

We the Parents

“Good Management Begins with Good People”

by Dennis Vicars

As most Americans know, it really goes like this: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The United States Constitution was created to bring order to 12 isolated colonies which had no joint resources, finances, or infrastructure to support and defend its own citizens. Soon after the Constitution was ratified, the Bill of Rights, which incorporated much from the 1689 writings of Englishman John Locke concerning the “natural rights that are inherent to all individuals” in their pursuit of “life, liberty, and property” was added. The Bill of Rights was our ability to ensure that we the people were protected in our individual pursuit

of freedom and happiness. Additionally every state, county, city, and hamlet has established laws meant to protect its citizens, including the rights of children (Child Protective Services, etc.), teachers (labor laws, etc.), and parents to one degree or another, but none that really hits the core of what a parent in an early care and education environment should be guaranteed.

We in early care and education have been given a responsibility beyond any other field, with the possible exception of medicine. PARENTS bring to us each day the most precious thing in their lives — their child. From as early as 6 weeks in some ECE settings on into elementary after-school programs, parents come to us in a bond of trust beyond their finances, material belongings, friendships, or even relatives. They come to us trusting that their most prized possession will be cared for in a safe, educational, and loving environment. They depend on us in ways that help to shape the very foundation of another human being, which will play out during the course of this little person’s entire life. WOW — what an awesome responsibility we share with a family every day that their child is in our presence. We are not fixing a radio or selling a car or building a house, but,

in fact, safely caring for a child and shaping a future adult human being. What we do is the work of nurses, teachers, counselors, coaches, and angels.

Parents have every right to question us, demand from us, and at times be difficult with us. They have placed supreme confidence in us or they would not have enrolled their child with us. So much in life is about attitude, and when we can change ours to reflect that of a parent (our customer) we begin to take on a partnership that is in the best interest of the child. A parent who questions us wants to join us in the growth and development of their child. A parent who demands from us is being an advocate for their child. A parent who is difficult is asking us to help them overcome their guilt, anxiety, and stress that requires our patience, education, and open-mindedness. These parents are asking us to save them because they don’t want to leave us. No three-year-old child writes a tuition check, so we had better make sure that mom and dad are cared for and have the ability and encouragement to participate in their child’s care and education.

I believe so strongly in customer service to our parents because I am honored



Dennis Vicars is the President of The Arista Group, Inc. In his career, Dennis has served as a child care corporate executive, preschool company founder, and advocate on both the public and private side of early childhood education. Dennis is past President of the Child Development Policy Institute (CDPI) and a former member of California’s Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC).

that they would choose me to help care and educate their most prized possession. I also know that the magic triangle of success for a child can only take place if child, teacher, and parent are working together as a team. I can think of no other field that has to reconfirm to their customer on a daily basis that they made a good purchasing decision. No other field has the responsibility for a young life like we have in ECE and, therefore, we owe parents the respect they deserve for the trust they have displayed in choosing us to care for and help shape their child's life.

Perhaps we all need to adopt a Parent's Bill of Rights in all of our schools, which incorporates the following:

1. A parent deserves and should expect an early care and education environment for their child that is safe, clean, organized, professional, and educational.
2. Every parent entering an ECE environment should be treated with attention, friendliness, and respect.
3. Every parent should expect to have their questions and concerns answered in a timely and professional manner.
4. Parents should expect clear, proactive communication concerning school events, messages, menus, and their child's progress.
5. Every parent should expect every teacher to know their child's name and take an interest in their child, regardless of the enrolled program.
6. A parent should find a lesson plan displayed in or near their child's classroom, which demonstrates intentional learning activities that are developmentally appropriate.
7. Every parent should find their child's art work or learning activity proudly displayed within the classroom.
8. A parent should be afforded a minimum of two formal teacher/director meetings per year to assess their child's progress.
9. Every parent should be encouraged to offer opinions and suggestions for the betterment of the school.
10. A parent should be able to walk into a facility that displays appropriate up-keep, maintenance, and is safe as well as a playground that reflects the same.

"We the parents . . . are the reason you can sustain your program."

— ■ —

