

# Parents Make a Difference in High School Success

Emily Johnson and Daniel Kain

Fewer than seven in ten high school freshmen make it to graduation in Arizona's high schools. The fallout from that statistic is significant. In earning power alone, some estimates of the current difference in take-home pay show that a high school graduate makes about \$400,000 more over a career than someone who does not complete school. The difference is nearly three times that for those who go on to graduate from college.

There are ways to make a difference for young people. The Arizona State GEAR UP program, a federally-funded program coordinated in schools throughout the state by Northern Arizona University has shown this success. Working with some 4,000 young people from high-poverty Arizona schools, the first state GEAR UP program saw more than 8 in 10 students graduate, with 75% of those entering higher education. GEAR UP learned a few things about how parents can help their high schoolers succeed. The answers are not as complicated as one might expect.

**1. Read everything that comes into your house from the school.** Every school mails out newsletters, handbooks and information about school policies and events. Do not depend on your child to be your only source of information on what is happening at school. Mailings from the school will keep you informed of events such as college preparation or financial aid workshops, family events, "meet the teacher" evenings and more. Make sure your contact information is up to date with your school's office so you get everything.

**2. Join an existing parent group on your child's campus. If there isn't one, ask about starting one.** As a member of a parent group, you will meet other parents with similar concerns and experiences. Chances are you all have roughly the same goals for your children: to learn, succeed, and be happy. Together, you can work to make positive changes in your child's school. Parent groups are also a good place to learn all you can about your child's education, such as college preparedness, graduation requirements and other opportunities that the school provides. The more informed you are as parents, the better you will be able to support your child's learning and choices.

**3. Talk to your student about school—every day.** You do not need to know how to do your child's math homework. You may not remember every assignment your child has or their teacher's names. But you can ask your child about school every day. Simple questions such as "How was school today?" show them you care. Unfortunately, as children age, parents tend not to talk with them about school. By showing your children you are interested in their education, you will convey the message that school is a priority and should be treated that way.

If you show your children that their education is important to you, they will be more likely to take it seriously themselves. Making these easy changes, starting today, could just be the positive impact you wanted to make when it comes to your child's education. GEAR UP encourages you to get involved. You may be surprised how much of a difference small changes can make.

*Emily Johnson is the GEAR UP coordinator at Carl Hayden High School in Phoenix, where a second GEAR UP program joins other Arizona schools under the guidance of director Teena Olszewski; Daniel Kain is the dean of the College of Education at Northern Arizona University*