Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!
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Newton County Schools

Five things families can do to help students thrive in school

Every family is different, but *all* families want their children to do well in school. Research consistently shows that a supportive home environment is a major predictor of academic success—from the early years through graduation.

Here are five ways to help your elementary schooler excel this year:

1. **Set high expectations.** Insist on your child's best effort, but don't demand perfect grades. Instead, celebrate persistence and improvement.
2. **Assign chores.** When children help at home, they learn how to be responsible. Give your child a few small jobs to do each week, like setting the table or putting away laundry.
3. **Teach social skills.** A productive learning environment hinges on students' ability to get along with others. Promote cooperation and courtesy. Demonstrate how to share, listen and be polite.
4. **Nurture your relationship.** Play games, go for walks and talk about your days. When kids feel loved and supported, they feel safer taking risks at school.
5. **Take care of yourself.** If you're always stressed, your child will be, too. Carve out time to relax, exercise or curl up with a good book. A calm, peaceful home starts with you.

Source: R. Gillett and R. Premack, "Science says parents of successful kids have these 11 things in common," Business Insider.

Prioritize connections over screens

Studies show that children aged eight to 12 often spend nearly six hours a day looking at screens for fun. Because of this, the American Academy of Pediatrics says families should choose digital activities wisely.

To help your family find a healthy balance, experts suggest following these simple tips:

- **Pick high-quality shows.** Before your child watches something new, check Common Sense Media. It is a great way to make sure a show or game is high-quality and safe for your child's age.
- **Set technology curfews.** Ask your child to turn off digital devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- **Create screen-free zones.** Put phones away during family meals or while riding in the car to promote conversation.
- **Demonstrate how to have fun** without a screen. Go for a walk together. Play cards or start an art project.

Source: L. Coffey, "New AAP 'Screen Time' Recommendations Focus Less on Screens, More on Family Time," EdSurge.

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It's time to get your family in the back-to-school groove

A new school year offers a fresh start for families and students. Here are some practical ideas to help you and your family gear up for a productive year of learning:

- **Make a weekly schedule.** Include time for schoolwork, play, activities and family.
- **Establish a family reading time** where everyone reads for at least 30 minutes.
- **Keep a family calendar.** Mark each family member's activities in a different color.
- **Reestablish bedtimes** and wake times for weekdays. Allow plenty of time to get ready in the morning.
- **Choose interactive media** that lets you play and talk with your child about what you see on the screen.
- **Create flexible learning spaces.** Allow your child to work where most comfortable, whether that's at the kitchen table or on the couch. Just make sure that the space has adequate lighting and is as distraction-free as possible.
- **Collect important contact** information for teachers. Update your work, medical and emergency contact numbers with the school.

"I hope you realize that every day is a fresh start for you. That every sunrise is a new chapter in your life waiting to be written."

—Juansen Dizon

Put attendance at the top of the priority list this school year

Attendance is the foundation of education, and showing up to school consistently ensures your child will get the full benefit.

Beyond being a legal requirement, regular attendance is vital for academic success. Since lessons build on each other daily, missing even one day can create gaps in learning. Being present also helps your child develop social skills and form the strong peer friendships necessary for a happy school experience.

To help your child develop strong attendance habits:

- **Explain that school** is important to your family. Unless your child is sick or there is a family emergency, your child needs to go to school and arrive on time every day.
- **Create evening routines.** Help your child pack school bags, make lunch and lay out clothes before bedtime. Preparation makes it easier to get out the door and arrive at school on time.
- **Plan ahead.** Try to schedule family vacations during school breaks or over long weekends so your child doesn't miss school. Make doctor or dentist appointments for non-school hours when possible.
- **Ignore excuses.** Avoid letting your child stay home to skip a test, catch up on sleep or finish a project. Showing up when things are tough teaches resilience.

Are you helping your child have healthy habits?

Developing and maintaining healthy habits can make it easier for students to stay focused, learn and absorb new information throughout the school day. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are promoting positive habits:

1. **Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Elementary school kids need at least nine hours of sleep each night to function at their best.
2. **Do you make sure** your child eats breakfast every morning? Kids' brains need fuel to learn.
3. **Do you encourage** your child to move every day? Exercise improves kids' memory and focus.
4. **Do you remind** your child to wash hands frequently? Hand washing reduces illness that lead to absences.
5. **Do you make sure** your child follows rules about safely interacting with others?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are instilling everyday habits that support learning. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Communication is the key to an effective family-school team

A student's success depends on more than what happens in the classroom. When families stay connected to school, they help their children reach their full potential. Communication is the key to making this partnership work.

To establish positive and effective two-way communication:

- **Connect with teachers.** Encourage them to share news and updates with you throughout the year. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Aim for a supportive and polite tone during conversations.
- **Be positive.** Talk with the teacher about the things your child does well. At the same time, be ready to discuss any areas where your child struggles and how you can help. You and the teacher both want your child to succeed. Working together is the best way to find real solutions.
- **Role-play.** Some families are nervous about talking with the teacher. If this describes you, consider practicing with a friend. If you aren't comfortable speaking English, have an interpreter join you. Still worried? Using email may put you at ease.
- **Choose words carefully.** A helpful tip is to use the word *we* instead of *you*. "How can we stay in touch to help Jordan?" works better than "Call me immediately if Jordan is falling behind." You and the teacher are teammates, and teamwork is a win for your child.

Help your elementary schooler strengthen reading muscles

Research shows that reading isn't a natural instinct. It is a skill that must be learned and strengthened through constant practice. To support your child's reading progress and foster a lifelong love of books, try these strategies:

- **Read aloud to your child.** Even as children become independent readers, they benefit from listening to more advanced books read aloud. This exposes them to complex sentence structures and new words. It also shows them what fluent reading sounds like.
- **Build excitement.** Make reading irresistible. Let your child stay up 15 minutes later to read in bed. Or, build a fort and read by flashlight.
- **Read stories** about local history. Or, find articles that match your child's current interests and hobbies. When children read about things they already care about, it builds the background knowledge they need to understand tougher texts.
- **Suggest your child start** a book club with a few friends. Talking about reading material helps your child practice explaining big ideas and understanding the deeper meaning behind the stories.
- **Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, say, "Read to me for three minutes. When the timer goes off, you can stop." Adding a minute every few days helps your child extend the focus required to read longer chapters.

Questions & Answers

Q: My child struggled with math last year and now "hates" the subject. I can't really blame my child, because I'm not good at math either. How can I encourage a better attitude?

A: Families' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents say they didn't like math when they were in school often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose families instill a sense of interest in math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe everyone can learn math. Say this often enough and your child will start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Gender and background don't determine how well a child can do in any school subject. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the baseless stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand your child's horizons. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an accountant, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.

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It Matters: Motivation

Learning goals keep students motivated

This school year, challenge your child to set learning goals. When students set goals, they learn to focus their time and resources more efficiently.

This process does more than improve grades. Achieving goals builds the self-confidence your child needs to keep tackling challenges.

To get started:

1. **Start a conversation.** Share a goal of your own first. For example, "I'm going to exercise more and cut back on my phone use." This shows your child that a goal is simply a promise you make to yourself.
2. **Brainstorm together.** Did your child struggle with anything last school year? Talk about making improvements. "You had trouble finishing assignments on time; what could we do to change that?" Ideas might include starting assignments earlier, refreshing a study routine or organizing a workspace.
3. **Define the goal.** Make your child's idea concrete by turning it into a goal. For example, what specific steps does your child need to take to refresh a study routine? "I resolve to spend at least 15 minutes studying each subject every day."
4. **Be supportive.** Motivation can fade, so offer encouragement if your child slips up. Say, "I know sticking to a routine is hard, but you can do it!" Falling short once in a while doesn't mean your child can't get back on track.

Fuel your child's passion for learning this school year

Children's attitudes about school directly affect their desire to learn. The start of a new school year is the perfect time to bolster your child's enthusiasm for education. Here's how:

- **Be a role model.** If you have a positive attitude about school, your child is more likely to feel the same way. Beyond just talking about the value of education, take action: Attend parent-teacher conferences and family school nights. Supervise study time when possible. Show a genuine interest in what your child is learning.
- **Compliment effort.** When your child works hard, be sure to speak up. Focusing on hard work rather than just grades reinforces the connection between effort and the feeling of success.
- **Link lessons to real life.** Help your child apply classroom learning to everyday life. Use math skills to calculate batting averages in baseball or to measure ingredients while baking. Point out a new vocabulary word when it shows up in a favorite book or movie. Remind your child that sports and group projects both build teamwork skills.

Ask questions to give your child's motivation a boost

If you ask your child "How was school?" you'll likely get a one-word answer. Instead, try asking for specific details. Showing interest in the "small things" helps your child feel supported and reflect on the school day in a fun, pressure-free way.

Here are a few questions to help you get started:

- **What made you laugh** today?
- **What was the most challenging** thing you did today?
- **What was something you** learned that surprised you?
- Who did you help today, or who helped you?
- **What is one thing** you would teach the class if you were the teacher?
- **What is one thing** you're looking forward to doing in class?
- **What was the best part** of your lunch or recess?
- **Can you show me** something you worked on today that you are proud of?