



Quality early education, parent help is key to success in school

By Shauna McVey
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Statewide, Del. -

The Rodel Foundation and Vision 2015 believe a strong education starts from the beginning.

Dr. Paul A. Herdman, president and CEO of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, said early childhood education is the foundation of a child's academic career.

"We have a preparation gap that starts in kindergarten and continues to grow over time," Herdman said. "If we can get kids on an equal playing field, we could help mitigate that gap as they go through school."

PNC Bank has the "Grow up Great" program, for which they have committed to invest \$100 million over 10 years to prepare children up to age 5 for school and life through grants to early childhood development programs, promotion of the importance of school readiness, encouraging volunteerism and providing resources and materials on how to enhance the development of children.

The PNC Foundation recently committed another \$100,000, totaling \$300,000 to date, to Vision 2015 in support of its early childhood education priorities.

United Way has a program called "Success by 6," which is an early childhood initiative that works with non-profit organizations, government agencies and academic sectors to find strategies that give all children up to 6 years of age access to high-quality early childhood care and education.

United Way of Delaware stated on its Web site the program "strives to equip caregivers to encourage early childhood learning, improve early education programs, strengthen awareness and communication and participate in public policy."

United Way of Delaware also has a partnership of “Success By 6” in “Delaware Stars,” which enables early childcare providers to know how they compare with others across the nation.

“It says, ‘Here’s what high quality service looks like,’ ” Herdman said. “They would be evaluated and given technical assistance and support about what to do. There are actually going to be financial incentives to encourage them to move up the ranks.”

Herdman said a review was done of 75 early childcare programs that encompassed 5,000 students. Very few met the highest standards, but the “Delaware Stars” program is working to bring each center up to par.

Appoquinimink School District Superintendent Dr. Tony Marchio said the district will host an early childcare summit on Thursday, March 12, at 6 p.m. at the Appoquinimink Teacher Training Center in Odessa and all area early childcare providers are invited.

“We’re going to talk to them about getting kids ready for school, what they can do and what our curriculum is about so they can come to us a little more prepared than they are now,” he said.

After the bell rings

Academic achievement doesn’t just happen inside the classroom.

Herdman said there are many ways parents can take an active role in their child’s education.

The Rodel Foundation sponsors the Delaware Parent Leadership Institute, which is six days of training stretched over three weekends. The program is free to those who want to improve student achievement in Delaware’s public schools.

Rodel states that DPLI, “Gives them information and data as well as skills to expand their role in their children’s education and the larger education community, motivates them to assume leadership roles, provides training to help build their confidence and increases their understanding of Delaware’s standards-based education system and what it requires of schools and teachers.”

One key element of DPLI is that participants conduct projects that help involve more parents and have a lasting, positive impact on student achievement.”

“We put a lot of pressure on teachers, but it’s a two-way street,” Herdman said. “While we’re holding teachers accountable, we need to hold parents accountable for their end of the bargain.”

He said there are a number of things parents can do like asking for a student improvement plan and talking with teachers about how they can help improve their child’s performance. Parents can also talk to their child about what they’re doing in school and give them a quiet place to read and do homework.

“Too many parents feel they’re resolved of duty once they’re dropped off at school,” Herdman said. “It needs to be a two-way street.”

The Appoquinimink School District has the Parent’s Academy, which offers workshops called Student Accountability, Behavior Support for Students, Internet Safety Education, Basic Nutrition for Active Families, Stay Sharp with Summer Reading and Academic Maintenance, and Helping your Student Make the Transition to High School.

“It’s looking beyond the school day at different ways we can support both students and parents,” Marchio said. “We need to reach out and communicate, and work with parents.”

He said extended day programs and before and after school programs can also help improve student learning.

“We need to look at each child and go beyond the regular school day for the kids who might need a little extra time,” Marchio said. “We can align those programs with what were doing in school to support us.”

He said another program that has been successful is the Twilight program for Appoquinimink and Middletown high schools. Students earn diplomas at their own pace through instruction that is done mainly online while in a classroom setting with teacher support.

“Some kids just can not function in the high school setting. It’s just not their thing,” Marchio said. “Kids will get into the Twilight program and thrive.”

Linda Jennings, MOT Charter School head of school, said their Parent Teacher Organization hosts a guest speaker each month.

“Last month the principal and I spoke to a group of parents on reading instruction, what it looks like at MOT, why we do certain things, how we measure it and how they can help at home,” she said.

Jennings said last week one parent who is a former principal, presented to the PTO how parents can help with homework and differentiate for their child at home.

For more information on DPLI, call Shannon Griffin at (302) 504-5236.

For more information on the Appoquinimink School District Parents Academy, call the Student Services Department at 376-4111.