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## Parent Academy promotes effective learning environments for children

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Jeanete Beatty has learned a little something throughout the years about what makes a good environment for learning.

She's steered her own seven children through the educational system, is involved in the educational lives of several great-grandchildren and is the caregiver for one of her great-grandchildren. Her own learning started as a child, when her mother wasn't able to attend many of her school functions because she was working.

"(I learned) it was important to me (as a parent) to be at everything I can be at," Beatty said.

That learning continued Thursday night as Beatty joined about a dozen other parents and caregivers at Mount Logan Elementary School for a Parent Academy on Conditions for Learning -- one of four recent initiatives launched by the Ohio Department of Education. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to create conditions at home, in school and in the community that make for the best environment in which children can learn.

One of those key conditions for learning, according to presenter Alison Sayre, elementary supervisor for the Ross-Pike Educational Service District, is parental involvement.

"Just by being here, you're already demonstrating that your kids are important to you," Sayre told the assembled parents in her introduction.

Children need several things for optimal learning, Sayre said. They include:

- Support for learning, meaning setting expectations for children, providing feedback and conveying that education is a top priority.
- Caring relationships, including parents, teachers, grandparents, parents of other students and others who can make a connection with a child.
- Opportunities to succeed, which means encouraging a child to pursue his or her interests and to explore new things without fear of failure.
- Hope for the future, meaning encouragement and showing them how to get through the rough times.
- Safety, encompassing physical, mental and emotional well-being. This includes an adequate

shelter, healthy food, a stable home life, knowledge they can count on their parent or parents and passing along an understanding it's OK if they fail sometimes.

- Good health, including nutrition and exercise physically and drawing on the influences of social workers or pastors emotionally.
- A sense of belonging, meaning children are shown how they can contribute to a family, school or community and are allowed to do so.

On the school end of the spectrum, Sayre said research has revealed that an ideal learning environment is safe, welcoming, cooperative, respectful and caring.

"These things all have to be in place to create a positive atmosphere in the school," Sayre said.

Several attendees indicated Mount Logan, where the meeting was conducted and where their children attend, is a school that has embraced those five necessities for a positive environment. Matt Thornsberry, second-year principal of the school, said school administration and staff have launched several initiatives to accomplish that.

The efforts have included establishing a consistent discipline system across grade levels, creation of pride assemblies to recognize students with solid attendance or who have learned class mission statements, homework intervention classes to make sure work is being done and battling absentee problems by having staff members develop relationships with students to create a connection for coming to class.

Parental involvement is key, Thornsberry said.

"It's extremely important," he said. "It's why we do this, to increase the level of involvement.

"We want it, and we need it."

There are challenges that can derail even the most solid environment, Sayre said. One is bullying, and the other is transitions.

Children, she added, go through several transitions in their learning, from moving grade levels to switching teachers to moving to other buildings all the way up to graduating and finding a job. Parental involvement and showing children the positives that exist during a time of transition can make a big difference.

"We cannot emphasize enough (the importance of) parents being involved in those transitions," Sayre said.

Both Sayre and Thornsberry acknowledged events such as the one Thursday reach parents who already are actively involved in their children's lives and education. It is their hope those parents who are will reach out to those who aren't -- either by sharing their own positive experiences or offering to bring them to a parent-teacher organization meeting or inviting them to help with classroom parties.

"You're hoping to have that ripple kind of effect," Thornsberry said.

## Additional Facts

## OHIO SCHOOL CLIMATE GUIDELINES

These guidelines, established in 2004, reinforce how educators, families and communities can improve their schools.

- **Guideline 1** -- Operational principles for local schools that are grounded in best practices for academic achievement and are espoused by the community produce system effectiveness.
  - **Guideline 2** -- School/community partnerships enable the provision of comprehensive services for students and staff.
  - **Guideline 3** -- Regular, thorough assessment and evaluation result in continuous improvement.
  - **Guideline 4** -- High-quality staff development and administrative support leads to effective program implementation.
  - **Guideline 5** -- Addressing real and perceived threats to safety and security enables students to focus on learning and teachers to focus on instruction.
  - **Guideline 6** -- A student's sense of belonging in the classroom encourages classroom participation, positive interactions and good study habits.
  - **Guideline 7** -- Engagement of parents and families in school-home learning partnerships maximizes the potential for effective instruction and student learning.
  - **Guideline 8** -- Youth engagement in forming school policy and procedure integrates an essential perspective into proposed solutions.
  - **Guideline 9** -- High-quality food service supports improvements in academic performance and behavior.
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