RAISING A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT
Elementary school
Supporting your child in elementary school

So much goes into raising a happy learner. Here, we focus on a handful of key ways you can support your child’s academic success at this young age — from organization and time management to helping with homework and building a love of reading that’ll last a lifetime.

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5 skills for academic success
It takes more than smarts to succeed in school. Teach your children these crucial skills so they can thrive academically.

1. Organization
For many students, academic challenges stem from a lack of organization, not 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 daily.

• Find out how your child plans to keep track of homework and organize notebooks; if necessary, help him develop a better system.

• Look for tools that will help your child stay organized, such as binders, folders, and an assignment book.

2. Time management
Some students wait until the last minute to finish homework 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 and break larger assignments into daily tasks.

• Help your child record how long it takes to do homework each week to figure out how to divide this time into manageable chunks.

• Work together to identify a good time for daily homework, taking your child’s internal clock into account. If evening isn’t productive because she runs out of steam, identify other times, such as early mornings or study halls. Help your child stick to this schedule.
3. Prioritization

Many children fall behind because they aren’t good at 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 everything he needs to do, including activities. Then 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.

4. Concentration

Whether your child is practicing her spelling words or studying for a math test, it’s important that she does schoolwork in an area with limited distractions and interruptions.

• Declare the internet, phone, games, 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’ll need a well-lit desk.

• Help your child concentrate by separating her from her siblings and other distractions.

5. Motivation

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

• Link your child’s interests to academics. If he’s passionate about music, give him books about musicians and show him how music and foreign languages are connected.

• 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.

• Congratulate and encourage your child. Celebrate all of his hard work and success!
Best ways to help with math homework

Your child’s math homework probably looks very different than the math you did in school. How can you help if you don’t understand it? And, how can you guide your child without just providing the answers?

• Go over the directions and find out what your child does and doesn’t understand about the assignment.

• Ask your child where he thinks he should begin.

• Ask if he can find information in his notes to solve the problem. Did they do a similar problem in class?

• Look for a similar problem explained in the textbook.

• Suggest that he draw or make a model to explain his thinking.

• Ask guiding questions, such as “What should you do next?” “Is this answer reasonable?” “Did you answer the question?” “Can you solve it another way?”

• Even when your child’s struggling, resist the temptation to give your child the answer. If you need to share the answer, demonstrate how you got there. Check that your child understands by asking him to explain the main idea in his own words.

• Let your child know it’s fine to ask for extra help — whether it’s getting guidance from the teacher or asking another student for help.

• If he struggles to understand the subject matter or has trouble keeping up with the amount of homework assigned, ask his teacher for recommendations.

• Remember: the greatest impact on your child’s attitude toward math is your attitude toward math. Show an interest in math and point out the many ways you use math in everyday life.
A math cheat sheet for parents

Remember this stuff? Not to worry, we’ve all forgotten some math lessons from long ago. Use this refresher to feel more comfortable helping your child with increasingly complex math homework.

Estimation means finding an approximate answer, not an exact answer.

Rounding decimals:
1. Find the place value you’re rounding to (the “rounding digit”) and look at the digit to the right of it.
2. If that digit is less than five, do not change the “rounding digit” and drop all digits to the right of it.
3. If that digit is greater than or equal to five, add one to the “rounding digit” and drop all digits to the right of it.

Rounding whole numbers:
1. Find the place value you’re rounding to (the “rounding digit”) and look at the digit to the right of it.
2. If that digit is less than five, do not change the “rounding digit” and change all digits to the right of the “rounding digit” to zero.
3. If that digit is greater than or equal to five, add one to the “rounding digit” and change all digits to the right of the rounding digit to zero.

Inequalities are mathematical expressions used to compare two quantities using one of these symbols:
> greater than
< less than
≤ less than or equal to
≥ greater than or equal to

Mean, mode, median, range:
Consider the set of numbers: 80, 90, 90, 100, 85, 90.

The mean is another term for average. It’s found by adding a set of numbers and dividing by the quantity of numbers there are in that set. \( \frac{80 + 90 + 90 + 100 + 85 + 90}{6} = 89.167 \)

The mode is the value that occurs most often. 90
The **median** is the number in the middle. To find the median, put the values in order from lowest to highest. Then find the number that is exactly in the middle. 80 85 90 90 90 100

If there is an even number of values, average the two values in the middle

\[(90 + 90) / 2 = 90\]

Notice that there is exactly the same number of values above the median as below it.

The **range** is the difference between the lowest and highest values. The range shows how spread out the data are.

100 - 80 = 20

**Shapes:**

- **Polygons** are flat, closed figures with three or more sides. The most common polygons are triangles, rectangles, and squares.
- A **quadrilateral** has four sides (squares and rectangles are quadrilaterals).
- A **pentagon** has five sides.
- A **hexagon** has six sides.
- An **octagon** has eight sides.

The number of sides also determines how many angles a polygon has. A quadrilateral has four angles, a pentagon has five angles, etc.

**Prime numbers:**

- A **prime number** is a counting number that only has two factors — itself and one.
- A **composite number** has more than two factors, such as 6, whose factors are 1, 2, 3 and 6.

The number 1 has only one factor (itself) and is neither prime nor composite.
Figuring out fractions:
• A fraction is a number written in the form: N/D where N is the **numerator** and D is the **denominator**.

• A **proper fraction** has a numerator that is less than the denominator: \( \frac{4}{9} \)

• An **improper fraction** has a numerator greater than or equal to the denominator: \( \frac{9}{4} \)

• A **mixed number** is a whole number and a fraction: \( 1 \frac{3}{4} \)

• The **reciprocal** is the inverse of a number. For a fraction, it’s obtained by “turning the fraction upside down.”

\[
\text{Fraction: } \frac{2}{3} \quad \text{Reciprocal: } \frac{3}{2}
\]

**Adding and subtracting fractions:**

**Like fractions** have the same denominator (2/3 and 1/3 are like fractions). You can add and subtract like fractions easily — simply add or subtract the numerators and write the sum over the common denominator.

\[
\frac{1}{3} + \frac{2}{3} = \frac{3}{3}
\]

\[
\frac{5}{7} - \frac{2}{7} = \frac{3}{7}
\]

Before you can add or subtract fractions with different denominators, you must first find equivalent fractions with the same denominator, or the **least common denominator (LCD)**. Here’s how:

1. Find the smallest multiple of both numbers.

2. Rewrite the fractions as equivalent fractions with the LCD as the denominator — just remember to write the new numerators as well.

3. Now add or subtract.

\[
\frac{1}{5} + \frac{1}{3} = \frac{1 \cdot 3}{5 \cdot 3} + \frac{1 \cdot 5}{3 \cdot 5} = \frac{3}{15} + \frac{5}{15} = \frac{8}{15}
\]
7 tips for reading with your child

Experts in child literacy are unanimous: parents should read with their children. The parent-child bond has a positive effect both on your child’s attitude toward reading and your child’s ability to read.

1. Use the "five-finger rule" to choose the right book. Pick a page in the middle of a new book and ask your child to read it. Each time your child comes across a word she doesn't know, hold up a finger. No fingers? The book is probably easy for your child and can be used to work on reading fluency. Two or three fingers? The book is at a good level. Five fingers or more? The book is too hard.

2. Use sound strategies to tackle a new word. Ask your child to sound out an unknown word. Look at the letters in a difficult word and have your child pronounce each sound, or phoneme. Then, blend the sounds together to pronounce the word.

3. Use the story to help your child learn. Ask your child what word or idea would make sense in the plot of the story when she gets stuck on an unfamiliar word. Encourage your child to look at illustrations, pictures, titles, or graphs to figure out the meaning of new words.

4. Give support and encouragement. Give your child a chance to figure out new words before you jump in, but it’s okay to help before your child gets frustrated.

5. Make reading a priority. Set aside a specific time for reading every day. The special together time will help kindle your child’s love of books and reading.

6. Make reading fun. Take turns reading in the voices of different characters, and play around with funny voices. Impersonate animals and unusual characters in stories.

7. Keep reading aloud to your child. Don’t stop reading aloud, even after your child learns to read independently. Reading aloud to your child models reading smoothly and with expression; it also helps your child enjoy books that are beyond her reading level and builds her vocabulary.