



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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In Case You Missed It....

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Viewpoints: School funding cuts put entire generation of children at risk

By Joshua Pechthalt and Carol Kocivar

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If there were ever a time for parents and teachers to work together – it is now.

Predictions that this may be the first generation of children in America to be less healthy and less educated than their parents makes the work we do today in our schools and in our communities even more important.

We are both parents of children who attend, or attended, public schools. One of us is a PTA leader and the other is a teacher. We have different roles, but to be successful we know we must work together.

We share some major concerns.

Massive funding cuts have left many schools, especially in the poorest communities, without adequate resources. Arts and enrichment programs have disappeared. Sports have been sidelined, and class sizes are growing at all levels. Most schools have no nurse and no librarian. Classroom aides have been lost, bus services stalled and support staff decimated. Even parent-teacher conferences have been cut at many schools.

This has put an entire generation of children at risk.

Those who suggest the fault somehow lies with teachers and school administrators distract us from the biggest issue – the failure to invest in and educate all our children.

Now is not the time for divisive talk. Now is not the time to fuel an us-vs.-them mindset.

Right now is when our children most need parents and teachers to work together.

Empowering parents through real, sustained involvement is not expensive and has a proven track record of success.

There is solid research that underscores how effective parent engagement is. Students whose families are involved in their education are more likely to stay in school and to do better in school, regardless of socioeconomic factors.

Other measurable positive results of family engagement include reduced teacher turnover. Studies show that schools with strong ties to families and the community are 10 times more likely to make substantial improvements in math and reading than schools that do not.

There's new, heartening data that parents are more involved in their children's lives.

American children are spending more time with their parents than they did in 1998 – including time spent reading, playing and eating dinner – according to data released in August from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation. The latest data were collected in 2009 from interviews with a nationally representative sample of more than 42,000 households.

Experts say this finding suggests a rising awareness among parents that involvement in their children's lives is essential for their success.

The census data also found that parents have rising expectations for their children's education. In 1998, less than half of low-income parents expected their children to graduate from college; in 2009 a majority did.

Amid all the talk of school reform and improvement, we must not lose sight of the basic collaboration needed for success in schools: parents, children and educators working together.

We must also not allow ourselves to be distracted from the central issue obstructing our path to quality education: inadequate funding. It's time for legislators to stop mouthing platitudes about supporting education and start finding the revenue we need to invest in our children's future.

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