

## They're Here! Report Card Time

By: Laurie Hurley Ah, February... Valentine's Day, a long President's Day weekend, spring is just around the corner, the days are getting longer... and REPORT CARDS! The wonderful relationship you think you have with your child can go right down the drain if the report card comes home and it's not good news, or worse, you are not prepared to open the envelope and read comments like, "homework assignments missing", "poor class participation", "missed class too many times". How could this be your kid, the one who definitely leaves every morning for school with backpack in tow, the kid who you know is in his room doing homework for two hours, the kid who lovingly smiles at you and kisses you goodbye on a Friday night on her way out the door to hang out at the mall with her friends? It all seems so normal and then the REPORT CARD arrives. What could have possibly happened to be staring at grades something like - four C's, two D's and a big fat F in P.E, or, in the case of an elementary student - a comment like "may be retained, please call the teacher". What can a parent do when this happens besides break down and cry or ground your child for life? There are more reasonable (and productive) ways to deal with a poor report card.

- 1) Don't scream and yell at your child. It will only make matters worse. They won't admit it, but they probably feel three times as bad as you do, after all it's their report card, not yours. Give them time to explain what happened. Try to remain calm and chances are you will get the truth, not a shrug of the shoulders and an "I don't know, I thought I was doing great!"
- 2) If they admit they just don't understand the subject or can't deal with their teacher, listen with an open mind. The teacher problem you can do nothing about. Tell them they have to learn how to manage their teacher, just like a boss. The teacher isn't going anywhere, but they have the power to make your child's life miserable. Explain to them they are going to encounter all kinds of people in the real world who they dislike and it would behoove them to try to do what the teacher is asking. If they don't understand the subject, ask them if a friend is doing better and can study with them or consider getting a professional tutor. Parents who think they have an excellent rapport with their kids usually are miserable if they try to help them. There is just something about mom or dad trying to teach Algebra or Chemistry that turns normal kids into monsters. Strongly consider outside sources to keep the peace between you and your child.
- 3) In the future, don't set yourself up for surprises. Most middle and high schools have websites that post the homework assignments. There is certainly nothing wrong with checking the site and asking to see the work. Looking at the homework doesn't mean reading it word for word; your goal is to be sure it has been completed. A savvy parent should know that reading Chapter Three in World History is going to take much less time than preparing a 1,000 word essay complete with a multi-media presentation for your student's English Literature class. Be aware of how your student is spending their time after school and how much time they are devoting to homework.
- 4) One of the most important classes missing from the agenda at a school is study skills. Most kids don't know how to study, organize or adequately prepare for a test if their grades are low. If they also just don't get the subject matter at all, they are guaranteed a low or failing grade. Get a professional involved to work with your child on not only learning the concepts, but applying them. Try to find a tutoring service that teaches from the school's curriculum. Your child will benefit from a tutor that can look at their textbooks and assignments and help them to apply what they are learning, not just memorizing it and then forgetting it the next day.
- 5) If you receive a retention letter, call the school immediately, especially if the letter is a surprise to you. A child in the primary grades has to be performing well below grade level in order for the school to make a decision to retain. If your child has not been diagnosed with any learning disabilities, ask that the school to test them to rule out any kind of disability that is adversely affecting their performance. Parents have a legal right to ask for testing and to receive it within 40-50 days of your written request. Ask your child if they can see the board and hear the teacher. I have interviewed many children who simply didn't realize they needed glasses or had a hearing problem that went undetected for several years.
- 6) If your child has a diagnosed learning disability and the school still wants to retain them, ask that the principal, special education director and teacher all meet with you. It is the school's responsibility to meet all of your child's requirements as far as special education. If the school is recommending retention, something in your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) needs to be revisited.
- 7) Retention, on the other hand, is not a bad thing for a child who started school young (their birthday is between the end of August and the end of December). It could be that they are not mature enough yet. Many of my clients were retained one grade, much to the parent's dismay, and it ended up being the best thing for the child. The next year they did so much better and developed wonderful self-confidence and self-esteem.

Report card time can be emotional for parents if their children are not performing as well as they should be. Take a good look at the reasons for the poor grades. Revisit your child's involvement in extra-curricular activities and their study habits. Are they overbooked with sports to the point that homework and academics are the last priority of the evening when they are too tired to complete any homework? Are they just plain lazy and apathetic about school? Are they trying their best and not meeting your expectations (which may be too high)? Not all students are capable of straight A's. Does your child feel too much pressure to perform so they are shutting down? Give your child a chance to redeem themselves. Sometimes a stern talking to and the removal of some privileges works wonders. Sometimes you need to reach out and get some outside help. Consider a tutor or learning center. Taking yourself out of the equation will do wonders for your relationship with your children. Of course you care about them and want them to do well, but they have to learn to be independent and establish good study skills at the same time. Selecting the appropriate support person or group will not make you the "bad guy". Your children will thank you for it years from now!

## About the Author

Laurie Hurley

