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Tips for a successful return to school

By Hope Lecchi

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For parents and students across the United States, the return to school is either highly anticipated or sometimes dreaded. As most students across Missouri have not been in a regular classroom setting since March 13 when Gov. Mike Parson announced the closure of schools across the state due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the wait has been even longer.

There are steps parents and their students can begin now that may help to create a more successful return to school.

The Democrat recently reached out to the Sedalia School District 200 elementary principals seeking their input on ways to help establish a smooth transition for the return to school.

Stephanie Jackson
Parkview Elementary

“I would give parents the tip of getting their child back into a school routine. Students have been out longer than a typical summer, so it is going to be important for parents to begin a back to school routine at least several weeks before school starts. I would suggest decreasing their bed time by 30 minutes each week until you get to the desired bed time for school. Also, it will be important children begin waking up earlier each morning and starting their day similar to a morning school routine. Most children thrive on routine and structure and it will bring a sense of security for starting school.”

Kelly McFatrigh
Skyline Elementary

“Parents can start to get their children back into the routine of doing homework by scheduling a time each evening for reading. During the summer months it’s common to get out of the habit of reading and young students need practice with reading every day to keep their skills sharp. Parents can

make sure that there is a dedicated time and space for kids to do homework or reading. Also committing to turning off electronics like the TV during this time will remove distractions and help students focus. Most young students can finish their school work within 20-30 minutes so it doesn’t have to be a long time set aside each night. Getting back into the habit now will make things easier on parents when school starts.”

Lisa Volk
Washington Elementary

“I would suggest each parent talk through how their child will get to school and be picked up each day. Some will be riding the school bus, but many may opt to use personal transportation this year. With more parents picking possibly dropping off and picking up each day, safety will be vital for everyone. All of our buildings have arrival/dismissal procedures in place so that safety is our top priority each day.”

Sara Pannier
Horace Mann

“I would like to remind parents the importance of thoroughly completing the online enrollment process and before the first day of school. It is extremely important that we have the most up to date contact information, medical/health history, and emergency contact information in case a situation should arise that we need to speak to them immediately.”

Angela Meyer
Heber Hunt

“I think another important thing is to establish a place to store school things and develop a morning routine. This will allow for students to have smooth mornings once school resumes.”

Brett Hieronymus
Sedalia Middle School

“I echo everyone’s sentiments as we have a very knowledgeable team. I cannot speak for everyone but our team here at SMS is very excited to get our kids

back. Although process and protocols might look and feel a little different our main focus will be to: establish a safe, secure and fun environment in which kids can learn. We realize the importance of developing the whole child, not just academically but also mentally as we embark on the most unprecedented years of my career.”

Brainly, one of the world’s largest peer-to-peer learning communities of students, parents, and teachers, created a list of its top five tips for parents to help their children of any age as they prepare to return to school.

1. Develop a sleep routine now

Getting up early for school can be jarring for middle and high school students who have been used to sleeping in all summer. Start a routine a few weeks before school begins so that your kids can get used to their new schedule.

2. Establish school routines

Students should get used to the hours of work and homework they will be expected to do during the school year. Developing a routine to help students manage their time and set up a dedicated homework space so they aren’t caught flat footed in September.

3. Avoid the summer slump

School-aged kids can revert by nearly a month’s worth of instruction over the summer. The best way to circumvent this issue is to keep skillsets fresh and minds sharp over the summer.

4. Purchase school supplies

This may seem obvious but students will need basic school supplies. Parents should check with their respective school’s websites for school supply lists.

5. Get students organized

Nothing adds heaps of unneeded stress to an already stressful time than not being organized. If possible try to maintain the organization throughout the school year.

Hope Lecchi can be reached at 660-826-1000 ext. 1484.

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Preparing your child for kindergarten

By Emily Walton

emilyw@sedaliademocrat.com

The beginning of the school year can be a stressful time for children but especially for kindergarten students beginning their school experiences. A couple of Sedalia School District 200 principals gave their tips for parents to help prepare their children for beginning kindergarten this year.

"A lot of parents are concerned just about their child and whether they are ready for kindergarten academically," explained Skyline Elementary School Principal Kelly McFatrach. "Some things that they can work on that we continue to work on here is counting to 10, writing their name, just practicing holding that pencil and getting them kind of accustomed to doing that if they aren't already. Knowing their a,b,c's. Just your basic stuff that it does help our teachers if they know those things."

There is also potential for separation anxiety, according to Horace Mann Elementary Principal Sara Pannier.

"If there is a potential for separation anxiety, then I would recommend for parents to practice dropping off their child at a trusted home or at Sunday School at church to get them accustomed to parents leaving and trusting they will come back to pick them up," Pannier said. "They may also want to drive by school so that they become familiar and excited. Parents will also want to discuss with their child how they cannot come

inside and will have to drop off from the curb or at the door."

McFatrach said going over what the child's day is going to be like in kindergarten and reassuring them they're safe at school can be helpful also.

"They just need to know that they're going to be safe here and taken care of and then whoever is taking care of them is going to be there when they get home," McFatrach said. "It's whatever their routine is going to be. If they can just talk to kids about it, visuals help...Preparing them for their day so that it's a little bit more predictable for them."

Pannier also said discussing with children "how much fun they are going to have learning and how exciting it is to be in kindergarten" can be helpful.

"Include them in the back to school shopping so that they feel important and excited about their first day of school and first day to use their new supplies," Pannier suggested.

Pannier and McFatrach both said to practice getting up early and going to bed early leading up to school. A good way to do this is to start a few weeks before, slowly getting children up earlier and earlier and putting them to bed earlier and earlier until they are used to their school schedule. McFatrach also said the school does not do naps, which might be something for some children to get used to.

"Kids will be tired at the end," she said. "A lot of parents say they fall asleep on the way home for those first couple of weeks."



DEMOCRAT FILE PHOTO

Dustin Bailey offers words of encouragement to his step-son Thomas Schlarb in the Sacred Heart School cafeteria who was beginning kindergarten in August 2019.

Other tips from Pannier included making sure children know how to use the restroom by themselves, proper handwashing and how to sit properly in a chair.

Pannier and McFatrach both said it was important to practice opening items that will be in the students' lunch like ziplock bags, yogurt containers, etc.

"If they're going to bring their lunch from home make sure that they're putting things in there that are easy for them to open," McFatrach said. "We will have adults up there that help with that but this year especially with the virus, we're going to want to limit how much we touch the items in their lunch...We want to keep kids as safe as possible."

The COVID-19 pandemic will be adding additional new things for kindergarten students to get used to. McFatrach

said it is important to prepare children to know their parents are not going to be able to go into the school with them. She also suggested making sure children are prepared to see their teachers in masks.

"Preparing them definitely to see their teachers in masks, that's going to be a different thing," McFatrach said. "That is something that is going to be kind of different and can be scary for them."

Pannier recommended practicing wearing masks with children if masks end up being required in the schools.

"Practice how to sneeze or cough in their elbow," Pannier explained. "Practice how to use hand sanitizers. Discuss what social distancing means and help them understand the importance of keeping their hands and feet to themselves."

Emily Walton can be contacted at 660-530-146.



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Missouri to host annual sales tax holiday

By Democrat Staff

Missourians will be able to save a little money as they prepare for back to school with the state's annual sales tax holiday.

According to the Missouri Department of Revenue, by state law, the sales tax holiday begins the first Friday in August and continues through the following Sunday. This year's tax-free weekend will be Friday, Aug. 7 to Sunday, Aug. 9.

Certain back-to-school purchases, such as clothing, school supplies, computers, and other items as defined by the statute, are exempt from sales tax for this time period. Only purchases for personal use qualify.

The sales tax holiday applies to state and local sales taxes when a local jurisdiction chooses to participate in the holiday. However, local jurisdictions can choose to not participate in the holiday. Even if a local taxing jurisdiction is not participating in the sales tax holiday, the state's portion of the tax rate (4.225%) will remain exempt for the sale of qualifying sales tax holiday items.

The County of Pettis is participating in the sales tax holiday but the City of Sedalia is not.

According to DOR, the sales tax exemption is limited to:

- Clothing: any article having a taxable value of \$100 or less.
- School supplies: not to exceed \$50 per purchase.
- Computer software: taxable value of \$350 or less.
- Personal computers: not to exceed \$1,500.
- Computer peripheral devices: not to exceed \$1,500.
- Graphing calculators: not to exceed \$150.

A more detailed list of items that do and do not qualify is available on the DOR website.

For more information, visit dor.mo.gov/business/sales/taxholiday/school.



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Tips for grabbing the best deals on school clothes

Learn the ropes to get back-to-school clothing deals. Children and parents often look forward to the dawn of a new school year. But before the first home-room session can take place, parents may need to take their students clothes shopping.

According to a 2018 survey by Deloitte, parents spend an average of \$510 per household on apparel, school supplies, electronic gadgets, and other items for their kids' return to school. The back-to-school season runs from July through September, during which American households alone spend \$27.6 billion, which is second only to the holiday season in regard to the most lucrative times for retailers.

Apparel is a large part of back-to-school shopping. Many parents find they need to outfit their kids with a new wardrobe each year. Jeans and leggings that fit like a glove in June may only reach mid-calf by Labor Day. To make the shopping process less harried and more productive, parents can employ these strategies.

Take inventory
Go through kids' wardrobes and see what can be salvaged and what might need to go. This is the perfect opportunity to put aside gently used, outgrown items that may be passed on to someone else who can use them.



Be sure to make a list of any items that the school requires, particularly in regard to uniforms or dress codes. By knowing what's in stock in the closet, you'll have a clear idea of what you need to buy.

Check for tax-free discounts
Some states or cities offer tax-free or discount shopping incentives, which can add up to considerable savings. It may be well worth the effort to stock up on necessities during these times.

Sign up for loyalty programs

If yours is a child who prefers certain brands, sign up early in the year for such brands' loyalty clubs. For example, the popular retailer Hollister has Club Cali that, with each purchase, grants points toward discounts. Plus, you may be privy to sale advertisements before the general public.

Get enough to get by

While certain clothing sales happen between July and August, oftentimes the real savings begin in October, according to the budgeting resource Money Crashers. Wait until that time to buy the bulk of kids' school clothes. After all, the first weeks of school are usually warm, and summer clothing will still suffice with a few new items thrown in to freshen up wardrobes.

Invest in quality shoes

Sneakers and other shoes can be expensive. However, investing in quality brands can help you avoid having to buy shoes frequently. Watch for shoe sales and stock up on coupons. Many stores offer "buy-one, get-one half off" during the back-to-school season.

In addition to these tips, save more by shopping overstock stores or warehouse clubs for name-brand items at lower prices.

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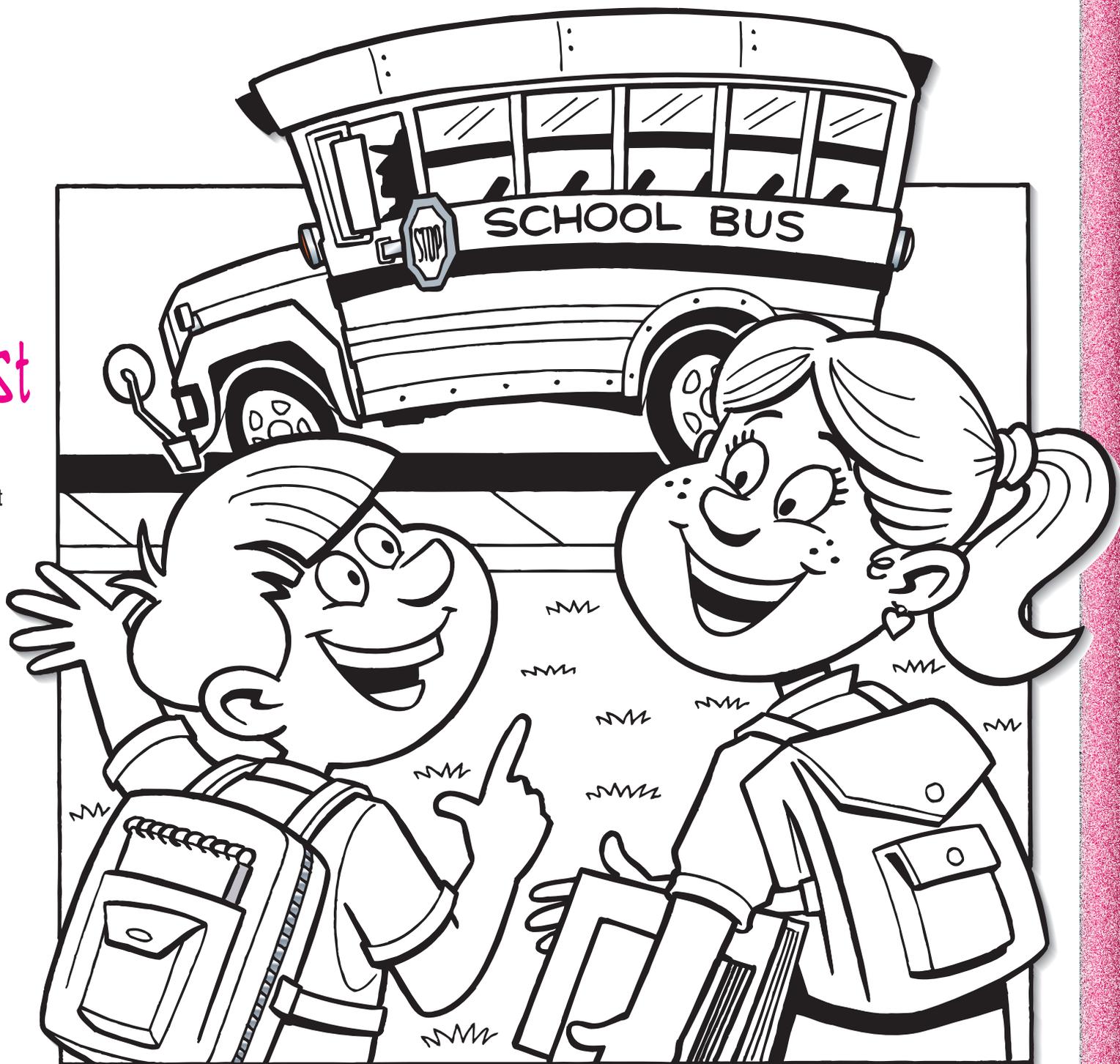
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Reading can help get kids ready to go back to school

It is common for children to backslide during summer vacations as they get further away from their daily school year routines. The rigors of schoolwork may come as a shock as children return to school and must reacquaint themselves with studying and doing their homework. But there are some steps students can take to keep their minds sharp as they ease back into school.

One of the most effective ways for students to stay sharp over summer is to continue reading. Pearson Education says evidence suggests that children who read for enjoyment every day not only perform better on reading tests than those who don't, but also develop a broader vocabulary, increased general knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures. Reading for pleasure also bears more influence on a child's academic performance than his or her social or economic background.

Summer reading assignments may not be mandated, but children can take it upon themselves to continually push themselves through recreational reading and

language arts pursuits. Here are ways that parents can facilitate that process.

- Set up a reading time. Children should have a set time each day that they devote to reading. Many find a regular reading time later in the evening before bed or as a precursor to other activities, such as watching television or playing video games, can help make reading a priority.
- Keep fresh reading materials. Stock the house with new books, magazines, newspapers, and even graphic novels. The more reading materials children have access to, the more likely they are to become habitual readers.
- Parents can lead by example. Parents should read as well. Choose books and periodicals over time spent on digital devices.
- Read in the world around you. Stop and read signs, menus, cereal boxes, billboards, and anything with the written word. Jot down difficult words and look them up together and discuss the definitions.



Reading is an important part of getting into the back-to-school groove. Make sure students set aside ample time for reading throughout the day, even during extended breaks from school.

- Consult with the teacher. Educators have tools they use to assess reading levels and abilities. Knowing a child's reading level and choosing the appropriate reading materials for that level can set kids up for success.



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Orthodontist provides tips for braces

By Faith Bemiss

fbemiss@sedaliademocrat.com

As children prepare for the new school year, many may have new braces. Listening to their orthodontist on how to care for their oral health and braces is important.

Sedalia orthodontist Dr. Gerald Spencer said he explains to children that the bacteria or plaque in their mouth are actually microscopic “bugs.”

“You have billions of bugs in your mouth,” he noted. “The bugs don’t eat your teeth and they don’t eat your gum tissues.

“All they can eat is any food that you leave in your mouth,” he continued. “A film of food is enough to feed them for 24 hours.”

He added the bacteria eating the food in the mouth doesn’t sound so bad, but once the “bugs” are full they let off secretions. Those secretions are filled with acid which in turn cause cavities in the teeth.

“If it (the acid) is on there for 24 hours it’s going to start burning holes in your teeth,” he noted. “And it will burn your gum tissues and your gum tissues will turn red and puff up.

“That’s the body’s response to something infecting it and inflammation,” he continued. “So, a lot of people tell me ‘when I brush my teeth, my gums bleed.’ That’s a warning that ‘hey we need help in here.’”

To keep bacteria from feeding inside one’s mouth Spencer said it’s “very important” to brush the teeth twice a day.

“Especially with braces,” he



STOCK PHOTO

Good dental hygiene is important for children who wear braces as well as for those who don’t. Following the orthodontist’s suggestion on not drinking soda and eating sugary treats are also important.

added. “Every morning before you go out the door. I will tell the kids it’s important to brush your teeth before you go to school.”

Brushing before school eliminates bad breath created from bacteria being in the mouth overnight.

“The other time it’s so important to brush is before you go to bed at night,” he noted. “Because these bugs, they don’t play tennis, they don’t even sleep. They are awake 24 hours a day ...”

Spencer added along with brushing twice a day, flossing is good but he suggests the use of a WaterPik to clean teeth.

“The best product, in my opinion, on the market today is the WaterPik,” he said. “I’ve seen what it does and I’ve read the reports. The reports show it’s more effective than flossing.

“Flossing used to be the standard,” he continued. “Every dentist used to say, ‘you have to floss your teeth.’ I’m not against flossing, but I do request that my patients get a WaterPik.”

He added the water from the Water Pik also neutralizes acid caused by bacterial secretions. Drinking water instead of sugary sodas and drinks will also help to neutralize bacterial acid.

Spencer said it’s important not to feed the “bugs.”

“Don’t leave stuff in your mouth that they can eat and turn into acid,” he explained. “The reason dentists say stay away from soda pop and candies and things like that, those little bugs in the mouth can turn sugar into acid 22 seconds after it enters the mouth.”

Spencer said sometimes children find their braces are taking

longer to adjust their teeth than they thought it would — the reason may be in the rubber bands.

“What I see more than anything with kids with braces, is that they will come in and their teeth haven’t moved much,” he added. “I’ll ask them, ‘are you wearing the rubber bands all the time?’”

He often finds children take their rubber bands off during lunch and then they forget to put them back on until after supper.

“That’s six to eight hours,” he said. “So, your teeth aren’t going to sit there and wait for you to come back and put the rubber bands back in.

“They will move back to where they were originally,” he continued. “Then you are starting all over again the next day.”

He added it’s “critical” to remember to put the rubber bands back in after eating or to just leave them in as one eats.

Spencer said most children ask about the pain involved with braces. Nowadays new technologies have allowed orthodontists to use thinner wire called physiologic archwire. In the past braces “overpowered” the teeth to adjust them into position. Physiologic archwire allows for a gentler movement of the teeth, hence less pain.

“The truth of the matter is you don’t have to have brute force to move teeth,” Spencer said. “All you need is physiologic force and the teeth will not only respond faster, because they’re not fighting it, they also like the physiology of it.”

Faith Bemiss can be reached at 660-530-0289 or on Twitter @fbemiss.

A refresher course in school bus safety



School buses are very safe vehicles, but passengers need to do their part to avoid injury.

The dawn of a new school year is a time marked by change and fresh opportunities. For many children, school marks the first time they are away from their parents for an extended period of time. It also may be the first time they ride in a vehicle other than their parents' cars.

Each school day, 25 million children ride a bus to school in the United States. A school bus is among the safest modes of transport and one of the most regulated vehicles on the road,

according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Riding a school bus can be a novel experience no matter a student's age or grade. Kindergarteners may be introduced to the school bus on their first day of school, while older students are no doubt familiar with life inside a school bus. But all students and families can benefit from a refresher course on school bus procedures to ensure this school year begins on safe footing.

- Be a smart pedestrian.

Riding the school bus is very safe, but injuries can occur walking to and from the bus stop. Watch for cars backing out of driveways and always look both ways multiple times before crossing streets.

- Remember school bus laws. Most areas of the country have specific school bus laws that include stopping when red lights are flashing on the school bus. Cars must stop whether they're behind the school bus, next to it or on the opposite side of the street facing the bus. Stopping allows passengers to enter or exit the bus safely.

- Stand away from the curb. The National Safety Council advises keeping 6 feet, or three giant steps, away from the curb while waiting for the bus. Young children should be carefully supervised.

- Be visible. Always cross in front of the bus, making eye contact with the driver so that he or she knows your intentions before crossing. If you drop something, do not bend down to pick it up. Tell the driver instead.

- Remain seated. Find a seat promptly and remain seated for the duration of the ride. Do not stand up and proceed down the center aisle until the bus has stopped.

- Minimize distractions. Always speak softly and behave so that you do not distract the driver.

Various steps can be taken to promote cyber safety among students, parents and administrators.



Cyber safety is important for every grade

People rely on the internet every day. In recent months, reliance on digital technology was pushed even further as social distancing measures had the world going online for school and work and to maintain relationships with friends and family.

A 2018 report from Pew Research Center indicated that nearly 25% of young adults in America reported being online almost constantly. Common Sense Media says teens spend an average of nine hours a day online, compared to roughly six hours for those between the ages 8 and 12 and 50 minutes for kids younger than 8.

Students must exercise caution when spending time online. Connectivity can be empowering, but it also puts students at risk from others and even their own, sometimes irresponsible behaviors. Staying safe online should remain a priority for students who must spend more time on the internet and using digital education tools. These are some tips for maintaining cyber safety.

- Exercise caution when sharing information like your name, address, phone number, and other personal data online. Check with a trusted parent or teacher before sharing private data.

- Report any online activity that makes you feel uncomfortable, scared or con-

fused, whether it is directed at you or a classmate.

- Think carefully before you post comments online. Data remains online indefinitely, and your words and actions today can greatly affect your future.

- Respect others online by refraining from demeaning or bullying comments.

- Do not try to get around firewalls and blocked websites set up by school administrators. These limitations are there for your protection.

- Stick to school-sanctioned assignments and internet browsing when using school-issued devices. Administrators may have the right to monitor student activity without students' knowledge and you can easily get yourself in trouble.

- It is easy to hide or fake one's identity on the internet, so never take someone you meet or speak with online at face value. Never meet up with someone you do not know or only met online.

- Talk to your parents or educators about extortion and ransomware that tries to trick you into providing payment in some shape or form to prevent a perpetrator from releasing private information about you, advises the Readiness and Emergency for Schools Technical Assistance Center.

The benefits of music instruction for young learners



Music instruction both in and out of the classroom can be a benefit to young learners.

Many children are introduced to music instruction at school. After being introduced to band, chorus and various instruments, students may be eager to explore music.

Young students are often introduced to the recorder or ukulele in the early grades and then given the opportunity to join primary bands as they move through elementary school and into middle school. Some children

also may want to supplement school music lessons with private music tutors, who can provide more in-depth instruction.

Parents considering making a commitment to music instruction may find that kids benefit from being involved with music in many ways, some of which may be surprising.

- The New England Board of Higher Education says several studies show that consistent music education improves vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Emerging evidence points to an area of the brain that controls both musical ability and language comprehension as being more closely related than previously thought.

- Music education may help young children learn words and how to pronounce them, as learning to play music enables them to process the many new sounds they hear from others.

- Researchers have discovered a strong relationship between participating in school arts and academic success as demonstrated by students' grade point averages, according to the National Association for Music Education.

- The relationship between music and academic

performance has been studied for decades. As far back as 1988, studies have been conducted about the benefits of music education. An analysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 demonstrated a significant correlation between participation in school music groups and achievement in math and English. And a 1996 study published in *Nature* found first graders who participated in special music classes as part of an arts study program saw their reading skills and math proficiency increase dramatically.

- Introducing music lessons to young children can have profound effects on their social development. Music fosters greater trust and cooperation, as well as a sense of community and belonging.

- Another benefit of music education is it allows children to harness their creativity and express it in a healthy way.

- The music instruction company Music U says children with developmental disorders and mental health issues might be able to unlock their potential with music. Music therapy has been shown to affect significant change in children with autism-spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, attachment disorders, cerebral palsy, and more.

3 ways parents can become more involved in their kids' educations

The dawn of a new school year provides a host of opportunities for students and their families. Students begin a new school year with a clean slate, while their parents can look at the start of the school year as an opportunity to take active roles in their children's education. Parents who pursue that opportunity can have a profound impact on their youngsters' academic success.

According to an analysis from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, students perform better in the classroom and enroll in more advanced classes when schools and parents work together. Parents who want to take a more active role in their children's educations can consider these three simple means to doing just that.

1. Help children establish academic goals.

The National Education Association notes that the most significant type of parental involvement is what moms and dads do at home. Before a new school year begins, parents can discuss academic goals with their children. Be as specific as possible when establishing goals so kids have



Parents can take various steps to be more active in their children's educations, which can benefit students in myriad ways.

something definitive to work toward during the school year.

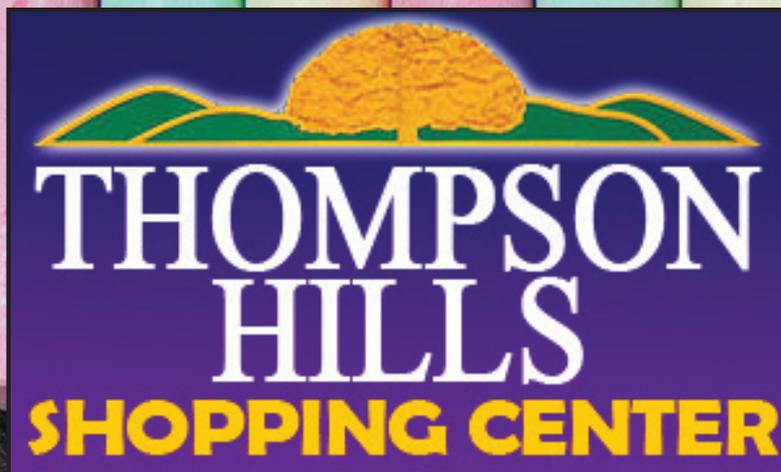
2. Foster a strong learning environment at home.

Numerous studies have highlighted the effects that strong home learning environments can have on students. A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Experimental*

Psychology found that something as simple as playing games with numbers with children can improve young students' ability to understand and work with numbers. Continuing to foster that same environment as students continue their educations is equally beneficial. Establish quiet hours after school so kids can concentrate on their homework free from distractions. When kids ask for help, offer it promptly. Such a response sends the message to students that school is of the utmost importance.

3. Become more involved at school.

Of course, it's not just what parents do at home that can have a profound impact on their children's educations. If possible, take an active role at school as well as at home. Get involved with parent-teacher organizations and/or offer to assist with extracurricular activities. Parents also can attend board of education meetings to learn about the happenings in their children's school district. Such meetings typically provide parents with an opportunity to comment publicly on any issues they feel are important, providing a great channel for parents to communicate directly with decision-makers.



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