

# Elementary School Parents

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Merrimack School District  
Title 1 Program

*make the difference!*



## Promote thinking skills with engaging conversations

In elementary school, teachers expect students to think about what they've read and then draw conclusions. To give your child practice developing this ability:

- **Ask open-ended questions** that require your elementary schooler to think. For example, after you watch a TV show together, have a discussion. "Why do you think the character did that?" or "Do you think things like that happen in real life?"
- **Share your thoughts** when you are making a decision. You might say, "I am still not sure which refrigerator to buy." Then, talk about the pros and cons of each choice. Your child may have some insights.
- **Set aside time to read together**—and then talk about what you've read. Some families make one meal a week their "reading dinner." Family members bring a book to the table and talk about it and ask questions about what everyone else is reading.
- **Make the most of car time.** The best conversations often take place in the car while you are driving. So ask about what's going on in your child's life.
- **Keep a shared journal.** Try reading the same book. Take turns writing notes to each other about your reactions to what you've read.
- **Explore different perspectives.** When discussing a topic, encourage your child to think about other viewpoints. Ask "How do you think someone else might feel about this?" or "What would you do if you were in their shoes?"

## Making gifts develops essential skills



Making homemade gifts for family members and friends helps young children build valuable school

skills. It promotes creativity, supports cognitive development, strengthens fine motor skills, boosts problem-solving and communication skills and much more!

Your child could:

- **Read a book aloud** and record it for a younger sibling to listen to while reading.
- **Frame a list**, such as "My 10 Best Memories With Grandpa."
- **Play a favorite game** with a family member or a neighbor who is homebound.
- **Record an audio** or video message for a loved one who lives far away.
- **Create a music playlist** with favorite songs to share.
- **Bake cookies** and deliver them to someone who may not receive many homemade gifts.
- **Create a calendar** for 2025 and decorate it with personalized artwork.
- **Make a gift certificate** good for two hours of household help.
- **Create a beautiful picture** or poem about a special person.

# Review your child's attendance in the first half of the year



The halfway point of the school year is approaching. It's time for a mid-year checkup on your elementary schooler's attendance.

When students miss too much school they are at risk academically. Here's what researchers have found:

- **School absences add up.** When students aren't in class, they miss out on valuable learning.
- **Missing school** becomes a habit. Students who miss a lot of school in kindergarten are still frequently absent in fifth grade.
- **There is a clear relationship** between early grade attendance and later achievement. Kids who attend classes regularly in the early grades are still doing

well in secondary school—and they are more likely to graduate from high school.

How many days of school has your child missed so far this year? If you're unsure, contact the school to find out. It's not too late to get back on track so your child can have a successful school year—and school career.

Source: "Attendance Awareness Campaign," Attendance Works.

**"Students are at academic risk if they miss 10 percent or more of the school year, or about 18 days a year."**

—Attendance Works

# Make the writing process easier by guiding your child's thinking



Ask any writer about the hardest part of writing and you're likely to hear the same answer: Getting started.

What's true for a seasoned writer is even more true for an elementary school child who's staring at a blank page. What on earth will your child write about? It can feel overwhelming.

Help your child get off to a running start by asking questions and offering comments to promote thinking. If your child is asked to write about a personal experience, for example, follow these three steps:

1. **Help your child make a list** of recent experiences: putting up the tent in the backyard (and watching it fall down); scoring a goal in the soccer game; etc. Then, have your

child select one of the experiences to write about.

2. **Ask your child to tell you** about the experience. Telling a story is an effective way to remember the key points. Why were they putting up the tent? Where was the tent stored? Did they read the instructions? Your child can even draw pictures about what happened first, second and third.
3. **Have your child answer** the basic newspaper reporter questions: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. Answering these types of questions will help your child collect all of the important details needed for the writing.

Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write—How Parents Can Encourage Writing Skills for Success in School, Work and Life*, Berkley Books.

# Are you helping your child beat test anxiety?



Some kids get butterflies in their stomachs before tests. But others go into full-blown panic. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to see if you are helping your child overcome test anxiety:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you help** your child create a study plan to prepare for the test?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your child about *your* expectations? Do you say that your love for your child does not depend on a particular test score?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you practice** calming techniques with your child? Deep breathing or counting backwards from 100 works for many students.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to talk to the teacher about fears? The teacher may be able offer reassurance that your child is indeed well-prepared.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** positive self-talk? When stuck during a test, your child can say, "I know this. The answer will come to me."

## How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are teaching your child to manage anxiety. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Use your child's report card to foster academic improvement



Report cards provide valuable insights into students' academic progress, strengths and areas that need

improvement. They help families understand their children's academic performance, identify any challenges they may be facing, and allow them to offer the necessary support and encouragement.

When reviewing a report card with your child:

- **Take it seriously.** A report card can't tell you everything about how your child is doing; however, teachers spend a lot of time making sure that the report card shows a snapshot of where your child is now. Spend time discussing each entry.
- **Ask questions** to get your child's perspective: *Are you surprised by any of the grades? Do you think the grades accurately reflect your effort?*
- **Remain calm**—especially if your child's grades weren't what you'd expected. Wait until you can quietly discuss what you and your child can do to improve grades. Together, set goals for improvement.
- **Find something to praise.** Did your child earn a higher grade in math? Did the teacher make positive comments about behavior or work habits? Celebrate this achievement.
- **Talk about your expectations.** Say things like, "You don't have to be *the* best. But I do expect you to do *your* best." Remind your child that effort is as important as ability.
- **Contact the teacher** if you or your child have any questions about the report card.

## Boost your child's vocabulary with five simple strategies



Reading at home is one of the best ways to build your child's vocabulary. That's because reading

exposes your child to new ideas, concepts and words.

Here are five effective strategies for increasing your child's vocabulary:

1. **Read different kinds of books** with your child. If you usually read fiction, go to the library and get a book that explains how something works instead. Check out a book about a sport or activity your child enjoys. Or, read a biography about a person your child admires.
2. **Look for words** your child might not know as you read. "It says here that George Washington went to school to become a *surveyor*. What do you think that word means?" Then, look up the definition together.
3. **Listen for new words** as you're watching TV. News programs often include words your child may not know. "Have you ever heard the word *tsunami* before? Let's look it up to see what it means."
4. **Consult a thesaurus.** Together, find synonyms for words your child uses often when writing or speaking.
5. **Help your child create** a personal dictionary. When your child discovers a new word, suggest writing it and its definition in a notebook. Review those words from time to time.

**Q:** My two children could not be more different about schoolwork. The older one spends about two hours a day on assignments, asks for help constantly and wants me to check over everything. My younger child either races through assignments, claims to not have one or says it was completed at school. How can I help my kids find a happy medium?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** This is a snapshot of the challenges teachers face every day. Your children have the same home environment, yet they are as different as can be.

Surprisingly, however, their two approaches to assignments can both be improved with the same three steps:

1. **Talk with their teachers.** Share what your children are doing at home. For example, two hours of homework a day might be more than the teachers expect. Could there be so much because your child isn't finishing class work in school?
2. **Establish a reasonable daily study time.** If there are no assignments, your children can read, solve math problems, work on a long-term project or review. And if there are assignments, your younger child will have less incentive to rush through them.
3. **Set some ground rules.** At the start of every study session, go over the work your children have to do. Help them set priorities and make to-do lists. Stay nearby doing your own work, and encourage your older child to do the work independently. Check at the end of study time to see if they finished everything on their lists.



# It Matters: Motivation

## Show enthusiasm for your child's education



Staying engaged with what your child is doing in school clearly communicates your interest in helping

your child be successful. Boost your child's motivation by showing your enthusiasm for education in a variety of ways. Here's how:

- **Maintain a relationship** with your child's teacher. Keep in touch throughout the year. Share information about how your child is doing. Ask for suggestions on how you can support learning.
- **Attend school events** to show your child that school is a priority for your family. If your schedule and resources allow, consider volunteering at home and participating in school-based activities.
- **Create an environment** that supports studying. Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to work. Keep it stocked with school supplies. Look over assignments and give constructive feedback.
- **Monitor assignments.** Completing schoolwork is a student's responsibility, but you should be aware of what your child is studying as well as the status of assignments, tests and class projects.
- **Stay positive** about schoolwork. Your attitude rubs off on your child. Whenever possible, mention something that your child learned that sounds interesting. Make positive comments about things your child's teacher does. "I like the way Mr. Thomas gives you a study guide before your tests."

## Too much praise can negatively affect students' motivation

Students who receive too much of the wrong kind of praise from their families may develop traits such as vanity, selfishness and self-centeredness. Experts note that unearned praise also has a negative impact on students' motivation.

While it's important for you to encourage your child, it's also important to make sure praise is:

- **Detailed.** Highlight behaviors you want your child to repeat. "You studied every day for your test and earned a higher grade than your last one!"
- **Honest.** You want your child to be able to trust what you say. Rather than saying, "You're the best piano player ever!" try, "You are making progress in playing smoothly!"
- **Focused on effort.** Support your child's efforts to try new things. Put special emphasis on things your child works hard to do, even if they aren't a big deal to others.



Perseverance is something to acknowledge and reward!

- **Meaningful.** Save compliments for times when your child really deserves them.

Source: E. Brummelman and others, "Origins of narcissism in children," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

## Ask three questions to ensure your expectations are realistic



High expectations are linked to high accomplishment. But how can you tell if your expectations for your child are also realistic? After all, you want to motivate your child.

When setting expectations, ask yourself these questions:

1. **Are they important?** Make sure you choose expectations that focus on the behaviors you want your child to develop.
2. **Are they appropriate?** Take your child's development into consideration. In addition to age, think about personality and maturity. Goals shouldn't be too easy or too difficult for your child to reach.
3. **Are they easy to understand?** State expectations in simple and clear terms, "I expect you to start your reading by 4:00 each day."

Then, set expectations that promote those outcomes.