

Classroom Confidential

After a long, lazy summer, getting back into the swing of school can be a challenge. We talked to teachers around the country for advice on how to make the transition easier for your kids and set them up for a great year. BY LESLIE PEPPER



Setting goals can lead to success.

As the first day back draws closer, talk to your child about what a “good” day looks like and what the reward will be. Also discuss what would constitute a “bad” day and go over the consequences that would involve. A clear understanding of your expectations makes it more likely your kid will succeed.

—Traci D. W. Jackson, Atlanta, GA

ELEMENTARY

Your kid needs a good breakfast.

With a less-structured summer schedule, parents can tend to be more laid-back about meals. I've had students fall asleep or burst into tears in class, and I know it's because they haven't eaten. Get back into healthy breakfasts when school starts so kids can focus better. We'll love you for it.

—Colleen Mier, Irving, TX

Shoes can make or break their day.

There's nothing more distracting than a pair of uncomfortable shoes. Make shopping for a new pair of sneakers a fun event that hypes the new school year. And please, have kids walk around in them for a few days before Day One. That way the shoes are broken in and I can have their full attention.

—Jill Armstrong, Carlsbad, CA

We dread when your child is late.

I don't think parents realize the stress that being late puts on a kid. To make mornings run smoother, prepare everything the night before. I'm talking all clothes chosen and laid out, water bottles filled, schoolbags ready. I have my son and daughter, who are 13 and 11, put their backpacks in the car before they go to sleep.

—Ann Boles, Plano, TX

If you get them excited before school starts, Day One will go easier.

Shop for a cool lunch box or backpack in the weeks leading up to school. Some principals will let kids visit their new classroom and even meet the teacher if you're lucky. But we're busy prepping, so please keep the visit to a few minutes!

—Len Saunders, Montville, NJ

MIDDLE SCHOOL

You're probably more nervous than your child.

Parents have a hard time—on so many levels—transitioning from elementary to middle school. Their sons and daughters are growing up! But kids see this as an exciting time. They could be going to a new school in a new environment with new teachers and new kids. I know it's easier said than done, but please don't convey to your kids that you're anxious because they'll feel anxious too. —Karen Evans, Old Saybrook, CT

Mindset-wise, sooner is better.

With my own kids, I gradually start transitioning back to school-year thinking in late summer, asking them to help pack lunches for the beach and getting them into bed a bit earlier. Sometimes we sit at the table and do a little reading or writing. It doesn't have to be anything grand, just enough to ease them back into the routines they'll need when school starts. —Sarah May, Bristol, CT

Don't believe everything you hear.

If your child is assigned a teacher that other students supposedly hate, or someone goes out of their way to tell you how "mean" a certain teacher is, don't agonize over it. Everyone is different, and your child may very well get along just fine with that teacher. —Stacy Kasse, Haddonfield, NJ



The locker may be the toughest part. Buy a lock early enough that your child can practice opening it until it's easy.

—Amy Buckelew, Bridgewater, NJ

HIGH SCHOOL

We want you at Back-to-School Night.

By the time your kids reach high school, you're likely not getting much face-to-face time at school, so it's important to attend Back-to-School Night to get to know your child's teachers and routines. Many districts have school websites or apps to keep you in the loop about assignments, tests and other key events. Use them!

—Karen Herman, Richmond, VA

Trust me, I'm your partner.

I would love for parents to email me at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves. And yes, tone counts. Make it positive, with the assumption being, We're a team. Something

like, "I'm looking forward to working with you this year. If there's anything I can do to make Suzy's year better, please let me know." That tells me you trust my experience. By supporting me, you empower me to get the best from your student. —Adrienne Oliver, Charlottesville, VA

Don't do it for them.

In elementary and middle school, parents and teachers play more of a coach role. And students' successes and failures rest on how well the adults do their job as coaches. But when kids get into high school, they have to control their own successes and failures. Remember, I want your child to succeed. But that doesn't mean I'm not going to fail them if they



don't do the work. I'm here to facilitate, but students have to do the work on their own. —*Kim Mohn, Durham, NC*

Encourage extracurriculars.

The work in high school can sometimes feel overwhelming. Finding something that interests teens and surrounds them with people who like that same thing can provide a welcome escape and be the key to staying positive. For instance, my daughter was involved in theater, French and art clubs. Those connections really helped her when things were tough. —*Donna Allen-Krug, Plant City, FL*

Your teen has to keep reading.

Most high schools give reading assignments over the summer, so make sure your kid does

them. And as an English teacher, I'd like your child to be reading more than just that one assigned book. So read yourself—your kids need you modeling the behavior you want them to follow. —*Lori Belbol, Franklin Square, NY*

Connecting with one teacher can make all the difference.

High school teachers generally have large rosters and multiple subjects or sections. It can be easy for a child to start feeling invisible. A great solution: Encourage your child to find one teacher they trust. Send that teacher an email, introduce yourself and build a relationship with them as well. When your child is struggling, reach out to that teacher for guidance, suggestions or advice. —*Jessica Todd, Saint Louis, MO*

College 101

As your parent role evolves, keep in mind:

► **They need life lessons.**

While they're still under your roof, have teens practice things they'll need to do on their own at college. Let them manage their own schedules. Have them make a doctor's appointment and fill a prescription or talk face-to-face with a teacher. Once they do these things a few times, they'll realize it's not as difficult as they're expecting. —*Kate Degner, Iowa City, IA*

► **We offer specific services to help kids adjust.**

Almost all universities offer not just counseling services but writing centers, tutoring and more. If your kid is having issues, make sure they thoroughly check out any support systems the school has in place. —*Djanna Hill, EdD, Wayne, NJ*

► **Kids need to go to class.**

Teens get their first taste of freedom in college and think they'll be fine if they just read the textbook or get the notes. They won't be. Students learn best when they see, hear and write the information simultaneously. Plus being in the classroom gives students the opportunity to ask questions and get clarification in the moment from the professor. Attending class is the most important part of being successful academically in college. —*Jamie Graber, Garden City, NY*

► **Don't tell, ask.**

If your child fails a test, instead of telling them what they should do (or calling the professor yourself!) ask what they think they need to do in order to pass the next exam. This is an opportunity to develop resilience. Ask, "What resources are available?" Show your teen you have every confidence in them and they'll work it out. —*Shahnaz Bruceck, Ann Arbor, MI*

Help them get and stay organized. There are a lot of moving pieces in high school, so a planner is crucial. Most versions have a month, a week and a day at a glance for scheduling homework. Also, teens can use their phones to set up reminders about assignments and due dates. Ask your kids at least once a week, "Do you have everything in your planner? Are you on track with all your work?" Then hopefully they won't get crushed at the last minute.

—*Jeannette Wilt, Wilmington, DE*