

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Linden Public Schools



September 2023

Help your middle schooler get a new year off to a strong start

The start of the school year is a time for new beginnings. Express confidence in your child's ability to make this the best year yet. Then, to spark motivation, have your student set goals in areas that support success, such as:

- **Schoolwork.** Your child might aim for turning all assignments in complete and on time. Establishing a daily study time is a smart first step.
- **Reading.** If your child doesn't read often for pleasure, suggest making that a goal. Start small. Perhaps your child can read for 15 minutes each evening before bedtime.
- **Writing.** If writing assignments are a source of stress, frequent practice will help your child strengthen skills and get more comfortable. Your child could set a goal of keeping a daily journal.
- **Projects.** If your child typically puts off long-term assignments until the last moment, changing that habit is a worthy goal. The next time a project or paper looms, help your child break it into small parts and write down deadlines for each step.
- **Extracurricular activities.** Joining school-based activities helps students find friends and feel a stronger connection with school. Encourage your child to explore the options and find an activity of interest.



Bolster school skills in everyday ways

Your child spends much more time at home than at school. And with your help, that time can have a positive impact on learning. To reinforce academic skills, make these activities a regular part of your time together:

- **Ask what your student** is doing in classes. Discuss similarities and differences between them.
- **Have your child** teach you about topics and concepts from recent classes. Explaining them will reinforce the information in your child's mind.
- **Assign responsibilities** that are meaningful and allow your child to contribute to the family.
- **Respect your child's abilities.** Ask your middle schooler to use knowledge and skills to help you.
- **Have conversations** with your child about everything. Ask what your child thinks. Listen and ask follow-up questions.
- **Expose your child** to new ideas and experiences. Discuss how they relate to things your child is learning in school.

Share a reading process

Reading academic material is different from reading for pleasure. Your child needs to understand and retain the material. Share these steps for *reading to learn*:

1. **Scan the text.** Your child should look at graphics, headings and bold-face text to get an idea of key points.
2. **Read carefully,** and take notes.
3. **Take a self-quiz.** Can your child recall themes and supporting facts from the text?



Money is real world math

Boost your middle schooler's interest in math by showing how vital it is to managing money. Have your child:

- **Track all money** received and spent.
- **Create a savings goal** and plans for reaching it.

Demonstrate what budgeting decisions look like. "I'd love to order pizza, but there's not enough money left in this week's budget."

Absences affect outcomes

Frequent absences make it more likely that a student will repeat a grade, get expelled or drop out of school. To help ensure your child attends every class:

- **Be firm.** A vague complaint shouldn't be a ticket to a day off. Follow school protocols for suspected illness.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school isn't always fun.
- **Be proactive.** If your child is avoiding school, consult a school counselor.



Source: P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd.



How can I make it easier for my child to get enough rest?

Q: My middle schooler has a regular bedtime, but still wakes up cranky and exhausted every morning. I don't want lack of sleep to affect school performance, but what else can I do?

A: Too little sleep can have a big effect on attitude and attention in school. At a time when children's natural inclination is to shut the bedroom door and stay up later, lost sleep really begins to add up. To make sure your middle schooler gets adequate sleep:

- **Do the math on bedtime.** Middle schoolers need eight to 10 hours of sleep to function at their best in class. Count backward from your child's wake-up time and make bedtime 20 minutes earlier than the time your child must be asleep.
- **Set a digital curfew.** Turn digital devices off an hour before bedtime. Help your child find other ways to unwind: reading, playing board games, taking a warm shower, etc. Charge devices outside your child's room.
- **Limit naps and caffeine.** If your student is sleepy in the afternoon, keep naps to under 40 minutes. Consuming caffeine within six hours of bedtime can also interfere with sleep.
- **Offer a listening ear.** Could worry be keeping your child awake? Stop by for a quiet bedtime chat and let your middle schooler unload. Finish by bringing up something your child did well that day.



Are you encouraging kind behavior?

Kindness and respectful behavior help create the positive school climate that students need to learn well. Are you encouraging your middle schooler to treat others kindly? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about the fact that it doesn't always show when people are having a bad day, so it is always best to be kind?
- ___ **2. Do you teach** your child never to post anything on social media that your student wouldn't say in person?
- ___ **3. Do you urge** empathy by saying things like, "Remember how you felt when ... "?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to befriend a variety of students beyond a single

friend group, even if other friends don't?

- ___ **5. Do you offer** praise when you see your child being kind?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child spread kindness in and out of school. For each no, try that idea.

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

—Aesop

Offer tools for organization

Multiple teachers and multiple classes mean organization is an essential study skill for middle school students. Encourage your child to use these tools:

- **A planner.** Writing down all assignments, due dates and test dates in one place helps your child stay on track.
- **To-do lists.** Have your child list tasks to complete that day, week, month, etc. and cross each task off when finished.
- **Sticky notes.** Your child can use them to tag items needed for assignments, or to mark a stopping place in a book with a summary of the plot so far.

Foster a sense of well-being

Self-doubt is a common issue in the middle school years, and it can make students more likely to give in to peer pressure or attempt to fit in at all costs. To support your child:

- **Spend time together.** Take an interest in the things that interest your child.
- **Encourage healthy friendships** and get to know your child's friends.
- **Discuss physical changes** your child can expect, and that it is normal for them happen to kids at different times.

Give your child three keys for school success this year

Middle schoolers are expected to take an active role in their learning. Explain that this means it's important for your child to:



- 1. Participate** in class.
- 2. Think** about the material. How does one topic relate to another?
- 3. Get help** at the first sign of a problem. Your child should ask the teacher to explain or suggest ways to find help.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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