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Library hosts workshop to help students succeed

Rachael Hotchkiss / Staff Writer

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The New Brunswick Free Public Library and Prevent Child Abuse-NJ presented a free workshop on Saturday aimed at making parents more conscious of their critical role in their children's educational success.

The workshop, titled "Taking the Lead to Help Your Child Succeed," provided advice on how to communicate effectively with their children's teachers, how to read and understand school report cards, how to be active learners and teachers in the home, and the benefits of being an involved parent.

Tanisha Jacob, a New Brunswick resident whose daughter attends the Greater Brunswick Charter School in the city, said she was already highly involved with her daughter's education but attended the workshop because she wanted to learn more.

"I knew my daughter was intelligent and eager to learn, so I didn't want her to get bored in a school system that was too easy for her," said Jacob, the only parent who attended the workshop.

She said her involvement in her daughter's education led her to apply to the Charter School and has been extremely happy with the school's educational expectations and accessibility.

Her daughter has used a mediator system in place at the school called "conflict resolution," Jacob said.

As a parent, she has taken advantage of the accessibility of teachers through counselor mediation in order to solve any problems that may arise involving her daughter at school.

Jacob said the parent-teacher-student conferences at the Greater Brunswick Charter School last about 20 minutes, but sometimes that is not enough time and more effort is necessary.

"Involving the student in the traditional parent-teacher conferences shows an important step in the family and schools' integral relationship," said Colleen Hicks, a representative for Prevent Child Abuse-NJ.

Laura Szalaj, an associate at the library, helped oversee the workshop.

"I normally create and run community programs aimed solely at adults, but this is a program that incorporates all that the library has to offer," Szalaj said.

Prevent Child Abuse-NJ provided a \$2,500 grant to the library to increase and enhance the collection of literature on parenting and parent involvement with an emphasis on children's education, Hicks said.

The library is required to use some of that funding to provide an informational activity for the community, Szalaj said.

"The library received funding from the New Jersey State Parent Information and Resource Center, which serves as a resource for schools and parents to increase parental involvement in education in hopes of improving the child's achievements in school," Hicks said.

NJ PIRC provides resource centers, online information, books and other texts in the library, and hold seminars in schools. They also work in conjunction with the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act, Hicks said.

She said Prevent Child Abuse-NJ offers information in schools as a way to link parents directly with their children's education.

"Our aim is to help schools develop parent-teacher action teams, which are different from the existing Parent-Teacher Organizations," Hicks said. "PTOs include parents who are already highly involved. Our programs are set up to recruit parents who may not have as much free time but want to be equally involved in the educational success of their children."

She said their resource centers are in eight different schools and three full districts around New Jersey. A school must apply through NJ PIRC in order to receive minimal funding for such programs, she said.

During the workshop, Hicks gave advice to parents on ways to keep their kids interested and proficient in school.

"Kids aren't failing for just one reason. There are many factors at hand, but parents play a large part in their children's success," she said.

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