

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School  
Cumberland County Schools



September 2023

## Encourage your teen to discover strengths and explore interests

High school is a time of discovery. When students take time to figure out what they enjoy learning about and what they are good at, they are taking a key step toward college and career readiness.

To support this learning process, encourage your teen to:

- **Read widely.** Reading a variety of materials exposes your teen to new topics and possible pursuits. Suggest that your teen read the news, novels, science articles, biographies, etc.
- **Ask people questions.** Encourage your teen to ask adults about their jobs. What do they like best about them? How did they prepare for them? Your teen can also ask friends and classmates about their interests. Could they teach your teen a new skill?
- **Try a range of classes and activities.** The easiest way for your teen to discover talents is to try new things. Challenge your teen to take a class in a new subject, or to join a new organization or activity. If your teen is interested in a career field, volunteering can be a way to learn more.
- **Research.** Suggest that your teen go online and research topics that sound interesting. What kinds of jobs do people do that involve those things? What skills do they need? What classes would your teen need to take in high school to leave those career options open?



## Focus on attendance from day one

Research shows that chronic absenteeism—missing more than 10 percent of school in a year—has nearly tripled in the past three years. Many teens think skipping classes isn't a big deal. But studies show that teens who skip:

- **Fall behind**, because they no longer understand the material.
- **Feel disconnected** from school.
- **Are more likely to drop out** of high school.
- **Are less likely to enroll** in education beyond high school.

Students who miss a lot of school in the beginning of the year tend to miss more later on than other kids.

That's why it's so vital to reinforce the importance of attendance with your teen now.

If you suspect your teen may be skipping a class, check with the teacher. Knowing that you are checking up may be the motivation your teen needs to attend to every class.

Source: E. Dorn and others, "COVID-19 and education: An emerging K-shaped recovery," McKinsey & Company; "Chronic Absence: 10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works.

## Help your teen power up into school mode

Even seasoned students may need some help reestablishing school routines and habits. For a smooth start to the year:



- **Help your teen set** and stick to a regular study time.
- **Help your teen create** a schedule that includes time for all responsibilities and use a calendar to keep track.
- **Limit tech distractions.** Unless needed for an assignment, your teen's phone should go in another room during study time and also while your teen is sleeping.

## Engage in effective ways

Actively engaging in your teen's education supports learning. Your student benefits when you:

- **Express high expectations**, especially about effort.
- **Have regular conversations** about school and what your teen is learning.
- **Stay aware** of assignment, testing and project schedules, and whether your teen is turning work in on time.



## Strengthen self-discipline

Responsible learners are self-disciplined, and it shows in their grades, test scores and attendance. To promote self-discipline:

- **Avoid doing things** for your teen that your teen can do independently.
- **Don't "save" your teen** from consequences. Instead, help your teen learn how to think ahead and solve problems.
- **Encourage activities** that develop self-discipline, such as sports and music.

Source: A. Duckworth and M. Seligman, "Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents," *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.



## How can I help my teen start off right in a new school?

**Q:** We moved over the summer and my teen is starting the year in a new high school. What tips can I share to help make the academic transition go smoothly?

**A:** Starting a new school can be exciting, but it can also be a source of stress. Your teen may be anxious about getting lost and making new friends as well as doing well in classes. But academics *are* a priority.

Share these strategies to help your teen get a great start:

- **Arrive in class ready to learn.** Your teen should have paper, pencils, chargers and any other necessary items. Make it clear that your teen should also do all assigned reading and complete other homework before class begins.
- **Concentrate on learning, not just on grades.** This involves thinking about the material as well as memorizing it. Students who don't understand something, or who want to know more, should ask questions. Teachers love to help—it's why they are teachers.
- **Demonstrate self-respect** and respect for others. Silly or disruptive behavior may get attention, but it won't help your student get ahead.

New-school-year worries are common. But by approaching school prepared and focused on learning, your teen will be on track for academic success.



## Do you talk about sticky situations?

High school students often face situations when the fun or easy thing to do and the right thing to do are different. Are you talking with your teen about how to handle these times? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you look** for chances to have casual chats with your teen? These conversations often lead to more serious discussions.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your teen about values that are important in your family?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make** it clear that you want your teen to speak honestly—especially about serious topics?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** about tough situations your teen may face before they occur?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you help** your teen rehearse ways to respond?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching your teen how to approach difficult issues. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Independence isn't doing your own thing; it's doing the right thing on your own."*

—Kim John Payne

## Healthy habits support success in school

Feeling tired, hungry or sluggish makes it harder to concentrate on learning. Encourage your teen to commit to these healthy habits:

- **Daily exercise.** Regular physical activity boosts alertness and memory.
- **Getting enough sleep.** Teens need 8-10 hours of rest every 24 hours.
- **Making healthy food choices.** Help your teen start the day with a nutritious breakfast, at home or at school.

## Insist on real writing

Today, digital tools like ChatGPT can write convincing papers—and students may be tempted to pass them off as their own. Make it clear to your teen that this is cheating—even if your teen changes some words. Then, discuss why writing skills are useful. Learning to write well will help your teen:

- **Strengthen thinking skills.**
- **Be more persuasive.**
- **Develop communication skills—** which are valuable in the workplace as well as in school.

Source: A. Klein, "ChatGPT Cheating: What to Do When It Happens," EducationWeek.



## Establish the ground rules

All schools have rules that help ensure a positive learning environment. To help make this year go smoothly, make it clear that you expect your teen to:

- **Obey school rules.** Review the rules and discipline policies together.
- **Obey family rules.** Teens who are expected to cooperate at home are more likely to behave well in school. Get your teen's input on rules, and discuss consequences prior to any misbehavior.

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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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