ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

December 2026

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Prince William County Schools

Motivate your child by showing enthusiasm for education



When you stay aware and involved with what your elementary schooler is doing in school, you send your child a motivating message: "I care about you and your education, and I want to help you be successful."

Repeat this message often in a variety of ways. Here's how:

- **Review schoolwork.** Completing the work is your child's responsibility, but doing a regular review will show you what your child is learning. Monitor the status of assignments, tests, and projects and your child's progress.
- **Make your home a place for learning.** Help your child create a study area in a spot with few distractions. Highlight connections between what your child is learning and life outside school. Also introduce your child to new ideas and talk about things you have learned recently. This shows your child that learning is something people do all their lives.
- **Be a positive voice.** Your attitude rubs off on your child. Whenever possible, mention something your child has learned that sounds interesting, and try to find out more together. Express appreciation for things teachers and school staff do. "I like the way Ms. Craig gives you a study packet before your tests."

Five strategies expand vocabulary

A strong vocabulary supports your child's reading ability. Words that are familiar are easier for students to decode, and knowing the meaning of many words helps your child comprehend the overall meaning of text passages.

To grow your child's vocabulary:

1. **Read many kinds** of books together. If you usually read fiction, try a book that explains how something works. Or, read a book about a sport or activity your child enjoys.
2. **Talk about words** your child may not know as you read aloud. "This says that armadillos are *nocturnal*. Do you know what that means? Let's look it up."
3. **Use a thesaurus** to help your child learn words with similar meanings to commonly used words. "The moon tonight is *bright*, *brilliant* and *luminous*!"
4. **Listen for new words** as you watch the news and other shows together. Look them up.
5. **Make a personal dictionary.** After learning a new word, have your child write the word and its meaning in a notebook.

Ask your child to think

Your child is learning to think analytically and draw conclusions. To provide practice:



- **Ask questions** that require thought. After watching a show, ask your child, "Why do you think the character did that? Do things like that happen in real life?"
- **Consider different points of view.** When discussing a topic, ask "How do you think someone else might feel about it?"
- **Think out loud** when you make a decision. Ask your child to brainstorm the pros and cons of each option with you.

Express high expectations

Having high, realistic expectations for your child fosters achievement. To establish them:

- **Factor in** your child's development, personality and maturity.
- **Focus** on key school success behaviors.
- **Explain** them in simple, clear terms.

Source: M. Pinquart & M. Ebeling, "Parental Educational Expectations and Academic Achievement in Children and Adolescents—a Meta-analysis," *Educational Psychology Review.*

Gift-making is enriching



Making gifts helps develop small motor, problem-solving and communication skills—and lets your child experience the pleasure that comes from giving. Your elementary schooler could:

- **Write a poem** about a special person.
- **Decorate a picture frame** and add a photo of your child with the person.
- **Draw 12 pictures** and use them to make a calendar for 2027.
- **Read a book aloud** and record it for a younger sibling to listen to while reading.

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Q&A What can I do to manage study time more effectively?

Q: My two children approach assignments very differently. The older one spends hours a day on them and asks for my help constantly. The younger one races through, or claims not to have any work to do. Is there a happy medium?



A: While teachers' homework practices vary, your childrens' opposite approaches to doing the work can be managed by taking the same three steps:

1. **Contact their teachers.** Ask about time expectations for assignments. Hours a day is likely more than your older child's teacher expects. Could it be so much because your child isn't finishing classwork in school? Your younger child's teacher may plan more in-class assignments, or may have suggestions for specific material your child should focus on at home.
2. **Set an appropriate daily study time** for each child. If there are no assignments, they can read, solve math problems or review. A set amount of time gives your younger child less incentive to rush through work.
3. **Provide structure.** 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, but encourage your older child to work independently. Check at the end that they have completed everything on their lists.

Parent Quiz Are you helping ease test anxiety?

It's common for children to be nervous before a test. But panicking can keep your child from performing up to capability. Are you helping your elementary schooler manage test anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you help** your child create and follow a study plan? Feeling prepared reduces anxiety.
2. **Do you say** that test scores won't affect your love for your child?
3. **Do you urge** your child to talk to the teacher about test fears? The teacher may be able to offer reassurance or strategies for coping.
4. **Do you suggest** self-talk your child can repeat, such as "I know this. It will come to me"?
5. **Do you practice** calming techniques with your child, like deep breathing and counting backwards from 100?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping take the fear out of tests. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Today has no idea it's about to meet your awesome face. You've got this."
—Kid President

Make time for math talk

Talking about math can strengthen your child's confidence and competence in the subject. To prompt math conversations:

- **Ask questions.** When your child solves a math problem, ask, "How did you get your answer?" Explaining helps children clarify thinking—and catch errors.
- **Add math to games,** such as Simon Says ("Simon says add 18 plus 18"). On the road, take turns solving problems using numbers on signs. If the speed limit is 65, players can solve 6+5, 6-5 and 6×5.



Offer praise that's deserved

Praising your child's effort and achievements provides encouragement. But too much *unearned* praise can reduce motivation. Offer compliments that are:

- **Specific** and detailed. Highlight behaviors you want your child to repeat.
- **Accurate.** Rather than saying "You're the best piano player ever, say "You are making real progress playing smoothly!"
- **Meaningful.** Save praise for times when your child has really earned it.

Is your child missing out?

There is a clear relationship between early grade attendance and later achievement. Kids who attend classes regularly in the early grades carry the habit forward and are more likely to graduate. Students who miss a lot of school in kindergarten are still frequently absent in fifth grade—and missing learning.

If you are unsure how many days your child has missed this year, check with the school. It's not too late to get back on track.

Source: "Attendance Awareness Campaign," Attendance Works.

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