

A Parent's Guide

to Helping Your Child Do Well in School

Your child has a right to attend and succeed in a great public school.

Regardless of income, ethnicity, family circumstances, disability, or school readiness, all children are entitled to an education that will help them reach their full academic, professional, and personal potential. As a parent or guardian, you are the best advocate to ensure that your child receives a quality education.

Help your child succeed in school

While all parents want their children to do well in school, many parents don't realize that the role they assume in personally monitoring and guiding their child's schooling is essential to academic success. Today, parents can no longer afford to take a hands-off approach to their children's education. Unlike a generation ago, students are facing an increasingly complex and challenging world that requires a more skilled workforce with an education or training beyond high school.

Parents and guardians have a legal and moral right to demand that their child receive a quality education. You have a right to expect that your children have up-to-date textbooks and computers that will prepare them for today's globally competitive economy. The quality of the tools and resources available in your local school is a good indicator of how much administrators and the school board are investing in their education. So, examine your child's school books and ask for new or replacement books if necessary.

But new books alone cannot guarantee achievement. Students need a safe and nurturing learning environment and small classes with a low teacher to student ratio. Unfortunately, too many school districts have allowed school buildings to deteriorate over the years and failed to keep up with increasing student enrollment. In fact, the condition of school facilities shows students how much adults really value education. School buildings should be welcoming and well-maintained with a modern cafeteria, gymnasium, hygienic rest rooms, a well-stocked library, and a wellness room. Communities must hold politicians accountable for the condition of their local schools by demanding adequate funding for schools.

Families have a major role in encouraging academic success. Adults must grab every opportunity to let children know that they have high expectations for their education. During daily conversations, adults should help children set goals and encourage them to create a plan of action to meet those goals—whether it is getting up in the morning on time or perfect classroom attendance, every small step taken helps build momentum to academic success.

Encourage learning at home

Parents must not only supervise homework, but create a comfortable location for doing homework. For starters, turn off the television set and eliminate any other distractions such as loud music. Simple steps like making sure there is sufficient work surface to spread out books or providing proper lighting, school supplies, and having a dictionary on hand can make homework easier to complete.

Helping your child develop organizational skills is the foundation for academic success. Make sure your child has a schedule planner for school and writes down homework assignments daily. Parents should help their child prioritize homework by deadline and by the amount of time required to complete an assignment. By breaking large tasks into smaller ones, assignments become more manageable and your child is less likely to become overwhelmed and procrastinate.

Work with your child's teacher

Regular communication between parents and teachers is key to improving student achievement. As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else—you know your child's strengths and weaknesses. Share your knowledge to help teachers adapt lessons to match your child's interests and learning style. The more teachers know about your child's daily life, language, and culture, the more they will be able to make lessons more meaningful and connected to your child's experiences. When children can make connections between what they learn in class with their lives outside of school, they become engaged and enthusiastic students.

A parent-teacher conference is an ideal opportunity to provide valuable insight in how to motivate your child to become an active learner. Once informed,

teachers are better equipped to incorporate teaching that reflects your child's experiences into their curriculum and create a classroom and school-wide environment that supports both the students' cultural values and the school's educational goals. Working together, parents and teachers can help students overcome negative social stereotypes and defeatist attitudes that inhibit academic success. When face to face meetings are not possible, parents should use e-mail, hand notes, or phone calls to communicate regularly with the teacher.

Your child may feel intimidated to make requests to an unfamiliar teacher, so it is important to be a strong advocate on his or her behalf. You can help your child do well in class by making sure clear, preferably written, expectations of student performance and the homework policy are provided. Ask the teacher what percent of your child's performance will be evaluated by tests, homework, or class participation. Request a curriculum outline so that you can help your child prepare in advance for class. Inquire about after-school tutoring and counseling for students. Talk to your children's teachers about individual learning plans so you can better monitor their progress.

Public schools help students reach their full potential

Schools that have high expectations for all students—and give them the support necessary to achieve those expectations—have high rates of academic success. When schools set high expectations, students work harder and aim higher because they learn to believe in themselves and in their future. From the principal to the cafeteria worker, all school employees have a role in helping students feel supported and respected. A sense of belonging and caring relationships are essential to developing self-esteem, independence, and a positive outlook on learning.

When public schools clearly communicate expectations to students, goals are identified, benchmarks are set, and students understand exactly how their work will be evaluated. Ask for up-to-date information about the school's academic standing, graduation rates, and test scores. Schools must provide meaningful and timely information on student performance. Under the No Child Left Behind law, schools are required to notify parents about test results of individual students and the school, as well as supplemental service providers if necessary. Raw test data is not sufficient. Get

interpretations of the scores, information on how the scores will be used, and advice on how they can help their children do better.

Because today's student population is more international, all schools should offer communication such as newsletters, bulletins, and even the school Web site in parents' native languages in order to ensure full participation. But parents need to be proactive to make sure their child receives all the resources to which they are entitled. Parents should ask about school-linked social services, lunch programs, and after-school activities—particularly programs for underachieving students. Extra-curricular activities should be open to all students. Research shows that after-school activities are linked to higher achievement and help students ease into the school culture. If possible, get involved in your child's school by volunteering or attending parent meetings. School is a partnership between administrators, teachers, students, families, and the community. It's up to all of us to help engage children in school so when they graduate they will be prepared for the challenges ahead.

Resources

National Education Association
www.nea.org/parents/solutionsguide.html

Greatschools: The Parent's Guide to K-12 Success
www.Greatschools.net

The College Board
www.Collegeboard.com

Fact Monster: Homework Center
www.factmonster.com/homework

Discovery School: BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper
<http://school.discovery.com/homeworkhelp/bjpinchbeck/>

Time for Kids: Homework Helper
www.timeforkids.com/TFK/hh/rr/

Kid Info
www.kidinfo.com/

Education World: Study Skills & Homework Help
www.educationworld.com/students/study/index.shtml

Pitsco's Ask An Expert
www.askanexpert.com



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