



American School Middle School Parents Resource Packet

The staff of the American Middle School regards you, the parents, as vital members of the educational team. We acknowledge your interest and contribution to the educational welfare of your child. To aid you in working at home with them, we have compiled a packet of methods which you may wish to use in order to support your child's learning in the classroom. These materials were developed by the Learn More Resource Center in the U.S. State of Indiana. The Indiana Schools' instructional package includes many of the methods that we are using, here, in the Middle School. Therefore, these suggestions fit perfectly with our program. With their permission, we have reproduced them below.

Making the Most of a New Beginning

If you are the parent of a middle-schooler, keep in mind that your child still needs a lot of help from you even though he or she is more independent than in elementary school. Middle school is a key time for parents to keep tabs on what their children do in school, because middle-schoolers often do not talk as much about school. As a parent, you might not know about problems until you ask or until a teacher calls you. Helping your child with homework, visiting a library together to work on an assignment, praising work well done, and investigating problems at school are all vital ways to stay involved.

What Parents Can Do

If you are the parent of a middle-schooler:

- Spend at least 15 minutes a day talking or reading with your child, and pay attention to everything your child brings home. Middle schoolers still need a lot of help!
- Give your child a quiet, well-lit place to study.
- Meet with your child's guidance counselor to plan choosing courses for high school. It's important to lay the right groundwork in middle school.

Back to School Facts for Parents

Students do better in school when parents stay involved. Thirty years of research has proven it. When parents are actively involved with a child's education, the child performs better in school and has a greater chance of success in life. In fact, statistics show that the most accurate predictor of a student's future success is the degree to which his or her family encourages learning, sets high expectations and gets involved with the child's school.

Source: Funkhouser & Gonzales, Henderson & Berla, and other studies, cited in *Turning Points*.

Ninth grade is a "make-it-or-break-it" year. For many students, the shock of moving from middle school to high school causes big problems. Educators call it 'the ninth-grade slump,' and it has been steadily worsening for decades. In the 1970's, 5 percent of American ninth-graders failed to move on to 10th grade. By the mid-1990's, it had reached 10 percent, or 400,000 students a year. Moreover, a 1998 national study showed that 25 percent of students who fail ninth grade will also fail to finish high school. At some schools, the percentage is as high as 45 percent. Source: Center For the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy, and Hertzog & Morgan, both cited in *American School Board Journal*, February 2004.

Students say their parents have a big influence on their plans for the future. In a recent study, 93 percent of eighth and ninth graders said that their mothers were helpful in planning their future college or career moves, and 87 percent said that their fathers were helpful. Focus groups revealed that students relied on parents for motivation and encouragement.

Source: Wimberly & Noeth, cited in *Schools Involving Parents In Early Postsecondary Planning: ACT Policy Report*, 2004.

Adolescents spend nearly half of their waking hours in school. For an adolescent, and even for an elementary or middle school student, school is where much of life happens. School is where children learn to socialize, to take on new tasks, and to act out their independence. But they bring to school everything they have learned at home. And what happens at home can shape a student's approach to education for the rest of his or her life. Source: Kerr, in *Educational Research Service Spectrum*, Summer 2002.

Teens need you more now than ever. Most parents surveyed by Public Agenda said, "It's natural for parents to be less involved when kids reach high school." Virtually all teens surveyed said, "the most important thing parents can do is stay involved in their lives and school work"

Source: "Playing Their Parts," *Public Agenda*, 1999.

Reading is the Key to Learning

There is nothing more important to your child's future than reading. He or she will need to read well in order to excel in all other subjects in school, follow written instructions, learn from books, study, take tests, fill out a job application, pass a driving test or write a job report. That's why it is so important that reading begin at home.

Helping Kids Read - What Parents Can Do

If you are the parent of a middle-schooler:

- **Allow your child to pick the books he or she wishes to read.** Occasionally, read the same book your child is reading, whether or not it is one you would choose to read. This will give you an opportunity to communicate by comparing notes and sharing opinions, insights and interpretations.

- **Control the amount of TV and the types of shows that your child watches.** TV is a passive activity that doesn't allow your child to participate or think. Instead, set an example for your child by having books at home and spending quiet time reading. And give your child a quiet, well-lit place to read and study.
- **It's also very important to find out from your child's teacher the level at which your child is reading.** Check in with your child's teachers and guidance counselors to see if they see any problems.
- **Keep an eye on your child's written homework.** Ask the teacher, also, how reading is taught in the classroom and what you as a parent can do at home to support your child's reading progress.

Reading - Facts for Parents

- **One-third of US ninth-graders have major reading problems.** An estimated one-third of students enter ninth grade with reading skills that are two or more years below grade level, according to a Johns Hopkins University study. That means big problems ahead for those who don't get the help they need. Source: Balfanz, McPartland & Shaw, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 2002.
- **Children who read well become more successful.** Years of research has proven that children who read at grade level are more successful in school and in life than students who read behind grade level. Reading is a key skill for performing well in school and enjoying more career choices. Source: *Read and Rise*, National Urban League.
- **Talking with adults helps children learn to read.** Research shows that children who are exposed to a wide range of words in talking with adults can use these words later to help them understand what they are reading. Source: *Put Reading First*, The Partnership for Reading, 2001.
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Quick Tips

10 Things Parents Can Do to Help Students Succeed

1. **Promote college.** All students will need to keep learning after high school: at a two- or four-year college, at a trade school or apprenticeship program, or in the military. Otherwise, they will not have the knowledge and skills to get and keep a good job. Make sure that your middle school student knows that he or she will need to take core courses throughout high school and explain why these high expectations are so important for his or her future.
2. **Build relationships with your teenagers teachers.** Find out what each teacher expects and how you can help your son or daughter prepare to meet those expectations. Make sure teachers and school counselors are promoting college, too.

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3. **Read.** Reading is the foundation for all learning. Keep exposing your young person to a wide variety of reading materials (newspapers, magazines, books, Web) and be ready to discuss what he or she has learned. Helping him or her develop strong reading habits and skills is one of the most important contributions you can make to your child's education.
4. **Practice writing at home.** Letters, journal entries, e-mail messages, and grocery lists are all writing opportunities. Show that writing is an effective form of communication and that you write for a variety of purposes.
5. **Make math part of everyday life.** Cooking, gardening, paying bills, balancing a checkbook, and even shopping are all good ways to help your young person understand and use mathematics skills. Show that there may be many ways to get to the right answer and encourage your son or daughter to explain his or her method.
6. **Expect that homework will be done.** Keep track of homework assignments and regularly look at your student's completed work. Some teachers now give parents a number to call for a recorded message of that day's homework assignments; others put the information on the Internet. If your school doesn't offer these features, talk to the teacher about how you can get this important information. Even if there aren't specific assignments, find out how you can stay informed about what your young person is working on so that you can help at home.
7. **Use the community as a classroom.** Continue feeding your son's or daughter's curiosity about the world 365 days a year. Take him or her to museums, local government buildings, state parks and workplaces. Encourage your student to volunteer in a field or area of interest in order to show how learning connects to the real world. These activities will reinforce what is learned in the classroom and may help your child decide what to do with his or her future.
8. **Encourage group study.** Open your home to your young person's friends for informal study sessions. Promote outside formal study groups through church or school organizations or other groups. Study groups will be especially important as your child becomes older and more independent. The study habits learned in middle school will carry over into college and work.
9. **Help other parents understand academic expectations.** Use your school and employee newsletters, athletic associations, booster clubs, a PTA or PTO meeting, or just a casual conversation to help other parents understand what academic standards mean for them, their children, and their school and how they can help their children learn at home. Also, make sure that other parents are promoting the college option, too. Remember, we want ALL children to have some college after high school.
10. **Spend time at school.** The best way to know what goes on in your teenager's school is to spend time there. If you're a working parent, this isn't easy, and you may not be able to do it very often. But once in awhile is better than never.

Self-Management

Self-Management Skills for Lifetime Success

As parents, we all want our children to grow up to be responsible citizens and good people. We want them to learn to feel, think and act with respect for themselves and for other people.

One important thing we can do for our children as parents is to help them acquire self-management skills to rely on throughout their lives. Research has shown that children who grow up with strong self-management skills are happier and do better in school. They are better able to balance their personal wants and needs against those of others and to make a positive contribution to society.

- **Responsibility**

Being *responsible* means being dependable, keeping promises and honoring one's commitments. It is accepting the consequences of what we do and say. It also means developing one's potential.

People who are responsible take charge of their lives. They make plans and set goals for nurturing their talents and skills. They find ways to overcome adversity, make good decisions and take into account obligations to family and community.

How parents can help:

- Make agreements with your child and expect them to follow through.
- When things go wrong, help your child take responsibility for his or her part and make plans to do things differently next time.
- Encourage your child to find out more about the world and how his or her actions may affect others.

- **Persistence**

Persistence involves self-discipline and sticking to commitments - putting off immediate rewards for later fulfillment. Children need your help in dealing effectively with emotions, such as anger or frustration, developing patience, and accepting their mistakes along the way.

How parents can help:

- Encourage your child to work toward challenging goals and help them break down the steps needed to reach the goal.
- Set an example - let your child see you practice patience when taking on a new or difficult task.
- Support your child's efforts and help with problems or set-backs. Have a family celebration when he or she has achieved the goal.

- **Punctuality**

Successful time management relies on your child understanding the importance of punctuality. Being on time for school and other activities as well as meeting homework deadlines will help prepare your middle school student for high school

and college assignments and for the workplace. Students are expected to hand in work on time in high school and college or risk receiving a lower grade. In addition, potential employers favor job candidates with a record of being punctual.

- **Effort.**

Trying one's best means putting all one's effort into achieving a goal or finishing a project. Competence is gained through practice and perseverance. Even small successes can help build confidence in your middle school student's abilities. Act as a coach for your child supporting him or her with your praise and encouragement.

- **Focus.**

We all have trouble focusing from time to time, and you know better than anyone, children are no exception. Like everyone else, in order to complete work, fulfill obligations and do well in school, students need to focus.

From the Internet to movies, children are bombarded with distractions. The first thing any student needs to do to succeed is limit those distractions.

How parents can help:

- Turn off the TV.
- Limit Internet time each day.
- Set a regular time and place for homework.
- Have all family members take part in a quiet activity during homework time.
- Show interest in your student's work.

Attention Deficit/Hyper Activity Disorder is something we hear more about these days, but children will be children, and once in a while they all have trouble focusing. If you think your child has more serious issues focusing, talk to the school counselor or a medical professional.

Study Skills

Practical Study Tips

Good grades increase opportunities for your child. They open doors to college and to careers. You can help your child get better grades by improving study skills.

Three Ways to Build Study Skills:

Set Goals

- **Work on big goals first.** Help your child to create positive, precise and realistic goals. Write them down. Goals should be not too difficult but not too easy.
- **Break down the big goal into manageable parts.** Have your child write down the smaller steps or mini-goals needed to reach the larger goal. Set up deadlines and discuss your child's progress often.
- **Create a plan to tackle the mini-goals.** Explain the value of practice and training in meeting goals. Work with your child to schedule time for study rather than cramming for tests or assignment deadlines. Help your student form a study group as well as set aside time for uninterrupted time for homework.

Get Organized

Good organization sharpens your student's study skills. Different colored file folders and assignments and notes filed in a class-specific notebook are signs of organization.

- **The Notebook.** Notebooks make learning materials easy to find. Folders and binders with dividers are great to organize notes, assignments and test results. Encourage your student to have separate, labeled notebooks for each class.
- **Assignments.** Suggest writing down assignments for all classes in one designated place. Include due dates and important information for each one. Encourage your student to ask the teacher to explain unclear assignments and keep records of the grades received. Notice the types of assignments that need more work and make sure your student asks teachers for help.

Create a Study Environment

Real learning takes time and attention. Reinforce a consistent approach to learning by creating a specific place and routine time for studying. Don't forget to allow for breaks!

- **Set a Place.** Choose a place that is quiet with few distractions and that has pens, pencils, paper, a dictionary and a ruler at hand. Study space should be well lighted and have music if it helps your child concentrate.
- **Set a Time.** Designate study time when your child is alert, fresh and relaxed and, ideally, at the same time daily. Don't forget short breaks to refresh the mind and schedule the first one before studying begins. During the break, suggest a walk outdoors or deep breathing exercises. Research studies show that physical well-being promotes mental well-being and renewed energy.

Time Management

Help Your Student Manage Time

Managing time is one of the most important and useful skills you can help your child learn. Dividing the semester, week and day into manageable sections helps your student track assignments, deadlines and activities.

Develop a Time Schedule

A time schedule helps your student worry less about deadlines and see the big picture in terms of goals, commitments and time.

Make a master schedule with your child for the semester

1. List the following items:
 - all required school activities
 - after-school activities
 - study times
 - family obligations
 - blank spaces for activities not yet scheduled
2. Write down deadlines for major projects on a blank calendar.
3. Review each project to estimate how long it will take to complete. Add a bit more time, then enter project start dates on the calendar.

Make a weekly schedule.

1. Make a short list of major events, activities and assignments each week. Refer to the master schedule.
2. Note important deadlines.

Make a daily schedule.

1. Suggest and review a "to do" list every day.
2. Check off items as they are completed.
3. Note any tasks that were not completed and help your student find ways to finish them.

Review the schedule.

After a few weeks, get feedback from your student on how well the schedule is working. Ask the following questions:

1. Are you getting your schoolwork finished on time?
2. Are you getting more done?
3. Do you feel you are in control of your time?
4. Do you have enough time to socialize and relax?

If the answers are "yes", then the schedule is helping your student to manage time. If there are problems, review the schedule and see how it can be improved.

Once again, we wish to thank the Learn More Resource Center in the U.S. State of Indiana for their development of these materials which we have reproduced for you through their gracious permission.

Should you wish to visit their site, please click on the following address

http://www.learnmoreindiana.org/@parents/parents_68/



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