

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Gadsden City Schools

*make the difference!*



## Regular school attendance is essential throughout the year!

**A**s the weather warms up and summer approaches, students often become less focused on schoolwork and more eager for the break. Unfortunately, this can lead to increased absences.

The end of the school year is still a crucial time for learning and growth. Here are four reasons to make sure your child attends school every day:

**1. Learning hasn't stopped.** Teachers are still teaching new content. Attending every school day (except in cases of illness) helps ensure that students meet learning goals. Studies show that students who miss just 10% of the school year in the early grades are still behind their peers when they reach high school.

**2. End-of-year lessons** often lay the groundwork for future learning. Missing these lessons can create significant gaps in understanding and leave your child less prepared.

**3. Teachers often plan group projects** for the end of the year. These projects help students learn collaboration, problem solving and responsibility. These are skills children will need throughout their school careers and in the workplace.

**4. Regular attendance** teaches kids to be accountable—an important quality for adulthood.

Source: E. García and E. Weiss, "Student absenteeism: Who misses school and how missing school matters for performance," Economic Policy Institute.

## Encourage your child to read books in print



In today's digital age, students are increasingly drawn to online reading platforms. While

digital reading offers convenience and access to a vast library, studies suggest that reading from a physical book fosters deeper comprehension and thinking skills.

Fast-paced, digital media trains the brain to process information more rapidly and less thoroughly. Online readers are more likely to skim than to read for meaning. They will read quickly, but not pay close attention. So when they are finished, they can answer concrete questions but they stumble on questions that involve deeper thinking.

When students read from paper books, the printed page doesn't change. Readers can take their time and turn back to refer to something they've just read. They are more likely to remember the story in chronological order and can recall more details.

So give your child plenty of opportunities to unplug and read some paper books this summer!

Source: K. Benson, "Reading on Paper Versus Screens: What's the Difference?" BrainFacts.org.

# Productive study buddies can make studying and learning fun



Sometimes, kids learn better if they work with another student. Having a study buddy can be an effective way for students to master challenging material.

Study buddies can help each other practice math facts. They can help each other prepare for a class presentation. They can test each other to see what they know—and don't know.

Of course, without a bit of planning, a session with a study buddy can turn into nothing more than social time. Here are some tips to make a study session productive:

- **Commit to the purpose.** Both students should agree that they are getting together to study math or social studies—not to play Mario Kart or other games.

- **Choose someone responsible.** Both students should be focused on learning.
- **Set a schedule.** Arrange a time and a quiet place to meet. The children could even meet online via FaceTime or Zoom.
- **Set goals.** The study buddies should decide exactly what material they are going to cover and stick to it!

**“Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”**

—Mattie Stepanek

# Reflect on the school year and celebrate your child's successes



As the school year winds down, it's a great time to help your child look back, look forward and celebrate. Here's how:

- **Talk to your child's teacher.** Ask about your child's strengths and weaknesses. How has your student improved? What areas need more work? Ask what you can do to help your child over the summer.
- **Talk to your child about the school year.** Ask, “What do you think went well? What challenged you the most?” Help your child figure out what changes to make for the upcoming school year.
- **Review your child's successes.** Look over schoolwork you've saved during the year. Point out how much your child has learned—how many new words, for example. Or, how to add and divide. Or, how your child's writing has improved.
- **Help your child set learning goals** for the summer, such as how much time to spend reading daily and which math concepts to work on mastering. Guide your child's choices, based on the suggestions from the teacher.
- **Encourage your child to thank** people who have made the year work—the teacher, school nurse, librarian, food service worker, etc. This boosts appreciation for all of the people who help children learn.
- **Celebrate the year's accomplishments** with a special activity. It doesn't have to be elaborate or cost anything. Just make plans to enjoy one-on-one time with your child.

# Are you making family time a priority?



To reach their full potential in school and in life, children need frequent, meaningful, undivided attention from

the adults they live with. But finding that time can often be difficult.

Are you finding ways to spend quality family time together? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_1. **Do you strive** to eat dinner as a family regularly?

\_\_\_2. **Do you balance** your child's structured activities with plenty of time for reading, relaxing and talking with family?

\_\_\_3. **Do you have** a bedtime routine that includes spending at least five minutes talking with your child?

\_\_\_4. **Do you schedule** one-on-one time with each of your kids each week?

\_\_\_5. **Have you designated** screen-free times? Digital devices can cause separation even when family members are together.

## How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're finding ways to make family time a priority. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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to Help Their Children.

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# Three habits keep children healthy during the summer



Habits can have a lasting impact on your child's health and performance in school. That's why it's important to emphasize

healthy habits all year long—not just during the school year.

As a family, make an effort to:

- 1. Be active.** Most children should exercise for at least one hour a day. Instead, many passively watch screens for hours on end. Make a list of fun physical activities you can do together, such as taking a walk, gardening, visiting a local park and kicking a ball around. Ask your child, "Which would you like to do?"
- 2. Eat well.** Involve your child in making healthy meals. You might borrow a cookbook from the library or search for recipes online. Try

some new dishes with fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Avoid potentially harmful or unnecessary ingredients, including excess sugar.

- 3. Stay hydrated.** This is especially important during activities in hot climates. Remember that drinks don't need to be sweetened or flavored. Water is refreshing—and free! If you serve juice, consider diluting it with water. The earlier you start doing this, the less your child will notice.

It's also important to take your child for regular medical checkups. Talk to the pediatrician about summer safety, vision, hearing, allergies and other essential topics. Also, remember to keep your child's medical records up to date.

# Build your child's character and leadership skills with service



The world's problems can seem overwhelming. It's vital for kids to learn that every person can make a difference, and

that when people work together, the results are amazing!

Summer volunteering is an effective way to teach this lesson to your child—all while building confidence, compassion and leadership skills.

To get started, talk with your child about:

- Interests.** How do your child's interests relate to community needs? An animal lover could look for ways to help an animal rescue group. A young entrepreneur could help with a fundraiser.
- Skills.** Your child's abilities and strengths can be gifts to others. Your child might hold a bake sale or read to younger children. Sometimes it's fun to learn new skills, too, such as how to help with landscaping or home repairs.
- Needs.** Perhaps your child has noticed a park that needs sprucing up. Or, maybe local families need clothing or food. Go online with your child and search for upcoming community service events in your area. You could even ask your child's teacher if the school needs help over the summer.
- Schedules.** Volunteering takes time, and families are busy! Set realistic goals that leave room for other priorities. Depending on your family's commitments, you and your child might volunteer just a few hours here and there—or decide to take on one large, exciting project!

**Q:** My elementary schooler is suddenly displaying disruptive behavior at home and in school. I'm worried that anxiety about the move up to middle school may be a factor. What strategies can I use to help my child cope and address these behavioral changes?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** When children are anxious, they tend to act out with the people they feel the closest to—usually their family members and teachers. Changes can be difficult and the move to middle school can seem scary—even if it's still months away.

Your elementary schooler may have a lot of concerns: "Will I still see my friends? Will I be able to handle the schoolwork?"

As you suspect, these fears can trigger misbehavior. Helping your child get these feelings out in the open is the first step in dealing with them.

Here's how to help:

- Have a discussion.** See if you can get your child to express fears out loud. A low-key approach usually works best. To open up a conversation, you might say, "I bet you're wondering about who will be in your classes next year."
- Address concerns.** Once your child begins to talk about worries, work with the teacher to address them. Perhaps the teacher can lead a few class discussions about life in middle school. Or, if your child knows someone who is already at the middle school, suggest asking that person about what it's really like.
- Reinforce rules** at home and at school, and remind your child that they must be followed.



## Plan educational and fun family field trips



Don't let "I'm bored" ruin your summer! Plan ahead and schedule some exciting family outings.

There are lots of free or low-cost educational destinations that will keep your child engaged and learning all summer long.

Consider going to:

- **Museums.** Call or go online to check upcoming exhibits. Which would your child like to see most? Add them to your summer calendar.
- **A public garden.** Children love walking through gardens, admiring flowers and learning about nature. Bring a camera or sketchbook so your child can record the plants and animals.
- **The zoo.** This trip is almost always a hit with children. Before leaving, read about the animals you'll see with your child. Talk about their natural habitats and what they like to eat.
- **A fire station.** Call ahead to see if a summer open house is planned. If not, call and see if you could schedule a visit.
- **An airport.** Simply parking near the airport is interesting. Can your child spot the control tower? What about the planes taking off and landing?
- **Parks.** Find a guide to local parks and keep it handy. Consider visiting hiking trails, historic landmarks and more. Add a nature guide and maybe even some binoculars, and you're ready for an adventure!

## Exploring science outdoors boosts knowledge and interest

**R**esearch shows that girls start to lose interest in science as early as grade school. But a new study shows that learning science outdoors can boost their knowledge and interest in the subject.

In one program, female students explored science in the natural world and recorded their findings in a journal. These students earned higher grades in science and understood more about the science they learned.

To encourage this kind of hands-on science learning whatever your child's gender, head outside and:

- **Have a scavenger hunt** for specific items that can be found in nature.
- **Observe** insects and frogs.
- **Look for evidence** of animals, such as tracks.
- **Record how plants change** over the summer.

If you or your child see something puzzling, visit your library or go



online to find out more. By encouraging your child to ask questions now, you can encourage enthusiasm for science in the future.

Source: K.T. Stevenson and others, "How outdoor science education can help girls stay engaged with science," *International Journal of Science Education*, Taylor and Francis Ltd.

## Improve the quality of family time with these five strategies



Summertime can be wonderful family time. You may see your child more during the day. But even if you don't, you can take advantage of the less stressful evenings.

To make family time more meaningful this summer:

1. **Establish a weekly family night.** Cook a meal together, talk, play board games. Avoid screen use.
2. **Discuss what you are doing** when you and your child go on errands.

3. **Ask for your child's opinion.** Take time to listen and ask follow-up questions.
4. **Hold regular family meetings** to solve problems and share ideas about fun ways to spend time together.
5. **Participate in family traditions.** If you always camp out in the backyard or have an outdoor movie night, keep doing it. No traditions? Brainstorm with family members and start some new ones this summer!