

September 2008
Vol. 20, No. 1

Elementary School Parents[®]

Charles County Public Schools
Eva Turner Elementary

make the difference!



Start the school year off with research-based tips for success

The start of a new school year is filled with promise. Notebooks are filled with shiny white paper. Crayons still have their sharpened points. Even your child's backpack is organized!

The start of a school year can also be a time for *you* to set some goals. Research has identified three easy—but important—ways to help your child do better in school this year:

1. Get to know your child's teacher.

When parents and teachers are on the same team, kids do better in school. So make plans to go to back-to-school night. If you can't attend, contact the teacher to set up a short meeting to talk. Once you've met face to face, you'll find it easier to ask a question or share a concern about your child.

2. **Settle into a routine.** Kids thrive on predictability. So have a regular time for doing school work. Set—and keep—a regular bedtime. Plan a morning routine that gets everyone out the door on time. Your family will be happier and you'll all have less stress.

3. **Make reading a habit.** Set aside 20 to 30 minutes each day for reading time. If your child is learning to read, let her show off her new skills. Set aside some time when you all read together and then talk about what you've read. If your child sees you reading, she's sure to catch the reading habit.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, "What Research Says About Parent Involvement in Children's Education in Relation to Academic Achievement," www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_14732_7.pdf.

Show your child how to respect teacher's time



You know how hard it can sometimes be to give your child your full attention. Imagine what it's like to be a teacher with 25 students, each of whom wants attention *now*.

That's why one of the most helpful things you can do as a parent is to help your child respect the teacher's time by teaching him to take turns and cooperate. Here are some fun ways to practice:

- **Play "I Talk, You Talk."** With your child, practice talking and waiting for the other person to finish.
- **Take turns.** Let your child take turns with things he likes (walking the dog) and things he doesn't (clearing the table).
- **Make cooperation** a family affair. Set the timer for 15 minutes and have everyone run through the house picking up clutter. Reward the group effort with some extra reading time.

Source: Margery Kranyik, *Starting School: How to Help Your Three-to Eight-Year-Old Make the Most of School*, ISBN: 0-82640-188-0 (Continuum Publishing Company, 212-953-5858, www.continuumbooks.com).

Help your child ask questions to improve reading comprehension



One thing that sets good readers apart is the questions they ask. Research shows that good readers ask themselves questions as they are reading.

The questions may focus on what's going on in the story: "What might happen next?" "Why did he do that?"

Good readers might also ask about words they do not know. "It says she is *slumbering*. What could that mean?"

Help your child become a better reader by showing him how to ask questions as he reads:

- **When you are reading aloud**, stop when you get to an exciting part in the story. Ask your child, "What do you think is going to happen next?" Listen to what your child says. Ask, "Why do you think that?" Then turn back to the book and say, "Let's see if you're right."

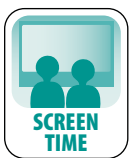
- **While you are reading**, stop when you read an unfamiliar word. "James is *irritable*. What could that word mean?" Together, think about other clues that might show what the word means.
- **After you finish**, ask questions to help your child connect the book to things he already knows. "Did you ever have a day when you felt *irritable* like James?"

Source: Lana Santoro and others, "The Comprehension Conversation: Using Purposeful Discussion During Read-Alouds to Promote Student Comprehension and Vocabulary," in *Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers, K-6*, Barbara Taylor and James Ysseldyke, eds., ISBN: 978-0-8077-4821-3 (Teachers College Press, 212-678-3929, www.tcpress.com).

"The important thing is to learn a lesson every time you lose."

—John McEnroe

Keep the television out of your child's bedroom to boost success



Do you want to keep your child healthy? Would you like her to sleep better at night and earn better grades?

Then here's a simple way to go about it: Don't allow her to have a television in her bedroom.

More and more researchers are finding that televisions in children's bedrooms can cause real problems. First, it makes it easier for kids to watch more television—without parents even knowing. That, in turn, means kids are more likely to be overweight. Time spent watching TV is time not spent on other activities.

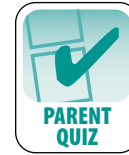
Kids with TVs in their rooms score lower on math and reading tests. Researchers think it's because these kids are more likely to be distracted during homework time.

TV can also interfere with sleep. Kids may watch an extra program before turning off the set. The next morning, they're tired and won't be able to focus in school.

Get this school year off to a good start. Take the TV out of your child's room. Your child will be happier and healthier.

Source: Tara Parker-Pope, "A One-Eyed Invader in the Bedroom," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2008 (The New York Times, 1-800-698-4637, www.nytimes.com).

Are you making read-aloud time the best it can be?



Time spent reading aloud is critical to helping kids become better readers. It's also fun! Are you making the most of your

read-aloud time? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you have a regular** read-aloud time with your child that lasts at least 20 minutes each day?
- ___ **2. Do you make read-aloud time fun** for your whole family by taking turns picking books you want to read together.?
- ___ **3. Do you sometimes stop** to talk about what you've just read or make predictions about what's about to happen?
- ___ **4. Do you let your child take a turn** reading aloud to you?
- ___ **5. Do you stop reading** at an exciting place so you won't forget to read again the next day?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're making the most of the time you spend reading aloud. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

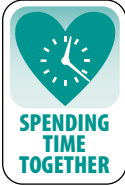
For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2008 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor:* Pat Hodgdon. *Editor:* Rebecca Miyares. *Writers:* Kristen Amundson & Susan O'Brien. *Illustrator:* Joe Mignella.

Improve your child's grades by eating meals together as a family



With today's hectic lives, it seems we are always on the go. Kate has to go to soccer at five. Mike has basketball at six.

Suddenly, "meal time" turns into a quick bite in the car.

But September 22, the official Family Day, reminds families to take a break and eat dinner together.

Studies show that kids who eat meals regularly with their families earn better grades. They are more likely to talk with parents and are less likely to use drugs and alcohol.

Here are ways to make family meals an enjoyable part of your day:

- **Ask for help.** Get your child involved in planning and preparing the meal.
- **Turn off the TV** and turn on the answering machine.
- **Talk about everyone's day.** Ask each family member to share the funniest thing that happened that day.
- **Keep the conversation positive.** Don't use this time to lecture your child about something. Make dinner time conversations something the whole family looks forward to.

Source: "Family Day," National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, www.casafamilyday.org/pages/about.html.

Team up with your child's teacher for success in school this year



Research shows that parent involvement in education is connected to student success at school. It's powerful when teachers, parents

and kids work together! But the family-school relationship is like any other—it requires good communication. Make a point to:

- **Set the tone.** It's natural to have questions and concerns when the school year begins. To build a strong parent-teacher foundation, let the teacher know that you appreciate her work. Ask key questions respectfully. Show support for your child and the class, and encourage the teacher to keep in touch.
- **Be positive.** When you talk with the teacher, enjoy hearing about your child's strengths. But prepare to hear about weaknesses or misbehavior, too. Remember to react

helpfully. You and the teacher both want your child to do well. Addressing struggles is the way to find solutions.

- **Role-play.** Some parents are shy about talking with the teacher. If this describes you, imagine meeting with her. What would you say? How would you respond to questions? Practice with someone else you trust. Take turns presenting both points of view. Still worried? Using email may put you at ease.
- **Choose words carefully.** Make polite requests rather than demands. A helpful tip is to use "we" instead of "you." ("How can we stay in touch to help Adam?" rather than "You should tell me if Adam is falling behind.") The teacher isn't your opponent; she's your teammate.

Source: Toni Klym McLellan, "How to Talk to Your Child's Teacher," Disney Family.com, <http://family.go.com/parenting/ms-learning/article-196485-how-to-talk-to-your-child-s-teacher-t/>.

Q: My daughter has just entered fifth grade in a new school. Until this year, she wore a school uniform. Suddenly she has to make a fashion statement every day. In addition, she is wearing clothes I think are inappropriate for school. How can I help her wear appropriate school clothes—and not break our family budget?

Questions & Answers

A: For your daughter, the chance to wear what she wants every day has turned out to be like taking a drink from a fire hose! There's just too much for her to handle.

So your job is to help scale back the choices. Here's how:

1. **Find out if your child's school** has a dress code and ask her teacher for a copy of it.
2. **Work with your daughter.** Begin by sharing your ideas (and the school's) about what's appropriate to wear to school. Look through magazines together and talk about different kinds of clothing. Some clothes are appropriate for work, some for play and others for a party. Then talk about clothes for school. They should be comfortable and simple, so that she can focus on her studies.
3. **Go through your child's clothes** together and create outfits that meet your approval. Perhaps she can wear leggings under one of her shorter skirts.
4. **Shop together.** Give your child a clothing budget and take her shopping. By shopping with you and staying within a budget, your child will learn how to get the most for her money. And inappropriate clothing won't end up in her closet!

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Responsibility

Help your child get organized for the school year



It's the beginning of a new school year—the perfect time to set the stage for learning success. Help your child

get off to a good start with these simple steps:

- **Get a head start.** Many families find that organizing at night prevents morning “rush hour.” You can review school papers, pack and refrigerate lunches, set backpacks by the door and agree on outfits.
- **Establish sleep routines.** Choose reasonable bedtimes so everyone is rested when the alarm clock goes off. Do your best to stick with them.
- **Develop morning habits.** If your child does the same things (in the same order) each morning, it's less likely that she will forget a step. For example, make bed, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth and put on shoes.
- **Choose a homework time.** With your child, pick a time when she will have the most energy and motivation to do assignments. Create a quiet study spot (complete with necessary supplies) where she can work at the same time each day.
- **Use organizational tools.** What will help your child stay organized? She might use calendars, to-do lists or a folder system.
- **Set priorities.** Schedule things like schoolwork, family meals and even free time on a calendar. Treat them like appointments. If there are openings, she can add activities.

Teach your child to persevere when faced with challenges

If your child has a goal he wants to reach, such as earning an “A” on a project or making the travel soccer team, achieving it will probably take hard work. And there may be times your child feels like giving up. It's important to teach your child to persevere, even when things are difficult. Here's how:

- **Discuss past success.** For example, did your child save up to buy something expensive? How did he do it? What did success feel like? What did he learn?
- **Choose a fun, realistic objective.** Make it something your child is likely to complete soon. If he wants to read a series of books, start with just the first one. Achievement is a great motivator.
- **Listen for ideas.** Kids often mention goals without actually setting them. (“I'd love to be in the talent show” or “I hope I



finish my report this week.”) Together, create a step-by-step plan for success.

- **Be a cheerleader.** Say things like, “You're sticking with this. I'm impressed!” Even if your child misses the mark, praise his efforts. Trying hard and learning from mistakes is a major accomplishment.

Source: Marie Faust Evitt, “How to Teach Kids Perseverance and Goal-Setting,” *Parents*, March 2006 (Meredith Corporation, 1-888-616-7679, www.parents.com).

Research confirms importance of regular school attendance



Parents often wonder, “Is it okay to take my child out of school for an appointment or a vacation? Could this really affect his success?”

New research on kindergartners through third graders answers that question. It suggests “chronic absence” (missing 10% or more of days in a school year) is linked to:

- **Low performance in school.** It's also connected to dropping out, substance abuse and more.

- **Lost learning time for kids who are at school.** When absent kids come back, teachers must help them catch up.

Show your child that your family cares about learning by making sure he is at school on time every day. Attending school is his responsibility. Of course, if your child is sick, he should stay home.

Source: “Chronic Absence in the Early Grades: Preliminary Findings of an Applied Research Project,” January 2008, *NCPIE Update*, www.ncpie.org/ncpie_update/ncpieupdateJan2008.pdf.