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How Moms and Dads Can Hurt a School

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Everyone knows the type: The parent who stands up at the PTA meeting, master of the arena, and says, "I believe I speak for everyone when I say . . ."

They aren't speaking for everyone, of course, but just about no one will directly challenge them. They will, however, be the subject of gossip after the meeting.

Those are the adults whom educator and author Rosalind Wiseman calls "queen bee moms" and "kingpin dads," the powerful parents who seem to soak up all the air at school meetings, try to set the agenda for the school community and seem to always get their way.

Wiseman, co-founder of the Empower Program, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating teenagers about violence, says the dynamic between these parents and the less assertive ones who won't challenge them is complicating school communities and sending bad messages to children about conflict resolution and about how to stand up to an unfair power system.

"Parents are as impacted by the culture, which is really peer pressure, as teenagers are, but we don't like to admit it because we are supposed to be beyond it," Wiseman said. "It is embarrassing to be in your forties and admit you are acting like you are 12."

Wiseman, who has just published a book about the interaction of parents titled "Queen Bee Moms & Kingpin Dads," said she sees all kinds of involvement by parents in their children's school lives but doesn't see enough "sane" behavior.

Parents, she said, would do well to stop worrying so much about whether they "fit in" at back-to-school night or what people will think about them if they alert another parent about their child's poor behavior.

"It's paralyzing for kids to see their parents not be willing to take these kinds of risks themselves," she said. "The danger for schools is that little tiny things get blown up into big things and the climate is affected."

-- Valerie Strauss

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