



GREATSCHOOLS BACK-TO-SCHOOL SURVIVAL GUIDE:

*Everything you need to start the
school year off right!*



Are you ready for the back-to-school season?

GreatSchools has you covered with school supply lists and tips on everything from staying healthy to getting organized.



- School supply list 2
- Back-to-school night 3
- 5 key skills to academic success 6
- 7 ways to be your child’s sleep advocate 9
- Notes 10



Back to basics: A school supply list to get you started

The smartest way to shop for school supplies is to eliminate the guesswork by getting a list from your child's teacher ahead of time. Even if the list isn't available you can still take advantage of back to school sales by sticking to the basics. Be sure to keep this school supply list handy to make your shopping as easy as A, B, C.

Writing essentials

- No. 2 pencils
- Colored pencils
- A pencil sharpener (hand-held with a top to collect shavings)
- A large pink eraser (the old fashioned ones do the best erasing)
- Ballpoint pens
- A box of crayons (Teachers recommend a 16-pack for younger kids)
- Water-based markers
- Spiral-bound or composition notebooks
- Looseleaf notebook paper

Craft materials

- Drawing paper
- Construction paper
- A ruler with English and metric measure
- Glue sticks
- A 4 oz. bottle of white glue
- Scotch tape
- A stapler

Craft materials continued

- Scissors (blunt ended for younger kids)
- Watercolor paints

Organizational helpers

- A three-ring binder
- Pocket folders (at least two folders, label one "keep at home" and the other "bring back to school" to help your child organize his papers)
- A box for storing items (teachers recommend an 8x5 inches wide and at least 2 inches deep to hold pencils, crayons, erasers and scissors)
- Highlighters (probably not necessary for kids in K-2nd grade)
- Index cards for making flash cards
- A sturdy, supportive backpack
- Calendar or assignment book to keep track of homework assignments

6 steps to a successful back-to-school night

Along with shopping for school supplies and adopting earlier bedtimes, back-to-school night is an important ritual marking the beginning of the new school year. Make the most of back-to-school night. It's a valuable opportunity to learn essential information about your child's classroom experience. Here are some tips to help you have a successful back-to-school night.

1. Find out if you can bring the kids

Your school's administration may have a no-children policy for back-to-school night, believing that parents should be free to focus on meeting the teacher and listening to his presentation. However, more and more schools recognize that arranging for childcare, getting the kids home and then returning to school is challenging for parents, and have started to offer childcare at the school for the evening. Be sure to find out what your school's policy is and make the necessary arrangements.

2. Devise a strategy if you need to visit more than one child's classroom

If you have more than one child at the school, you'll need to strategize. If your older child has already had the teacher that your younger child now has, you might decide that visiting your older child's teacher is the priority for the evening. If both parents are able to attend, you can divide and conquer or take turns in the different classrooms.

3. Bring a pen and paper

Brenda Lofton, recent Louisiana Teacher of the Year and a middle school math and science teacher, recommends coming prepared to take notes: "If the teacher says you can contact me and these are my conference hours, you need to write down that information. Also, teachers may give information through a Power Point presentation or maybe something written on the board. So bring something to take notes with."

"I usually go over homework procedures, discipline procedures, the different things that are expected, and then give parents time to ask questions," says Lofton.

4. Don't ask specific questions about your child

Ask any questions that you have about the curriculum, field trips or grades, but refrain from asking questions specific to your child that won't be useful to other parents. It's better to make an appointment for a conference to discuss your concerns one-on-one.

"It happens all the time that someone wants to ask you specifically about their child," says Lofton. "Parents need to know that the teacher would be better prepared to answer their questions and have more time for them if they would set up a conference, instead of trying to do it at 7:30 when it's possible that a teacher might have a young child at home and has been there all day and you may have other parents standing around. So questions are good, but they just need to be ones that address everyone's concerns."

5. Be ready to volunteer

There will be many opportunities to sign up for volunteer activities, either for school-wide programs or in the classroom. You'll be better prepared if you've already given some thought to your time constraints and how you'd like to contribute to the school community.

Denis Cruz, recent California Teacher of the Year, has taught in both elementary and middle school, and has seen many parents quit volunteering when their children reach middle school, often because they're intimidated by the subject matter. "Ask the principal if there's anything you can do to be involved in your child's education," suggests Cruz. "We seem to lose parents by eighth grade, but we still want their participation."

6. Bring a note for the teacher about your child

If your teacher hasn't already asked for it, now is a good time to give him a letter describing your child's personality, academic history and any areas of concern you may have. He will appreciate receiving the information.

Important information to take away from back-to-school night

1. An overview of your child's school day

Elementary school teachers will share the typical daily and weekly schedule for the class. If you want to volunteer in the classroom, this information is helpful in determining the best time to come. For example, if the teacher asks for parent volunteers to help her work with struggling readers, you need to know when the class is in the classroom reading and not out for music, art, P.E. or lunch.

2. Knowledge of what the classroom looks like

Take a look around the classroom. Is it well-organized? Is it warm and inviting? Is there a lot of clutter? If it's cluttered, is the clutter educational and stimulating to young minds? You can tell quite a bit about the teacher from what you see on the walls and in the bookshelves. You will also have the opportunity to look at the textbooks and any journals, portfolios, and artwork the students have created.

3. What it's like to sit in your child's seat

Many teachers ask parents to sit in their child's seat. This gives parents the opportunity to see the classroom from their child's point of view, and it gives teachers the chance to mentally match parents with students.

4. The homework and discipline policies

The homework policy should include information on when homework is due, how it is evaluated and how often, how much is assigned each night and on weekends, and how much it counts towards the final grade.

5. How to contact the teacher

Find out how to contact the teacher and what form of communication she prefers: email, voice mail, or notes. Many teachers now use websites or weekly classroom newsletters to stay in touch with parents. If the teacher plans to send home a printed newsletter with your child, you'll want to know how often and if you should expect to receive it on a particular day of the week, so you'll know to remind your child.

5 key skills to academic success

It takes a combination of skills — organization, time management, prioritization, concentration, and motivation — to achieve academic success. Here are some tips to help get your child on the right track.

1. Organization

For many students, academic challenges are related more to a lack of organization than to a lack of intellectual ability.

Tips to help your child get organized:

- Make a checklist of things your child needs to bring to school (and back) every day. Post a copy of the list by the door, and put another in your child's backpack. Encourage him to check the list every day.
- Find out how your child plans to keep track of homework and organize notebooks; if necessary, help him develop a better system.
- Look together to find tools that will help your child stay organized, such as binders, folders, and an assignment book.

2. Time management

Some students always wait until the last minute to finish a homework assignment or tackle a project. Learning to organize time into productive blocks takes practice and experience.

Tips to help your child manage time:

- Show your child how to track assignments on a monthly calendar. Work backward from the due date of larger assignments and break them into daily tasks.
- Help your child record how much time it takes to do homework each week so she can figure out how to divide this time into manageable chunks.
- Work with your child to identify a good time for daily homework and help him stick to this schedule.

Time management continued

- Take into account your child's internal clock. If evening homework time isn't productive because she runs out of steam, for example, identify other times for schoolwork, such as early mornings, study halls, or weekends.

3. Prioritization

Many children fall behind in school because they aren't good at managing their time or assessing which assignments are most important. Prioritizing tasks is a skill your child will need throughout life, so it's never too early to learn.

Tips to help your child prioritize:

- Ask your child to write down all the things he needs to do, including non-school-related activities.
- Ask him to label each task from 1 to 3, with 1 being most important.
- Ask about each task, so that you understand your child's priorities. If he labels all his social activities as 1, then you know where his attention is focused.
- Help your child change some of the labels to better prioritize for academic success. Then suggest he rewrite the list so all the 1's are at the top.
- Check in frequently to see how the list is evolving and how your child is prioritizing new tasks.

4. Concentration

Whether your child is practicing her second-grade spelling words or studying for a trigonometry test, it's important that she works on schoolwork in an area with limited distractions and interruptions.

Tips to help your child concentrate:

- Turn off access to email and games when your child works on the computer.
- Declare the phone and TV off-limits during homework time.
- Find space that fits the assignment. If your child is working on a science project, she may need lots of space; if she's studying for a Spanish test, she will need a well-lit desk.
- Help your child concentrate during homework time by separating her from her siblings and other distractions.

5. Motivation

Most children say they want to do well in school, yet many still fail to complete the level of work necessary to succeed academically. Tapping into your child's interests is a great way to encourage her to do well in school.

Tips to help motivate your child:

- Link school lessons to your child's life. If he's learning percentages, ask him to figure out the price of a discounted item next time you shop.
- Link your child's interests to academics. If he's passionate about music, give him books about musicians and show how music and foreign languages are connected.
- Give your child control and choices. With guidance, let him determine his study hours, organizing system, or school project topics.
- Encourage your child to share expertise and exciting new information. Regularly ask about what he's learning in school.
- Attend school events and help out at your child's school when you can.
- Talk to your child about college! This helps even young kids have a tangible goal to work towards.
- Congratulate and encourage your child, and celebrate all of his successes!

7 ways to be your child's sleep advocate

Children ages 5 to 10 need 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night, according to the National Sleep Foundation, yet studies show that most kids are not getting enough sleep each night. Sleep deprivation can affect cognitive skills and academic achievement. A chronic lack of sleep is linked to serious health problems including diabetes, obesity, heart disease, depression, and a shortened life span. Use the following tips and ideas to help improve sleep habits at your house.

1. Talk to your child about sleep

Help her understand the importance of a good nights sleep.

2. Establish a sleep routine

Set a regular wake-up time and bedtime, and stick to a nightly routine.

3. Say no to late-night TV and computer use

Keep the computer and TV out of your child's bedroom, so you can monitor screen activities and make sure your child doesn't stay up too late.

4. Ask the teacher

Ask your child's teacher if your child is alert or sleepy in class. If he is frequently sleepy in class, that's a sign that you need to help him get more sleep.

5. Power naps

A short nap after school may be refreshing, but don't let your school-age child sleep for hours during the day - that could throw off his natural sleep schedule.

6. Exercise, exercise, exercise

To promote healthy sleep (and overall good health) make sure your child gets regular exercise. If your child's school doesn't offer sufficient recess or PE time, consider having your child join a sports team or take a swimming or martial arts class.

7. Be a role model

Show your child that you make sleep a priority in your own life by following a regular sleep schedule.

Notes and reminders



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