Middle School Parents®
May 2026
Vol. 29, No. 9
Clarke County School District
still make the difference!

Help your middle schooler handle year-end assignments

Your middle schooler is probably facing an array of tests and projects as this school year draws to a close. You can help keep the workload from overwhelming your child by encouraging your middle schooler to:

- **Remember that schoolwork** is a priority. Some kids like to do assignments as soon as they get home from school. Others work better after some time to unwind. Still others are at their best later at night. Whenever your middle schooler likes to work, turning in completed assignments on time should still be the top priority.
- **Keep track of key dates.** Few students can remember when all of their assignments need to be turned in without writing down due dates. However, many students get out of the habit of writing everything down in a planner. Remind your middle schooler to do this and to check the planner daily.
- **Jot down reminder notes** during the school day. Writing "Bring history notes home tonight" on a sticky note and sticking it to the front of a notebook really can help your child remember to bring the notebook home.
- **Limit distractions.** Digital devices may not be a problem when your child has less of a workload. But at the end of the school year, when more things may be due at once, your child will need to make a stronger effort to avoid distractions. Establish a "tech-free" study zone.

Teach your child to stand up to peer pressure

Negative peer pressure can affect students' well-being and performance, often leading to lower self-confidence, increased anxiety and declining grades. Since simply saying *no* doesn't always work to fend off this pressure, empower your child with a variety of ways to respond.

Your middle schooler could:

- **Offer personal reasons,** like "I'm working hard to make the club soccer team. I don't want to screw that up."
- **Talk about consequences.** "Sorry, the last person who got caught sharing test answers was suspended. I won't risk that."
- **Be dismissive.** Your child could make a face and walk away.
- **Blame a parent.** "If my dad finds out, he will freak out."
- **Suggest an alternative.** "I was planning to see a movie. Want to come with me instead of going to that party?"
- **Stay away.** Someone who repeatedly tries to get your child into trouble is no friend at all. Suggest that your child consider avoiding the person, at least for the time being.

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Offer these journal prompts to encourage your child to write

Writing regularly will help keep your child's skills sharp over the summer. Journaling is a great way to do this. Share a few of these writing prompts to get your child's creative juices flowing:

- **If you could solve any problem** in the world, what would it be?
- **Write about three values** that are important to this family.
- **Write a poem** about your favorite activity or hobby.
- **Write about the best vacation** you ever took.
- **Would you rather** jump out of a plane or go scuba diving? Why?
- **Write about your favorite show.**
- **Write about a time** when someone helped you.
- **Write about a rule** at school or at home that you'd like to replace.
- **What is your favorite way** to be creative?
- **Why is respectful behavior** important?
- **Write about the most important** thing in your life.
- **If you could live inside any video** game, which would you choose?
- **What is your favorite thing** about yourself?
- **Write about a goal** you recently reached. How did you do it?

Source: J. Schoenberg, "31 Fun Writing Prompts for Middle School," Journal Buddies.com.

> **"Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go."**
>
> *—E. L. Doctorow*

Five ways to enhance time with your child this summer

Summertime can be wonderful family time. You may see your child more during the day. But even if you don't, you can take advantage of more relaxed evenings to spend time connecting with your child and providing enriching experiences.

Experts agree that children who spend quality time with their families tend to perform better academically. To make the most of your time together this summer:

1. **Have a Family Night** at least one evening each week. Cook a meal together, talk, play board games. Avoid screen-based activities.
2. **Ask your child's opinion.** Many middle schoolers enjoy current events. Because kids this age tend to be idealistic and want to "save the world," they often have strong opinions. Take time to listen to your child's ideas.
3. **Hold regular family meetings** to solve problems and discuss plans. Brainstorm ideas about fun ways you can spend time together.
4. **Take your child along** on errands and visits to friends and relatives. Your child may not always want to go, and that's OK. But compromise on a schedule that includes your child some of the time.
5. **Participate in family traditions.** Traditions bond children to their families. If you always go to the same park to watch fireworks or attend summer sports events in your town, keep doing it. No traditions? Create some together.

Are you helping your student concentrate?

It's common for students to struggle with focus toward the end of the school year. Are you helping your child concentrate? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you encourage** your child to participate in enjoyable focus-building activities? For some children, this might be reading; for others, it could be cooking.
2. **Do you set limits** on recreational screen use? Extended time in front of fast-paced media can reduce your child's concentration.
3. **Do you encourage** your child to finish tasks and offer praise for doing so?
4. **Do you discourage multitasking?** It's difficult to concentrate on assignments if your child is also watching television.
5. **Do you minimize interruptions** when your child is working?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child maintain solid concentration. Mostly *no* answers? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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

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Playing board games builds skills and promotes learning

Did you know that playing board games reinforces skills that aid learning and thinking? Board games give children an opportunity to:

- **Follow directions.** Even middle schoolers need practice with this skill—just ask any teacher!
- **Use logic, reasoning and strategy.** For success with many games, your child will need to decide which move to make or card to play. This kind of decision-making is helpful in math and science classes.
- **Read, write, spell** and boost vocabulary. Some board games are all about creating words and word puzzles. For others, your child must read and understand questions and clues.
- **Create and spot patterns.** Learning how to recognize, remember and apply patterns is directly related to success in math.
- **Focus and pay attention.** Taking turns, planning strategies and monitoring opponents all require focus and attention. Your child will sharpen these skills while playing.
- **Negotiate and communicate.** Some board games, such as Monopoly, require players to make deals and alliances in order to move forward—providing lessons in how to collaborate with others.
- **Manage time and resources.** Many games have limited money, cards or turns. Your child will learn how to use resources wisely and choose the most important action to take right now.

Middle schoolers need structure and supervision over the summer

Summer usually offers more freedom for kids—and requires more oversight from families. During the school year, families generally know where their children are and what they are doing during certain hours. That may not be as true during the summer months.

The key to a safe summer is to strike the right balance between structure and freedom. Here's how:

- **Establish rules** with your child at the beginning of summer. Rules should cover exactly where your child is allowed to go, with whom and when. Be clear that any exceptions need to be discussed and approved by you in advance.
- **Establish consequences** for breaking the rules that relate to the misbehavior. For example, coming home late may mean your middle schooler has to stay home the next afternoon.
- **Help your child create** and follow a daily schedule. Among other things, the schedule should include regular times for sleep, meals, exercise and chores.
- **Keep your child busy!** Sign your student up for a summer learning program or camp. Together, research interesting volunteer opportunities. Your middle schooler could even start a business babysitting children, walking dogs or mowing lawns.
- **Encourage open communication** about social plans. Instead of just allowing your child to "go hang out," always ask for specifics, such as, "Where will you be and which friends will be there?"

Questions & Answers

Q: My middle schooler is nervous about starting high school next fall. What are some ways I can calm my child's nerves and support this big step?

A. It's completely normal for students heading to high school to feel nervous! To reduce anxiety and build your child's confidence, here are several steps you can take together over the summer:

- **Visit the new school** together. See if there is an orientation or Rising Freshman Day planned by the school. If not, call the school and schedule a tour.
- **Encourage your child t**o talk to high school students (family friends, neighbors or siblings of friends). Suggest your child ask this question: "What do you wish you had known before starting high school?"
- **Explore extracurricular** activities offered at the high school. Help your child research the types of clubs, sports and activities offered on the school's official website.
- **Promote learning** over the summer. Encourage your child to write about experiences in a journal and read at least one novel recommended for ninth graders.
- **Remind your child** that there will be other students new to the school. Everyone in ninth grade will be starting fresh.
- **Reassure your child.** Avoid emphasizing the difficulty or challenges of high school. Instead, focus on the positive and say things like, "I know you're going to work hard and be successful in high school. I'm excited for you!"

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It Matters: Summer Learning

Summer contests inspire learning, healthy risks

There are many opportunities for middle schoolers to keep learning during the summer months. And without the demands of school, they can choose what they'd like to learn more about.

Entering a summer contest can allow your child to spend time developing talents and interests. Contests can also:

- **Motivate students to excel.** Whether the subject is art, writing, photography or science, the idea of a competition may motivate your child to produce a "personal best."
- **Boost confidence.** Win or lose, your child will have taken a healthy risk and put forth effort. Be sure to emphasize this. "You worked so hard. You got your entry in on time and tried something different. You should feel really proud of yourself. "

To find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Sometimes, companies that sponsor contests for students will send materials and entry forms directly to schools.
- **Head to the public library.** Librarians often know about contests for students.
- **Search online.** Check out www.weareteachers.com/student-contests-competitions to start. Research any group offering a contest before allowing your child to enter. You should never have to pay a fee or provide personal financial information to enter.

Encourage activities that lead to meaningful learning

Middle schoolers can find themselves with too much time on their hands when school is out. Here are some ideas to keep your child busy and learning:

- **Give your child** a small research project. Do you need to find the best price and model of a small appliance? Ask your child to research the options online.
- **Help your child learn to cook.** Challenge your student to choose recipes and prepare a simple family meal at least once a week.
- **Be a tourist in your town.** Ask your child to research interesting local places. Then, visit and let your child be your tour guide.
- **Consider whether your child** is ready to earn money outside the home. If so, pet care, babysitting or helping a neighbor with yard work can help boost responsibility.
- **Start a book club.** Let your child pick a book. Read it together and set a date to talk about it. Or your child could start a club with some friends.

Make sure your middle schooler keeps reading over the summer

When students avoid reading during the summer months, they risk losing vocabulary and reducing their reading fluency.

To keep your middle schooler reading over summer break:

- **Walk the walk.** Make reading a part of your own daily life. Let your middle schooler see you choose a novel over your phone.
- **Read a few** young adult books yourself. Exploring books written for middle schoolers may give you a better feel for what's going on in your child's life.
- **Share what you're reading.** Did you just come across an interesting article? Tell your child about it.
- **Respect that your child's interests** are changing and help find books that reflect new interests.
- **Don't panic.** Adolescence is all about change, so it's normal for your middle schooler to lose interest in reading for a while. Just continue being enthusiastic about books and reading, and chances are that enthusiasm will return.