

Back to School, Already?



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I always loved the beginning of the school year as a student and as a teacher. It was always an opportunity to begin again, to do things better in the new school year.

How can we as parents and guardians be better this year? We are, after all, partners in the education of our children. Taking on the role of partner with our children's school is the best way to ensure our children will receive the best education possible. Research has shown a connection between parent engagement and improved student learning. How can you be supportive partners and advocates? Here are some suggestions:

Get to know your children's teachers and the principal. Communicate regularly.

Get to know various teachers' personalities and how they work with children. Get to know their expectations and goals for their students.

Talk to the teachers about your children. Tell them

about your family's values and traditions. Build two-way relationships.

Learn about what your children are learning. Some teachers send notes home with that information. If they do not, ask your children and ask the teachers. Look at the work your children bring home to get a clue. Sometimes schools hold literacy, math or science nights. These are great opportunities to become familiar with what and how your children are learning.

Talk to your children about their day. If the answer you receive to "What did you learn?" is "Nothing.", ask more specific questions. "Tell me something funny that happened in school today." "Tell me something surprising that happened." "Tell me something serious or sad that happened." These starters should get a conversation going.

If your young child is having problems with homework or with schoolwork, and you are at a loss as to how to provide support, schedule a meeting with the teacher. Use the time to share about your child's experience from your perspective and seek to understand what your child needs to be able to do from the teacher's perspective. At the end, clarify how the teacher will support your child's growth and how you will support it from home. Follow up until you are satisfied that your child is doing better. As children get older they should be encouraged to communicate directly with the teacher when they are having problems learning, but it is still helpful to your child if you monitor to make sure the support is being sought and received.

Help in the classroom or take part in classroom

activities such as field trips to the extent you can. Children love seeing their parents in school. That will likely change when they reach middle school, so take advantage while you can.

Get involved in school activities. Attend meetings and social events to keep abreast of the needs of the school at large. Parents can play a critical role in the school's welfare, whether through school beautification activities or fundraising efforts aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for students.

Know that the school belongs to you as a member of the community. Own it. As you take on the feeling of ownership, so will your child. When children have a feeling of belonging in their school, they learn better.

If English is not your first language and you are having trouble communicating at school, request translation. Schools must provide translators when a language is spoken by at least 15% of students at the school.

As parents and guardians, we have the opportunity to renew our commitment to the education of our precious children, a critical path to their future and to ours.

With love and affection,

Rosemarie

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