Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!
November 2026
Vol. 38, No. 3
Alleghany County Schools

Fixing mistakes helps your elementary schooler learn

Has your child made a mistake on a test or school assignment? How you talk about it can change how your child feels about learning. Instead of focusing on the grade, frame the mistake as a chance to grow.

Research shows that when students understand their mistakes and learn how to correct them, they feel more confident in their ability to learn. Fixing errors helps children see that intelligence isn't something they are born with—it is something they build through practice.

When reviewing schoolwork, start by pointing out what your child did well. Then, to help your student learn from mistakes:

- **Talk about them.** Ask your child to explain why an answer was wrong and fix it. If your child doesn't know how, work together to find the answer or plan to ask the teacher.
- **Keep it positive**. Remind your child that mistakes are just part of the learning process, not a sign of failure.
- **Praise progress.** Focus on your child's improvement. Explain how learning from past errors helped your child avoid repeating this time.
- **Create a mistake log.** Encourage your child to write down common errors in a notebook to review before tests—and turn setbacks into a personalized study guide.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience,* Elsevier B.V.

Get results at a parent-teacher conference

Parent-teacher conferences are a valuable way to learn about your child's learning strengths and weaknesses. These meetings also help you and the teacher work together for a successful school year.

To get the most from your conference with the teacher:

- **Talk to your child** before the meeting. Ask if there are any topics your child would like you to bring up.
- **Plan to tell the teacher** details about your child and family that will help the teacher support your child better.
- **Make a list of questions** for the teacher, such as, *Is my child working at appropriate levels in reading and math? Does my child participate in class discussions? Is my child meeting your expectations?*
- **Arrive on time.** Being punctual ensures you get your full time with the teacher.
- **Make an action plan.** Ask the teacher to share one or two specific ways you can help your child learn at home.

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Turn writing practice into a fun adventure with quick writes

Writing can sometimes feel like hard work. However, a "quick write" is an easy, low-pressure way to encourage your child to get ideas down on paper. Here is how to do one:

1. **Choose a fun question** or idea to get started.
2. **Set a timer** for five minutes.
3. **Write.** Both you and your child should write down everything you can think of until the timer beeps. Don't worry about spelling or perfect sentences.
4. **Share.** Once time is up, compare what you each wrote.

Try these fun prompts:

- *Would it be good or bad if dogs could talk? Why?*
- *The best birthday I can imagine would be … .*
- *The most challenging part of being a student is … .*
- *It was a stormy day, so I decided to … .*
- *Ten years from now, I will be … .*
- *I invented the most amazing machine. It can … .*
- *When I woke up this morning, I was a different person. I was … .*

Even kids who usually struggle with writing assignments often enjoy quick writes and are surprised by how much they have to say about a subject!

"Writing is like any other sort of sport. In order for you to get better at it, you have to exercise the muscle."

—Jason Reynolds

Help science will come alive with these simple experiments

Turn your kitchen into a laboratory and keep your budding scientist experimenting with these kid-friendly and affordable activities:

- **Vinegar volcano.** Grab a cup or bowl, a box of baking soda, and some plain vinegar. (Conduct this experiment outside or in the kitchen sink.) Add a little bit of the baking soda to the cup, pour in some vinegar, and voilà! Chemistry in action! The fizzy rush happens because the baking soda—a base—reacts with the vinegar—an acid.
- **Raw or cooked?** Take two eggs—one raw and the other hard-boiled—and try to figure out which is which. (Nope, you can't crack them.) How to do it? Put each egg on its side on a flat surface and then spin it. The raw egg will wobble, while the hard-boiled egg will spin smoothly. Why? The yolk and white in the raw egg are liquid, so they shift when moved. This affects the egg's center of gravity and makes it wobbly.
- **The sinking/floating orange.** Fill a sink with water and drop in a whole orange. It floats. Now, peel the orange and drop it in again. It sinks. That's because the peel is full of tiny air pockets that make the fruit less dense (and able to float). Strip away those air pockets, and the fruit is denser than water. Hence, its trip to the bottom of the sink!

Are you preparing your child to make smart choices?

Helping your child learn how to make well-reasoned decisions is a vital skill. You want your child to be confident saying *no* to negative peer pressure and saying *yes* to positive things.

Are you showing your student how to make wise choices? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you provide** plenty of opportunities to make decisions—and expect your child to live with the results of those choices?
2. **Do you discuss** family decisions together? Do you brainstorm options and discuss their pros and cons?
3. **Do you sometimes think** out loud when you are trying to make a decision?
4. **Do you encourage your child** to ask questions and gather information before making a choice?
5. **Do you teach your child** that every decision has consequences?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your child make better choices today and in the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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Regular exercise boosts your child's health and academics

Physical fitness provides many benefits for kids. Studies show that regular physical activity is linked to higher self-esteem and attentiveness in classes. It also lowers the risk of health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

To increase your elementary schooler's activity level:

- **Add movement to screen time.** Encourage your child to take breaks for physical activity when watching shows or playing games.
- **Plan family outings.** Pick types of exercise your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might go for a short walk before dinner every night, or take a hike every Sunday afternoon.
- **Encourage your child to play** games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.
- **Be creative.** During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park a few blocks away from a store and walk. Or, make a quick stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** Kids who see their family members staying fit (stretching, walking with a friend, etc.), are more likely to be active themselves.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance: an analysis of mediating and confounding relationships in primary school children," BMC Public Health, BioMed Central.

Make geography meaningful with fun learning activities

Teaching kids about geography helps them better understand the world. To make geography more personal:

- **Have your child draw a map** from your home to school, the grocery store or a friend's house. Then, take a trip together and follow the map to see if it's correct.
- **Go outside and point out** north, south, east and west (and northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest). Ask your child to describe where places in your town are located. For example, "My school is northeast of my house."
- **Look for patterns in your town.** Some streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. You might also find streets named in alphabetical order (like Adams, Bay and Club streets). Help your child spot these clues!
- **Encourage your child** to collect items from different countries. Stamps, post cards and coins are great items to collect and learn about.
- **Talk about where relatives live.** Look at a map together and talk about the different ways to travel there from your home.
- **Walk around your house and** check labels to see where items were made. A calculator might be from Taiwan, or a cereal box might be from Michigan. Together, find these places on a map.
- **Have your child pick a country** and find a simple recipe from that region. As you cook together, look up the country and talk about what life might be like there.

Questions & Answers

Q: My fifth grader suffers from some serious self-doubt. "I can't do anything right!" is my child's current mantra. How can I help my child see the smart and capable person that I see?

A: As children get older and school becomes more challenging, self-doubt and insecurity can rear their ugly heads. Some students feel immense pressure to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you probably can't make insecurity go away altogether, you can do things to help your child feel more confident and competent. Here's how:

- **Find the right outlets.** Let your child experience success by recommending activities where success is the most likely outcome. If sports are your child's thing, encourage practice to perfect certain skills. If your child enjoys reading, suggest starting a book club with friends.
- **Assign responsibilities.** Your child may gripe about having to put away laundry, but that's OK. Completing chores is an effective way to make your child feel valued, because doing them helps the whole family. It can make your child more responsible and capable, too.
- **Acknowledge accomplishments.** Did your child do something wonderful? Offer your congratulations. Talk about your child's achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or setting a beautiful table for dinner.

With a little help from you, your child will begin to see the same resourceful person you see!

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It Matters: Literacy Skills

Reading and writing at home boosts success

When students practice reading and writing, they do better in school. Strengthening these skills can also help them succeed later in life.

Research shows that children who work on reading and writing skills at home—even just for fun—often do better in class than their peers. As they grow up, these students tend to become hardworking adults who do well in their jobs.

Luckily, there are some simple ways to encourage your child to spend more time reading and writing. Here are a few ideas to try:

- **Make books a priority.** Don't save stories for bedtime—read them any time of day! Keep books in places where your child can easily reach them. Visit the library to find new favorites. Also, set a good example: When you have downtime, pick up a book instead of the remote or your phone.
- **Start a family journal.** Each weekend, ask your child to write down something special about the week. It does not have to be long; a few sentences are fine. After your child's entry, add your own.
- **Play word games.** Games like Scrabble, Boggle and Bananagrams help your child get better at reading and writing while having fun.

Source: N.L. Alston-Abel and V.W. Berninger, "Relationships Between Home Literacy Practices and School Achievement: Implications for Consultation and Home-School Collaboration," *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation,* [1]Taylor and Francis.

Retelling can improve your child's reading comprehension

You've just finished reading a story with your child. One of the best ways to check for understanding is to ask your child to retell the story.

Retelling a story requires your child to think about the details and decide what's really important.

Give your child these three rules for retelling a story:

- **Tell what's important.**
- **Tell it in a way** that makes sense.
- **Don't tell too much.**

Your child should be able to tell you what happens at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. If your child forgets certain details, look back at that part of the book together.

Revisiting the text shows your elementary schooler that verifying details is a smart way to understand the reading material better.

Source: B. Taylor and J. Ysseldyke, *Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers: K-6,* Teachers College Press.

Help your elementary schooler discover the joy of reading

Strong reading skills make learning every school subject much easier. However, literacy experts agree that literacy skill-building is most effective when children want to read. If your child isn't interested, try these ways to spark that excitement:

- **Listen to audiobooks** or record your own. Your child can follow along with the physical book while listening.
- **Follow current events** that catch your child's interest. Read the latest updates together each night. It's a great way to show how reading connects your child to the world.
- **Sign up for a pen pal.** Kids love getting mail and reading about life in other countries. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian about how to find a pen pal program.
- **Take a virtual field trip.** Challenge your child to research a local attraction, like a museum, online. Your child can be your "tour guide" by sharing interesting facts from the museum's website.
- **Give reading coupons.** Use these as rewards for good behavior to show your child that reading is special. The coupons could be good for 30 minutes of shared reading time or a trip to pick out a new book.