Middle School Parents®
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SHELDON ISD
Where Vision Becomes Legacy



Daily attendance gives your child a real advantage

One of the best ways to help your child do as well as possible this school year is to prioritize regular, daily attendance. According to researchers, missing two days a month can cause a student to fall significantly behind.

By emphasizing the importance of daily attendance, you show that school is a priority and help your child build the habits necessary for long-term success. Talk with your child about these reasons for attending school every day:

- **Middle school builds** the foundation for all future learning. Daily attendance helps your child master the essential basics needed for success.
- **Missing school affects grades.** Studies show that when students miss class regularly, their performance suffers.
- **Friendships often get started** at school. Especially at the start of the year, a child who misses school often may have a harder time making friends.

To aim for top attendance:

- **Set the expectation.** Tell your child that education is important in your family and that you expect on-time attendance every day.
- **Plan ahead.** Schedule vacations during school breaks or weekends. Schedule appointments for non-school hours whenever possible.
- **Stick to the routine all year.** Avoid letting your child stay home to dodge an exam, catch up on rest or wrap up a last-minute project.

Help your child take charge of learning



Middle schoolers are old enough to start taking responsibility for their learning. Developing independent habits now builds the confidence and skills your child needs for success in middle school and beyond.

Encourage your child to start these three habits:

1. **Look ahead.** By skimming over the next day's lesson or chapter the night before, your child will already know a bit about the topic. This makes it easier to follow along, ask questions and participate in discussions.
2. **Review daily notes.** Even if there is no assignment due, your child should spend time reading over class notes each night. This is a quick and easy way to keep the information fresh in your child's mind.
3. **Organize for the morning.** Before going to bed, your child should check the calendar, pack school bags and select clothing. This preparation prevents a morning rush, helping your child arrive at school feeling calm and ready to learn.

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Ten ways school counselors support students and families



School counselors work hard to help every student succeed in the classroom. They are also prepared to support students and families with many different types of problems. Contact a counselor if you or your child need assistance to:

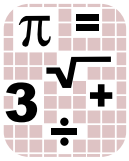
1. **Set academic goals** and select appropriate classes.
2. **Learn about evaluations** for learning differences or accommodations.
3. **Get back on track** after facing academic problems.
4. **Strengthen coping skills** for dealing with conflict or with grief.
5. **Make plans for high school** and beyond.
6. **Solve problems with friends.** This can include help with handling online drama or standing up to bullying.
7. **Address attendance** or school anxiety.
8. **Explore careers options** and learn about educational paths.
9. **Connect with community agencies** that help families in times of crisis
10. **Access additional professionals** for academic and personal support.

Source: "The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association.

"You can do anything as long as you have the passion, the drive, the focus, and the support."

—Sabrina Bryan

Talented students share their secrets for mastering math



What should your child do when faced with a tricky math problem? The best advice is simple: Stick with it.

In a survey, students who competed in top math contests said that persistence was the secret to their success. What else did these students do that can help your child with math? They:

- **Think about the "why."** Instead of just memorizing steps for a test, they try to understand the big idea behind the problem. This helps them solve different versions of the same problem later.
- **Practice regularly.** Once they learn how to solve a problem, they do it over and over. Just like a soccer player or a piano player, they know that practice makes them faster and better.
- **Focus.** Most top students study alone in a quiet place. They try to keep distractions away so they can give the math their full attention.
- **Draw a picture.** When a problem is confusing, they often sketch a diagram or a chart. Seeing math visually can make a challenging word problem much easier to understand.
- **Double-check their answers.** Before moving on, they look back at their work to see if it makes sense. They try to catch small mistakes before they turn into big ones.
- **Refuse to quit.** If one way doesn't work, they try a new path. They aren't afraid to ask a teacher for help or look up a video online to help clear things up.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week.*

Are you teaching your child how to manage time?



Time management can be a real challenge for kids. The challenge gets greater as they get older and have to manage complicated projects and schedules. Students often feel this pressure the most as they begin new grade. Are you helping your child learn to use time wisely? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you encourage** your child to write all academic and personal commitments on a calendar?
2. **Do you talk about priorities** and explain that when everything can't be completed, your child should focus on what's most important?
3. **Do you suggest** your child make and follow a schedule each week?
4. **Do you show** your child how to break down large assignments and tasks into smaller, more manageable steps?
5. **Do you set an example** by planning and scheduling aloud?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child build time management skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Help reduce the risks of social media for your middle schooler



Middle schoolers are spending an increasing amount of time engaging with social media. While it can help them connect with friends, there are also some serious drawbacks.

Middle schoolers' brains are still developing. The part that helps adults manage distractions and plan ahead is not mature yet. This leaves them vulnerable to the negative effects of social media such as distraction, sleep loss, anxiety and depression.

To protect your child:

- **Delay.** If your middle school student isn't using social media yet, consider waiting.
- **Set rules.** Don't allow devices at mealtime. Keep devices out of your child's bedroom overnight.
- **Discuss what is appropriate** to post and what's not.
- **Stay connected.** Follow your child's accounts and be sure your student knows you will look at them.
- **Create a family account.** This lets your middle schooler stay in touch with friends, but in a safer space.
- **Schedule family time.** Middle school is a time when your child needs you more than ever. So plan time to do things together—with the devices turned off!

Source: E. Abi-Jaoude and others, "Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health," *CMAJ,* Canadian Medical Association.

Offer low-stress ways for your child to practice reading skills



If reading is a struggle, your child is less likely to do it. Showing your child that reading is a powerful tool for real life, rather than just a school task, can help your child see the value in improving reading skills.

Here are some low-stress ways to support your child's reading progress:

- **Ask your child to help** with real tasks, like reading reviews for a new gadget or following instructions to build furniture.
- **Find reading material** related to your child's hobbies. Graphic novels, gaming guides and sports magazines count! These help kids practice reading while looking at pictures and data.
- **Encourage your child to research** a topic to win a family debate or learn about a local issue.
- **Read an article** or watch a movie based on a book together. Ask, "Was the ending fair?" rather than "Did you understand it?"
- **Listen to audiobooks or podcasts** in the car. This helps your child hear big ideas without getting stuck on hard sentences.
- **Watch a film version of a story,** then read one exciting scene from the book to see which version did it better.
- **Give your child the power** of choice. Kids work harder when they pick a topic to read about.
- **Focus on the story,** not mistakes. If your child is reading aloud, don't stop for every tiny error. Focus on the "big idea" instead.
- **Let your child see you reading** for information or relaxation to show that reading is a regular part of adulthood.

Questions & Answers

Q: I have always tried to be involved in my child's education, but I can't help with much of the schoolwork anymore. My child also doesn't want me to show up at school. Is there still a point to being involved?

A. You bet. Studies show that family engagement is just as important when kids are in middle school as it was when they were younger. In fact, staying involved during these years might be even more critical for your student's success.

Middle school brings new challenges. It is hard to help with tough assignments in subjects you may not know well. Plus, your child is naturally seeking more independence. However, you can still support your student's growth in many other important ways:

- **Make sure** your child sets and sticks to a regular time for studying. Falling behind by even one day can be costly.
- **Find quiet work** of your own to do nearby during study time. Your child will sense your support even if you can't help with specific subjects.
- **Talk together** about what your child is learning and would like to learn more about. Help your student set specific learning goals.
- **Reach out** to your middle schooler's teachers. Let them know that you want to support them and your child. Ask for specific ways you can support your child's learning.
- **Get involved** with the school community. Meet the families of classmates. Join the parent-teacher organization and stay current on what is going on and how families can help.

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It Matters: Motivation

Link academic success to your child's future



It's a new academic year, which means it's time for a fresh start. To set your middle schooler up for success, turn your family's focus to the importance of education.

Studies show that one effective way to help middle school students succeed in school is to remind them that doing well is about more than getting high grades. It's about reaching their future goals.

Middle schoolers are at a great age to begin thinking about their futures. And even though they may want more independence, they still take family guidance seriously. In fact, "lack of guidance" is a big reason capable students don't continue their education after high school.

After reviewing data from 50,000 students over a 26-year period, researchers also found that, by middle school:

- **Kids begin losing interest** in grades. Help your child set learning goals and celebrate progress.
- **It's challenging for families** to build relationships with teachers. Even if you can't meet a teacher during the school day, staying in touch via email will help you work together to benefit your child.
- **Family engagement still matters.** And stressing the long-term benefits of doing well in school matters even more.

Source: N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," *Developmental Psychology,* American Psychological Association.

Middle school students share what they need from families

When children feel loved and supported at home, they are more motivated to learn. Research shows that children who enjoy strong relationships with their families:

- **Feel safer** and have a sunnier outlook than kids who don't.
- **Are less likely** than other students to cheat on a test.
- **Feel healthier** and happier than other kids.
- **Believe they will be successful**.
- **Are more likely** than other students to excel academically.

What's the best way to show your child your love? When asked in a survey, students said they'd like their families to:

- **Take** an interest in schoolwork.
- **Listen** to them when they talk.
- **Avoid** comparing them to others.
- **Spend** more time with them.
- **Avoid** lecturing about mistakes.



- **Treat** them with respect.
- **Set** reasonable rules and limits.
- **Notice** when they do things right.
- **Offer** guidance.

Source: A. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others,* Teachers College Press.

Inspire your middle schooler to work hard and succeed



Motivation is like an engine that keeps students moving when things get difficult. When students are excited to learn, they develop the persistence they need to succeed.

To boost your child's motivation:

- **Help your child get organized.** It's hard to stay focused when papers are scattered everywhere. Help your child create a simple system for sorting and filing schoolwork.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Support your child's interests outside of school. If your middle schooler loves art, for example, visit a gallery together. Exploring new things makes learning feel like an adventure.
- **Give positive feedback.** When you see your child working hard, celebrate that effort! Talk about how persistence led to a finished project or a better grade.
- **Be patient.** Sometimes your middle schooler won't feel excited about school, and that's OK. Continue supporting and encouraging during those times.