



Pexels Image

My husband used to teach in a low-income high school riddled with crime, homelessness and poverty. He loved his job. When he figured out that one of his students couldn't read because he couldn't see the words, my husband spoke with a counselor and together they made sure the student got an eye exam and glasses.

He helped students apply for scholarships and drove a senior who didn't have transportation to visit college campuses. Instead of interpreting it as a sign of laziness, my husband felt compassion for teenagers who fell asleep during class because they rode around on public transportation all night rather than return to a violent or abusive home situation.

My husband was named Teacher of the Year.

Unfortunately, the job was a three-hour commute and he eventually got a teaching job five minutes from our house. I say, unfortunately, because in his new high-income, high-tech school district, he encountered his first helicopter parents. Despite the problems he had faced with students in his first school, teaching in this new environment presented challenges that would tax his dedication and integrity.

Wikipedia defines a **helicopter parent** (also called a cosseting **parent** or simply a cosseter) as a **parent** who pays extremely close attention to a child's or children's experiences and problems, particularly at educational institutions.

Paying close attention would be admirable if parents were insisting their children complete homework assignments, behave appropriately, and learn how to deal positively with failure and gracefully with success. But this isn't what helicopter parents are doing. Instead, they're insisting their children receive good grades without earning them and receive special accommodations without needing them.

Some students don't complete assignments, don't attend class regularly, or are disruptive and disrespectful. When the consequences are C's or, *God forbid*, F's, their parents wake up and come to life. This doesn't mean parents suddenly realize their children are doing poorly and need to work harder. What usually happens is that parents demand to know why teachers are failing their children. The fault, in their opinion, must be the teacher's.

My husband has been surprised by the number of parents who write medical excuses for their children to miss class for beach trips, senior skip day, or just about anything else. After the missed week or weeks, guess who is responsible for making sure students complete missed

assignments? If you guessed the student, you're wrong. Responsibility for completed work falls on the already over-burdened shoulders of the teacher, who will schedule after-school makeup sessions which the student will most likely fail to attend.

A recent news show reported that 41 percent of young people today don't know about the Holocaust. The show attributed this paucity of knowledge to poor curriculum in schools as if there were some plot afoot to deprive students of an adequate education. But the problem isn't with the curriculum. Teachers are teaching about the Holocaust and other important historical events. Students just aren't listening. They don't have to. They can stare at their phones, goof off, skip class and their parents will make sure they graduate anyway.



One student's parents, both lawyers, threatened to sue my husband's school because their son wasn't passing. He was expected to attend an Ivy League college and his high school teachers weren't making this happen.

School administrators got the word out to teachers: do whatever you have to do, but make sure this boy graduates. We don't want a lawsuit.

My husband, who grades on a curve if a student has put in some effort, bumped a student's grade from 89 to 90 so the student would get an A. The mother called to ask if the grade could be bumped all the way to

100, which would help her son's GPA for acceptance into his college of choice.

Sometimes students who are hyperactive, intelligent outside-the-box thinkers one semester return to school the next semester so heavily medicated that they resemble zombies. They are more placid, but they've lost the spark that sets them apart.

Parents who were concerned about their children not making A's are happier when their children are properly medicated and able to focus. But being medicated is also grounds, in a parent's eyes, for extra accommodations. A diagnose of ADHD, PTSD or just plain stress will earn a student additional time to take tests and to complete watered-down assignments.

This is helpful for those students who use extra time wisely. But too often when special accommodations are made students goof off, distract other students, and get by without completing their work. They know their parents will demand more concessions and additional accommodations.

Teachers aren't told outright to pass failing students, but the implication is there. If too many students flunk a class, the teacher is not exactly fired. Instead, she's surplusd. This means she is "let go" from her current school but free to find employment elsewhere within the school system. Not many teachers choose to be surplusd.

My husband's school is filled with students from affluent, white collar families. Parents are doctors, lawyers, business managers and technology leaders. School administrators defer to them, and teachers face consequences if their children don't pass.

When my youngest son was in school, he was diagnosed with ADHD. He fell further and further behind until he was making F's. His teachers contacted me to say he wasn't turning in work, and the school recommended that he be enrolled in Special Ed classes.

I didn't blame the teachers or insist that my son be passed despite his grades. Instead, I made him sit at the kitchen table as soon as he got home from school. Then I set the oven timer for one hour, 45 minutes. He had to sit at the table until the timer went off. He could either study

or do nothing, but he wasn't allowed to listen to music, look at electronic devices, or eat.

The first few days he did nothing. When the timer buzzed, he was free. But this grew boring, and eventually, he dragged books from his bookbag and began working on homework. His grades improved along with his confidence, and each day he worked a little more enthusiastically. By the end of the year he didn't need the timer.

He went on to earn a Ph.D. in Environmental and Civil Engineering, start his own company and write optimization software.

Parents who insist their children get the grade without earning the grade are doing their children a disservice. Failure is part of life, and sooner or later people should learn to deal with it constructively.

A work ethic doesn't usually spring from the soil of entitlement. It needs to be instilled.

Students who are disruptive and disrespectful in school will carry a disregard for others into adulthood. The fruits of this will be ingratitude and discontent.

When the bar is set high for behavior and academic achievement, students rise to meet those expectations. Real achievement results in a sense of self-worth that no amount of parental hovering can accomplish.

Helicopter parents not only do a disservice to their children. They do a disservice to society when more and more students graduate without learning to think independently, solve problems or accomplish complex tasks.

I don't want a future filled with doctors, bridge builders, airplane mechanics and engineers who haven't mastered the skills and knowledge essential to their jobs. Do you?