MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

February 2026

Moore Public Schools

Building financial literacy and math skills is a great investment

Most middle schoolers think it would be great to have lots of money. But they are just beginning to learn what goes into making it. Your child is probably familiar with the concept of working at a job for pay. To introduce the concept of investing—and provide math practice and a lesson in risk at the same time—have your child play a stock market game.

First, explain that stocks are small pieces, or *shares,* in the ownership of a company. If lots of people are buying shares in that company, the value of a share goes up. But if people are selling off their shares, the price goes down. Show your child where stock prices are listed online or in a newspaper. Then, to start the game:

1. **Assign your child an imaginary amount of money** to invest. Have your student pick several familiar companies and decide how much of the pretend money to "spend" on each company's stock.
2. **Have your child chart the value** of the investments each day for a month. On day one, buying 100 shares of a company's stock at $10 per share gets your child $1,000 worth of its stock. If the stock later goes up to $11 per share, your child would have $1,100 worth. But if it goes down to $9, your child would have only $900.
3. **Ask your child to report on results** at the end of the month. What would your child do differently next time, based on this experience?

Share an organized approach to tests

Study habits like organization make a big difference in school. In addition to keeping supplies and papers tidy, organized students also take a structured approach to schoolwork and studying.

When preparing for a test, spending some time figuring out what the test will cover and gathering all the materials needed to study effectively will improve your child's chances of doing well.

Few middle schoolers can keep all the relevant information for every test in their heads, so help your child create a test-prep checklist and fill out a copy each time.

When a test is announced, your child should answer these questions:

- **What class is the test in?**
- **When is the test?**
- **What format will it take?**
- **What is the relevant reading** material to study?
- **What else do I need to have** in order to study—notes, past quizzes and assignments?

Use report cards to plan

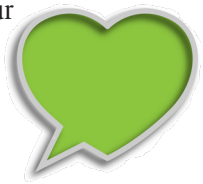
Chart a positive course for the rest of the school year by using your elementary schooler's latest report card as a guide. Sit down with your child and:

- **Discuss what is going well.** What is your child doing that's working?
- **Talk about issues.** What does your child think are the reasons for a disappointing grade?
- **Set goals** for keeping up good work and improving in areas that need it. Define steps your child will take to reach them.

Talk about commitments

Responsible students honor commitments, so it's important for them to think before agreeing to do to something. Whatever the request—to tutor a friend, help a neighbor shovel snow, etc.—encourage your child to consider, "Will I be able to follow through?" before saying *yes*.

Choose motivating words



The way you talk about your child to others can provide a motivation boost—or discourage further effort. For a positive effect:

- **Do assume** your child is listening if within earshot. Kids pick up on tone and context as well as words.
- **Do praise** your child for demonstrating things that are important to you: learning, responsibility, persistence, etc.
- **Don't make** critical remarks about your child to family. Think about how it would feel to hear people you love discuss your flaws. Pointing out strengths and weaknesses to siblings fuels rivalry.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc. www.parent-institute.com

MIDDLE SCHOOL
Helping Students Learn®
Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School **February 2026**

Q&A How can I convince my child that honest effort matters?

Q: I caught my middle schooler copying all the answers from a friend's assignment. My child claimed it was no big deal and said all the kids do it. What should I do?

A: Students do a lot of collaborating in school, so begin by asking your child if working with others was part of the assignment. If not, it's time for a serious talk about cheating.

To prevent a one-time mistake from snowballing into a major academic problem for your student:

- **Ask why your child cheated.** In middle school, students become more aware of how they compare with their peers. Some turn to cheating as a way to keep up. Others think it is just easier than doing the work themselves. Many students are worried about disappointing their families.
- **Explain that learning is what matters,** and by cheating, your child is missing out on learning. Say that learning takes effort and sometimes involves mistakes. Make it clear that your love doesn't depend on grades.
- **Seek help if your child is struggling** or has fallen behind. Consult your child's teachers about help sessions or other available resources.
- **Help your child improve study habits.** Then your student can earn higher grades without cheating.

Parent Quiz Are you preparing your child for new kinds of relationships?

Many children become interested in romantic and physical relationships in the middle school years. Are you providing facts, guidance and values your child can use to navigate these tricky waters? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you discuss** the subject calmly and ask about your child's knowledge, opinions and feelings?

___**2. Do you explain** your family's values and expectations about appropriate behavior?

___**3. Do you talk** about the consequences of risky behavior?

___**4. Do you emphasize** the importance of self-respect, respect for the other person, kindness and consideration?

___**5. Do you set** rules about social activities and remind your child that schoolwork comes first?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child learn to handle romance responsibly. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about."
—Angela Schwindt

Encourage future thinking

Life after high school is years away, but middle schoolers can start strengthening key skills now to prepare for a successful future. Help your child practice:

- **Speaking and writing clearly.** If your child wants you to allow something or modify a rule, ask to see a presentation about why you should.
- **Thinking analytically.** Students often see things they would change. Help your child think of how to be part of a solution.
- **Making well-reasoned decisions.** Suggest making a T chart with the reasons *for* a choice on one side, and the reasons *against* it on the other.

Source: B. Cook: "College and Career Ready: What it Means for Middle School Students," Association for Middle Level Education.

Quench fiery outbursts

Preteens are known for their strong feelings. But overreacting to a blazing outburst just adds fuel to the fire. Instead:

- **Wait to talk** until you are both calm. Avoid imposing punishment in the heat of the moment.
- **Stick to your decisions.** Make it clear that pleading won't change your mind.
- **Offer choices.** "You can work on your report before or after dinner. You choose."

Make learning engaging

Middle schoolers often seem to care about their friends more than school. To boost your child's interest in learning:

1. **Make it personal.** Link school topics to your child's life.
2. **Encourage imagination.** "What might it have felt like to be at Valley Forge?"
3. **Use humor.** Share silly cartoons, GIFs or videos about things your child is learning.

Helping Students Learn®
Published in English and Spanish, September through May.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Alison McLean.
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.
Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc. www.parent-institute.com