

SMART KIDS OR GOOD KIDS?

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

If you had a choice and you had to decide between having a good kid or a smart kid, what would you choose? In my years of being a classroom teacher, a school counselor and a school administrator I have worked with every kind of child and adult. Some parents do make this choice and unfortunately it is usually to have smart kids. For many people goodness does not seem to have much value these days.

In a county school system near Nashville, Tennessee, some youths broke into their school after hours and created some mayhem by vandalizing the lobby and some classrooms. They obviously weren't very smart because they were caught on the school's security cameras doing their dastardly deeds. They were arrested and that evening some of their parents were interviewed on television. I could not believe their reaction! A mother stated, "Well, they need to be let off because kids will be kids. They were only having fun. They are A and B grade students and they are smart. I don't want my son to have a record. It might harm his future. He might have his college goals spoiled!"

Hellooo!! Ma'am, your son isn't smart, and he sure needs to be taught some goodness by you. Goodness can't be very high on your list of life priorities. The same parent probably brags about her child and has a bumper sticker saying, 'My son is an honor student at ...'. I would far rather see a bumper sticker saying, 'My son is an honorable person'. I might come across as a person who doesn't appreciate academic achievement. Just the opposite is true, but things have to be put into perspective and priority. Character and values are far more important than achievement and success. After all, there are many successful people out there who have major character faults and leave senior citizens high and dry when they embezzle their life savings or siphon off millions of dollars of investors' money before they send their corporation sliding into the creek. Goodness seems to be perceived as having no competitive value and therefore not worth pursuing.

So many parents seem more concerned about their child's image, whether they are attractive, have all the mod-cons, are smart or successful. Little attention seems to be given to whether their child displays good morals, cares about the less fortunate or sticks up for justice. Image, it seems, is valued more than character.

I advocate the introduction of students wearing standard school attire or uniforms because research in other countries shows that behavior and academic achievement is enhanced when this occurs. The reaction from many parents was, "But my child won't be able to express their personality or individuality!" My

stock answer was that school is not a 'cat-walk' to model your creative expressions in clothing. It is a place of learning.

Cheating, disrespect of authority, drinking parties by under-age youths sponsored by parents, sex after the prom and bullying go unchecked. In fact, if you raise these problems many parents have got a quick answer to acquit their child's actions. When children have to face society's sanctions and your consequences they have an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. When you shelter them and give them excuses for their unacceptable behavior, you are harming them more than you can comprehend. "Such parents", says Dr. Laura Schlessinger, "are willing to sacrifice their children's moral and spiritual growth for material gain. As adults, these children may well continue to sacrifice what is good and just for what is expedient and concrete."

In light of what Dr. Laura says it is better to develop character in your kids than for them to believe that stuff is more important. As parents, it is important to work out our moral and spiritual values and weave these into our children's tapestry in order that we produce children that not only we are proud of, but God is, too.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.