

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

HIGH SCHOOL

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



May 2026

## Help your teen maintain focus through the last day of school

Summer is approaching, but it isn't here yet. High school students are still busy learning new material, completing end-of-year projects and reviewing for final tests.

To help your student stay on track, emphasize that school is a priority through the last day. Encourage your teen to:

- **Make time every day** for schoolwork *and* studying. As well as completing assignments, your teen should allow time to commit the material to memory and practice recalling it.
- **Plan ahead and use time wisely.** Now is not the time to put things off to the last minute. Help your teen break big tasks down into more manageable parts and schedule time to do each one.
- **Take brain breaks.** Suggest that your teen take a 10-minute break after every one hour of work. Breaks help prevent burnout.
- **Tackle problems as they arise.** Is your teen worried about a grade in a class, or struggling with a particular assignment? Tell your teen to reach out to the teacher for advice rather than just hoping for the best. Taking action immediately allows your student to use all the time available to make necessary improvements.



## Get a summer start on college essays

Students who will be applying to college in the fall can do themselves a favor this summer. Most applications require written essays. Writing them while classes are out will reduce your teen's stress in the fall. Share these four tips:

- 1. Start early.** Some colleges require two or more essays. More than 1,000 schools, however, use the Common Application, which lets students write one essay to submit to multiple schools. Visit [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org) to check out the 2026-27 essay prompts.
- 2. Be authentic.** It's important for teens to write essays that show how they think and what they care

about. Having family members or AI write essays is never OK.

- 3. Answer the question.** The essay should tell your teen's story, but must also address the prompt.
- 4. Allow time for rewriting.** After writing a few drafts this summer, your teen can get feedback from a trusted teacher in the fall.

Source: "Advice from Undergraduate Admissions Officers," Purdue OWL, Purdue University.

## Promote outdoor activities

Nature inspires wonder. And research shows it can also boost teens' mood and learning. Encourage your teen to try these activities:

- **Identify plants** and animals using a field guide or an app, such as Seek.
- **Go on a photo** scavenger hunt. Suggest making a list of items to take pictures of: a cumulous cloud, a spider web, a tree's shadow, etc.
- **Make a sundial** using sidewalk chalk. Have your teen research how.



Source: K. Weir, "Nurtured by Nature," *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

## Talk about tough decisions

When it is tempting to do the wrong thing, it's vital for your teen to be prepared to do the right thing. Talk together about situations that call for making tough choices: *If a friend asked for a test answer when the teacher was out of the room, would you give it?*

Explain that even minor choices—like hitting the snooze button and missing first period—can have big consequences. Making the right choice may seem hard, but your teen will have an easier time in the future.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Simon & Schuster.

## Advise exam preparation

Many high schoolers will take final exams in the weeks to come. Help your student get a jump start on studying. Recommend that your teen:

- 1. Talk** with teachers about what will be covered.
- 2. Organize** materials—assignments, quizzes, handouts, etc.
- 3. Schedule** study time on a calendar.





## My teen acts so entitled. How can I change this?

**Q:** No matter what I do for my teen, it never seems to be enough. How can I get my teen to be more appreciative and stop taking people and things for granted?

**A:** Gratitude strengthens relationships, reduces depression and lessens anxiety. It is also linked to academic achievement. Students who practice gratitude tend to be more engaged and motivated—which can result in a deeper understanding of the material.

To foster a grateful attitude in your teen:

- **Focus attention** on all the necessities your teen and your family have. Help your teen think about what life might be like for others who have less. Downplay family discussions of material possessions.
- **Separate privileges and gifts** from rights.
- **Be a role model.** Let your teen see you thanking people and returning favors. Thank your teen for things, too.
- **Point out kind gestures.** Note how wonderful it was for someone to take the time to do something nice.
- **Start a weekly tradition** of sharing gratitude. Pick a regular night to have everyone at the dinner table say what they were grateful for in the last week.



## Are you stressing the value of effort?

With effort, your teen is capable of achieving “personal bests” in every school subject. Are you teaching your teen that when students work hard, they get more out of school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you compliment** your teen's positive work habits? “It's great you are starting right in on your project. You're making the most of your time.”
2. **Do you notice** and celebrate the progress your teen makes?
3. **Do you encourage** your teen to take pride in doing a good job? “It must feel great knowing the work you put into your paper was worth it. It is so persuasive.”
4. **Do you lead** by example and put diligent effort into your work?
5. **Do you pay** more attention to effort and learning than grades?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are nurturing your teen's motivation to strive. For each no, try that idea.*

“Give your best effort, because you are worth your best effort.”  
—Denis Waitley

## Fill summer with learning

It's OK to give your teen a week or so to relax after school lets out for the summer. Then, show your teen that learning never stops! To reinforce skills in:

- **Writing:** Suggest that your teen pick a new skill to learn and record progress in a journal.
- **History:** Ask your teen to research past events or notable people that have changed your community.
- **Science:** Challenge your teen to plant and care for a garden. This requires learning what plants need to grow well.



## Stick with basic routines

Keeping up with a few basic routines over the summer develops teens' self-discipline and sense of responsibility—and makes readjusting to school easier in the fall. Retain routines for:

- **Sleeping.** Bedtime and rising time can be a little later, but stick to a schedule.
- **Exercise.** Plan for at least one hour a day.
- **Screen use.** More free time should not mean more time spent passively scrolling.

## Suggest fun ways to read

Reading for pleasure daily this summer will help your teen maintain literacy skills and school readiness. To encourage it:

- **Show you understand** that your teen is maturing by sharing and discussing articles on more grown-up topics.
- **Be reading “tourists.”** Browse libraries, thrift stores and yard sales in nearby towns for interesting titles.
- **Hold a summer “film series.”** Take turns choosing a book that has a movie version. After everyone reads the book, pop some popcorn and watch the movie.

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