HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM FUNCTIONS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION: Research shows that children do better in school when their parents participate actively in their education. This is a period when parents know their children very well. It is no exaggeration to say that parent participation is the most important factor in the academic excellence of their children. However, for it to be effective, it is necessary to be aware of how the school system functions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:
- What programs are offered in elementary school?
- How can I find out which programs will benefit my child?
- What can I do if my child is not performing well in school?
- How can I, as a parent, support my child’s education?

UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM
The school system is like any other institution. It has its rules and procedures that establish how things should be done. For example, schools have manuals that explain what to do when your child is absent from school, how to schedule an appointment with the teacher, etc. The school district also has rules for all the schools, such as the criteria for promoting and holding back students, the absences that call for suspension, etc. Parents can ask for this information from the school, the board of directors or the school district. As more parents become aware of these school policies, become involved with seeing how the school system works and get to know the teachers better, their children’s education will be more effective.

The elementary school stage is very important because the academic foundations that prepare children for college develop during these years. Take advantage of this stage by teaching them to develop positive attitudes, good study habits, and to have confidence that they will go to the university.

Children learn through daily life experiences. These experiences help them to think, talk, read and write. School classes and activities are organized in a certain way to help children develop from the most basic to the most advanced skills. The organization of these classes and activities is known as the curriculum or the study program.
FUNDS THAT PAY FOR STUDENTS’ EDUCATION

Contrary to popular belief, public schools are not free. We pay for the service with our taxes. In other words, schools are part of our communities. Schools receive federal and state funds that pay for different program expenses. Some of these funds are specifically aimed at improving the academic level of children who are performing below average. It is important that we familiarize ourselves with the programs that schools offer in order to know which ones our children can benefit from the most.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Among the most important programs that schools offer are: the GATE program, for over achieving students and the IEP program, for students with learning disabilities. Before schools place children in a program, they should first inform parents and obtain their authorization. Other programs offered by schools are: reading and computer labs, tutoring, help with homework and many others.

Within the school district, there are schools that offer other types of programs such as the Choice Program (if you want to choose a school that is not in your neighborhood), VEEP (Volunteer Enrollment Ethnic Program) and Magnet Schools that have a special focus in a certain area, such as music, computers, another language, mathematics, sports and science.

WHAT CLASSES ARE GIVEN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

The basic subjects that are taught in elementary school are: Language Arts (reading, writing), Mathematics, History-Social Studies, Science, and Physical Education. Other subjects offered are Art and Music.

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

Reading is the most important skill that children should learn in school. It is the foundation to learning other subjects. In order for students to be successful in Social Studies, Science, and even in Math, they need to have good reading skills. Since reading is the key to discovering new knowledge and the foundation for higher education, parents should pay close attention to their children’s reading progress and make sure that they do not fall behind. If a problem comes up, ask for the school’s help immediately.
SARC (SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD)

This is a report schools should update annually to inform parents on aspects such as: school demographic information, class sizes, ethnic composition, teacher and staff information, programs offered, academic data, and fiscal and expenditure data. This information is available to parents and it is generally available in various languages.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS or NORMS

These are documents that inform us about what each student should know and how they can succeed in their current grade level. Parents can obtain this information from the school office to make sure that their child is satisfying the required courses in accordance to their grade level.

CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TESTS, SIXTH EDITION (CAT/6)

This is an aptitude test that replaces the SAT 9 test. Beginning with the 2004-05 academic year, the CAT/6 is given only in grades three and seven. Students are tested in reading, language, spelling, and mathematics. The results of these tests can be found in the student’s cumulative file, known as the CUM FILE. All parents have a right to view their child’s Cum File. By making an appointment with your child’s school, you will be able to review his or her scores. It is highly recommended that you do so. That way, you can stay informed about your child’s academic progress.

SCHOOLS NEED OUR HELP!!

As we come to understand that schools really do belong to parents, students, and the community, we also become aware of our responsibilities to help them out. There are a number of ways in which we can support our children and their schools:

- At home, make sure that children do their homework every day and develop the habit of reading at least 20 minutes a day.
- Schedule regular conferences with your child’s teacher so that you can stay on top of his or her academic progress.
- Volunteer at the school!! It benefits everyone: the school, your child and you, the parent. We will be able to see first hand what kind of education our children are receiving and be better prepared to help them.
- Become a member of school committees such as the SSC (School Site Council), PTA, PTO (Parents, Teacher association/Organization), and ELAC. School committees are involved in making important decisions that affect the school and all its students.
How to put these ideas into practice…

- Visit your children’s teacher at least once a month so that you are aware of their progress and know when and how to help them before a problem turns into a crisis.
- Find out about all extra curricular activities and programs offered at the school. Encourage your children to become involved and talk to your children’s teacher about their interests.
- Help your children develop a habit of reading every day for at least 20 minutes.
- Ask to see your children’s CUM FILE and review their CAT/6 results as well as past test scores (SAT 9) and look for any progress or problems.
- Make an effort to make attendance a priority in your family.
- Meet with your children’s teacher to discuss their level in math and reading. If they’re falling behind, ask the teacher for help (find out what tutoring programs are available at school and what you can do at home).
- Be sure to talk to your children’s teacher about the details of the report card (and other forms that parents receive regarding their children's progress).
- Limit and supervise the amount of television your children watch each day.
- Participate in school committees such as the School Site Council, PTA, ELAC, Title I Advisory, etc. You can be an important part of the decision-making process that affects children’s programs at your school.
- Talk to your children about their future and your expectation of them going to college. Let them know that you will work together to make it happen.

REMEMBER:
PARENTS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION!!!!

Materials based on the Parent Institute for Quality Education Program in California
Lesson No. 5 Elementary

How the School System Functions – Elementary / 2005
How the School System Functions – Elementary / 2005

The School System Functions in a manner that is designed to ensure the best possible educational experience for all students. The system operates on a variety of levels, from the local school district to the state level and beyond. Each level has its own set of responsibilities and functions.

At the local level, elementary schools are responsible for providing a comprehensive education to young children, from kindergarten through fifth grade. This education includes instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects.

Elementary schools are also responsible for providing a safe and nurturing environment for their students. This includes ensuring that students have access to the resources they need to succeed, such as technology, library materials, and extracurricular activities.

At the state level, the Department of Education is responsible for setting educational standards and ensuring that schools are meeting those standards. This includes administering standardized tests and providing resources and support to schools and teachers.

The Department of Education also works to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education. This includes providing funding for schools and supporting initiatives to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In addition to these functions, the School System is also responsible for providing support to families and communities. This includes offering resources and services to families, such as counseling and support groups, as well as partnering with community organizations to provide additional support.

Overall, the School System functions to provide a comprehensive education that prepares students for success in life.
SARC (Georgia Education Standards)

The school system functions differently in different parts of the state. In general, the system is divided into elementary and secondary schools. Each school system is responsible for providing a certain number of students with a certain amount of resources. The resources include teachers, staff, and facilities. The schools are also responsible for providing students with a certain amount of instruction. The instruction includes academic instruction, extracurricular activities, and other programs.

Elementary Education:

Elementary education is the first level of education that a child receives. It is typically divided into grades K-5. The curriculum includes reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and art. The instruction is typically more hands-on and interactive than in secondary schools.

Secondary Education:

Secondary education is the second level of education that a child receives. It is typically divided into grades 6-12. The curriculum includes a wide range of subjects, including English, math, science, history, and foreign languages. In addition, students are required to take courses in health, physical education, and community service.

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses:

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered at the high school level. They are designed to challenge students and prepare them for college-level work. AP courses are offered in a variety of subjects, including English, math, science, history, and foreign languages.

SAT/ACT:

The SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and ACT (American College Test) are standardized tests that are used to evaluate a student's academic performance. They are typically taken by students in their junior and senior years of high school.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the school system functions differently in different parts of the state. Elementary and secondary schools have different curriculums and courses. Advanced Placement courses are offered to students who wish to challenge themselves. The SAT and ACT are standardized tests that are used to evaluate a student's academic performance.
Materials based on the Parent Institute for Quality Education Program in California
TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS

1. **The Importance of Standardized Tests:**

Every spring, all public school students in California are assessed with a series of standardized tests. With these tests, teachers, schools, and school districts measure what is taught and how, as well as how much students have learned.

These exams are part of the Standardized Test and Report Program (**STAR**), which is basically made up of four components:

1. **The general academic content tests on the California standards (CST)** are the ones that count the most when the state public schools are evaluated, and therefore, parents should pay special attention to them. The content of these tests matches the state academic standards in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, history, social studies, and science.

2. **The California Aptitude Tests (CAT/6),** which replaced the Stanford 9 Exams. These tests evaluate students in grades 3 and 7 in reading, written expression, and mathematics.

3. **The Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, 2nd edition,** known as **SABE/2.** This test is obligatory for students whose native language is Spanish, who are not proficient in English, and have been in the California public schools for less than twelve months.

4. **The California Alternative Performance Assessment,** or **CAPA,** evaluates disabled students with special needs.

The main goal of tests is to find out whether the student is learning what he/she should.

*Handout Lesson # 5 Elementary Level / 2004*

*Source: “La Opinión” Special Supplement: “Parents in Schools”*
II. **English Language Development Test:**

The **California English Language Development Test (CELDT)**, was administered for the first time in 2001.

The state law requires that all school districts administer the CELDT to all new students between kindergarten and twelfth grade whose mother tongue is not English. This must be done during the first 30 days after they are enrolled at the site, and then every year for those who are still learning the language. The main goal of this test is to determine the students’ progress in learning the language and the type of help they need.

The test includes four skills areas: **oral comprehension, listening, reading, and writing**. Kindergarten and first grade students are assessed only in the areas of oral comprehension and listening, and other students are tested in all four areas.

Depending on the exam scores, students who turn out to be “English learners” are classified as:
- **beginners**
- **low intermediate**,
- **intermediate**,
- **low advanced, and**
- **advanced**

However, this is not the only measure which is used or should be used for this purpose.

Once the teacher has the test scores for each student, he or she is legally obligated to inform the parents within thirty days.

Both the state and the federal government offer special funds for schools with English learners. These funds are used to hire bilingual staff and buy materials to help the students.

Handout Lesson # 5 Elementary Level / 2004

Source: “La Opinión” Special Supplement: “Parents in Schools”
2. **Parent Institute for Quality Education Program in California**

Materials based on the Parent Institute for Quality Education Program in California

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