

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Shenandoah Valley Elementary School



May 2026

## Prepare your child to manage end-of-year projects step by step

In the spring, teachers often assign long-term projects to help students apply the skills they have learned. One of those skills is time management. Reinforcing this skill at home will boost your child's ability to tackle a big project successfully.

Help your elementary schooler:

- **Think about the steps** necessary to complete the project. Ask your child questions: *Will you need to do research? What kind of outline will you use to organize your thoughts? Do you have the supplies you'll need for your poster?*
- **Block out time** on a calendar to complete each step. Students often delay starting long-term projects because they think they have lots of time. Assigning a deadline for each step and scheduling the time to do the work provides a more realistic view and helps keep students on track.
- **Plan a short break** after completing each step. Your child could enjoy a favorite healthy snack or short activity. Structured breaks allow your child to celebrate progress and build motivation for the steps ahead.

Then, as your child works on the project, monitor progress. Schedule regular times to check-in. If issues arise, help your child brainstorm solutions.



## Discuss this year and what comes next

Your child has come a long way since September—mastering new skills, reading new books and perhaps even overcoming some learning obstacles. This month, review this year's learning together and look ahead to next year.

Talk with your child about:

- **Successes.** What goals did your child accomplish? What project did your student learn the most from? What strategies did your child use effectively to handle challenges?
- **Personal growth.** How has your child changed this year? Discuss specific instances where your elementary schooler showed resilience, a positive attitude or a strong work ethic.
- **What's ahead.** What seems exciting about next year? Is there a subject your child would like to improve in or an extracurricular activity that sounds interesting?
- **A new goal.** Have your child choose something to learn this summer. Together, make a detailed plan to achieve the goal.

## Suggest a summer journal

Journaling is a low-pressure way for kids to practice writing. Themes make it fun. Encourage your child to keep:

- **A research log.** Your child could research a topic, such as *cheetahs*, and write about what they eat, their predators, how they communicate, etc.
- **A travel log.** Your child can record the sights, sounds and smells of trips around the block or farther away.
- **An observation log.** Your child can describe things in detail, and note if and how they change over time.



## Celebrate successful effort

Success in one area can motivate children to try to succeed in another. So when your child reaches a challenging goal, it's time to celebrate!

Take a picture of your child with evidence of the goal—a better report card, a finished book, etc. Frame the photo and place it by your child's bed. Seeing it and starting each day feeling like an achiever may inspire your student to work toward the next goal.



## Mix it up at reading time

Reading at home every day for at least 30 minutes supports students' skill development. Adding variety to reading time can keep your child interested. You can:

- **Read the news together.** Choose a newspaper (in print or online) with comics. Ask your child which is funniest. Then, read and discuss an article or two.
- **Take turns reading.** You could alternate pages. Or, you can read the narrative and have your child read the dialogue.
- **Encourage practical reading.** Have your child read instructions while you cook, build or repair something.



## How can I help my child improve before next year?

**Q:** My fourth grader is barely passing. I know my child needs help or next year will be worse, but I can't afford a tutor. What can I do now and over the summer to help my child catch up?

**A:** There are ways to help your child have a better year in fifth grade, and you are right to start now.

To get your child back on track:

- **Talk with the teacher** as soon as possible. Find out what specific areas your child struggles with. Ask what resources are available through the school to help your student strengthen those skills, now and over the summer. Can the teacher recommend educational apps and strategies you can use at home? Together, lay out a summer learning plan.
- **Rule out possible medical causes.** Have your child's vision and hearing tested.
- **Schedule time each day** for your child to work on school skills.
- **Reinforce your child's sense of competence.** Offer reminders of past learning successes, particularly those that involved effort.
- **Have fun learning together** this summer. Visit museums and historic sites. Attend a free concert. Go on nature hikes and try to identify things you see. New experiences strengthen your child's foundation for learning.



## Are you committed to summer safety?

Fun outdoor activities make summer special. Taking safety precautions keeps the focus on the fun. Are you doing all you can to ensure your child's health and safety during the summer? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you have** your child put on sunscreen and insect protection when playing outside?
2. **Do you require** your child to wear a helmet when riding a bike, scooter or skateboard?
3. **Do you make sure** that your child is closely supervised when playing in or near water?
4. **Do you give** your child plenty of water to drink when playing or exercising in the heat?
5. **Do you sign** your child up for supervised activities that provide active, interesting things to do?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child enjoy the summer safely. For each no, try that idea.*

"When the sun is shining I can do anything; no mountain is too high, no trouble too difficult to overcome."

—Wilma Rudolph

## Plan a summer of learning

Summer offers countless opportunities for children to learn in ways that don't feel like school. To promote learning all season:

1. **Grow a garden** together. Choosing, planting and caring for plants is a hands-on way to practice science, math and reasoning skills.
2. **Have a weekly game night.** Choose board games that involve reading, math and strategic thinking.
3. **Sign up for a reading program** at the library. These often include read-alouds, contests, book clubs and crafts.



## Hold on to helpful routines

Keeping up some routines at home over the summer will make it easier for your child to readjust when school resumes in the fall. Maintain routines for:

- **Sleeping.** Bed and wake times can be slightly later, but stick to a schedule.
- **Reading.** Make time for it every day.
- **A daily family meal.**
- **Screen use.** Maintain limits and encourage healthy, active alternatives.

## Promote community service

In a community—whether it's a family, a school or a city—members have responsibilities to others. Help your child learn about giving back by including volunteering in your summer plans. Your family could:

- **Participate in a clean-up effort** on your street or at a local park.
- **Fight hunger.** Your family may be able to collect food or assemble bags of supplies for a food bank or meal program.
- **Make greeting cards** to send to elderly or housebound neighbors.

### Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)