High School Parents®
still make the difference!
September 2026
Vol. 34, No. 1
Clarke County School District

A daily reading habit sets the stage for school success

The start of a new school year is the perfect time to focus on the power of reading. While many families believe the work ends once a child learns to decode words, strengthening reading skills is actually a lifelong process.

In high school, reading is the primary way your teen builds a mental library of facts that supports future learning.

Regular reading also helps your teen:

- **Strengthen brain connections.** Reading complex texts is a cognitive workout that builds the brain muscle required for advanced problem-solving.
- **Build background knowledge.** New information needs a place to "stick." The more teens read, the more "hooks" they build in their brain, making it easier to grab and hold onto difficult ideas taught in class.
- **Expand vocabulary.** Seeing words in context helps students master professional and academic language.
- **Improve fluency.** Regular reading helps your teen process text more quickly and focus on deep comprehension.

To support your high schooler's reading skills:

- **Encourage at least 20 minutes** of daily reading.
- **Keep reading material** on high-interest topics in common areas.
- **Discuss** what your teen is reading. Ask open-ended questions.
- **Support the use of audiobooks** and e-readers. These tools also build reading skills.

Help your teen create a positive digital image

Today's online choices can shape your teen's future. While students have a right to free speech, there is a big difference between what they *can* post and what they *should* post.

Colleges and employers often check social media to learn more about the students who apply. Encourage your teen to:

- **Think about the long term.** Remind your teen that a boss or coach could see posts many years from now.
- **Clean up old posts**. Delete inappropriate photos and comments.
- **Interact with intention.** Every comment, like or share should reflect the person your teen wants to be.
- **Use social media** as a portfolio. Your teen should share content that highlights academic and personal achievements, community service, hobbies and talents.
- **Follow colleges** and companies of interest. Engaging with these organizations' posts shows genuine interest and initiative.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®

Talk to your teen about the negative effects of cheating

Most high school students don't view cheating as a serious offense. When they feel a lot of academic pressure, many see cheating as a way to lessen it. As a result, everything from using AI to write a paper to copying a classmate's assignment to using a phone to look up answers during a test has become "regular" behavior.

To discourage cheating, let your teen know that:

- **Cheating is never OK**—even if other students are doing it. Explain that you'd rather have your teen work hard and earn a low grade than to score higher by cheating.
- **Cheating is dishonest.** Some teens don't realize that it is the same as lying and stealing. They're stealing someone else's work and lying by saying it's theirs.
- **Cheating hurts.** While there may be some short-term benefits (getting out of some work), your teen won't learn the material, and if caught, could fail the class.
- **Cheating can become a habit.** When teens cheat and get away with it, they are often tempted to cheat again.

> **"Cheating in school is a form of self-deception. We go to school to learn. We cheat ourselves when we coast on the efforts and scholarship of someone else."**
>
> *—James E. Faust*

Time management skills are vital to high school success

The transition from summer break to a new school year can be a major wake-up call. While many students struggle with time management, the pressure builds as they move into higher grades with more demanding projects and busier calendars. To stay on top of everything, encourage your teen to:

- **Create a master schedule.** Seeing all responsibilities and activities in one place provides a better understanding of how much time your teen has available.
- **Prioritize.** Your teen should check for calendar conflicts and schedule daily study time. If sports already fill three days a week, a part-time job may be too much.
- **Create a weekly schedule.** At the start of the week, your teen should transfer items from the calendar to a weekly planner. Then your teen can block out times to accomplish each task.
- **Plan each day.** Help your teen get into the habit of making daily to-do lists that prioritize schoolwork. If there is no assignment, your teen should use study time to read, review or work ahead.
- **Take advantage of technology.** Digital calendars can help students manage time and stay informed on the go. Suggest your teen set up reminders that will go off a few days before an assignment is due or a few minutes before study time is scheduled to begin.

Are you helping your teen get off to a great start?

The secret to a stress-free finish is a strong start. While a new school year offers a clean slate, the real key to lasting achievement is helping your teen build a solid foundation of habits today.

Are you guiding your teen toward better learning habits? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you encouraged** your teen to establish effective study times and places that are free from distractions?
2. **Have you suggested** your teen use tools such as calendars and to-do lists to keep track of assignments and other responsibilities?
3. **Do you make one-on-one time** a part of your weekly schedule? Teens may act like they don't need family support, but research shows they do.
4. **Do you encourage** your teen to read something for pleasure every day?
5. **Have you helped** your teen establish healthy digital habits?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are preparing your teen for a productive year. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

High School Parents still make the difference!

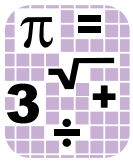
Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.
Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.,
an independent, private agency.
Equal opportunity employer.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

 Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®

Your teen can improve math skills with support from you



Math is like a giant puzzle. If a student is missing a few pieces from middle school, it is hard to see the full picture in high school. This makes many students feel stuck or frustrated before they even begin. Here's why reinforcing daily math practice is so important:

- **Classes like algebra** and geometry move quickly.
- **Students must use prior knowledge** of math facts and processes to solve new problems. If those basics are shaky, lessons feel confusing.
- **Feeling uncertain** makes students embarrassed to ask for help.

To support your teen's math progress:

- **Focus on the basics.** It's never too late to review key skills like adding or multiplying fractions with your teen.
- **Encourage questions.** Remind your teen that asking for help is a strength.
- **Stay in touch with teachers**. A quick check-in can catch problems early in the school year.
- **Use real life examples.** Talk about math in daily life like budgeting, shopping, cooking or sports.
- **Create a calm workspace.** Having a quiet, organized place to study helps your teen focus on work.
- **Focus on the process.** Talk about what your teen learned while doing the work rather than just the grade.
- **Find extra help if needed.** Tutoring or online tools can help your teen understand challenging concepts.
- **Build confidence.** Remind your teen that math skills can grow with daily practice.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** If you stay positive about math, your teen is more likely to feel good about it, too.

Source: E. Blad, "Elementary Math Has Been in Focus. But Middle and High School Students' Struggles Are Daunting," Education Week.

Reinforce attendance by countering common excuses

Families have heard every tired line in the book about why their teens should be allowed to skip school. But attendance is crucial for school success. Here's how to shut down some common excuses:

- **"I don't feel good."** This classic is as old as education itself. Unless your teen can cite specific symptoms, has a fever or meets school-mandated health criteria for staying home, it's time to go to school.
- **"I need to rest up for the big game** tonight." Remind your teen that academics always take priority over sports or clubs. Big events never justify missing instructional time.
- **"If I could just sleep** one more hour, I'd be way more productive." Respond by explaining that your teen is welcome to go to bed an hour earlier tonight to catch up.
- **"I have a big project due** that I haven't finished yet." State firmly that skipping classes to complete work for a different period isn't an option. Later, help your teen plan a schedule to finish future assignments on time.
- **"Juniors don't have school today."** If there is any doubt, call the front office to verify the schedule.

Persistent school refusal may signal a deeper issue. If you are concerned, consult teachers or the counselor.

Questions & Answers

Q: The school year has just started, and my high schooler is already falling asleep during English class. My teen says that the combination of a "boring" subject and the early hour makes it challenging to stay awake. How can I help?

A: Studies show that most teens are not, by nature, morning people. But they have to get up and start school anyway.

Sleeping during a class is a problem. Besides missing what the teacher says, it also damages your teen's relationship with the teacher. Teachers are more willing to help students who pay attention and participate in class.

To help your teen stay alert during class:

- **Enforce an earlier bedtime.** Your teen needs adequate sleep to stay awake and perform well in school. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends teens get eight to 10 hours of sleep per day.
- **Make sure your teen knows** that bedtime means no digital devices. Don't allow devices in the bedroom overnight for recharging—your teen will be too tempted to check them.
- **Have your teen talk** with the teacher and request a seat near the front of the room. The teacher may have additional ideas to help your teen stay engaged, such as allowing stretch or standing breaks.

The combination of more sleep and a little more focus should keep your teen awake during classes—even the early morning ones. And the teacher will appreciate your teen's honesty and willingness to improve.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®

It Matters: Motivation

Inspire a love of learning in your high schooler

You probably ask about your teen's progress in classes. You may ask how biology is going, or if math is getting easier. But many families admit that what they really want to find out about is their teen's grades.

It's easy to focus on grades, but the real magic happens in the drive to learn. Shifting your energy from the final grade to the spark behind the work helps your teen build a curiosity that fuels learning. Ask your teen about:

- **Inspiration.** What was the most interesting thing said in class today? Did any specific topic make your teen want to learn more?
- **The book your teen is reading.** Does your teen relate to the main character? Does the book remind your teen of any personal experiences?
- **Accomplishments.** What part of that science project made your teen feel proud? How did your teen push through the frustration of a challenging assignment to reach the finish line?
- **Personal growth.** Does your teen feel a sense of improvement in a specific skill? What new strategies is your teen planning to try to master the next big challenge?

Questions like these show that you value your teen's intellectual curiosity. They shift the focus from external rewards to the internal satisfaction of learning. Both reinforce the message that staying motivated is about finding personal meaning in education.

Three ways to build your teen's motivation with praise

Kind words are a great tool to help students keep going—especially for teens who feel discouraged or find schoolwork tough. However, if you cheer for every little thing, your words might stop feeling special.

Here are three ways to make your encouragement count:

1. **Be specific.** Instead of a simple "Good job," explain what you noticed. You might say, ""I saw how you organized your notes for that math test. Your preparation helped you get right to studying and it paid off."
2. **Keep it between the two of you.** Most teens get embarrassed by a loud "My kid is the best!" in front of others. A quiet comment while you are driving together is more powerful. Your teen will still feel the boost even without a crowd.
3. **Help your teen recognize** progress. Instead of just saying you are happy, help your teen notice their own success. You might say, "You put a lot of effort into that project. You should feel great about how much you improved."

Source: R. Lavoie, *The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child,* Touchstone Books.

Empower your teen to lead the way this school year

Sometimes, the best way to motivate high schoolers is to step back. As students grow, their need for independence grows, too. When teens feel they have a say in their education, they are more likely to stay driven.

To support your teen's growing independence:

- **Offer choices.** Instead of telling your teen when to study, ask, "Do you want to finish your math before or after dinner?"
- **Ask what your teen** wants to achieve this school year. Then, help your teen make a plan to reach that specific goal.
- **Let your teen solve problems.** If your teen hits a snag, resist the urge to fix it. Ask, "What do you think the next step should be?"

When teens feel in charge of their own learning, motivation often follows. When you move from a manager to a consultant, your student can build the self-reliance needed for a successful future.