It Starts With the Teacher

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Abstract

Though there are many factors both positive and negative that affect student learning, I focused on three important ones and came up with a solution to one using research. Student health, home life, and teacher attitude are three impacts that when implied negatively can severely impact a student’s learning. Some things are inevitable such as the common cold, a death in the family or a teacher having a bad day, but when these things are constantly negative the student loses a lot academically and will have a hard time coming back from it. Being a future educator myself I realize that as my job there is only so much that I can do to help the students succeed as best as possible. I cannot control what goes on at home or if they eat three meals a day but I can control my attitude and be the best teacher, coach and motivator I can be. With the help from a grant all teachers in America can work to improve their selves and to be constantly learning new ways to teach, help overcome and be the students’ biggest fan and motivator. All teachers and principals should be highly qualified and never stop learning. With this career it should be required for teachers to attend workshops and receive further knowledge, even if that requires additional college classes. With the “Improving Teacher Quality Grant” it makes this more realistic and affordable.

There are many factors that play into student success. Without a doubt there are many positive factors; but one must take the good with the bad. Unfortunately there are endless negative issues that are severely interfering with children in America’s learning. There is no denying that every child will have some kind of negative factor affecting their learning at some point in their school career. May it be poverty, home life such as parenting (single parent or divorced), physical abuse, neglect, drug and/or alcohol abuse, violence, death in the family, poor health care, education instruction, anxiety, gangs, bullying, lack of resources such as technology, inadequate school conditions, motivation, family beliefs and values, the list could go on and on from a personal, national, communal, school or family level. The three most important are student health, home life and teacher quality.

Poor health has to be one of the saddest factors, because there is only so much one can do as an educator. Student health plays a significant role in student academic success. When a student is healthy, their mind is healthy and ready to learn. When a child is not getting enough sleep, too hungry to concentrate, has an illness or poor hygiene they are less likely to be focused and more likely devoting all of their time to feeling better. Sickness is inevitable sometimes, free and reduced breakfast/lunches are available to most schools but it does not help if the student did not receive dinner. The hygiene and sleep are left to be the parent responsibility if the child is not of responsible age. It is estimated that 85 percent of adolescents are sleep deprived. The film, “Sleepless Epidemic” proves that a lack of sleep makes teenagers irritable, more likely obese, poor athletic ability, and showed a decrease in math skills. Mary Sheedy Kurcinka is a sleep expert and explained to students that not only the proper amount of sleep but reducing caffeine intake, and avoiding electronics before bed will improve student learning. If a student is too tired to listen; that child will not learn anything you said if they are constantly nodding off (Films Media Group 2013). Student health is not the only negative factor that educators have control over, a student’s background or home life also significantly impacts their learning.

Home life: single parent vs. married couple, divorced vs. deceased parents. No two students are the same, come from the same background or live the same life style; everyone has their own story, and it is what makes us unique. Studies show that one in every four children come from single parent homes. Being a student of a single parent is challenging because the parent is more than likely stressed out and working a lot to make ends meet. The student may not get to do homework or have dinner with that parent if they are not working a nine to five job. Much research has been done on ‘abnormal’ families. “It is revealed that children whose parents live apart are twice as likely to drop out of high school as those in two-parent families, one and a half times as likely to be idle in young adulthood, and twice as likely to become single parents themselves (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Also in this book it shows that there is a positive correlation between family structure and student success. Often it is not recognized though that a split house hold is sometimes better for the children than the parents being a part. There is no way that all American students will have the same family structure; it is something that cannot be changed. What can change are teachers and their attitudes, motivation and growth.

Teachers can have a positive or negative affect on student learning. The words “Teacher” and “negative” should never go together in a sentence. Teachers are humans too and we all make mistakes. It is not rare for a teacher to make a judgement on a student and treat them likewise. It is not extremely difficult to earn a teaching license. It is not uncommon for someone to become a teacher and not have their heart and soul into the students. Some teachers are good teachers but they use material and handouts from twenty years ago. Times are changing and generations are constantly changing. With all of this change, teachers need to change too. Which brings me to my proposal. Yes there are many things that negatively affect student learning but the most important one that can change starts with the teacher. Teachers don’t stop teaching, so they should not stop learning as well. Constant training and education is needed for teachers in America to maximize student success so that no matter what is going on in their life, they can count on all of their teachers to have the most updated information, books, learning styles and motivation to keep them going. Teachers are like coaches, they are supposed to have the plays down and to be there cheering on their team (classroom) on during learning. Teachers should never give up on a child. When a student feels like the teacher does not even believe in them they will give up and it will follow them throughout their academic career. Some sort of constant training needs to be mandatory to all teachers in America, conferences in each state. It would not be difficult to achieve given almost all teachers have summers off. There is already a grant for something similar to what I was planning. It is called the “Improving Teacher Quality State Grant” It is a formula grant “Title II, Part A”. It is money to provide states with improving teacher and principal quality. On the website they are seeing it as schools are accountable for student achievement, with this grant we can improve teacher and principal quality which will ultimately improve student success. The project states, “State-level activities include but are not limited to: (1) recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and principals; (2) increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in classrooms; and (3) reforming teacher and principal certification programs. They must be based on a needs assessment, and, among other things, be aligned with state academic content standards, student academic achievement standards, and state assessments (for formula grants). The SAHE works in conjunction with the SEA to make competitive sub grants to partnerships of IHEs, high-need LEAs, and other entities (for competitive grants) through specific activities that focus on professional development for teachers, highly qualified paraprofessionals, and, if appropriate, principals (2015).” Just like all grants, a contract was written. It basically says that in receiving these funds each state is accountable for improvements in academic achievement, states are given the flexibility to use the funds as they please and to address challenges in teacher quality whether it involves hiring new teachers, firing old teachers, teacher retention, further knowledge, whatever it takes to have top of the line teachers and principals (2015). This grant is wonderful because it is not strict guide lines on what has to be done, it gives the freedom to choose just as long as it is done. The total appropriation of this grant is $2,349,830,000.00. The website has a list of all the laws and regulations that go into play with this grant. Critics want to know what exactly a “high qualified teacher” is and it was the first question answered in 2006,

“The term “high-quality professional development” means professional development that

meets the criteria contained in the definition of professional development in Title IX,

Section 9101(34) of ESEA. Professional development includes, but is not limited to,

activities that:

• Improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of academic subjects and enable

teachers to become highly qualified;

• Are an integral part of broad schoolwide and districtwide educational

improvement plans;

• Give teachers and principals the knowledge and skills to help students meet

challenging State academic standards;

• Improve classroom management skills;

• Are sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused and are not one-day or short-term

workshops;

• Advance teacher understanding of effective instruction strategies that are based on

scientifically based research; and

• Are developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents, and

administrators.

There are 80 pages of what the critics are saying and the answers of those in support of the grant. Research has proven that to maximize student achievement, teacher quality needs to be top notch. We cannot control what happens to a student at home or make them have perfect health, but we can require teachers to be highly qualified in every state, every county, city and every school.

Sources

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