



Parents, What is Your Family's Academic Plan?

By Shawnta S. Barnes - January 15, 2019

Over the last few months, I have been asked by three different groups to give parental advice. I will be the first to tell you that I do not have it all figured out. Some days, I feel like a complete failure as a parent. As with any aspect of life, it is easier to bounce back when you have a plan.

People frequently comment about how smart my identical twin sons are. "I can't believe they are in second grade, but read on a fourth-grade level." I have also heard, "Are they really doing

multiplication already?” When they were in first grade, I took them to a festival. They did an activity where they had to write. The lady at the booth accused me of lying about how old they were because as she stated, “First graders would not use those words in their writing.” Yes, this could turn into one of those belief gaps pieces, but I’ll save that for another day.

Yes, I believe my boys are smart. Yes, I would like to say they got their intelligence from their mom and dad, but it really comes down to hard work and a plan. I believe other black children can exceed expectations if they are pushed and have a goal.

In our family, we told our boys they must earn As and Bs; Cs, Ds, or Fs would not be tolerated. When midterms came during the second quarter, one of my sons had a C+. We sat him down and said, “What is the family plan when it comes to school?” He replied, “Only As and Bs.” We allowed him to share why he believed he had the grade, and we helped him come up with strategies to improve his grade. Next, we informed his teacher that we expected him to reach his potential and earn at least a B especially since his grade had nothing to do with his capability, but it was due to him choosing not to finish work. Now, that everyone was on board, he was able to improve his grade to our family’s standard by report card time.

As parents, we have to do more than hope our children receive a good education when we send them to school; we have to actively be involved to ensure it happens. Our children need to know our expectations for them. Saying, “Get good grades and act right” is not enough. What is a good grade to you? What is act right? If you don’t have a specific plan, you could end up with your child falling behind in school.

A plan has to be more than words; it also takes action. I try to maximize my time. I love to cook, so I cook almost every day. While I’m slaving away in the kitchen, my children are eating a snack at the table and getting work done. I frequently have my children read aloud while I am cooking or practice math aloud. This allows me to cook and know they are working because I can hear them. I am also consistent. If we have to go somewhere after school, we don’t go unless I have a plan to ensure their work is done. My husband and I check in with them about school daily so if they are struggling with the teacher, a peer, or an assignment, we know up front and aren’t surprised later.

The academic plan should go beyond this school year. We have also told our children that as much as we love them, they cannot live with us forever. We explained they are in school to work towards their future which includes obtaining a job and taking care of themselves. We talk about what they want to do when they grow up and the skills they need to acquire. One of my

sons wants to be a scientist. He has it narrowed down to chemist and geologist. My other son also wants to be a scientist, but he is not sure which kind. He also wants to write and illustrate books. Knowing this, we can provide opportunities to help them see if they are really interested and to help them grow their skills if they are. This is why they have attended art camp and STEM camp. They also attend monthly STEM activities. Yes, this will take time and work, but aren't your kids worth it?

If you are not sure that your children know your expectations for them, sit down and let them know. If you are not checking in with your children and monitoring their grades, start now. It is never too late to step up and ensure your child not only meets your academic expectations but exceeds them.