

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



September 2018

Riverside Middle School  
Where Character Counts!

## Setting goals helps your child plan for a successful year in school

Setting learning goals at the beginning of the school year will help your child make the most of the year ahead. But who should set them? Now that your child is in middle school, expect him to take more responsibility for his learning. Setting his own goals is an ideal way for him to start.

To support and guide your child, have him:

- **Identify his highest priority** and set a specific goal to address it. "Get all A's" is probably too broad, especially if your child has struggled in the past. Help him narrow his focus to something more realistic and achievable. "I want to have a B in math by the end of the quarter."
- **Write his goal down** and post it where he will see it often.
- **Think through steps** he will take to reach his goal. If your child plans to study math for an extra 30 minutes each day, he will need to block the time out on his calendar and reduce the time spent on other activities.
- **Evaluate.** Every few weeks, help your child evaluate the progress he is making. What changes, if any, should he make? If he achieves his goal at the end of the quarter, he can explore and set new ones. If he doesn't, he can make a new plan of action.

Source: "Grades 6-8 Goal Setting," The Colorado Education Initiative, [niswc.com/startgoals](http://niswc.com/startgoals).



## Build a solid foundation for the future

Attendance in middle school is critical to later academic achievement. Research shows that middle schoolers who improve their attendance do better in high school than kids with similar grades who don't. It's also true that:

- **Middle school students** who miss more than 10 percent of school are more likely to fail in high school.
  - **Absences affect grades.** Kids who miss class lose opportunities to ask questions and hear answers to classmates' questions.
  - **Peer relationships suffer** when kids miss school. A child who misses school often may have fewer friends.
  - **Parents have a significant influence** on their children's school attendance.
- Tell your child that school is important and that you expect her to be in school on time every day. Don't let her miss school to catch up on sleep, avoid a test or finish a project.

Source: E.M. Allensworth and others, "5 Key Findings for Middle Grades from *Looking Forward To High School and College*," University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, [niswc.com/attendmid](http://niswc.com/attendmid).

## Promote class participation

Your child will get more out of his classes if he pays attention. To help keep him focused and engaged with what he's learning, encourage your child to participate in class. Challenge him to to ask one question per day in each of his classes and to take part in class discussions. He'll have to listen closely and think about what he hears.



## Get ready to get involved

Your child benefits when you are involved in her education. To prepare to take an active role this year, find out:

- **Your child's class schedule.**
- **Her teachers' names,** and the best ways to contact them when you have questions or things to discuss.
- **Her counselor's name** and contact information.
- **What school projects** and events are planned for this month.
- **Some ways you can volunteer** to help the school this year.

Keep this information where you will be able to find it easily.

## Organization helps students stay on track

Before your child's backpack overflows with crumpled papers and he can't find anything he needs, help him learn to organize his schoolwork. Here's how:

- **Have him assign** a place to keep work for each of his classes. He can use folders or a binder with dividers.
- **Give him a planner** or notebook to write his assignments in.
- **Plan weekly backpack clear-outs.** He can toss trash and file his papers.





## How can I switch my child back into school mode?

**Q:** My child had a wonderful, relaxed summer. But now I'm having a hard time getting her to focus on school. She acts like she's still on vacation. What should I do?

**A:** The structure of the school year may not appeal to your child as much as the easy summer days when she could do what she liked. But vacation is over, and in order to succeed in school, she'll need to regain her focus.

Here are some ways to help:

- **Restore routines.** With your child, decide on a regular study time. If it worked last year for her to have a snack then hit the books, put out a healthy treat and an encouraging note about homework. Make mornings easier by having her pack her backpack for school the night before.
- **Set and stick to a reasonable bedtime.** Staying up late and sleeping in won't work now. Middle schoolers need eight to 12 hours of sleep a night. Lack of sleep can affect your child's health, academics and mood.
- **Limit recreational screen time.** Research shows that too much time spent with TVs, computers, tablets and smartphones keeps kids from doing things that improve learning, such as reading. Set a technology curfew an hour before bedtime when all devices will be turned off.



## Are you helping your child adjust?

New middle schoolers are going through a big change. No longer the "old pros" at elementary school, they must adjust to new teachers, new routines, even new friends. Are you helping your child cope? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Have you helped** your child learn about the middle school? Have you looked at the website together? \_\_\_\_\_ away if he is having difficulty in school?
2. **Do you reassure** your child that he is ready for middle school and can do well? \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Do you plan** to attend family events at school to learn how to support your child? \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Do you ask** your child what he thinks about middle school and listen carefully? \_\_\_\_\_
5. **Do you encourage** him to tell you and his teachers right \_\_\_\_\_

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are smoothing your child's middle school transition. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."  
—George Bernard Shaw*

## Teach anti-bullying actions

Many students feel unable to confront a bully and demand a stop to the behavior. Talk to your child about other important things she can and should do if she witnesses bullying in school or online:

- **Tell an adult.** She can tell you or a trusted adult at school.
- **Refuse to join in.** Your child can avoid laughing at the bully's target, even if everyone else is. She can change the subject and try to redirect attention.
- **Support the victim.** Your child can be friendly and offer to go with the child to report the incident.

Source: J. Spiegler, "Empowering Students to Curb Bullying," Eductopia, niswc.com/empower.

## Take your child's learning to the next level

Learning isn't only for the classroom! To enrich your child's education:

- **Keep materials** at home that stimulate his creativity and curiosity—everything from library books to art supplies.
- **Plan outings** that relate to what your child is learning—such as a trip to a museum or an elected official's office.

## Three C's are key to respect

Respectful behavior allows classrooms to function and students to learn. Teach your child the three C's of respect:



1. **Communication.** Respectful people ask for others' viewpoints and opinions and react politely, even when they don't agree.
2. **Courtesy.** Let your child know that *how* he says something is as important as *what* he says. Manners and tone of voice count.
3. **Consideration.** Responding positively to someone else's needs or concerns shows respect. Your child should treat others as he would like to be treated.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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