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## Don't take it for granted

Children need to be accountable for their education

The word "accountability" has been buzzing around U.S. schools like a swarm of bees in a honeycomb since the 1980s. More and more, standardized tests are being used to hold teachers accountable for students' progress. But there's another aspect of accountability that parents can help with: Teaching students to take responsibility for their education.

Rarely does one hear the term "student accountability." What are students accountable for when they are sitting in a classroom? Are they responsible for behaving, being prepared to learn, having school supplies or being amenable to others?

Some states, such as North Carolina, have created student accountability programs. Yet, there are few, if any, scripted guidelines for what a "child's role" is in the average classroom. Make no mistake; I'm not talking about behavior. Most school districts have policies and procedures that govern student behavior. Effective schools have rules, regulations and policies that are clearly written in student handbooks. Effective teachers have behavior modification plans that encourage positive



student behaviors. However, students must learn to take ownership of their educational experiences and be accountable for the outcomes of their efforts if they are going to be successful.

Some students are naturally inclined to perform well in school. Other students need coaxing and constant guidance. Studies show kids in elementary school need little motivation to learn, but more is required as they progress into middle school. I know firsthand about this change between elementary and middle school.

When my son entered middle school, I think he felt very liberated.

He loved changing classes and socializing in between. We quickly learned he enjoyed socializing more than he enjoyed being in class. While this is totally normal, it is our job as parents to reinforce the importance of academic success and ensure he stays on track.

It is imperative that students discover their role in education and deem it as important. When students actively engage in the learning process and learn that they play a large part in their success or failure, students tend to perform better.

In addition, students should be expected to behave and interact well with others. Students should listen during instruction and take the initiative to prepare for tests outside of the review provided at school. Students should complete tasks when asked and be expected to interact and engage in classroom activities.

Parents can help their children become successful students by holding them accountable for their actions. Teach them to accept the consequences for making poor choices. Parents should teach children to be organized and to be informative. I remember Jude, at 13, entering middle school.


All of a sudden, he stopped telling me when he had tests and what homework he had. He lost his entire set of "little informant" skills he had learned during elementary school. It was a tough adjustment for all of us.

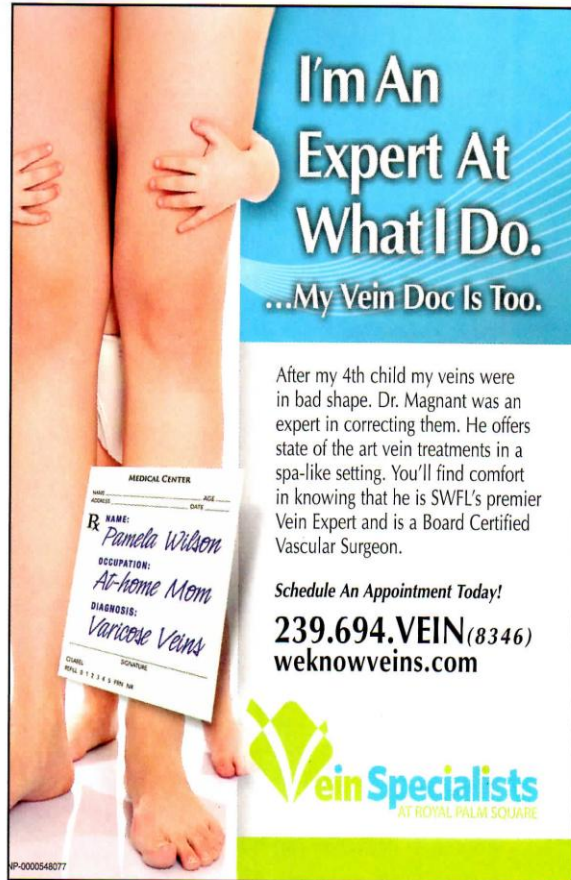
It is students' responsibility to inform their parents when they need help with work at school. Successful students take test preparation seriously and regularly review materials taught in class. Parents can help students by reminding them of their "role" as a student and reviewing what is expected of them.

Parents also need to support teachers by working together to promote their children's success.

Students suffer when parents make excuses for their children's poor academic progress. For example, when a child performs poorly on several tests and forgets to turn in homework, many teachers will call a parent conference. During that conference, parents are most helpful to their children if they listen to how they can help their child and not provide excuses why the child performed poorly. ("He is training for all-star baseball." "Our schedule is hectic." "I am working two jobs and can't help him.")

While these excuses may be legitimate, it is instead more helpful when parents ask how they can support their child's progress and find ways to make it happen. Through this type of healthy dialogue, a child will begin to understand his role and accept responsibility for his academic success.

While public education is still provided free in the United States for all children, it should not be taken for granted. 



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