

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Special School District Schools  
Title I.A - Family Engagement

## Test preparation shouldn't stop when the test is over

Tests are an important way teachers, schools and school districts can see what students have learned. By middle school, most students are used to learning and studying *before* a test. But unless your child gets a perfect score every time, there is more he can learn from the tests he takes.

Educators agree that proper review *after* a test is one of the most effective ways to improve scores on future tests. When your child gets a graded test back, encourage him to:



- **Review his answers** and note which he got right and which he got wrong. Have him correct the wrong answers and make sure he understands them. If he isn't sure why an answer was marked wrong, he should ask the teacher.
- **Determine the types of errors** he made. Mistakes are generally caused by one of two things: carelessness or lack of preparation.
- **Adjust his study strategies.** Brainstorm with your child about ways to avoid careless mistakes—such as circling key words in questions, double-checking his answers, etc. For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is probably more studying. Experts suggest that students begin to review five days before a test. The last day before a test should be spent reviewing a final time, not trying to learn new material.



## Journals help students see the future

Most middle schoolers don't have a firm idea about what they want to do with the rest of their lives. But by sixth grade, it is helpful for kids to begin thinking about what they like and don't like, and what their strengths and struggles are. Writing in a journal is a great way to process these ideas.

Give your child a notebook, and encourage her to write down her thoughts about questions such as:

- **What are my strengths** in school?
- **What are my weaknesses?**
- **What do I love doing** outside school?
- **What am I good at doing** outside school?

- **What do I like** to learn about?
- **What would I like** to learn more about?
- **What is important to me** right now?

Ask your child to update the journal regularly. Over time, her ideas will change, and that's OK. But the things that don't change could provide clues to her future success.

## Education is everywhere

Every meaningful experience can have an impact on your child's learning—from shopping for groceries to seeing objects from the past in a museum. On your next family outing, challenge your child to think of ways the things he is seeing and doing relate to what he is learning in school.



## Make organizing a routine

Your child's organization skills can make the difference between doing well and struggling in middle school. To help her make organization a regular part of studying:

- **Sit down together** each Sunday to plan the week ahead. Bring your family calendar and mark deadlines and events.
- **Have your child write** all assignments and activities in a planner.
- **Teach her to use** checklists to keep track of daily homework tasks and long-range project steps.
- **Have her choose** specific places to keep school belongings, and expect her to put her things away each evening.

## Ride out the ups and downs

In addition to physical changes, adolescence brings many emotional changes. Your child may be experiencing:



- **Self-doubts.** Help him get past these episodes by praising him when he does well and catching him when he stumbles.
- **A desire for respect.** Honor your child's need to feel more grown up. Give him real responsibilities and allow him to make some decisions on his own.
- **A need for independence.** As he separates a bit from you, remember that he still needs your love and support.



## My child wants me to stay away from school. Should I?

**Q:** I want to get involved at school. I thought that helping out in one of my child's classes could be good for both of us. But she says she'd be embarrassed. Should I volunteer, or not?

**A:** You don't want your involvement at school to sour your relationship with your child. However, there are many ways you can make a valuable contribution at school outside of the classroom. To pursue volunteering without making your child cringe:

- **Listen to her.** Sit down and ask her what she's feeling. "I realize you don't want me volunteering in your class, but I'd like to know why. Is there something specific you are worried about?" When you listen to her concerns, remember the huge social pressure to fit in that middle schoolers feel.
- **Discuss her feelings.** "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me at school?" If she says *yes*, have her put herself in their shoes. Would she think less of her friends if their parents came to school? Would she even notice?
- **Work out a compromise.** Respect your child's feelings. If after you've talked she is still nervous about having you in class, volunteer in another part of the school. Call the office to ask how you can help. And if you see your child while you're there, just give her a smile and walk away.



### Parent Quiz

## Are you reinforcing healthy habits?

By this time in the school year, the positive habits your child established in September may have started to slip. Are you helping him stick with practices that support his health and success in school? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you serve** nutritious family meals that include non-starchy vegetables and lean protein?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make sure** your child gets eight to 10 hours of sleep each night?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you promote** exercise for the whole family?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you discuss** the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to take part in fun activities that will help him reduce stress and enjoy life?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child stay in top form throughout the school year. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

"Character is simply habit long continued."  
—Plutarch

## Use strengths to inspire

Have you heard the saying, "Nothing succeeds like success"? If your child is struggling with a subject in school, point out the things she's doing right in another subject. Then help her apply her strengths to the situation. To begin the conversation:

- 1. Ask your child** what subject she thinks she is best at in school.
- 2. Have her list reasons** why this area is a strength. What strategies does she use to learn the material?
- 3. Add some positives** you've noticed to her list, such as her persistence.
- 4. Brainstorm together.** If she always reads the textbook in history, what about doing the same in math?

## Careful reading gets results

Two reading strategies can help middle schoolers do better on tests, no matter what the subject. Encourage your child to:



- 1. Read, then reread** the directions to be sure he understands exactly what to do.
- 2. Read each question** carefully. He should think about his answer before reading the choices provided.

## Be alert for cyberbullying

Bullying doesn't have to happen in school to affect a child's feelings about school. Research shows that bullying on the internet can make victims—and bullies—feel negative about school and learning.

Discuss cyberbullying with your child. Ask her to tell you if she sees cruel or threatening things about her—or anyone else—online. Your child should never respond to these posts. Instead, print them out and show them to school officials or the police.

Source: "Female cyberbullies and victims feel the most negative about school and learning," Science Daily, niswc.com/cyber.

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