

The image shows a navigation menu for Region 18 Education Service Center. At the top left is the logo for Region 18 Education Service Center. To its right is a graphic of colorful paper clips. Further right is the text "Services & Staff". Below these are several navigation buttons: "Home", "About Region 18 ESC", "Directions & Map", and "Site Map". Below these are three columns of buttons: the first column has "Workshops" and "Search E-mail"; the second column has "Educator Resources" and "Services & Staff Listing"; the third column has "School Districts" and "Job Opportunities".

BrainSMART in the House: Why Parents Make the Difference
 By Marcus Conyers



It is a dream come true to be writing this article for Texas Association of School Board's Parent Learning Network. The first time I presented at the PLN conference, I was overwhelmed with excitement at seeing how well parents and educators can work together to ensure all students' academic success. Dr. Donna Wilson and I talk proudly about PLN at all our national and international workshops. Everywhere we go people say, "We wish we had an organization like that in our state."

Dr. Wilson and I will present at the 2002 PLN Texas Conference. In my conference keynote, I will share breakthroughs in brain and cognitive research and strategies that parents can use to make a dramatic difference in the lifelong achievement of all children. We believe that this is the greatest generation of parents, doing more to help their children become healthy, happy, successful human beings than generations before. We are proud to support you by providing updates on the science of learning and a toolbox of practical strategies that build healthier, happier, more productive lives. The research data is clear on the positive impact you make on the lives of your children.

Fact one: Up to age 18, students spend 87 percent of waking hours outside school in the care of the parents or guardians. Parents do make the difference.

Fact two: The support that parents give to their children is at least twice as important as socio-economic factors in terms of determining the lifelong success of children.

Fact three: In national surveys, children rate parents as being their greatest heroes, well ahead of rock stars and sports personalities.

Fact four: The National Institute of Mental Health discovered that the single best way to reduce the risk of aggression, depression, and suicide is for parents to dialogue with their children on a regular basis.

Fact five: Ninety percent of what is known about the brain and learning has been discovered in the last 10 years. The Society for Neuroscience has grown from 500 to 30,000 members, who have an average age of 32. Breakthroughs in brain science are giving us insights into more effective ways for helping all children learn.

Fact six: The learning strategies that children learn from parents can be critical to academic success. For example, a mother learned BrainSMART strategies and taught them to her daughter after she failed important tests. When the daughter took the tests again, she got the highest possible marks!

Fact seven: In a recent survey, children said the most important thing they wanted was not more time from their parents, but was for their parents to be less stressed and fatigued.

Fact eight: A Gallup Poll discovered that parents thought that the most important area of learning in school was all-around health education.

Fact nine: Optimism, a learned way of thinking about the world, is the key to lifelong health happiness and academic success.

To illustrate this last point, I will share a personal story about my childhood. My mother, Hazel Powell, guided my thoughts every night in a way that would lead me to be a lifelong optimist. Every night before I went to sleep, my mother would ask, "What were the best things that happened today, Marcus?" Then she would say, "Watch out tomorrow for even more wonderful things." So each day in my early years, I learned to save the treasures of the day and look forward to the new shining treasures of tomorrow. Research suggests that the brain is wired to notice what we focus on. We also know that the brain is wired to notice what we expect to find. That is the reason I noticed the treasures of the next day, every day. It was this "learned optimism" that empowered me to write eight books on the brain and learning, appear on 600 TV and radio shows around the world, travel and work in 35 countries on five continents and to have taught BrainSMART strategies to 50,000 parents and educators who reach more than a million children.

Parents are the most powerful force for creating the opportunities for ordinary children to build extraordinary lives. In our keynote and breakout sessions at the 2002 PLN Texas Conference and in our new book *BrainSMART in the House*,

Dr. Wilson and I will share strategies for helping build healthy, happy productive lives. Visit us at www.brainsmart.com to learn about our new book for parents called *BrainSMART in the House* and attend the Region 18 ESC workshops this fall to learn more!