

# Groups seeks to get Evansville fathers more involved in kids' lives

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EVANSVILLE — For David Wagner, taking his grandchildren to their first day of classes at Lincoln School is a step in creating a partnership between students' families and the principal and teachers. And it's a partnership Evansville men can take a step toward creating Wednesday — the first day of school for most Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. children.

Diane Clements, executive director of the Evansville Vanderburgh Human Relations Commission, said the Million Father March is a way for male figures — whether they're fathers, grandfathers, foster fathers, stepfathers, uncles, older brothers or another significant male role model in a child's life — to take their children to school on the first day and meet the teachers and principals, as well as discover activities their children are a part of.

"I think that is just really a first step for fathers, when the role traditionally may have fell on the mother, or the mother takes on a lot of the child rearing, it's getting the fathers involved. I'm sure there are fathers who are doing that already," Clements said. "It's just developing a relationship with the schools."

Clements said she has heard of various commissioners with the Evansville Commission on the Social Status of African American Males who have shared this with friends church congregations to get the word out and motivate people.

The Million Father March is a national movement sponsored by the Chicago-based Black Star Project. Part of the group's mission is to "improve the quality of life in black and latino communities of Chicago and nationwide by eliminating the racial academic achievement gap," according to the organization's website.

Wagner, a commissioner with the Evansville Commission on the Social Status of African American Males, said they are inviting fathers and significant males to be a part of the movement locally. "Data indicates that when fathers and significant males are a part of the educational careers of students, that they do exceedingly better than those students who don't have that male involvement," Wagner said.

Wagner said he attended his grandchildren's first day of school at Lincoln last month (the school uses a year-round calendar) and was encouraged to see many other men there. "There was just a lot of good energy, and a lot of pride to see those males and the number that participated," Wagner said. "It was very encouraging."

He said he'd like others to know that the partnership between parents, the children and the schools "it's vital."

"We know education is going to be the key to their success, and I wanted to emphasize that I value education, I value them, and I'm there to support them," Wagner said. "That me and the school we're in partnership of education my grand kids, so I'm a part of the process."