

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup> Mentor Public Schools

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## *make the difference!*



## Celebrate famous February birthdays with learning fun

February is filled with birthdays of notable people. Plan some fun activities to help your child learn about these heroes, writers, inventors, scientists and artists:

- **February 4**—Rosa Parks. Go online to learn more about this heroine of America's civil rights movement. There are lots of books about her, too. Check some out at the library.
- **February 8**—Jules Verne. He is often referred to as the father of science fiction. Read one of his science fiction stories together.
- **February 11**—Thomas Edison. Ask your child to invent something to improve daily life.
- **February 12**—Abraham Lincoln. He delivered one of the best known speeches in American history, the Gettysburg Address. Challenge your child to memorize the speech.
- **February 15**—Susan B. Anthony. Go online to learn more about this activist who fought for women's right to vote.
- **February 19**—Nicolaus Copernicus. Take a walk together and look at the stars this early astronomer studied.
- **February 21**—Nina Simone. Listen to the singer's music with your child and learn more about her life.
- **February 22**—George Washington. Ask what your child would do as president of the United States.
- **February 25**—Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Look at his paintings online or in a book. Ask your child to create a painting in Renoir's style.

## Four ways to strengthen your child's character



Values help students make good choices, develop self-esteem, and become responsible individuals.

Teaching values at home supports what schools are doing to create a positive school culture that helps all students learn.

Here are four strategies to build your child's character:

1. **Think about the values** that are important to you and your family. Talk about them openly with your child.
2. **Teach by example.** Your example is the most powerful teacher of all. Ask yourself, "If my child watched my behavior all day, what lessons would it teach?"
3. **Set high standards.** Expect your child to act responsibly, to be kind to others and to tell the truth. Some families make it a point of family pride. "In the Smith family, we tell the truth."
4. **Talk about the Golden Rule.** Teaching kids to treat others the way they would like to be treated helps them make better choices. Ask your child, "Would you want someone to talk to you that way?"

## Research shows nutrition is linked to academic performance



Have you heard the expression “food for thought”? Well, it turns out to be, quite literally, the truth.

Good nutrition really does feed the brain. And it starts with breakfast. Research shows that eating breakfast helps students stay on task and recall information. Eating breakfast regularly is even linked to improved overall school performance.

What can you do? If your child doesn't eat breakfast at school, keep easy options like low-sugar, whole grain cereals and fruit on hand. And be prepared for a rushed morning with items your child can eat on the way out the door, like a hard-boiled egg.

Whether you're packing lunch or your child is eating a school lunch, teach your child to avoid high-calorie and high-fat foods. When children eat a meal that is high in fat and sugar,

their bodies tend to become very tired—which makes it difficult to concentrate.

Children are typically hungry when they get home from school, so be sure to keep a variety of healthy snacks on hand—fruits, veggies, cheese, sugar-free yogurt and whole grain crackers.

When you get groceries, prioritize foods you want your child to eat. Your child is more likely to choose healthy options if that is all you have in the house.

Source: C. St John, M.P.H., R.D.N., “Proof Positive: Breakfast Improves Kids' Grades, Mood and Weight,” HealthyEating.Org.

**“Take care of your body.  
It's the only place you  
have to live.”**

—Jim Rohn

## Help a disorganized child take responsibility for belongings



Your child has a special notebook to keep track of school assignments—but left it at school. Your child needs to turn in a

math worksheet—but it is sitting on the counter at home.

Some children have difficulty taking responsibility for their schoolwork. Here are three steps you can take to help your child learn to be more responsible:

**1. Ask your child** to help develop a plan. Talk about ways to get more organized. You might say, “You're having trouble getting to school with all your assignments and bringing home everything you

need. What could you do that would help you remember? Why don't you think about it, and we'll discuss it at dinner.”

- 2. Let your child** try to make the plan work—without jumping in to help. For example, if your child leaves an assignment at home, don't rush it to school. Instead, let your child face the consequences.
- 3. Suggest changes** to the plan if it's not working, but let your child put them into action. Say something like, “How about if we try placing a box here by the door? Then you can put everything that needs to go to school in the box. What do you think of that idea?”

## Are you helping your child deal with frustration?



Elementary school students don't always have the skills to cope with life's minor hassles. Are you helping your child learn to deal with frustration? Respond *yes* or *no* to each statement:

- 1. I understand** that it isn't my job to protect my child from all of life's ups and downs.
- 2. I encourage my child** to keep trying when stuck on a homework problem. I ask questions to help my child think of solutions.
- 3. I help my child** link effort to success. Sometimes I say, “Learning isn't always easy. But you'll get it if you stick with it.”
- 4. I point out real-life stories** of successful people who have overcome challenges.
- 5. I put my child's feelings** into words. “You're frustrated that learning this science concept is taking longer than you hoped. You'll get there.”

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your responses are *yes*, you are giving your child opportunities to work through frustration. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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# Support your child and promote learning as an academic ‘coach’



An effective coach is someone who guides, encourages and inspires. When you play this role, you help motivate your

child to persevere, problem-solve and find answers.

To be a positive academic coach:

- **Act as a resource.** Expect your child to complete assignments independently. But be available to offer encouragement, answer questions and suggest places where your child can find additional information, such as a website or a particular reference book.
- **Talk about the things** your child is learning. Grades matter, but they are merely a result of learning. It is more important to emphasize

the *learning process*. This includes hard work, persistence and making steady progress.

- **Be willing to say, “I don’t know.”** There may be times when you are not familiar with the material your student is learning. If your child comes to you with a question, it’s OK to say, “I never learned that. Let’s look online or in your book.”
- **Keep in mind** that your child has strengths and weaknesses. Some students never need help in English, but may struggle in math. Support and encourage your child in every subject, but do not expect the same performance in every subject.

**Source:** K.T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth–Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.

# Strengthen social skills by focusing on social awareness



When students have the ability to understand and empathize with others, they can form solid connections with

classmates, teachers and friends. They are also able to think about situations from different points of view.

Social awareness allows children to feel compassion for others—even when their background and culture may be different. Families can help children develop their social skills so they can interact, cooperate and problem-solve positively and respectfully with people from a variety of backgrounds.

To develop and practice social awareness, teach your child to:

- **Consider the needs of others.** Tell your child, “It’s great that you and

your friends play tag together every afternoon. But what about the new neighborhood kids? How do you think they feel watching you guys play? Do you think they would like to be included?”

- **Understand that people** may respond differently under similar circumstances. One child might be excited to meet a new friend, while another might be nervous and shy.
- **Respond appropriately.** Your child could return a smile with a smile, offer to listen if the other person wants to talk, or suggest an activity to take the person’s mind off of worries. For example, your child could say, “Let’s get out of here and ride our bikes around the neighborhood.”

**Q:** My fourth-grader is very competitive in sports. The teacher has noticed this competitive spirit in the classroom, too. Instead of taking the time to be neat or to check work, my child rushes through assignments, hoping to be the first one finished. I know this habit will affect my child’s grades. How can I help?

## Preguntas y respuestas

**A:** It sounds like your child has a habit of turning tasks into competitions—and wants to be first across the finish line. But being first isn’t what matters when it comes to schoolwork.

To change this habit:

- **Talk with the teacher.** Say you would like to work together on a plan to help your child focus more on *quality* work, instead of *speedy* work.
- **Talk to your child.** Put that competitive nature to work by using a comparison from a sport, such as basketball. Explain that sometimes it is important for a player to get down the court as fast as possible. But when a player is shooting free throws, accuracy is more important than speed. Doing schoolwork is more like shooting free throws.
- **Look over your child’s** assignments each night and check the work for neatness and accuracy. Let your child know that if it is not up to an appropriate standard, it will have to be redone. In school, the teacher can try the same approach, looking over work before it’s handed in. Soon your child will figure out that slowing down results in higher quality work the first time—which actually takes less time in the long run!



# It Matters: Test Success

## Studying should be a daily habit for students



Whose name would you remember more easily—someone you spent a little time with once, or someone you see regularly?

Of course, it's the person you see often. Studying works the same way. It's better to study something repeatedly over time than to cram before a test. The keys to studying effectively are:

- **Organization.** Teach your child to use assignment notebooks and calendars to schedule study time and keep track of test dates. Making daily to-do lists works well for studying, too.
- **Participation.** Expect your child to listen in class and take notes. Your child should not be afraid to ask the teacher questions. Most likely, there are other students in the class with the same questions.
- **Dedication.** Designate a quiet, comfortable spot for working and make sure studying is part of your child's daily routine. If there are no assignments, encourage your child to read ahead or tackle some sample problems.
- **Review.** Your child should spend a short time reviewing lessons each day. Notes from recent classes are especially good to read over.
- **Correction.** It's important for your child to correct wrong answers on quizzes, assignments and tests. This reinforces learning and prevents your child from falling behind.

## Reduce your child's test anxiety with four proven strategies

It's normal to get a little nervous before a big test, but many students suffer from excessive test anxiety. They worry so much about taking the test that their performance suffers.

To help your child relieve those pre-test jitters:

1. **Focus on preparation.** Encourage your child to spread studying out over time. True learning requires time to review and think about the content. And knowing the material is the best way to reduce anxiety and stress.
2. **Discourage cramming,** which can increase anxiety and interfere with clear thinking. The most important things your child can do the day before a test are to review and then get a good night's sleep.
3. **Encourage a positive outlook.** Build confidence by reminding



your child of strengths. Have your child imagine what it will feel like to do well on the test.

4. **Maintain perspective.** Remind your child that test scores aren't everything. Make sure your child knows that your support and love are unconditional.

## Help your child review graded tests and make adjustments



Your child is used to learning material before a test. But what about after the test? Unless your student gets a perfect score on every test, every time, there is still learning to be done!

After a test, your child should:

- **Review the graded test** and make notes about which answers were correct and which were incorrect.
- **Identify the types of errors** most commonly made. Mistakes generally come in two forms: Carelessness—your child may have rushed through the question.

Lack of preparation—your child didn't study enough, or is still confused about a topic and needs to ask the teacher for help.

- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm together about how to reduce careless errors. For example, your child could read questions twice and check work before turning it in. For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is more studying. Your child should start to review several days before the test. The last day should be spent going over everything a final time, not learning new material.