

CLASSROOM



connection

Becoming a proactive junior high parent

As children move from elementary to junior high school they begin to crave more independence. At the same time, parents often wonder how much freedom to allow their child to have and how to stay involved with school without invading their child's turf.

The good news is there are many ways for parents to stay informed and involved without "smothering" your child's growing need for independence. Research shows that encouraging learning, setting high, but reasonable, expectations for your child and making the extra effort to be involved with your child's education at home and in school can have long lasting benefits. These include higher grades and tests scores, more positive attitudes and behaviors, less chance that kids will use alcohol and other drugs, higher graduation rates and fewer placements in special education.

Creative ways to stay connected

In elementary school there are ready-made opportunities to be involved, such as "homeroom parents" or classroom party helpers. However, finding ways to stay connected during junior high school takes a little more creativity.

Here are some tried and true suggestions from parents, teachers and social workers that will help keep you linked with school and your children during these early adolescent years:

► **Attend annual back-to-school events such as Open House and parent conferences.** This is one of the best ways to learn about the increased academic demands of junior high school and to get to know teachers and their expectations. Open House is a time to listen and ask general questions of teachers and staff. Questions or concerns about your child's individual performance should be saved for a private follow-up, like a parent-teacher conference.

Parent-teacher conferences are a good time to get the real skinny on how your child is doing at school and where he/she needs to apply himself/herself. It is also a good opportunity to learn about school-based resources like academic intervention services (AIS) and counseling that can support your child's school success.

► **Stay connected.** Contact your child's teacher to check on his/her progress and to share relevant information. Teachers may be able to suggest at-home learning activities for families and online and print resources that help support the school lessons. The district Web site can also be a great resource for information about upcoming school events and opportunities to volunteer at school. The district Web address is www.johnstownschoools.org. Bookmark this site and visit it regularly.

READ ALL ABOUT IT... the truth about tweens

Learning about the many physical, social and emotional changes that happen during the early teenage years can assure you that most of what your children are experiencing—shifting friendships, clothing crises, mood swings and all—is perfectly normal. Check out the Web site for KidsHealth at <http://www.kidshealth.com/kid/grow/index.html> and books like the *American Academy of Pediatrics Caring For Your Teenager* by Philip Bashe and *Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager, Revised and Updated* by Anthony E. Wolf for more information.

► Attend sporting events, school performances, etc.

There may not be a need or opportunity for you to spend regular time in your child's classrooms. And, in truth, having you right in his/her space may not be a dream for your child.

But you can spend time in other venues

where you will meet your child's teachers and coaches and talk with their friends and their families. Interestingly, the families we spoke with mentioned their time driving to and from these types of events as most meaningful. If it's just you and your kids, you have uninterrupted time to catch up on their lives. If you take along their friends, you'll have a chance to observe how they interact and gain some insight into what really matters for your child right now.

► **Offer your skills to improve the school community.** Perhaps you are a writer who can offer a few hours a week tutoring kids in language arts, or an auto mechanic who can inspire kids to apply themselves to their studies with a talk about the complex math and science that goes into your job. No matter what your background, you undoubtedly have things you can share that can enhance the learning that takes place at school. This is true even if the time you spend volunteering doesn't include your own child.

Volunteering your time in the school can help you forge friendly relationships with teachers and other school staff. This can go a long way toward building trust and softening the tension that can arise if problems develop down the road. It gives you an opportunity to meet your child's classmates and learn about the day-to-day routine at school. It also sends a powerful message to your child that school is important and worthy of your time.



After School PROGRAM

provides positive experiences for teens

**It's 3:00 p.m.
Do you know
where your
children are?**

They might be getting a little extra help on a school project, tutoring assistance in the academic areas, or they could be snowshoeing on the school's front lawn. Who knows? They might even be baking cookies to take to residents of the local nursing home.

"Extended learning opportunities for Johnstown students are the result of the district receiving the 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School Program grant," says Katherine Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent. The Greater Johnstown School District has been awarded a 4-year grant to operate this federally-funded initiative.

Open to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students (free of charge), this after school program provides a safe and nurturing environment beyond the regular school day where children can participate in various activities that enhance academic, social and emotional growth. "The biggest benefit of the program is that students will be surrounded by adults who care for them," says Site Coordinator and Lead Teacher Allyson Warren. "It really helps in the development of the whole child."

A typical arrival

"The program provides a place for safe and structured after-school activities," adds Community Coordinator David Sammons. Upon arrival, students are responsible for signing themselves in, allowing for the lead teacher to keep track of attendance on a daily basis. After signing in, children are provided with a nutritious snack and then follow a schedule of events for that particular day.

One of Sammons' main goals as a Community Coordinator is to be a facilitator between students, teachers and community organizations. "Teachers are under a lot of pressure to fit in all of the curriculum material mandated by state and federal educational standards," Sammons says. "With such time constraints, they're not always able to include extra activities during the regular school day. The after-school program can be beneficial to students by providing extra time for work and individualized help, along with hands-on activities that relate to classroom learning."

Each day is a different experience

Each day holds a different and new experience for participating teens. For example, in December some students may be outside

snowshoeing, while others are inside involved with one of the many clubs that students help organize and create. "All of the clubs and community service projects are student-initiated and directed," says Warren. "If children have an idea, we'll try to find a way to make it happen."

Over the summer, a group of Johnstown students got a small taste of the types of experiences the program offers when they went to see the New York City Ballet perform at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. "One of the principle dancers came to speak to the students before her performance," recalls Sammons. "She explained the storyline and

told them what to look for during the show. The students were really excited when the dancer taught them some ballet positions."

During the school year, the group is expected to take a trip to Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery BOCES Career and Technical School for career and job training. Students will experience first-hand the vocational programs offered, while possibly sparking an interest in a future career.

Enhancing the community

In other districts, participants in the 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School Programs have helped their communities by visiting with senior citizens and volunteering at local animal shelters.

This year, the after-school program at Knox will be looking to do the same. "The whole idea is to have the children come up with the ideas of how to help in their own community that they live in," says Warren. For example, students may be able to work with various local organizations, such as the Big Brothers and Big Sisters and the YMCA.



Knox students with principle dancer from the New York City Ballet.

Commonly asked questions about Johnstown's after-school program.

What are the program hours and how will my child get to the program if he/she is in sixth grade?

The after-school program will operate Monday through Friday, in conjunction with the school calendar. The program begins upon dismissal from school and ends at 5:15 p.m. For the 2005-06 school year, sixth-graders will be bussed to Knox Junior High School, where they will meet with other participants in the school cafeteria. Students at Glebe Street Elementary School will be escorted over to Knox by a staff member.

How will my child get home?

For the 2005-06 school year, children enrolled in this program will be transported home by bus, or they may be picked up by a parent, guardian or another designated person.

What if my child is involved in other activities and can't go to the program every day?

Arrangements can be made for children who are involved in other extracurricular activities, such as band and sports.

Who runs the after-school program?

The program is staffed by a variety of educators from the Greater Johnstown School District, as well as other qualified professionals. The Site Coordinator and Lead Teacher for the program is Allyson Warren, who previously was the coordinator for the 21st Century Community Learning Center at Fonda-Fultonville Middle School and most recently was a Physical Education teacher. She will be on-site at Knox Junior High School from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. The Community Coordinator is David Sammons, who had served as a middle school and high school social studies teacher for 36 years in a neighboring school district. He also taught summer school computer classes for eight years in the Johnstown School District.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions, please contact the 21st Century Community Learning Center main office at (518) 762-5891, or call the center's cell phone number at (518) 332-8367. Additional information about the after-school program is available on the district Web site at www.johnstownschoools.org.

The 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School Program is administered by Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery BOCES in partnership with over 40 community agencies.

MARK YOUR calendar



SDM MEETINGS

All SDM meetings will be held in the Knox library at 3 p.m. on the following dates.

- ▶ October 17
- ▶ November 14
- ▶ December 12
- ▶ January 9
- ▶ February 13
- ▶ March 13
- ▶ April 10
- ▶ May 8
- ▶ June 12

PTSA MEETINGS

All PTSA meetings will be held in the Knox library at 6:30 p.m. on the following dates.

- ▶ October 6
- ▶ November 3
- ▶ December 1
- ▶ January 5
- ▶ February 2
- ▶ March 9
- ▶ April 6
- ▶ May 4
- ▶ June 1