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Parental support key to child's future

By Lisa deneal Post-Tribune correspondent April 16, 2011 10:47PM

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GARY — Increased parental involvement and unity between parents, students, teachers and community were some of the key components addressed Saturday at the Indiana Parenting Institute's first Parenting Resource Fair and Empowerment Panel Conference at the Diamond Club.

Panelists included state Sen. Earline Rogers, community activist and Primerica Financial Services regional vice president Emmett Mosley, Sojourner Truth House board member Kimberlee Ward, Northwest Indiana Parent Community Academy director Carlyle Edwards and Hammond High School lead counsel Michelle Rushing.

Moderated by Melvyn Harding, director of the Educational Talent Search at Purdue University Calumet, questions varied from the state of relationships between K-12 and college institutions, charter vs. public schools and parental involvement and school testing.

On parental involvement, Mosley said parents need to be proactive with their children's lives and education before they even start kindergarten.

"You have to be involved in their decisions before they even enter the school system. There are other populations of children already being prepared for the world before anything," Mosley said.

One parent in the audience, Cindy Sangaster of Hammond, said she has a child attending middle school and another in high school and expressed concerns about preparing for state testing such as the CORE 40.

"One of my children is disabled and has limitations in preparing and getting assistance to prepare for the state tests. They only get so much," she said.

Rushing replied that no matter the child's background or learning ability, resources should be available in the school that would help her child prepare for any and all of the mandatory tests.

Rogers said pending legislation will allow students to graduate in three years with \$4,500 available for college.

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"But while they would be academically ready, would they be socially ready for college life," Rogers questioned.

Edwards added that schools should raise the bar when it comes to educating students and that parents should also step up and address issues with their children and the teachers. "And schools should stop reorganizing just to keep from losing their accreditation or closing.

Harding said changes have to be made as students are now competing on a global level with foreign students.

"We complain about going to school 180 days and there are foreign students who have come from school systems that hold classes for more than 200 days a year. In the end, the corporate world is going to hire the very best," Harding said.

When it came to the friction between charter and public schools, Rogers said the original idea of bringing charter schools into Indiana in 2001 was to take the charter school's learning initiatives and weave them into the public school curriculum.

"However, in 10 years charter schools have overwhelmed Indiana, there are more charter schools in Gary and it has become a war with Gary schools. We should not be in competition with each other but come together," Rogers continued. "I mean in the words of Rodney King, can't we all just get along?"

Ward said she is a supporter of charter schools, but there has yet to be proof of results available to confirm that charter schools are successful.

"I believe we slow down the process of adding more charter schools in Gary until we get actual proof that charter schools work," Ward said.

Mosley said the bottom line for all is to become more involved in children's lives.

"We cannot settle for less. Not from our children or ourselves," he said.

Guest speaker David Miller of Baltimore is the chief visionary officer and cofounder of the Urban Leadership Institute. He echoed the panelists' sentiments and added his own.

"At the end of the day we cannot blame teachers, the community, Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, music or TV for what is wrong with our children. We have to blame ourselves. At the end of the day if we don't love our children in these trying times, our world is doomed," Miller, 43, said.

He added that after witnessing two friends die from a game of Russian roulette when he was 12, to having his best friend die in his arms from a robbery when they were preparing to attend their second year in college, families have to go back to the days of love, care and spirituality.

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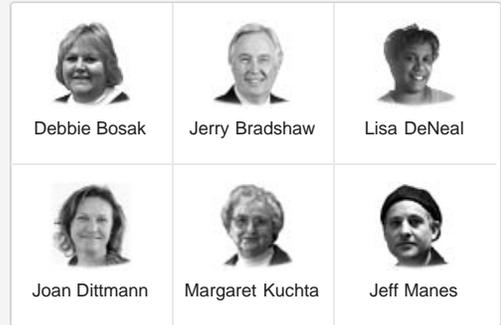
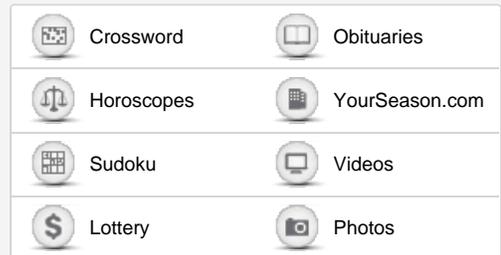


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