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A Guide for Families: Helping Your Child Succeed in School

A research-based guide to help you understand:
State Learning Standards
College and Career Readiness
Parent Practices to Help Children Learn
Family–School Relationships

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All families want their children to succeed in school.

This guide is designed to give parents, grandparents, and other caregivers ideas and tips that will improve their children's potential for success in school from prekindergarten all the way through high school.

Solid research shows that children from homes where families are engaged with their children, other parents, and their children's schools:



Earn better grades,



Get better test scores,



Enjoy school more, and



Are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college or technical school.

State Learning Standards

The state learning standards are statements which define a core of basic knowledge and skills that all students enrolled in public schools are expected to know and be able to do in each major area (English/language arts, mathematics, science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign languages) in each grade. The schools use these standards as a guideline for teaching and testing and to help determine the curriculum—the courses taught. The standards are a way to help all the students in the state have fair, equal opportunities to learn. Most state education agency websites have links to their standards so you can read them online.

As a parent or guardian, you will receive a report card and other information about your child's progress in meeting learning standards. States are also required to use their learning standards to measure each school's progress. State websites post school report cards showing how each school (and district as a whole) is performing. This report card also includes information on how different groups of students are doing. These school report cards give families and the public information they can use to make good choices for their children and to help their schools improve. Look online or ask for a copy of the report card for your child's school; ask for help if you have any trouble understanding it.

State Learning Standards

Below are some questions you might ask school staff related to standards, school report cards, and the information they provide:

- Ask the principal or district leaders to have a meeting to explain the school report card to parents and community members.
- If any of the numbers on average class size, staff-to-student ratios, or parental contact percentages concern you (for example, an average class size over 25), ask how the school is planning to improve.
- Ask your school office whether your child's teacher meets state qualifications for the grade or subject being taught.
- Ask whether paraprofessionals provide services to your child and, if so, what their qualifications are.
- Ask what is being done to improve. For example, if reading scores are low (or lower than the previous year), what is your school doing to bring them up? Or, if a certain subgroup is not doing as well as others, what are possible causes, and what is being done to help?
- If your child is struggling in a certain area, ask what help is available (see more tips below).

College and Career Readiness

Following your child's progress according to learning standards is one way to consider their readiness for their next step after high school. As your child progresses from year to year, even in elementary school, it is natural for your child to consider: Where will my education take me? This is one of the most important of all questions, and it leads to other questions that will form the basis of many conversations you will have with your child over the years. An old maxim advises us: "begin with the end in mind."

Children naturally wonder about their future and the possibilities, and it is never too early to talk to your child about what they want to do and where they want to be when they grow up. The sooner you encourage your child to look at the future with wonder and hope, the more readily they will seek a connection between what they learn in school and how it helps them confidently ask and answer such questions as: Who am I? Where do I want to go? How will I get there? Your unique knowledge of your child will help you guide them in exploring these questions. It is important that your children understand that it is perfectly normal for them to have lots of interests and consider lots of different possibilities, that often successful adults have more than one career or occupation, and that being a devoted parent is as important as work that takes place outside the home.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Families at home

You are your child's most important advocate for thinking and planning for the future. The many tips in the sections below will help you to get your child ready for a career and the steps needed to begin—including a college or trade school, depending upon the career chosen. Here are a few ideas more directly related to helping your child think ahead to a career.

-  Have your children consider what is interesting to them and what they are curious about, even if it is different from children around them.
-  Make it safe for your child to consider a wide variety of possibilities—try not to shoot down any ideas just because it isn't what you would pick.
-  Help your child choose books (including biographies) that will open their imagination to different ways they can serve others as they mature. When appropriate, encourage them to speak to trusted adults about different types of interests and work, including the joys and difficulties involved in what they do to serve their families or serve in an occupation.
-  Encourage your child to be an eager learner, but also encourage ways to apply learning by developing simple skills that build confidence—from something as simple as helping with chores around the house to more complex skills in any area of interest.
-  Talk with your child about the value of effort and hard work, no matter what the task is.
-  Encourage your child to keep a journal to write out hopes, dreams, thoughts, feelings, and more, even if only writing once in a while. Children who keep a journal of their own impressions can use it as a tool to build confidence in their own decisions, to rebound in times of difficulty, and to grow in resilience.

Help from school

Teachers and counselors in your children's school will also want to help them make plans for the future, whether that is how to thrive in the next school grade or in their plans after graduation. The school may include classroom activities which highlight careers for them to consider, including making connections between learning and how knowledge can be used in the world beyond the classroom. The school may also provide opportunities for your children to begin a plan of study in which they are free to choose certain subjects to give more attention or to develop an ongoing career plan.

Ask your child's teacher(s) what is done at school to help the students learn about career options.

Ask your child's teachers how they help students connect school learning with everyday life, including possible future occupations or areas of service.

Ask teachers, counselors, or other leaders what your child needs to do to prepare for a chosen or potential future path—selecting the right classes and activities to be on track may begin as early as fifth or sixth grade.

Talk with your child frequently about the future and how important attitudes and actions right now may be in reaching goals and dreams.

Curriculum of the Home: Parent Practices to Help Children Learn

The “curriculum of the home” is made up of the patterns of family life that support a child’s ability to learn in school. Your parenting practices and the relationship you build with your child’s school will help your child succeed. You don’t have to understand advanced math or buy anything special. Talking together often about your hopes and dreams for your child’s future and what it will take to reach those goals is one of the most important things you can do!

Following are more proven practices that can benefit your family, with tips to help you get started and questions to help you find more information and help along the way.

Parent–Child Relationship

Daily conversation about everyday events

- Spend a few minutes daily with each child, talking and listening with patience and love.
- Take time to understand your children’s world—their friends, activities, music, etc.
- Talk with your child about strengths and interests you have noticed in him/her, both in school subjects and outside school.

Showing affection

- Show love to your child in many ways, from hugs to praise for effort to special time together.

Family discussion of books, TV programs, web content, games, etc.

- Talk with your child about what he/she is reading and what you are reading.

Family visits to libraries, museums, zoos, etc.

- Go with your children to places where learning is a family activity.
- Ask school personnel or other parents for ideas of free or low-cost places your family could visit together.

Encouragement to try new words

- Make a family game out of looking up new words: Who can find the most new words in something you are reading together, or who can guess the correct meaning of a new word heard on TV—before you look it up in a (hardback or online) dictionary?

Routine of Family Life

Formal study time at home

- Make daily study time a “family value,” something each child does with or without homework assignments from school.

A daily routine that includes time to eat, sleep, play, work, study, and read

- Establish a family routine with regular mealtimes, bedtimes, homework/study time, and outdoor play/exercise time.
- Make sure your child eats healthy, nutritious foods and visits a doctor and dentist regularly.
- Make school attendance a family priority, and have your child complete makeup work as soon as possible after an absence because of illness or other issues.

A quiet place to study and read

- Find a spot with good light for a reading/studying area.

Family interest in hobbies, games, and activities of educational value

- Share family stories and traditions; they give a sense of meaning and belonging.
- Set times for family fun, such as a regular weekly game night.

Family Expectations and Supervision

Priority given to schoolwork and reading over screen time and recreation

- You don't have to sell your devices, but DO set time limits on TV, computers/tablets, and phones. Too much time at a screen takes away from time your child should be spending somewhere else.

Children expected to be on time

- Help your children pack backpacks each night with everything they need for school the next day.

Children expected to do their best and take responsibility for what they do

- Emphasize good study habits and a good attitude toward school.
- Praise your child for real effort and good attitudes about school work.

Concern for correct and effective use of language

- As much as you can, model proper English.
- Show and model courtesy when talking with your children by using please, thank you, etc.

Parental knowledge and discussion of what is being watched on TV and computers/screens

- Make sure you know what your child sees, and use shows as a chance to talk about values.
- Discuss and enforce Internet safety and courtesy rules.

Parental knowledge of school achievement and personal growth

- Talk to your child, your child's teacher, and other school staff often.
- Check your child's progress: review report cards, attend parent-teacher conferences.
- Ask your child, "Tell me something you learned in (school subject)" rather than yes/no questions.



Communication

Children benefit from parents and teachers talking and listening to one another. Below are some opportunities for communication:

Parent-teacher (and parent-teacher-student) conferences

- Take questions you have to the conference, and discuss what is on your mind.
- Ask about your child's strengths—both in academics and in social/emotional or character traits, and share those you see in your child.

● Let the teacher know you are watching your child's study habits and attitude toward school.

● Ask the teacher what he/she, you, and your child should do next to support learning.

Report cards

● Ask for a time to meet with the teacher if you have any questions or concerns about your child's report card.

● Ask the teacher how you can support your child in areas he/she may need to improve.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings (if your child has one)

● Be a part of the team that makes plans for your child.

● Ask the teacher or principal what services are available to you and your child.

School or classroom newsletter and other notes from school

● Check your child's backpack daily for flyers and read them (ask for translation if that would help you).

● Answer and return permission slips, emergency forms, and surveys.

Electronic Communication

● Ask if your child's teacher uses the school's online portal, a communication application (smartphone app), email, or other methods to message back and forth with students' families. Ask for help if you are not familiar with these methods, and use whatever works best for your family to have ongoing, two-way contact with the school.

Parent bulletin board (may be on school website)

● If your school has a parent bulletin board, either in the school building or online, check it often for new information.

Assignment notebook

● If your child has an assignment notebook, check it daily and sign it if asked by the teacher.

● Ask your child's teacher if you have any questions about assignments being completed or how well they are being done.

General communication tips

● Set up a time to visit the classroom and meet the teacher.

- If you have a concern, set up a time to discuss it. Don't wait for a conference.
- Share any information that might help the teacher understand your child.
- Don't forget to tell the teacher, "thanks." Send a note when you especially appreciate something a teacher has done for your child or family.
- Know the school calendar.
- Ask the teacher or guidance counselor what classes your child needs to take to prepare for the jobs/careers the child is interested in pursuing.

Involvement in School and Community

Remember, research shows parent involvement at home has the biggest effect on a child's school success. However, there are many other ways to be involved in your child's school and community. If you can, try to participate in one or more of the ways listed here:

Attend school activities

- Go to school plays, sports events, and award ceremonies. Even if your child isn't participating, these events are fun and great opportunities to get to know other children, their parents, and teachers.

Attend parent education programs or workshops set up to help you support your child's school success

- Ask what is available, and suggest topics you would like to learn more about.

If you can, volunteer to help at school

- Here are some ways you might help:
 1. Tutor and mentor children.
 2. Go on field trips.
 3. Supervise the playground or lunchroom.
 4. Share hobbies and talents with the class.
 5. Put up bulletin boards.
 6. Help with a Parents' Bulletin Board or a Family Resource Library at the school.
 7. Help plan and conduct Family Reading Night (or Math Night or Game Night, etc.).
 8. Collect and donate materials for projects.
 9. Make costumes and props.
 10. Make welcome signs.
 11. Ask the teacher for any project you could do at home.
 12. Offer to translate.

Help make decisions

- Here are some ways to help make decisions:
 1. Join your school's parent organization.
 2. Learn school rules and policies.
 3. Serve on school committees or advisory boards.
 4. Join a School Improvement Plan team.
 5. Help develop a family involvement policy for your school.
 6. Run for your local school council or school board.
 7. Voice your support or concerns on any issue that will affect your family.

- Ask questions about any policies you don't understand.

- Ask administrators how teachers are supported in family engagement efforts.

Stay connected with other parents

- Try some ways to connect with other parents:
 1. Meet your children's friends and their parents. Talk with the parents about their rules and expectations before your children visit them.
 2. At school activities, introduce yourself to other parents, get to know them, and share phone numbers.
 3. Encourage other parents to get involved in their child's learning.
 4. Offer to lead a parent education group.
 5. Give other parents rides to school events.
 6. Assist with babysitting so other parents can attend school events or conferences.

- Ask your school how you can help other parents.

- Ask your employer for release time to participate in school activities.

Stay connected with your community

- Keep a list of community resources, including contact names. This list may include the school, your place of worship, medical centers, agencies, police department, and fire department. Teach your children how to use this list.

- Have a backup plan if your children cannot reach you. Who should they call? Where should they go?

- Participate with your children in community activities, such as block club parties, holiday parades, back-to-school events, etc.

- Participate with your children in programs offered by your public library.

- Register your children with their pictures and fingerprints when your school or police department offers this program

- Volunteer with your children to help in your community—for instance, at a food pantry, visiting senior citizens, neighborhood cleanup, etc.

- Encourage local businesses to partner with your school by providing financial support, volunteers, computers or other supplies, etc.
- Speak out for children in the community. Join a local community or school-based group and make your voice heard.
- Make sure your local elected representatives know what's working for children and families in your community and what is missing.

Homework

Homework can help students practice what they've learned, explore subjects more fully than time permits in school, and develop good habits and attitudes. Homework can also bring families and educators closer together; parents who supervise homework learn about their children's education.

Students learn best when homework is assigned regularly, graded, returned promptly, and used primarily to rehearse material first presented by the teacher at school. With this in mind, here are some tips for making homework work for your child:

Be positive—your attitude about homework will make all the difference!

- Tell your children how important it is to study and do their best at school.
- Expect children to study at least 10 minutes per grade level per day (for example, a 3rd grader would study for 30 minutes).

Set a regular study time and place

- Make sure the study place has good lighting.
- Remove distractions, including the TV and phone/devices.
- Pick a time when your children will study each evening; don't let them wait until just before bedtime.

Keep supplies that might be needed nearby

Set a good example

- Try to do some of your own "homework" while your child studies, such as bill paying, reading, writing, etc.

Be interested, available, and supportive

- Encourage your child to work independently.
- If your child asks for help, listen and provide guidance, not answers.
- Watch your child for signs of frustration or failure, offering a break when needed or a chance to talk through difficulties.

Stay informed

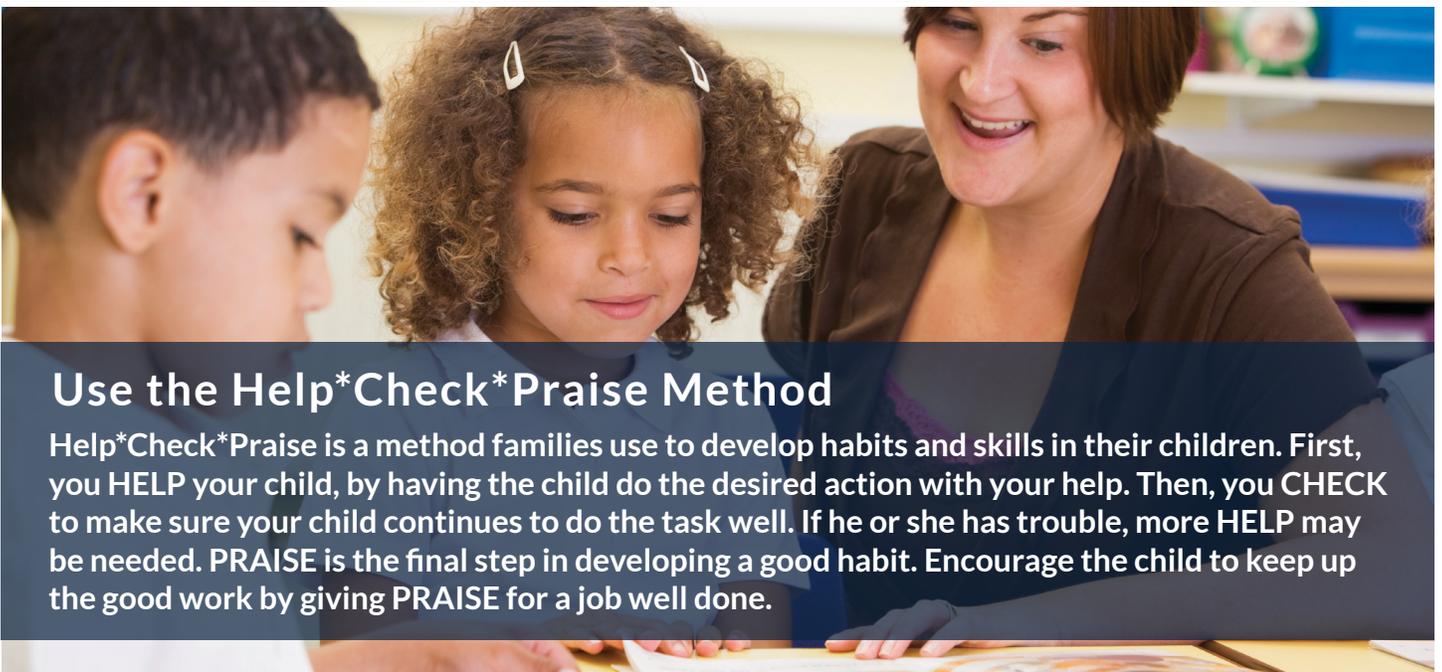
- If your child is struggling with homework, approach the teacher positively, as a partner, and find out what you can both do to help your child.
- Ask the teacher at the beginning of the school year: What kinds of assignments will you give? How much time do you expect students to spend on homework? What type of involvement do you expect from parents?

Help your child with time management

- Have your children do harder work first, when they are most alert. Easier work will seem to go faster after that.
- Help your children keep track of assignments and due dates, especially for larger projects.

Reward progress and hard work

- Serve your child a snack during or after study time.
- Praise hard work—tell your children if they are showing good effort.
- Beware of praising intelligence (“You’re so smart”). Children may then choose easier tasks out of fear of failing. Praising effort instead keeps them working toward more challenging goals.
- Celebrate big accomplishments with a special treat (pizza, a trip to the park, etc.).



Use the Help*Check*Praise Method

Help*Check*Praise is a method families use to develop habits and skills in their children. First, you **HELP** your child, by having the child do the desired action with your help. Then, you **CHECK** to make sure your child continues to do the task well. If he or she has trouble, more **HELP** may be needed. **PRAISE** is the final step in developing a good habit. Encourage the child to keep up the good work by giving **PRAISE** for a job well done.

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