ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

September 2026

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Prince William County Schools

Students do better when families and schools communicate

Two-way communication between families and schools supports academic success. When you and the school work together, it is easier to for everyone to identify and address what your child needs to do well in class.

To keep this productive communication flowing:

- **Sign up to receive** communications from the school on all platforms—social media, parent portals, etc. If you aren't sure how, contact the office.
- **Reach out to your child's teachers** with questions or concerns about your child's learning. For questions about a school policy, ask the office who to contact.
- **Offer suggestions.** Explain factors that the teacher or the school may not know about and what you think would help your child most.
- **Keep an open mind.** A teacher's or staff member's view of a situation may be different from your child's or yours. Ask for clarification of anything that is confusing. Focus discussions on finding solutions.
- **Follow up** after meetings to see how things are going. If a plan of action for your child isn't working, discuss next steps for addressing the situation.

Make read-alouds an everyday thing

Elementary schoolers of every age benefit from hearing books read aloud. Reading aloud to your child not only supports literacy development—it also demonstrates that reading is an important and fun way to spend time.

For maximum results:

- **Create a daily routine.** Choose a read-aloud time when your child will be most receptive, such as after playing outside or before bed.
- **Preview books.** Reading aloud is performing. You'll do a better job if you are familiar with what you are going to read. Previewing a book can also prevent getting bogged down in a story neither you nor your child enjoys.
- **Get dramatic.** Emphasize the first line of the book to grab your child's attention. Use voices and facial expressions to bring characters and situations to life.
- **Prolong interest.** Stop reading for the day at a point where you and your child are both eager to hear what happens next.

Attendance is a foundation

One of the most important ways you can support school success is to make sure your child attends every day. Missing as few as six class days can harm academic performance. To keep attendance on track:

- **Prep for mornings** the night before—lay out clothes, pack schoolbags, etc.
- **Schedule appointments** and family trips for non-school times.
- **Reach out to school staff** for help finding solutions for attendance issues.

Source: E. Blad, "Absenteeism May Hurt Academics Long Before It Becomes 'Chronic'," EducationWeek.

Foster friendship skills

Friends can make school life better—and more dramatic. To help your child navigate the ups and downs of friendship:

- **Listen.** Sometimes, children need a sympathetic ear more than a solution.
- **Ask questions.** "What do you think you could do about that?"
- **Tell stories** about your own social challenges and how you faced them.

Reinforce online safety

Millions of children go online every day to learn, create and socialize. Ensuring their safety is vital. To help protect your child:

- **Monitor** your child's online activities. Keep devices where you can see them and use parental controls.
- **Establish** rules—no playing online games with people not also known in real life, no underage social media use, etc.
- **Tell** your child to alert you to inappropriate content, messages or experiences online.

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Q&A My child gives up too soon. What can I do to help?

Q: My eight-year-old has recently begun responding to new challenges by saying "I can't"—without even trying. How can I help my child feel capable of learning hard things?

A: Your elementary schooler seems to be exhibiting a lack of self-confidence. One or more of these factors may be at work:

- **Fear of making mistakes.** Both adults and children tend to point out things kids do wrong more than things they do right. Fault-finding can lead children to doubt their abilities.
- **Perfectionism.** Children who feel a need to be perfect may give up rather than attempt a task they aren't sure they can do perfectly the first time.
- **Comparisons to others.** When children observe and negatively compare their performance to that of others'—or have the comparison pointed out to them—they may stop trying.
- **Too much "help."** When adults do things for children that they can do for themselves, the children may get the message they aren't capable.

Reassure your child that mistakes are a normal part of learning. Everyone makes them and can learn from them how to improve. Show that you know your child is a capable person, and eventually your child will believe it.

Parent Quiz Will you give your child a boost this year?

The start of the school year is an ideal time to establish patterns of positive engagement in your child's education. Are you ready to set your child up for success in the new school year? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Will you explain** what you expect of your child in school—attendance, cooperation, effort, persistence etc.?
2. **Will you establish** routines for bedtime, schoolwork, reading and other family times?
3. **Will you express** your confidence that your child can handle any changes or challenges this year might bring, and that you will help?
4. **Will you contact** your child's teacher early in the year?
5. **Will you participate** in events for families at school?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are getting off to a great start. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach them to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning."

—Carol Dweck

Review schoolwork daily

Reviewing and talking about schoolwork together shows your child that you think learning matters. It also gives you a window into what your child is learning. Each day:

- **Look over classwork** and assignments. Ask your child to tell you about the work. Before your child turns schoolwork in, check that it is complete.
- **Praise genuine effort** and progress.
- **Discuss upcoming projects.** What is your child looking forward to doing? Will the projects be easy or challenging?

Don't skip this smart start!

Healthy food is fuel for learning. Research shows that students who eat breakfast before school are more able to concentrate, manage tasks, regulate emotions and remember things than those who go without it.

Make busy mornings easier by keeping a few grab and go options on hand, like peeled hard boiled eggs. In a pinch, even a piece of last night's pizza will do!

Source: K. Adolphus and others, "The Effects of Breakfast and Breakfast Composition on Cognition in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review," *Advances in Nutrition*, Elsevier.

Science skills apply to life

The science skills your child is learning—observing, asking questions, thinking and drawing conclusions—will also help in other school subjects and later in the workplace. To encourage interest in science:

- **Investigate together.** If your child has a question, say, "Let's find out!" Show how to look up answers. Help your child test an idea to learn if it is workable.
- **Watch science shows** for kids together and discuss them. "Wasn't it neat to see how fish breathe through their gills?"

Source: E. Finkel, "The scientific method: It's not just for science anymore," K-12 Dive.

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