

When The Going Gets Tough, Don't Give In

By Richard Norman Rickey

April 13, 2016

As the founder of a public charter school I've witness a growing number of parents that give in to their child when they should expect more. Too often when a child is struggling in school the parent will become frustrated, blame the teacher or school administration, and then transfer the child to another school hoping for a better academic result. That is the temptation of school choice and its challenge. While Orenda Education was born from the school choice movement of the 1990's, and I certainly support and believe in school choice, it can be a double edge sword because choice also gives the student and the parent an escape from having to deal with the real issue.

I think we should assume strength in our children, not weakness. More often than not what is needed for academic success is not some fancy new instructional method, the latest in technology, more rewards or a different school. What is needed is parenting with high expectations, getting your child to do what they don't want to do, and not apologizing for being tough. Your child will thank you later, probably much later. As a parent of two very different children, and genders, I know from experience how challenging is the task when you have a child that is struggling academically. Of course you are going to want to know if they have a learning disorder, or if some other social-environment factor is a contributing factor, but I can tell you an often underestimated cause of poor school performance is good old fashioned laziness. And sometimes we as parents get lazy in our parenting.

Amy Chua wrote the controversial book Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother a few years ago. The book is about parenting children with high expectations. For Amy, growing up in Boston in a home with hard working Chinese immigrate parents, she got in trouble for an A-, had to drill math and piano every day, with no sleepovers and no boyfriends allowed. Her book is a memoir of her struggles as a parent to raise her two daughters here in America where the culture was not as demanding of its children as the one she grew up in. Many people were critical of her book and her demanding parenting style. I highly recommend the book so you can decide for yourself, but I do agree with Amy that we in America can ask more of children than we typically do.

This lack of courage to parent tough may come about from the softening effect of an entitlement culture where all the kids get trophies for participation, schools don't give out "F's" for poor work because they don't want to hurt anybody's feelings (or have them transfer to

another school), and competition and keeping score is considered a bad thing. Here at Orenda Education we believe an entitlement culture will only make our American children less prepared for a global society and economy where they are competing for a job against smart hard working young people from China, India, Morocco, and many other countries where their students are outperforming American kids in math, reading and science.

All of us parents want our children to reach their true potential, but to do so they have to work at it. As parents we need to make sure we keep the bar high enough so they don't under achieve. I'm not saying they can't have fun along the way and enjoy being a kid, but the growing culture of entitlement and low expectations must be countered with our parental determination to do everything we possibly can to take away all our children's excuses for why they are not excelling in school. Too many kids are spending too much time on Snapchat and not enough time with their nose in a book and their fingers on the keyboard typing a 1,000 word expository essay on why they hate their demanding parents.