MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

March 2024

St. Landry Parish School Board - Title I
Tawasha Thomas, Coordinator

Help your child practice strategies for managing time effectively



Middle schoolers are expected to take on more responsibility for learning. Self-management skills are vital for doing this well. Research shows that developing these skills helps students earn higher grades and test scores, and increases the likelihood of graduation.

One of the self-management skills that can be challenging for middle schoolers is time management. To help your child learn to use time wisely:

- **Review the week ahead** together on Sundays. Block out commitments on a calendar. Help your child calculate the amount of time available to fulfill responsibilities and plan when to do them.
- **Promote the use of checklists.** Encourage your child to make daily lists of tasks to complete and to cross off completed tasks.
- **Help determine priorities.** There isn't always time for everything kids need and want to do. Ask your child, "What's the most important thing you have to do today? Do that first. What's the *next* most important?"
- **Demonstrate how to break down** large assignments into smaller parts and schedule a due date for each part.
- **Show how useful small amounts of time** can be. Your child could study flash cards on the way to practice, or solve a few math problems in the 10 minutes before dinner. Small chunks of time add up to big advantages.

Source: S. Claro and S. Loeb, "Self-Management Skills and Student Achievement Gains: Evidence from California's CORE Districts," Policy Analysis for California Education.

Keep your child on track to graduate

When it comes to helping students stay in school and graduate, the middle school years are key. Many students who drop out of school between ninth and twelfth grade start down that path in sixth, seventh or eighth grade.

Studies show that without intervention, sixth graders are 75 percent more likely to drop out if they:

- **Miss school** more than 20 percent of the time.
- **Fail a core class,** such as English or math.
- **Earn poor grades** as a result of behavior issues.

To help your child stay on track:

- **Express belief** in your middle schooler's ability to succeed.
- **Insist on attendance** in every class, unless your child is ill.
- **Encourage involvement** in extracurricular activities at school.
- **Work with the teachers** to support your child's learning.

Source: E.M. Allensworth and others, "5 Key Findings for Middle Grades," UChicago CCSR.

Encourage journal writing



Journaling helps students understand their feelings and behaviors so they can make better decisions. And it's great writing practice! Urge your child write in a journal a few minutes a day. Suggest prompts like:

- *How are you feeling? What do you like to do when you feel this way?*
- *What thoughts do you have about changes you've noticed in the world recently?*
- *List four true sentences that start with "I will always remember... ."*

Play a paraphrase game

To help your middle schooler practice listening and remembering spoken information, play a game at dinner. Take turns describing something that happened during the day. The next person to speak must correctly summarize what the previous person said before sharing their own news.

Boost math test success



Several test-taking strategies help students get every point they deserve on math tests. Encourage your child to:

- **Write down** any memorized formulas at the top of the test. Then your child can simply refer to them as needed.
- **Read the directions** carefully.
- **Show all work.** The teacher may give partial credit, even if the answer is wrong.
- **Use all the available time.** Your child should not feel pressured by how quickly others finish.
- **Double-check work,** and look for careless errors. Are the decimal points in the right place? Are graph axes labeled?

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Q&A How can I get my child to take assignments seriously?

Q: My child always studies for tests and quizzes, and does fine on them. But homework is a different story. How can I get my child to take more responsibility for assignments?



A: Quizzes and tests may seem more significant to your child. But doing homework in middle school not only reinforces learning, it also helps students develop effective study habits they will need in high school.

To help your child take responsibility for schoolwork:

- **Have a conversation** with your student. Spell out the issue clearly. "I've noticed that you are letting a lot of assignments slide. That is not OK, so let's figure out how to change this pattern."
- **Set a daily homework time.** Find a time that works for your child and make it part of daily routine. On days with no assignments, your middle schooler can use the time to review, work ahead or read.
- **Establish positive consequences.** "When your schoolwork is finished, you can relax with a game."
- **Follow up.** Say that you will be checking to see that all your child's assignments are turned in and complete. Decide on a consequence if you find they are not. If your strategies aren't working, get teachers involved.

Parent Quiz Are you mentoring your middle schooler?

Mentors are wise and trusted counselors who teach and coach. You can be your child's strongest mentor. Are you actively guiding your middle schooler through these formative years? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you take** time to share your special interests, knowledge and experience with your child?

___**2. Do you encourage** your student to observe, ask questions and keep an open mind?

___**3. Do you help** your child set goals and work to reach them?

___**4. Do you try** to find resources to help develop your child's abilities and talents?

___**5. Do you praise** your child's progress and resilience, no matter what the outcome?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean that you are helping your child flourish in school and in life. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you than you see in yourself and helps bring it out of you."
—Bob Proctor

Better notes, more learning

Even if teachers provide handouts, taking notes in class will help your child remember explanations and what material was emphasized when it's time to study for tests. Share these note-taking tips with your child:

- **Take notes by hand.**
- **Don't try to write** everything down. Instead, listen for key facts and the relationships between them.
- **Write down** what the teacher repeats or writes down.
- **Review notes** each day, and expand on or clarify information so that it will still be understandable days or weeks later.

Support safety efforts

Safety at school is everyone's responsibility. One important way to help is to have open discussions with your child about:

- **The school's safety** and security procedures. If you don't know what they are, ask the school office.
- **School rules** and discipline policies. Talk about the reasons for them.
- **Strategies for solving** problems and resolving conflicts peacefully.

Also remember: If you hear something that concerns you, tell the school immediately.

Reduce digital time-wasters



Often, middle schoolers will stop to watch a video or play an online game "just for a minute," and not realize that half an hour has gone by. To build awareness, encourage your child to spend one week tracking recreational screen use and how much time is spent on what activities. Then, challenge your child to reduce the unproductive time the following week.

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