MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board

September 2005

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

It's still important for you to be involved in your child's education

The school needs volunteers for an upcoming activity. "I don't need you to come," your child says. "Let other parents do it." It's tempting to be persuaded. Does he really need your involvement anymore?

Research provides a clear answer: *Parent involvement in education makes a huge difference for kids of all ages.* The results can be improved attendance, better behavior and higher grades.

This doesn't mean you have to be at every school event. You might not see a class play, for example, but you could send cookies for the cast party. In fact, many home tasks are linked to student performance. The National Education Association strongly suggests talking about school, helping with homework and monitoring your child's time. These are things you can do every day.

Meanwhile, steps such as visiting the class occasionally and going to parent-teacher conferences send an important message, too. They also say to your child, "School is important." "I care about your success." "Kids, parents and schools are an unbeatable team."

Source: "Getting Involved in Your Child's Education," National Education Association, www.nea.org/parents/index.html.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Teach the importance of attendance

Does your child miss school when it isn't necessary? Do you schedule doctor's appointments during the school day or let your child oversleep and arrive late for class?

These actions are risky. When parents allow kids to miss school, they send the message that:

- **School** isn't that important.
- **Rules** can be broken.
- **Commitment** to teachers and classmates isn't essential.

Being present and on time shows respect for others—and oneself. Luckily, kids can learn this habit.

Start by setting a good example. Help your child develop routines that keep her on schedule, such as packing her schoolbag at night and putting it by the front door.

Source: Michael L. Brock, *School-Smart Parenting: Raising Children for Success and Happiness in School*, ISBN: 0-533-12110-8 (Vantage Press, 212/736-1767, www.vantagepress.com).

DISCIPLINE

Discipline begins at home

When teachers stop to handle discipline problems, learning time is wasted. Help prevent your child from being the cause of lost learning time. Here's how:

- **Be clear. Review rules regularly.** Discuss with your child what you expect and why.
- **Talk about the importance** of treating teachers and classmates with respect.
- **Enforce rules.** Kids naturally test limits until they know they're firm.
- **Follow through.** Keep promises about rewards and punishments so your child trusts you mean what you say.

Source: "Discipline K-12 at Home and School," Partnership for Learning, www.partnershipforlearning.org/category.asp?CategoryID=11.

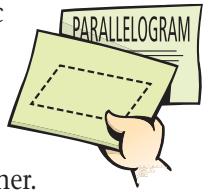
SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Set goals for the new year

The beginning of the school year is the perfect time to help your child set goals. What happened last year that he'd like to change? What worked particularly well? Help him devise a step-by-step plan for reaching goals that are meaningful to him.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Use your child's strengths



Every child has specific strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes what helps your child shine in one area can also help her improve in another. For example, "You're great at learning math facts with flash cards. Maybe we should make spelling flash cards. Let's draw a picture for each word, and put the spelling on the back."

Source: Louise Fenton Tracy, *Grounded for Life?!* ISBN: 0-943990-95-5 (Parenting Press, 1-800-992-6657, www.parentingpress.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can I help my child retain what she reads in textbooks?

Q: My daughter reads her textbooks, but she still has trouble on tests. How can she learn to remember what she reads?

A: Reading retention is important. One solution is SQ4R. It stands for *survey*, *question*, *read*, *restate*, *reflect* and *review*. It works like this:

S = **Survey** the material to see what it's about. Have your child read the introduction, headings, summary and chapter questions first. Notice photos, graphs and emphasized words.

Q = **Question** before reading each section. She can use the headings to come up with *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why* and *how* questions that encourage her thinking about the information in the text.

R = **Read** one section at a time. Have her look for answers to her questions. Notice facts, ideas and relationships—how does one event precede another, for example.

R = **Restate or recite.** After reading a few paragraphs, ask herself, "What did I just learn?" Then she can rephrase the main idea and answer questions she made up earlier.

R = **Reflect** on information. How does it tie in with ideas from previous assignments? Firsthand experiences? Personal opinions?

R = **Review** the chapter right after reading it and many times before the test. This improves long-term memory. Your child can use self-made questions as a practice test, too.

PARENT QUIZ

Have you established good routines?

Home routines are critical to success in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging important family habits:

_____**1. Do you enforce** a regular, reasonable bedtime each night?

_____**2. Do you provide** supplies such as folders that help your child get organized?

_____**3. Do you promote** helpful habits, such as choosing school outfits at night?

_____**4. Do you require** your child to do homework at the same time and place each day?

_____**5. Do you schedule time** for one meal together a day?

How did you do? *Each* yes *answer is a sign that your home life supports school achievement. For each* no *answer, use suggestions from the quiz to change your response to* yes.

"Just talking to your child is only half the job. You can keep the lines of communication open by knowing how to listen and when to talk."

—National Youth Anti-Drug Campaign

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Promote math success

Your child will do best in math if you express that it's important, highly useful and, even fun. Here's how:

- **Ask questions about math work.** For example, "Can you see a pattern in these problems?" Understanding concepts is actually more important than coming up with correct final answers.
- **Use practical math when possible.** Have your child calculate the tip when you're out to dinner, for example.
- **Foster a study routine.** Each math skill builds on the one before, so regular practice is necessary. Help your child find a good time and place to work every day.

Source: Jean Kerr Stenmark, Virginia Thompson and Ruth Cossey, *Family Math*, ISBN: 0-912511-06-0 (Equals Publications, 1-800-897-5036, www.col-ed.org/equals/eqfammathpub.html).

BUILDING CHARACTER

Hard work defines success

Sometimes children confuse *doing* their best with *being* the best. Success does not require being the smartest or the fastest. It requires hard work and dedication. So when your child fails, encourage her to learn from her mistake and try again. Persistence really does pay off.

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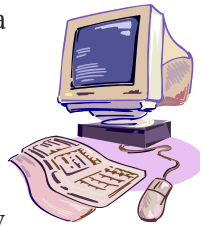

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