THE WAY

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FROM THE SENIOR SCHOOL DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

As I write this, my wife and I are preparing to attend our daughter's Year 10 Parent/Teacher and Subject Selection evening. I always feel a bit conflicted when it comes to events like this at my kids' schools. On the one hand, I rarely learn anything new. Teaching, learning, subject selection, the HSC, and study skills are my bread and butter. Sitting in the audience, I sometimes feel like a fraud—nodding along to information I already know. Occasionally, I catch myself thinking critical thoughts about how the session could be improved. Other times, I'm genuinely impressed and take mental notes to bring back to my own school.

My wife, who is not a teacher, often learns a great deal—so I'm reminded that not everyone comes to these evenings with the same background or expectations. It makes me think of how a nurse or doctor must feel when they are on the receiving end of a medical procedure, or how an airline pilot might feel sitting in the cabin as a passenger.

And yet, despite my familiarity with the content, it's still important that I show up.

It's important that I support my daughter—not just as an educator, but as her dad. When we leave work a little early, drive across town on a cold winter evening, navigate traffic, and circle the school car park looking for a spot, we are sending a powerful message: We value you, and we value your education.

Recently I came across an article from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) that drew on decades of local and international research. It explained that:

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“Parental engagement in learning means parents undertake an active, meaningful, and sustained sharing of their child’s education. Such engagement can provide additional months of academic progress over the course of a year… The impact on learning can be even greater for children with low prior achievement.”

Of course, engagement is more than just turning up to parent-teacher interviews. It might look like reading a school report together and asking thoughtful questions. It might mean offering encouragement when they’ve done well or gently addressing areas of concern. It could involve helping with homework, providing a quiet space to work, or simply asking, “What were two highs and two lows of your day?”

Even having regular conversations about what students are learning—what they think about a current event, how they’d solve a problem, or why something matters—makes a difference. One study found that students who discuss social and political issues with their parents perform better in reading tests than those who don’t. These conversations not only directly impact academic success but also nurture student interest, motivation, and responsibility.

So, whether you’re deeply familiar with the content of the evening—or learning it all for the first time—your presence matters. It speaks louder than any words. Keep showing up. Keep asking questions. Keep engaging.
Because when it comes to education, our presence is one of the most powerful tools we have.

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