

Over the years, I've learned that you can't trust every statistic you hear. But I heard one recently that caught my attention – mainly because it was just that staggering, but also because it reinforces a core philosophy in our school communities.

It went something like this: Over the course of a child's school years, only about nine percent of their time is spent at school, in class. The other 91 percent is spent at home or in the community, with their parents, friends, coaches and others. My curiosity (and former math teacher self) got the best of me and I decided to put this statistic to the test. After doing the math, I found it was spot on with the experience of our own Lakota students.

As an educator, you could look at this stat and feel nothing but discouragement. *How can I possibly make a difference in such a short period of time? Or you could look at it this way. How can I multiply the impact of my work in the classroom by asking parents to be actively involved?*

At Lakota, we believe the best education comes from a shared responsibility between the schools and our community partners. It means nothing if we teach our students to value education and then send them home or out into their communities where the same message isn't being reinforced. More specifically, it's exactly why parent engagement is so important to us.

For starters, some of the technology we've introduced – a parent portal for easy access to schedules, grades and teachers, and a learning management system for accessing digital classroom content and assignments, for example – helps ease ongoing communication among staff and parents. But truly effective parent engagement goes well beyond online resources.

It's why our parents see things like family literacy, technology and multicultural nights, career panels, course registration information sessions, and evening programs on topics like character development and social media use. It's why non-traditional programs like our new "Barber Shop, Books & Boys" program promote side-by-side learning between our students and a role model.

It's why our special services department has introduced a new series for parents to learn all about post-graduation options and resources and a parent mentor for one-on-one support in navigating the complexities of special education. It's why our gifted department has rolled out a whole host of parent education sessions in close collaboration with a strong parent advocacy group for gifted education, Lakota LEADS.

It's also why we have a longstanding group called the District Parent Council, or DPC. About two representatives from each school come together every other month to hear updates and key opportunities for parent involvement. The group plays a critical role in sharing out what they hear with more parents at their home schools.

So, in the words of our very own community engagement consultant, Angie Brown, "Show me a parent who's engaged with their child and I'll show you the road to a successful student." Everything we do is driven by student achievement – and by my calculations, about 91 percent of our success comes from the active support of our parents.

*Robb Vogelmann is the acting superintendent for Lakota Local Schools.*