

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



April 2020

La Mesa-Spring Valley School District  
Extended School Services Program

## Awaken your middle schooler's interest in studying STEM

Science and math have a reputation for being “hard subjects.” Because of this, many middle schoolers convince themselves that these classes aren't interesting or fun.

But when students actually try a few hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering and math—the STEM subjects—they often enjoy them.

To open your child's mind to the wonders of STEM:

- **Emphasize the process.** Tackling a new topic in a science or math class is often a challenge at first. So don't focus all your attention on the grades your child is earning. Instead, show enthusiasm for *what* he's learning and the new skills he's developing.
- **Look for role models.** Help your child learn about STEM celebrities like internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee or universe mapper Margaret Geller. Search on *Ted.com* for talks by scientists doing cool things.
- **Experiment in the kitchen.** Cooking involves math and chemistry, with tasty results. As you cook together, ask questions: “Why does water boil when it gets hot?” “What happens if we don't add yeast to bread?”
- **Visit a museum.** Look for interactive exhibits that engage kids in learning about scientific and technological discoveries and how things work.

Source: S. Cornelius, “5 Ways Parents Can Support STEM Learning,” *Getting Smart*, [niswc.com/stemsupport](http://niswc.com/stemsupport).



## Tailor expectations to fit your individual student

Expressing your expectations for your child encourages him to meet them. When setting expectations, keep in mind that recommendations found in parenting information are based on averages. Base your expectations for your child on who *he* really is. Work with his teachers to figure out goals that are challenging *and* realistic.

## Foster a sense of respect

Respect is a key building block in a positive school culture. To encourage your middle schooler's self-respect and respect for others:



- **Model respectful speech** and behavior. Look your child in the eye when she speaks to you. Be honest and polite. Show respect for her opinions.
- **Don't always put** your child's needs and wants first—she won't learn to respect the fact that others also have needs.
- **Allow her to experience** disappointments. Help your child learn from them and move on. She'll likely respect herself for bouncing back—and you for showing her that she could.



## Three skills boost success now and later

College and a career may be years away, but you can help your child start building skills now that will help her achieve those goals. In any class or workplace setting, your child will need to be able to:

1. **Think critically** and solve problems. Middle schoolers often see things they wish were different. Encourage your child to think about how she could help solve a problem she notices.
2. **Communicate.** Help your child strengthen her speaking and listening skills at home. If she wants you to rethink a rule, have her build a case and present it to you. Why does she want to stay

out later on Friday? How has she shown she is responsible enough for this rule change?

3. **Make decisions.** To help your child think through a choice, teach her to make a T chart. She can put the reasons *for* an option on one side and the reasons *against* on the other, then see how they stack up.

Source: B. Cook, “College and Career Ready: What It Means for Middle School Students,” Association for Middle Level Education, [niswc.com/mid\\_skills](http://niswc.com/mid_skills).

## Teach time management for better test results

Time management is as important for test success as studying. Remind your child to read all the questions before he begins, and then budget his time. If an essay question is worth 50 percent of his score, he'll know he should spend half his time on it. He'll also know if he's spending too much time on a single question. And if he finishes the test with time to spare, he should use it to check his work.





## What should I do about my child's afternoons alone?

**Q:** I am starting a full-time job, and my child will be coming home to an empty house after school. She's mature enough to behave well, but I'm worried about her being alone so much. What should I do?

**A:** Since you can trust your child to be responsible when she is at home alone, you may just want to reduce the amount of time she spends by herself each week. To find a solution that works for your child:

- **Look into the school's after-hours programs.** Clubs, study halls and social hours might offer your child supervised opportunities to hang out with other students a few times a week.
- **Investigate local options.** Ask at a nearby community center about activities suitable for middle schoolers. Check out youth volunteer opportunities. You may be able to arrange transportation with the families of other participants.
- **Discuss safety during "home alone" time.** Make sure your child understands your rules for things like checking in, answering the door and the phone, cooking and having friends over. Post a list of numbers she can call in an emergency, including a trusted adult nearby she can call if she can't reach you.



## Are you making attendance a priority?

Your child may be dreaming of summer break, but he still has a lot of learning left to do! It's critical that he attend school regularly through the last day. Are you making it clear that attendance matters? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you affirm** to your child that attending school is his most important responsibility?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you avoid** taking your child out of school unless he is ill or there is an emergency?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you let** your child know that you won't tolerate his skipping school?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you establish** routines to help your child get to school on time, like setting an alarm?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you work** with the school to make sure you are

notified if your child misses classes or school days?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are prioritizing school attendance. For each no, try that idea.*

**"Absences add up!  
Missing just 2 days a  
month means a child  
misses 10% of the  
school year."**

*—Attendance Works*

## Explore tutoring options

If your child is struggling in one or more classes and things don't seem to be getting better, she may benefit from the one-on-one help of a tutor. Ask your child's counselor about tutoring resources at school and in the community.

When your child works with a tutor:

- **Expect results** to take time.
- **Set small**, attainable goals.
- **Let the tutor** take charge.
- **Make changes** if needed. If your child's work isn't improving after several months, it may be time to try something new.

## Make reading time count

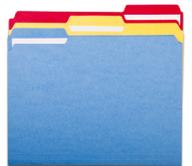
You already know you can't force your child to read. So focus on making sure he has time to read and finds it worthwhile. You can:

- **Let** your child stay up 15 minutes later as long as he is reading.
- **Ask** him to read to a younger sibling or older relative.
- **Encourage** him to read his own way. He can read a series out of order or switch books in the middle if he wants.

## Spark learning motivation

Your support can motivate your middle schooler to work hard through the end of the year. Here are three ways to show it:

- 1. Help your child get organized.** It's much easier to study when notes, assignments and tests are filed by subject.



- 2. Nurture curiosity.** Help your child explore her interests, both in her classes and outside of school.
- 3. Be patient.** Your child's motivation to do schoolwork will probably have its ups and downs. Consistent support from you will see her through the lows.

### Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

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