HIGH SCHOOL

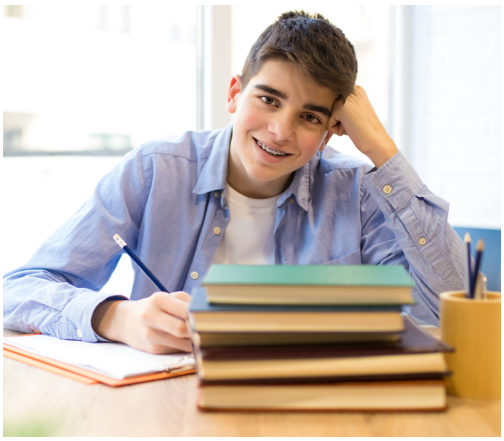
December 2026

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Cumberland County Schools

Small daily actions can help your teen take control of learning



Many students are quick to blame things outside their control as reasons for doing poorly in school. *The teacher was mean. The test questions were unfair.* These teens don't recognize how much their own actions can affect their outcomes.

To highlight this connection, help your high schooler decide on some everyday actions to take to improve. The more specific the actions are, the more likely your teen is to keep them up. So instead of a general "I will try harder," your teen's list could include:

- **I will ask at least one question in every class.** In order to ask an informed question, your teen will need to pay attention in class. Engaging in this way often leads to more questions—and more learning.
- **I will study my class notes every evening.** Reviewing notes soon after taking them allows your teen to clarify them and add any missing information while the memory of the class is fresh. This helps your teen retain the information. Clear notes also make studying easier at test time.
- **I will read for 30 minutes every day.** Few students make time for reading that isn't required. But reading widely and often is the best way for your teen to learn new words and strengthen comprehension.

Encourage pleasure reading over break

With time off from classes during winter break, your high schooler will have many free hours to pick up some reading—just for the fun of it!

To motivate your teen to read:

- **Offer a challenge.** Challenge your teen to find one book that seems interesting and read it before school resumes in January. Suggest going to the library with friends. They can wander up and down the aisles until they each find a book they want to read.
- **Play an audiobook** at home or while you are traveling in the car. Encourage your teen to download another to listen to while relaxing or exercising.
- **Involve the whole family.** Decide on a book everyone will read and ask your teen to lead an informal discussion about it.
- **Encourage reading to others.** Your teen could volunteer to read aloud to residents of a nursing home, or make read-aloud videos for a day care center.

School is still in session

The weeks leading up to winter break are just as important for learning as the rest of the school year. To emphasize that attendance and effort matter, talk with your teen about:

- **Classes.** What is your student learning in each class? Will there be assignments to do over winter break?
- **Checklists.** Have your teen make a list of everything due before the break starts and schedule time to do the work.
- **Priorities.** Remind your teen that school and schoolwork come before festive events and other activities.

Power naps sharpen focus



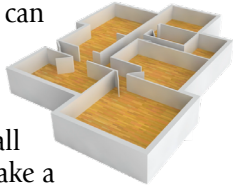
Most teens need about nine hours of sleep a day, but few get it. To help your teen get the rest needed to manage early school start times, busy schedules and high school workloads, suggest a short nap after school. Sleep researchers say that a brief nap (30 to 60 minutes) before 4 p.m. can help teens be more alert and better able to focus on studies.

Source: X. Ji and others, "The Relationship Between Midday Napping and Neurocognitive Function in Early Adolescents," *Behavioral Sleep Medicine*, Taylor & Francis.

Memorize with mnemonics

Mnemonics are learning tricks that make recalling information easier. Here are two to encourage your teen to experiment with:

1. **Chunking.** Have your teen divide long lists of facts into smaller groups and study each group.
2. **Mapping.** Your teen can make a mental map of your home and connect each fact to a specific area. To recall them, your teen can take a mental walk through the house.



Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc. www.parent-institute.com

HIGH SCHOOL
Helping Students Learn®
Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School
December 2026

Q&A I don't want my teen to drop out. What can I do?

Q: My 11th grader skipped a lot of classes this fall and got way behind. With failing grades in two classes, my teen now wants to give up and drop out. How can I help my teen get back on track?



A: It's common for students who fall behind in classes to feel that there is no chance they will ever catch up. But by working with your teen and the school, you can empower your teen to turn things around.

Here are the steps to take:

1. **Talk with your teen.** Discuss why staying in school is important. Express confidence that your teen has what it takes to graduate. Then, ask your teen to research what jobs are available to dropouts. How far will minimum wage go when your teen wants to live independently?
2. **Contact your teen's teachers.** Ask what your teen can do to improve grades before the end of the year. Can your teen make up missed work?
3. **Meet with your teen and a school counselor.** Plan how to help your teen get back on the graduation track. Can your teen retake a class over the summer? What support is available for struggling students? Help your teen set realistic goals—attending all classes, turning in all work, etc.
4. **Monitor** your teen's attendance and progress on a regular basis.

Parent Quiz Are you instilling positive screen habits?

Some screen activities offer teens benefits, while others are linked to serious downsides. Are you helping your teen balance positive digital media use with productive screen-free activities? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you talk** with your teen about the difference between accessing educational content and endless passive scrolling?
2. **Do you discuss** ways to avoid digital distractions during study time, such as putting unneeded devices in another room?
3. **Do you maintain** a digital curfew when devices must be off for the evening and stored outside of your teen's bedroom?
4. **Do you help** your teen plan digital media use in advance?
5. **Do you encourage** healthy screen-free recreational activities, such as exercising, reading and talking to family and friends face-to-face?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your teen use digital media wisely. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Balance is not something you find. It's something you create."
—Jana Kingsford

Build your teen's word bank



Strengthening vocabulary boosts literacy skills and will help your teen express ideas precisely when speaking and writing. To help your teen learn and use new words:

- **Choose a word of the day.** Challenge family members to use it in conversation.
- **Quiz each other.** Have your teen make flash cards with vocabulary words and definitions. Review them together often.
- **Play a texting game.** Text your teen a word and ask your teen to text you back with the definition.

Keep the lid on alcohol

In a recent survey, 75% of 12th graders rated alcohol as the most available drug, and 41% reported using it in the past year. Teen alcohol use can have a devastating effect on learning, including poor memory, reduced ability to solve problems, poor self-control and reduced visual and spatial skills. Do not allow your teen access to alcohol at home, and discuss its dangers regularly.

Source: R.A. Meich and others, "Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2025."

Inspire intrinsic motivation

Students with *intrinsic motivation* are curious and have an inner urge to learn. They are also more likely to persist and continue learning than kids who are motivated by external rewards like grades. To foster this urge:

- **Ask your teen,** "Can you teach me something you recently learned?" Show interest and ask follow-up questions.
- **Ask what your teen** hopes to learn from new assignments or projects.
- **Praise progress** and talk about how good it feels to accomplish something.

Source: P.Y. Oudeyer and others, "Intrinsic Motivation, Curiosity and Learning: Theory and Applications in Educational Technologies," *Progress in Brain Research*, Elsevier.

Helping Students Learn®

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.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc. www.parent-institute.com