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Sandy Banks

## For This Dad, Son's 'F' Is a Family Affair

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It started with the "F" in English.

That's what got Eric Moore's attention, let him know he hadn't been involved enough in the academic life of his 17-year-old.

His son was a junior at Crenshaw High, long past the stage when he needed Mom or Dad to help with schoolwork. "He'd be in his room, on the computer, with the door open," Moore recalled. "We thought he was doing homework. Until he brought home a failing grade."

At first, Moore said, "I got mad at the school. Why didn't I know? Why didn't anyone tell me? Then a bell went off. I realized that I should have been on top of things. This was my child. That was my responsibility."

Moore headed to the school in search of answers. And what he found had less to do with overcrowded classes, unprepared teachers and unmotivated kids than with the waste of the single most important resource children have--parents, who watched from the sidelines, uninvolved.

And he began to think that the best way to keep kids tuned in to school might be to get their parents plugged in at home.

Moore had never felt the need to push his son. "He was one of those bright kids who, when he did his work, was a straight-A student. But in 11th grade he decided he wanted to be popular more than he wanted to be successful," Moore said. His son's attitude changed, his schoolwork suffered--and his parents didn't notice until it was too late.

"From there on out, I told my son, we are going to be best friends." For the next year, he sometimes accompanied his son to school, sat in on classes, inspected his backpack, his homework, his locker. He started questioning the teen's teachers, his friends, the other parents.

"Maybe I went a little overboard," Moore admits now. "Everyone on campus knew me. His friends would say, 'Hey, isn't that your dad?' I'm sure my presence made him a little embarrassed."

But it also conveyed an important message, one that sparked a turnaround for his son, who is now working part time and attending junior college in Santa Monica. "Just the fact that I took an interest, I held him to high standards, that helped him to become more focused." And it led father and son to grow closer "because it showed him that I cared far more about him than my job or any of my other interests."

The experience taught Moore something as well. He realized that few of his son's high school classmates had the kind of parental support he'd been pushed into providing. "A lot of parents would complain about what's going on, but they weren't involved at the school," he discovered. "I'd go to parent meetings and there would be 10 or 20 parents on hand" at a school that enrolls 3,000 students.

He started canvassing parents to find out why. They blamed long workdays, big families, their own lack of education. They couldn't make it to meetings or volunteer on campus. They weren't home enough to monitor their children's homework or attendance. And they didn't realize how much it mattered.

"It wasn't that they didn't care," he said. "You have a parent who wants his kid to be a doctor or lawyer but has no idea what it takes to get that child into college. I saw kids failing who didn't have to."

Moore realized that Los Angeles' overloaded schools could not be expected to provide everything it takes to help a child succeed. Tutoring, summer classes, homework help, specialty camps, college counseling ... those were the new necessities, but they seemed out of many parents' reach.

A college-educated financial planner, Moore was savvier than most parents he met. But even he had been frustrated by the maze of options he encountered when he sought help for his son. "I found there was no easy way to figure out what was out there," he said. Reference books were often outdated, programs seemed to come and go, the Internet offered a confusing array of education Web sites.

So Moore took his computer expertise and compiled a CD-ROM offering links to more than 1,200 opportunities for students, everything from college scholarships to programs for handicapped kids to Web sites offering homework help and tutoring. He created EducateLA, a nonprofit group, to market the program and set about spreading the word in the South Los Angeles community.

And what he'd started as a research project, aimed at getting his son into college, soon became Moore's obsession. He quit his job with American Express and now works full-time on EducateLA. Today, four years after it started, the group is still small, with Moore its only paid staffer and a \$200,000 annual budget drawn mostly from corporate donations and the \$11.95 sale of CD-ROMs.

But its reach is large, and growing daily, as it draws parents onto the information highway. "Our Web site gets 30,000 hits a month," he said. And he's getting his CD out through hundreds of churches, community groups and schools.

"I realized a lot of parents were intimidated by the thought of 'navigating' the Internet," Moore said. "With this, you don't have to know how to type, you don't have to know [online] commands, you don't even need your own computer. Take it to work, to school, to the library."

Just point and click, and a whole new world of options comes into view. And while they might not aim a failing kid toward Harvard, they can give a parent a

new set of tools.

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