

The Parent-Driven School is also the catalyst for long-term career success.

“Schools have become systems that applaud mediocre work – every one gets praise and when we go out into the work world – not everything is praised, and the students of today do not know how to handle it. Not everyone gets a trophy in the work place. And the work place is not your family. You have to be self-reliant and have accountability.”

---Laurie Cozart, Mary Frances International

Are our schools truly preparing our kids to enter the world of work and career?

During the 1990's there was a real buzz about “school-to-work-readiness”. Some money was thrown at the issue, ROP and vocational education got a boost, but, on an international basis, U.S. student scores rated extremely low in comparison to other industrialized nations (a.k.a. our competitors). So, politically, the emphasis changed again in 2000 to focus on the fundamentals or reading, writing and arithmetic. Thus, No Child Left Behind.

Now, just as it was at the beginning of the 1990's, industry is once again saying that our kids aren't ready for the world of work (and, by the way, there wasn't an appreciable improvement during the '90's, either).

So, what's missing? Unlike regular public schools in the U.S., schools in Europe and Japan place a great deal of emphasis on providing a well-rounded education with standard features that include foreign languages and the arts. This neo-Classical education leads foreign kids into a direction that U.S. kids lack: becoming a lifelong learner.

If business were to put their collective finger on the one thing that's mission in crop after crop of high school and college graduates, it is that they may have received wonderful grades, but they don't necessarily know how to learn. I would suggest that the emphasis on test-taking and getting high test scores is tantamount to “applauding mediocre work”.

How many employers care whether or not Johnny received a high test score in math? Not many. On the other hand, what they do care about is whether or not Johnny can solve marketing problems by interpreting statistical data and somehow apply it to the soft skills needed in deepening relationships with key customers. That's a whole different ball game than whether or not he can score a 95% on his STAR math test.

A lot of data has been collected since the 1990's on school-to-work readiness. Not surprising, the key factor that determines a child's eventual success in the world of work

are her parents. In fact, a conclusion made by Sandra Kerka in her article, *Parenting and Career Development*, published by ERIC Digest (#214) in 2000, sums up this finding:

“The research reviewed (here) demonstrates the strong influence that parenting behavior and family functioning have on career development. The findings suggest that career counselors and career educators should 1) shift the focus from the individual to the family system; 2) develop a new and richer view of parent involvement in schools; 3) help families become more proactive; and, 4) consider ways of duplicating helpful types of family functioning in schools, especially for those children whose families are not proactive.”

This finding sums up the reasons why we need to put the education of our children back into the hands of their parents. Let’s stop using our schools as places for social experimentation. Let’s put an end to schools taking the role of “emancipating” our kids from their parents (as one school nurse plainly said her role was during a school board meeting in one northern California community).

Instead, let’s follow the *real* research that says parents have a profound influence on the lives of their kids. Let’s follow the natural path that says parents really *do* have the best interests of their kids in mind. This means teachers working in collaboration with parents to create individualized learning plans that help a child maximize his potential, hone her skills, and truly prepare them to enter the competitive world of work and career with a confidence that has been *earned*, not given as a result of an entitlement.

While it’s true that the top-down Weberian world of autocratic management has been proven to be a dinosaur in today’s economy, it still holds that the worker of today must remain accountable for the results he or she produces. Does this mean industry won’t tolerate failure? Hardly. In fact, I believe the opposite is true. Industry wants employees who know how to deal with adversity, overcome setbacks, and move through difficult barriers.

I think one of the key things missing in kids today is that they aren’t taught that *failure* is a part of life. Our schools don’t teach kids how to *fail forward*. Educators grade our kids outcomes (e.g. test scores), but don’t teach the skills necessary to build the character necessary to experience truly earned success. Which means that failure, at times, is necessary. The ability to manage one’s failures is the key component of developing a belief in one’s own creative abilities because, when guided, the child learns to overcome failure by building resiliency. This is a centerpiece of lifelong learning. By neglecting this character-building asset, educators are doing our children grave harm...setting them up for *true* failure in the “real world”.

Thankfully, an answer to this problem is already present. Charter schools, especially those that are parent-driven, can undertake the needed educational approach that will satisfy the needs of our economy. But, more importantly, they emphasize the individualized path to lifelong learning which extends into every aspect of that child’s

life for many years to come. In other words, the emphasis on lifelong learning prepares the child to have a *life*, not an entitlement.