July 18 2015 Ashford Citizen Article

Dr. Longo

 ***Thinking Ahead to the Opening of School***

In most cases, July and August are great months to be a child. You don’t have to get up and go to school, and maybe you get to play without adults telling you what to do every moment. Yes, you have more control over your daily activities in July and August than you do during the rest of the year. I hope that that is true for your children. I hope that they have opportunities to be creative and to play a little more freely than they do during the school year. A day in school should be good, but free play should be great!

I am writing this article because in a few weeks it is back to school, and we need children to be ready for another school year. It sounds simple. School begins, children go to school, and the cycle of learning renews itself in a different room with a different teacher and some different classmates. However, how simple it actually is depends a good deal on the child’s readiness for school, and the feelings and attitude that he or she brings with them on that first day. That back-to-school attitude comes in part from experience, and in part from role models. That is where we become partners and we all do the little things that make the child’s attitude toward another school year a bit more positive.

Learning is a complex matter. Scientists in universities and laboratories throughout the world are studying it, developing theories and ideal approaches in the ever-evolving fields of education, psychology, and brain science to name a few. I am not going to get into that here. This is neither the proper time nor place for such a dialogue. However, there are great books, resources, and places to get information on the subject if you are interested.

What I am going to do here is just mention a few things that you can do to increase the likelihood that your child is ready and experiences an optimal opening of school this year.

First, go to our school website and look for the welcome back brochure offered by the teachers in the grade that your child is entering. This brochure will orient you to the coming year by telling you a bit about the grade level’s curriculum and expectations, and also the materials that your child will need to bring to their first day. We don’t want you to go out and spend a lot of money on back to school supplies without seeing what the teachers hope your child will bring with them to the first day. Every grade is different and what the teacher would like the students to bring to school differs from year to year.

Next, look at the summer work packet put on the website by your child’s grade level teachers. If you have not been having your child do any of the suggested summer work, now would be a good time to ease them into it. A little work each week as the summer winds down gets them back into schoolwork without too much pressure or stress.

Another helpful way that you can make back to school more fun and less anxiety prone is how you discuss the fact that summer is ending and school will be opening soon. It seems like a small thing, but if you drop a few positive thoughts about the opening of school, and even engage in a little discussion about the coming year, that is encouraging and enthusiastic, it will help your child’s readiness and attitude on that first day. This dialogue might even elicit fears or anxieties that you did not realize your child had. He or she may be more nervous about going back to school that you thought. Occasionally having seemingly spontaneous conversations about going back to school that allow your child to express his or her feelings, while you are being positive and supportive, might be really helpful and important to your child. Over the years I have had a number of parents tell me how glad they were that they took the time to discuss back to school casually and in a positive way.

We all know how important it is to be supportive, and willing to listen to our children, but we might not realize that back-to-school is an issue that can really benefit from a conversation or two.

We want you to know that we have been working diligently all summer to be ready to welcome your children back to school. Teachers and administrators have been meeting regularly to write curriculum and plan instruction, custodians have been cleaning and preparing the facility, and the central offices have been ordering materials and pulling it all together. Summer is a very busy time for us, and hopefully a time for the students to relax and recharge. There is not much more to say, but that we are looking forward to seeing you and your children, and that September is just around the corner!