

Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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



December 2025

Help your elementary schooler develop math fact fluency

Math fluency is similar to being fluent in a language. Fluent math students know that $2 + 2 = 4$ without having to think about it, just as they know "Hello" is a greeting. Being able to recall math facts automatically lets your child focus on the more complex aspects of solving problems.

To strengthen your child's fluency in math:



- **Use counters.** Small items like dry beans or buttons help students "see" numbers and processes. Your child can put several pennies in a cup, dump them out and add those that land on "heads" plus those that land on "tails." Then, have your child add the tails number to the heads number. Or, subtract the heads number from the total number of coins.
- **Play Math War.** Remove face cards from a deck and deal the rest face down. Each player flips over two cards. In Addition War, each player adds the numbers on their cards, and the one with the higher sum wins all the cards. In Subtraction War, each player subtracts their smaller number from their larger one: the one with the larger difference wins the cards.
- **Choose a number,** such as the date. Ask your child to come up with as many addition and subtraction facts as possible that equal that number. On the 15th, your child might think of $20 - 5$, $7 + 8$ and $10 + 15$.

Source: N.M. McNeil and others, "What the Science of Learning Teaches Us About Arithmetic Fluency," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Sage Journals.



Fill winter break with learning fun

The thought of days of free time during a school break can inspire joy in students—and mild panic in their families. To avoid hearing "I'm bored" from your child, plan a few enjoyable activities that promote learning:

- **Volunteer as a family.** Turn your child's attention from the "I wants" to helping others who are less fortunate.
- **Cook together.** Help your child make seasonal foods you remember from your childhood. Share your memories.
- **Read and watch.** Choose a book that has been made into a movie. Read it together, and then watch the movie. Discuss how the two are alike and different.
- **Explore first-person history.** Help your child interview relatives—even you—about life in the past. Together, brainstorm a list of questions, such as, "What was school like for you when you were my age?" and "What trends were popular?" Have your child record or write down the conversations.

Kindness is empowering

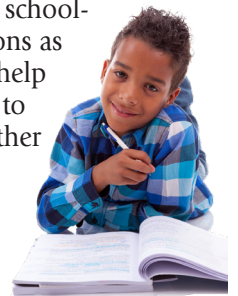
It's true that children aren't always kind to one another. But your child doesn't have to accept unkindness as the norm. Talk together about ways to respond if a classmate is being treated unkindly. Then, challenge your child to do at least one nice thing for a classmate each week. Explain that your child has the power to make a difference.



Say 'no' to multitasking

It isn't really possible to concentrate on many things at once. Research shows that when students multitask, their minds just switch quickly between tasks without focusing on any.

When your child does schoolwork, eliminate distractions as much as possible. Then, help your child schedule time to do tasks consecutively, rather than at the same time. Limit multitasking to activities that don't need attention, like eating a snack while chatting.



Source: C. Kubu, Ph.D. and A. Machado, MD, "The Science is Clear: Why Multitasking Doesn't Work," Cleveland Clinic.

Check off responsibilities

Checklists are useful tools that can help your child remember to fulfill responsibilities without being reminded. Sit down together and make a list of responsibilities your child is ready to handle independently. Here is a starter list you can adapt:

- **Get up on time.**
- **Complete schoolwork.**
- **Read at least 20 minutes a day.**
- **Take care of personal hygiene.**

Agree on consequences for shirking. And be sure to praise your child for a job well done!



How can I teach fairness to my highly competitive kids?

Q: My children are so competitive that it's an issue. My younger child cries after losing, and the older one sometimes cheats when my back is turned. How can I teach them to be good sports?

A: Whether children are competing in games, in the classroom or in life, they need to learn how to play fairly and accept the results. To help your children learn these lessons:

- **Explain that fair play is important.** Make it clear you expect them to play by the rules and be gracious to opponents—win or lose.
- **Set time limits.** Establish a time to stop playing and set a timer before the game starts. When it goes off, the game is over.
- **Be gentle when correcting** your children for making a wrong move. Just explain what the player should do instead.
- **Discourage cheating.** Review the rules at the start of the game. If a child tries to cheat, just repeat the rules. The second time, calmly say, "When you don't play by the rules, people get upset. If it happens again, the game is over."
- **Reject trash talk.** Every poke, put-down or unkind comment earns the player a foul. Five fouls, and the player is out.



Are you teaching your child to move on?

Disappointments happen to all students from time to time. Events are canceled, games are lost, friendships fade. Are you helping your child learn to move forward after letdowns? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child see what can't be changed and what can? "You can't change the weather. But you can change your plans."
2. **Do you talk** about things to learn from mistakes? "Next time, you can start studying a few days earlier."
3. **Do you explain** that it is OK to express feelings, but not OK to sulk?
4. **Do you teach** your child to expect the unexpected and respond in positive ways?

5. **Do you help** your child brainstorm next steps to take?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to cope with disappointment. For each no, try that idea.

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them."
—Maya Angelou

Discuss respectful behavior

When children behave respectfully toward teachers, classmates and school staff, they help create the positive academic environment all students need to learn. Remind your child that it's important to:

- **Be courteous to everyone.**
- **Raise a hand** and wait to be called on, and avoid interrupting others.
- **Listen when the teacher** or classmates are speaking.
- **Accept constructive feedback** from the teacher politely. Teachers point out mistakes so students can learn from them.

Play with punctuation

Punctuation makes writing easier to read and understand. Here's a fun way to get this point across to your child and provide some practice at the same time:

1. **Write a short story** and remove the punctuation.
2. **Ask your child** to read it aloud. It's challenging!
3. **Edit the story together**, adding punctuation that makes it easy (or funny) to read. Talk about why you are choosing—or not choosing—certain marks. Then, let your child write a story for you to punctuate.



Let your child tackle it first

Students gain skills and confidence when they learn to do things for themselves. Let your child take the lead with:

- **Addressing confusion** about schoolwork or grades. Ask your student to talk to the teacher about it before you step in.
- **Solving minor issues** with peers. Discuss things your child can do.

If issues persist or are serious, such as bullying, contact the school yourself right away.

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