have high expectations for them when they start back to school this year. They need to know how much our community values academic achievement, good citizenship and positive behavior. For them to know that, we must communicate our expectations to our children.

We need everyone's help to do that.

During Back to School Weekend, we are asking adults and children to take an "Excellence Pledge" to support success in school throughout the year, and to encourage excellence in academics, citizenship and behavior every day.

The pledge is a wonderful way for parents and students to state their intentions to support school success, but it is really just a first step. We hope that the pledge and the weekend itself will kick off to a yearlong commitment to excellence.

We hope that our community organizations and houses of worship will encourage their members to take the pledge. We also hope they will serve as partners in celebrating children who do the right thing, and celebrating our hard-working parents, teachers and volunteers.

We need organizations to open their doors after school and on the weekends; we need volunteers to mentor, tutor or help out in the classroom; we need business partners to host events that affirm that doing well in school is the key to success.

We need incentives and rewards, and we also need models and examples.

We need opportunities for community service, and we need opportunities for students to test their leadership skills and learn about social responsibility.

Learning is a complex activity that requires effort both inside and outside the classroom.

All of the adults in a child's life must together teach children to value the fruits of education, to understand their responsibility to the well-being of the community and to apply their own potential to make a difference.

We will also take a pledge: to work tirelessly to create schools that are academically rigorous, and to support safe, nurturing learning communities that cultivate the diverse needs, interests and skills of the individual.

We pledge to create schools where parents, caregivers and families are valued as partners and collaboration is valued. We will expect excellence every day, for every child, in every class.

Welcome back to school.
