



MAKING SURE YOUR CHILD GETS THE EDUCATION THEY DESERVE

A Guide for Parents

Your child has a right to attend and succeed in a great public school. Regardless of income, ethnicity, family circumstances, disability or school readiness, all children are entitled to an education that will help them reach their full academic, professional and personal potential. As a parent or guardian, you are the best advocate for ensuring this happens.

The importance of a hands-on approach

While all parents want their child to do well in school, many don't realize that personally monitoring and guiding their child's education has a huge impact on academic success. In fact, playing this role has never been more important.

Today's high school graduates face a highly competitive global economy, which favors workers with greater education and training than their parents had. Whether your child wants to be in education, finance, politics, art, science, manufacturing or virtually any profession, technology and the rapid pace of societal change have upped the minimum skills required.

It is your moral and legal right to demand a rigorous, high-quality education that enables your child to thrive in the world. This includes insisting on:

✓ **Up-to-date textbooks and technology:**

The quality of the resources available in your school is a good indicator of how much administrators and the school board are investing in keeping up with modern education and workforce demands. Examine your child's school books and ask for new or replacement books if necessary. Tour the school to see what type of technology exists. Make sure there are computers available for student use in the classroom or library. Ask about audio-visual equipment for incorporating digital media into instruction and school activities.

✓ **A safe and nurturing learning environment:**

Unfortunately, too many districts have allowed school buildings to deteriorate or failed to upgrade them to reflect safety and technological advances, and accommodate increases in student enrollment. The ideal learning environment includes small classes with a low teacher-to-student ratio. School buildings should be welcoming and well-maintained, with a modern cafeteria and gymnasium, hygienic restrooms, a well-stocked library with a librarian and a wellness room with a full-time nurse. Parents and communities must hold politicians accountable for providing the funding needed to keep local public schools in excellent condition.



✓ **Strong parent-teacher communication:**

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else. Share your child's strengths, weaknesses or any special concerns with teachers, so they can adapt lessons to match your child's interests and learning style. The more teachers know about your child's daily life, language and culture, the more meaningful they can make classroom experiences. Attend parent-teacher conferences. Contact your child's teacher whenever you have questions or concerns. Engagement in your school community, like when you join your student's PTA or PTSA, sit in on a class, or volunteer for a field trip has a benefit for your child and others in the school too. The important thing is to stay connected, so you can advocate for your child.

✓ **Transparency around learning objectives and tests:**

Public schools should clearly set and communicate expectations to both parents and students. You should know the learning objectives at the beginning of each new class and school year, as well as how and when your child will be evaluated against those objectives (through both routine classroom tests, projects, and/or state standardized assessments). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, schools are required to notify parents about their child's test results, whether the test was administered by the school or a supplemental provider. And raw data is not sufficient. Don't be afraid to ask for an interpretation of your child's scores, information on how the scores will be used and advice on how to help your child do better if needed. Also make sure that tests are not the only criteria being used to judge your child's performance. Ask the teacher what percentage of your child's grade is determined by tests vs. homework, class participation and other factors. (See our brochure "Testing at Your Child's School" for more.)

✓ **Information on school performance:**

Ask your school for up-to-date information about its academic standing, graduation rates and students' access to advanced coursework compared to others in your district or state. They are required by law to provide this data. If your school has fallen behind, hold your politicians accountable for more funding, specialized staff, teacher training and other resources. Check your state's board of education website regularly to stay on top of issues that impact access to quality education.



✓ **High expectations:**

When schools set high expectations, students work harder and aim higher because they learn to believe in themselves and their future. Make sure the school is communicating its expectations in a format that makes sense to, and inspires, your child.

✓ **Access to services and activities, regardless of language or income:**

Schools should offer communications in your family's native language, whether in print, online or in person. All students should have access to school-linked social services, lunch programs and remedial education if needed. And extracurricular activities should be open to all. If your child is having trouble finding or gaining access to an activity, be their advocate. Contact the school, ask questions and know your rights.

The importance of learning at home

Learning doesn't stop once your child leaves the classroom. In fact, your child's academic success requires that they study at home and get support and encouragement from family members. A few things you should be doing:



✓ **Supervise homework:** Know what your child has been assigned, how much your child has done and whether your child needs extra help. Request a curriculum outline from the teacher, so that you can help your child prepare in advance for classes and tests.

✓ **Create a quiet place to read and study:** Insist that your child turn off the TV and put away their cell phone while studying. Create a designated, quiet, comfortable and well-lit space in the house just for studying.

✓ **Teach organizational skills:** The older your child gets, the more work and activities they need to balance. Make sure your child has a daily planner (this could be an app on their phone) and teach them to write down all commitments, plan ahead and check things off as they go. Teach your child how to prioritize and meet deadlines. If your child struggles with procrastination, help them break large tasks into smaller ones that seem more manageable.

✓ **Get extra help sooner rather than later:** If your child is struggling, don't wait to inquire about after-school tutoring and counseling. If the school doesn't offer these, they should make other recommendations. You can also talk to the teacher about an individualized learning plan, so you can both better monitor your child's progress.

The importance of family involvement

Families can play a major role in academic success. Aunts, uncles, grandparents and other adults in your child's life should grab every opportunity to let them know that education is important, that they have high expectations for your child, and that they're available to help.

Adults in the house should help your child set goals and encourage them to create a plan of action, whether that's getting up on time, improving classroom attendance, starting assignments further in advance, raising their grades one step at a time or finding study partners at school.

Above all, in daily conversations, talk about quality education like a gift, a right and a journey—one your child can freely pursue, secure in the knowledge that they have your full support.



Resources

National Education Association:

[NEA.org](https://www.nea.org)

National PTA:

[PTA.org](https://www.pta.org)

The College Board:

[CollegeBoard.org](https://collegeboard.org)

Be A Learning Hero:

BeALearningHero.org

Homework Help Desk:

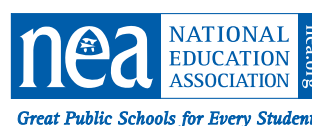
HomeworkHelpDesk.org

Other Resources

There is a range of other Parents' Guides to help you ensure your child thrives at school. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ Preparing Your Child for School
- ✓ Raising Ready Readers
- ✓ Raising Scientifically Literate Children
- ✓ Helping Your Child with Today's Math

For these and other guides, visit [NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html](https://www.nea.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html) or [pta.org/familyguides](https://www.pta.org/familyguides)



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