Envisioning Parent Engagement in Urban Schools

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Every home is a university and the parents are the teachers.

Mahatma Gandhi
A guide to engaging families in Urban Schools
We Often Hear The Following:

• “Parents have no accountability!”
• “If you want a parent in your school, you must serve a meal and find baby sitters.”
• “Parents are abusive to Educators and staff.”
• “Parents don’t do anything. They don’t raise their children, they don’t discipline, they want teachers to teach and set boundaries. They want us to be the parent”
• Parents don’t teach children to respect educators.

• Parents “fight” against educators. “My child didn’t do that.”

And the list goes on..
Which can look very much like this..

DON'T YOU DARE PUT THE BLAME ON MY BABY ABOUT HIS LACK OF EDUCATION! IT'S YOUR FAULT!
As school Board members we are

• Often removed from the daily interactions with families and schools
• Spend our time developing policies as it applies to parental involvement with very little “real time “ experience that shows what is working beyond what we are shown in power points at our board meetings.
• Our own experiences with families can be challenging as we most often do not see parents/guardians at school board meetings unless there is an issue.
• We have our own challenges with budgets, buildings and staff.
Consider the following..

• In the Philadelphia Public school system, 1 in 5 families are plagued by violence and abject poverty.
• Parents struggle to keep their children from the lore of guns and easy money selling drugs to either support their families or gain street credibility.
• Many of those young people see no hope for living in fear of the streets.
• Truancy is a large issue in many schools
• Budgets are cut from lack of state and federal funds
• Teacher frustration is high and many are opting to choose a different career as schools have become places where learning cannot take place
• Charter schools have taken over many urban districts and in Louisiana’s urban school districts, Charters have almost completely taken over.
Added to the frustration..

- In many urban schools, while the students of color accounts for more than 60% of the population, the staff is not a reflection of that population and students rarely see anyone that represents them in the classrooms.

- The disparities in understanding culture and ethnicity, creates a divide between staff, students and families.
A large urban school was given a satisfaction survey about culture

- Staff and families responded to the survey and this is what was found.....
Everyone said they celebrated diversity but...
Their thoughts about children of color said otherwise
How is it that some schools can attract

• Great parent engagement?
• Smiling families who will happily volunteer and raise monies for their school?
• Advocates who enjoys a warm open partnership with teachers?
• Parents that hold their children accountable?
• Families that feel welcomed and invited into a building?
Strategies from a policy level

• Have a parent engagement policy with “teeth”
• Ask the Superintendent and Administration to give follow-up at the building level on programs that are actually working
• Attend some of those programs at the school level so the constituents can see that you care and are accessible to them.
• Hire qualified, engaging facilitators to run parenting programs that work.
Policy level continued..

• Ask for a district level parent engagement committee and ask that at least 2 parent leaders from each building attend along with faculty and staff.

• Ask those leaders for feedback that will enable you to put a solid plan in place WITH their help and support. That creates a relationship that is invaluable.

• Invite those families to policy meetings at the state level to discuss how harmful budget cuts are to their children.
Strategies at the building level

• Look at the staff/student ethnicity ratio and begin conversations around safety, trust, cultural responsiveness and responsibilities of all.

• You may most likely need and outside facilitator to keep this conversation on an even keel as emotions will run high.

• Encourage the parent leaders in each building to meet with staff leaders and work together on how to engage families fully and with authenticity.
Strategies at building level continued

• Have building leaders invite parent leaders to sit in on a few key meetings, beyond the classroom so they can have a “buy in” and will be able to stop rumors and misunderstandings as they begin to fester even as they learn more about the process.
No one is as passionate for schools as an engaged parent!!
The bottom line is this.. We are in it together..

"You must be Timmy's dad. I'm Timmy's teacher."