

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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To get the most out of school, your child has to be in it

Several school districts have adopted a slogan that goes something like this: "Every day matters." It was true on the first day of school and it's true now, as classes wind down.

It is critical that your child be in school every day at this time of year. Classes and tests that play a role in the grades a student gets for the entire year are occurring now. A student's ability to pass a difficult class may be at stake.

Attendance *does* matter. Here's why:

- **Teachers are still teaching** new material. If your child is absent, she won't be exposed to things she will be expected to know.
- **It's review time.** At the end of the year, teachers devote some class time to preparing students for exams that cover the whole year's material. Often, students prepare for two tests per class: a state exam and the class final. Class review work is strongly linked to exam results.
- **Exam schedules are set.** Make-up dates for state exams and finals are limited. It is important that your child be present on scheduled test dates.
- **Projects are due.** Some teachers require end-of-year projects. If your child is out, she will not hear about due dates and resources for these projects. Nor will she be able to ask teachers for help if she is stuck.

Source: T. Jaeger, "District Reminds All That Every Day Matters," Amphitheater School District, www.amphi.com/media/1025044/every%20day%20matters.pdf.



Summer's near: Make priorities clear

It's not vacation time yet! Your child may be dreaming of summer, though. Keep him focused and on track for a strong year-end finish by:

- **Being firm.** Even if you're hearing summer's siren song, too, keep enforcing school-year routines. That means no abandoning homework or bedtime just because the days are longer and oh-so-beautiful.
- **Setting specific goals.** Rather than send your child a generic "keep working hard" message, help him define his goals. "French has been giving you trouble all semester. I think you should commit to an extra 15 minutes of studying each night."
- **Staying connected.** Keep reading handouts that come home and stay in touch with your child's teachers. Let your child know you're still on top of things. "I read in your school newsletter that there's going to be an end-of-year spelling bee. How are you prepping for it?"

Ramp up summer reading

Reading is the best way to avoid learning loss over the summer. Decide now to:



- **Make a deal.** If your child reads more than the school requires, give her a treat.
- **Add magazines** and audiobooks to your child's library list.
- **Think fun.** Encourage your child to read things there's no time for during school.

Source: New York State Library, "Importance of Summer Reading: Public Library Summer Reading Programs and Learning," NYSED.gov, <http://tinyurl.com/yqkmdq>.

To solve math homework problems, ask questions

Does your child struggle with math? And resist your help? Try a new approach. Ask:

- **What specific problem** are you working on? Help him focus on one problem to avoid being overwhelmed by an entire sheet of equations.
- **What do the instructions say?** Have him read them to you. He may catch something he missed the first time.
- **Are there things you've learned** before that may help you here? He may already know how to solve some individual parts of a complex problem.

Source: "Tips for Families—Homework Help," National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, <http://tinyurl.com/82zt5vj>.

Responsibility is job one

A part-time summer job can be an excellent way for your child to learn responsibility. If she's mature enough to handle it, consider letting her:

- **Babysit.** She can make a flyer for families you know.
- **Mow lawns.** Be sure she can use a mower safely.
- **Work for you.** If it's okay with your boss, offer her a chance to help out a few hours a week.





How do I fend off trouble if my child is home alone?

Q: My 13-year-old is a good kid, but he'll be home alone every day this summer. I worry about his experimenting with drugs and alcohol when I'm not around. What can I do?

A: It's smart to think ahead. For some kids, hours of unsupervised time do spell trouble.

No matter what your summer plans, you must tell him that experimenting with drugs and alcohol is not okay, and that abusing them can not only ruin his grades, it can threaten his life. Next, be proactive:

- **Investigate summer activities** for your child, so he won't be home alone. Ask his school counselor for suggestions.
- **Clean out your medicine cabinet.** Are there leftover painkillers from last year's back surgery? Get rid of them. If you currently take anything (even over-the-counter) that could potentially be abused, lock it up.
- **Inventory your alcohol.** If you keep alcohol in your home, pay attention to how much is in each bottle. Lock the cupboard.



Although these measures can help, they're no substitute for open, honest communication. So continue talking with your child about drugs and alcohol, and act immediately if you suspect he's getting into trouble.

Source: C.C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*, Broadway Books.



Is your child ready for what's coming?

A student's time in middle school is short. Your child may be preparing to enter high school next year. If not, it won't be long. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping her get ready:

1. **Do you work** with your child on organization, emphasizing the use of tools such as calendars and planners?
2. **Have you given** your child a place to study and made sure she's doing some kind of studying each night?
3. **Do you discuss** her future? She should get serious about schoolwork now—later, in high school, grades affect options.
4. **Do you make sure** your child stays away from unsafe or inappropriate activities?

5. **Do you let her know** she can come to you for love, support and guidance?

How are you doing?

Mostly yes answers mean you are equipping your child for the future. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

“Adolescents need tremendous support as they go about the task of figuring out their identities, their future selves.”
—Madeline Levine, Ph.D.

Support freedom safely

As a middle-school parent, you must balance your child's desire for independence with your need to make sure she is safe and cared for. This summer, try these ideas:

- **Add structure.** If at all possible, enroll your child in a regulated activity, such as camp, sports or a civic program.
- **Know where your child is.** If she's with friends, know who they are, when she'll be home, and how to reach her.
- **Assign chores.** Without homework, she needs chances to be responsible.
- **Limit electronic media use.**

Source: C. Murfin, "Summer and Your Middle-Schooler," Seattle's Child, <http://tinyurl.com/l5shjg2>.

Make your evenings count

Students whose parents support their efforts do better in school. But when school is out, it is important that you maintain a level of involvement. If you are not with your child during the day this summer, plan to make early evenings family time. Have your child help make dinner. Talk and eat. Then take a walk or do an errand together. You will show him that he is important to you.

Volunteers learn on the job

Learning does not stop over the summer, but it does take different forms. Volunteer work provides your child a great chance to learn responsibility to the community while in a constructive activity. Some ideas:

- **Tutor a younger child.**
- **Help out at the library.**
- **Collect cans of food** for a food bank.
- **Join in the efforts** of a local group: a house of worship, scouting or pet rescue.



Source: L.H. Moore, "Volunteer Ideas for 5 Different Age Groups," CommunityService.org, <http://tinyurl.com/69l3oa9>.

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