

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

HIGH SCHOOL

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



December 2023

## Share six test-taking tips to help your teen get results in math

When a math test looms, even students who have paid attention in class, done their homework and studied can still get nervous. Remembering a few simple test-taking strategies can help students settle in and earn every point they deserve.



Remind your teen to:

1. **Write down memorized formulas** at the top of the paper as soon as the test is handed out. Then, your student can refer to them and free up brain space to focus on solving specific problems.
2. **Look over the whole test** and start with the easy problems. This lets your teen score points and build confidence at the same time. Your teen can circle harder questions to come back to later.
3. **Keep an eye on the clock.** In a 50-minute class period, your teen should not spend 10 minutes on a problem that's only worth five points.
4. **Tackle every problem and show all work.** Even if your teen can't solve a problem completely or doesn't get the right answer, the teacher may award partial credit.
5. **Spend time on solving, not erasing.** If your teen has made an error, it's best just to cross it out and keep going.
6. **Pause after answering** a question and ask "Does this make sense?"



## Bystander reports make schools safer

Everyone has a role to play in school safety—including your teen. Rather than just standing by, it's essential for students to report concerns and information about violence and other issues that affect classmates' well-being.

Make sure your teen knows:

- **Topics to report** include not just threats of school violence, but also concerns or information about bullying, drug use, self-harm, depression and suicide.
- **Students have a duty**—and the power—to support safety. School administrators can't address situations they don't know about. Reporting makes it

possible to prevent tragedies and get people the help they need.

- **All the ways** to make a report. Check with the school if you and your teen are uncertain.
- **Students should encourage** one another to report concerns. If someone is hesitant, your teen could offer to go with them.

Source: "Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening K-12 Reporting Programs," U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

## Instill better sleep habits

Using digital devices, eating, drinking and exercising in the hours right before bed makes it harder to sleep. And vitamins, caffeinated drinks and pills are not substitutes for a good night's sleep. Help your teen trade poor sleep habits for these healthy ones:

- **A relaxing bedtime routine:** a warm shower, pleasure reading, quiet music, etc.
- **A consistent sleep schedule.** Staying up late and sleeping in on weekends only makes waking up harder on Monday.
- **A short power nap** (under 60 minutes) before 4 p.m.

## Pass on organization tips

One major goal of organization is to have what you need when you need it. Teach your teen to:

- **Use sticky notes** to mark items that need to come home or go back to school.
- **Schedule** a weekly backpack clear out and file papers by subject.
- **Prepare for tomorrow** tonight!



## Help your teen keep trying

Giving up when the going gets tough won't get your teen very far in school or life. To promote persistence:

- **Help your teen** brainstorm other ways to solve problems when one way isn't working.
- **Suggest** positive self-talk. Saying, "I'm going to do a great job on this," can keep students motivated.
- **Let your teen** plan breaks. A five-minute rest can restore energy to keep going.
- **Celebrate** when your teen sees a difficult task through.





## My teen wants to drop out. What should I do?

**Q:** My junior skipped school a lot this fall and is failing two classes. Now my teen is thinking about giving up entirely and dropping out. How can I turn this around?

**A:** Students who fall behind in one or more classes often begin to feel that there is no way they can ever catch up. But there is a way back.

Take these steps together now to change your teen's future:

- **Meet with the teachers.** Ask what your teen can do to improve grades before the end of the year. Make up missed work? Do projects for extra credit? Help your teen set realistic goals, such as turning in all assignments.
- **Consult your teen's school counselor.** Together, develop a plan to get your student back on track to graduate. Can students retake classes over the summer? What other support is available for struggling students?
- **Talk with your teen** about why staying in school is important. Say that you will support your teen's efforts to graduate. Next, have your student find out what jobs are available for dropouts. How far will minimum wage go when your teen wants to drive a car and live independently?
- **Check in regularly** with teachers and the school to make sure your teen is in every class, every day.



## Parent Quiz

### Are you encouraging civic responsibility?

Being part of a community—at school or in the wider world—offers benefits. But it also carries responsibilities. Are you helping your teen learn how to contribute in positive ways? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you talk** with your teen about the link between rights and responsibilities?
2. **Do you discuss** the importance of being honest with others? Demonstrating honesty lets people know they can trust your teen.
3. **Do you have** conversations about current issues and events? Do you ask your teen's opinion about them?
4. **Do you suggest** peaceful and constructive actions your teen can take in response to issues of concern?

5. **Do you explain** why making the right choice matters, even if it isn't popular?

#### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen become an asset to the community. For each no, try that idea.

"What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."  
—Jane Goodall

## Keep the focus on school

Are festive events and winter break plans distracting your teen? To help your student stay focused and motivated to learn:

- **Ask questions** about classes. What is your teen learning? Has your student missed classes or assignments? If so, discuss goals for timely performance.
- **Suggest a checklist.** Have your teen make a list of everything that has to be finished before the winter break starts.
- **Make it clear** that school is your teen's top priority.

## Have a talk about alcohol

Alcohol use among high school students is rebounding after a decline during the pandemic. The effects of alcohol on teens' brains and ability to learn can be devastating. Teen alcohol use can lead to poor memory, reduced ability to solve problems, poor self-control, and reduced visual and spatial skills. Make it clear to your teen that drinking doesn't solve problems—it causes them.

Source: R.A. Miech and others: "Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2022: Secondary School Students," The National Institute on Drug Abuse at The National Institutes of Health.

## Foster feelings of gratitude

Writing in a "gratitude journal" for a few minutes each week can have a positive impact on students' grades and engagement at school. Encourage your teen to write regularly about topics such as:

- **A personality trait** your teen is glad to have.
- **A recent opportunity.**
- **A growing experience.**
- **Something great** that happened to your teen or a friend.



Source: G. Bono, "Gratitude Practices at School That Work (and Why Some Don't)," EducationWeek.

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