The Central Valley Chronicle

February 2026

CENTRAL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

INSTILLING PRIDE, INSPIRING OTHERS

MS. VLACH'S

COUGAR CONNECTION

AIM FOR CONSISTENCY: BUILDING MOMENTUM IN THE SECOND SEMESTER

As we begin the second semester at CV, our focus is on one powerful idea: AIM for consistency. Success doesn't come from one big moment; it begins with small, intentional actions that happen every day. Just like the first domino sets everything else in motion, showing up, being on time, and being present are the foundation for learning and growth. Simply put, momentum can't be built if you aren't here.

Consistent attendance does more than keep students in class. It helps reduce stress and anxiety, strengthens routines, and creates a sense of stability. While bad days will happen, growth comes from stringing together good days and staying committed even when motivation dips.

This semester, students are being encouraged to choose effort over motivation. Motivation can come and go, but habits and routines keep progress moving forward. By choosing commitment over complaints and knowledge over negativity, students learn to stay focused on growth rather than obstacles.

A key focus this semester is also respect over response. Taking a moment to recognize how we react to situations matters. Pausing before reacting shows respect for others and for ourselves, and it allows students to respond thoughtfully rather than emotionally. These moments of reflection help build maturity, empathy, and stronger relationships within our school community.

Learning is not "one and done." Growth happens through consistent practice, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking every day. Each assignment, each class, and each moment of preparation matter when building momentum toward bigger goals.

We want CV students to encompass these ideas every day: knowledge, commitment, respect, and effort. By aiming for consistency at school, students are building the habits needed to be productive, engaged, and informed citizens not only within our school, but within our local, state, and national communities.
As we move forward, we encourage students to line up their dominoes and take pride in the small, daily choices that lead to great things. When effort becomes routine, it no longer feels optional, and that's when real progress begins.

NAEP 2026 PARENT-GUARDIAN NOTIFICATION LETTER

Grades 4, 8, and 12 Civics, Mathematics, Reading, or U.S. History

Monday, January 26, 2026

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Central Valley High School will participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) on Tuesday, February 24, 2026. NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students know and can do in various subjects. NAEP is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, within the U.S. Department of Education. NAEP is different from our state assessments because it is a common measure of achievement across the country.

Your child will/may take a mathematics or reading assessment. In addition to subject-area questions, students voluntarily complete NAEP survey questions. These questions provide valuable information about participating students' educational experiences and opportunities to learn both in and outside of the classroom. More information about NAEP survey questions is available at https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/parents under the section "Survey Questionnaires & Your Student: What You Need to Know."

The assessment takes about 120 minutes for most students, which includes transition time, directions, and completion of survey questions.

The information collected is used for statistical purposes only.

- Your child's grades will not be affected.
- Students may be excused for any reason, are not required to complete the assessment, and may skip any question.
- While the assessment is voluntary, NAEP depends on student participation to help policymakers improve education. If you do not want your child to participate, please notify me in writing by Friday, February 6, 2026.

There is no need to study in preparation for NAEP, but please encourage your child to do their best. Contact Krista Sipes at 308-428-3145 or at krista.sipes@centralvps.org if you have any questions.

We are excited that our school is participating in NAEP. We know that Central Valley High School's students will show what our nation's students know and can do.

Sincerely,

Kimbrie Vlach

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducts the National Assessment of Educational Progress to evaluate federally supported education programs. All of the information you provide may only be used for the purposes of research, statistics, and evaluation under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA; 20 U.S.C. § 9543) and may not be disclosed, our used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law. Every NCES employee as well as every NCES agent, such as contractors and NAEP coordinators, has taken an oath and is subject to a jail term of up to 5 years, a fine of $250,000, or both if he or she willfully discloses ANY identifiable information about you. Electronic submission of your information will be monitored for viruses, malware, and other threats by Federal employees and contractors in accordance with the Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015.

The ACT test is a curriculum-based education and career planning tool for high school students that assesses the mastery of college readiness standards. The ACT is made up of four separate exams in English, Reading, Mathematics and Science with an option to complete a writing test. The ACT is scored on a scale of 1 to 36, with 36 being the highest possible score. ACT scores are accepted at virtually all colleges and universities across the nation. The test is administered in all 50 states and is the predominant college entrance exam in 25 states. Nebraska has a greater percentage of graduates taking the exam due to it being a state requirement for all 11th grade students.

The following table shows the trend of local and state ACT-tested graduates. From this table you can determine:

* Changes in the number and percentages of participants
* Score changes in subject areas and the ACT composite
* How local graduates compare with the state averages

Years	Number of Students Tested	Number of Students Tested	Eng.	Eng.	Math	Math	Rdng.	Rdng.	Sci.	Sci.	Comp.	Comp.
	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State
2025	15	23,408	14.8	18.2	18.7	18.9	17	19.6	18.7	19.4	18.1	19.2
2024	21	22,163	15.2	18.1	17.0	18.8	15.6	19.5	16.5	19.4	16.3	19.1
2023	18	22,401	16.1	17.6	18.7	18.6	17.3	19.0	18.2	19.1	17.6	18.8
2022	21	22,223	14.8	17.7	18.0	18.6	16.2	18.9	17.3	19.0	16.7	18.6
2021	21	21,847	15.9	17.8	17.2	18.8	18.7	19.1	17.6	19.1	17.4	18.8
2020	No data	available										
2019	17	24,744	20.2	19.4	19.4	19.7	19.9	20.3	20.2	20.2	20.1	20.0
2018	14	24,516	19.3	19.4	18.6	19.8	19.9	20.4	19.7	20.1	19.4	20.1
2017	15	18,993	19.9	20.9	23.0	20.9	21.7	21.9	22.5	21.5	21.9	21.4
2016	26	18,598	18.7	20.9	20.1	20.8	20.2	21.8	20.9	21.5	20.1	21.4
2015	12	18,347	19.8	21.1	20.6	21.0	22.8	21.9	21.8	21.6	21.5	21.5

The ACT has established the above following as college readiness benchmark scores for designated college courses. A benchmark score is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject area test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher on the corresponding credit-bearing college courses.

English Composition: 18 on ACT English Test
College Algebra: 22 on ACT Mathematics Test
Social Science: 22 on ACT Reading Test
Biology: 23 on ACT Science Test

Cougar Candy Bouquets

All proceeds go to the business class!

Fun Size Bouquet



Arrangement of 10 fun sized candies

$15

Large Bouquet



Arrangement of 8 full sized candies accented with 5 fun sized candies

$20

To order, contact Mrs. Jodie Thies' Business Class or jodie.thies@centralvps.org

Orders not delivered! may be picked up at the high school in Greeley or the elementary in Scotia.

Central Valley Elementary

February Newsletter

From the Principal's Desk: Mr. Nick Carlson



Cougar Community Recognition

December Star Student Winners (POSITIVITY)



Semester One Perfect Attendance





Staying Steady During a Busy Time

As we move into February, this time of year can feel especially busy for families and schools alike. With winter activities, changing schedules, and a lot happening both in and out of school, we encourage families to do their best to keep routines as consistent as possible.

Consistent routines, like regular bedtimes, morning schedules, and daily attendance, help students feel secure, focused, and ready to learn. Even small routines at home can make a big difference in helping students stay on track during these busy weeks.

We truly appreciate the care, effort, and support you provide your children each day. Those daily habits and moments at home play a powerful role in helping students feel confident and ready to learn at school.

Star Student Winners: Rhett Stromp, Cooper Klassen, Brody Malmstrom, John Foster, Lenna Poss, Wyatt Bloom, Asher Kniss, Anistyn Grim, Stella O'Connor, Sadie Goldfish, Becca Bauld, Hazel Nordhues

Semester One Perfect Attendance: Haidyn Nekoliczak, Milka Benitez, Madison Foster, Blaikely Nekoliczak, Lenna Poss, Lakin Weeks, Varek Anderson, Wyatt Bloom, Lillydawn Jensen

Central Valley Elementary

February Newsletter

CVE Core Values: Respectful, Kind, Responsible, Positive, Hard Working



Upcoming Events

February 4th
1:30 Dismissal

February 10th
NO SCHOOL P/T Conference

February 13th
8:30 Decorate with Dad

February 14th
Valentine's Day

February 20th
NO SCHOOL State Wrestling

February 24th
10:00 Loup Basin Smiles Clinic

February 27th
3:00 Cougar Community Recognition

December Golden Spoon Winner: Mrs. Wurst's 2nd Grade Class



Central Valley Elementary

February Newsletter

CVE Core Values: Respectful, Kind, Responsible, Positive, Honest, Hard Working



2nd Semester Cougar Point Goal:

100,000 Points

Semester Two Total: 12,400

Principal For a Day









Central Valley Elementary

February Newsletter

CVE Core Values: Respectful, Kind, Responsible, Positive, Honest, Hard Working



WAY TO GO, STAR STUDENTS!







December Pizza with the Principal



Sponsored by the Central Valley PTO!



All A Honor Roll - Quarter 2



Front row l-r: Craytyn Wagner, Kwyn Cargill, Cayda Landers, Jentry Dugan, Lauryn Rosander, Trasa Klein, Maci Ford, Mason Shoemaker, Turner Freeman
Second row l-r: Landen Poss, Dalton Dugan, Zethan Wolf, Mavdan Soto, Taylor McIntyre, Brooklyn Perrott, Maggie Kriewald, Payton Kniss, Annaka Wood, Ky Cargill
Third row l-r: Taylor Rosander, Breckyn Straka, Lincoln Nekoliczak, Ethan Lobner, Tyler Luscomb, Drexon Dugan, Cayle Grossart, Addy Ryan, Laurel Mann, Kerry Luscomb, Bentleigh Dugan
Back row l-r: Landon Shoemaker, Griffin Allen, Caleb Studley, Zavyer Wolf, Zevan Wolf, Oaklan Soto, Luke Shoemaker, Gunnar Vanosdall

A-B Honor Roll - Quarter 2



Front row l-r: Daniel Wuertz, Jackson Bauld, Graysen Wuertz, Zach Jensen, Haylee Allen, Lydia Studley, Gracen Owens, Alexa Gonzalez, Peyton O'Connor
Middle row l-r: Dallas Wadsworth, Laretta Davis, Tenley Perrott, Hadlee Sherman, Kinley Boydstun, William Pokorny, Wyatt Hansen, Jaxon Stephens, Harper Jensen
Back row l-r: Cash Hammerstrom, Quincy Wright, Austin Dush, Wyatt Rosander, Taten Sherman, Thayer Davis, July Gotschall, Lauren Diessner, Reed Gotschall

CONGRATULATIONS ON MAKING THE HONOR ROLL

The Early Development Network provides early intervention services for families with children birth to age three with developmental delays and/or health care needs. Our program connects families with needed services and provides ongoing support. EDN has caring and professional Services Coordinators to serve families with an individualized and strengths based focus. These services are free to families and we welcome anyone who may have questions or concerns.

If you are concerned about a child's development or know someone who is please call EDN (308)237-2280 at ESU 10 for services in Region 10 or 1(888) 806-6287 for referrals throughout Nebraska. If you are unsure which EDN office serves your area please call (308)237-2280 and we are happy to assist you in finding your best contact person.

Junior High and High School students competed in a Quiz Bowl Competition in Central City hosted by Nebraska Christian on January 12, 2026.

~Mrs. Sarah Hansen, Sponsor



Front row l-r: Ethan Lobner, Annaka Wood, Laretta Davis, Bentleigh Dugan, Maggie Kriewald, Cayle Grossart, Taylor McIntyre, Trasa Klein

Back row l-r: Landon Shoemaker, Zavyer Wolf, Luke Shoemaker, Gunnar Vanosdall, Lincoln Nekoliczak, Griffin Allen, Zevan Wolf, July Gotschall, Brooklyn Perrott



Wyatt Hansen, Cayda Landers, Jaxon Stephens, Zethan Wolf, Daniel Wuertz, Karter Brown, Kwyn Cargill

Thank You to Our FCCLA Community Supporters

Kathleen Kennedy, Adviser

The Central Valley Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America would like to extend a sincere thank you to our community partners and volunteers for their outstanding support. We are grateful to those who volunteered their time as judges and to the individuals and businesses who generously donated services and products as we hosted the District 9 STAR Events.

Your time, talents, and commitment provide valuable real-world experiences that help our students build confidence, leadership skills, and career readiness. Because of your support, our FCCLA members continue to develop into responsible, capable leaders.

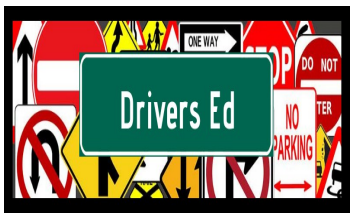
Thank you for investing in our students and supporting the mission of FCCLA.

Our FCCLA chapter was proud to host the District STAR Events competition, welcoming 117 contestants from 7 schools who competed across 27 categories and 3 levels. Hosting this event highlighted our chapter's leadership, organization, and commitment to FCCLA.

We are especially proud of our medalists: Ethan earned a Gold medal in Leadership, Level 2, and serves as the District President-Elect; Laretta earned a Silver medal in National Programs in Action, Level 2; and Kerry and Nevaeh earned a Silver medal in Nutrition. We are incredibly proud of all our members who helped make the event a success and represented our chapter with excellence.



Ethan Lobner, Kerry Luscomb, Nevaeh Vanosdall, Laretta Davis



Driver's Ed classes will again be taught in Greeley this year. Nebraska rules state that each student must attend 20 hours of class time and 5 hours of driving time to complete the program.

Your child must be 14 years or older **AND** have a school/learners permit to drive. The cost of the class will be $150 for Central Valley students and $250 for students not in the Central Valley district. Your payment and a copy of your school/learners permit are required before taking the class.

Classes will start March 2nd from 4:30-8:30. (You must attend all classroom times.) Driving times will be scheduled the first evening of class. Each student will have to drive for at least 5 hours and will be driving in groups of 3 or 4.

If you have any questions or would like to register your child, please call the Central Valley High School at 308-428-3145 or Annice Marlow at 308-750-4221.





Share a five-day study plan

Studying all night before a test isn't recommended. Teach your teen a five-day plan instead.

Day 1:
Gather notes outlines, quizzes and handouts on the material.

Day 2:
Review materials and list facts to know. Practice recalling them.

Day 3:
Write questions the teacher might ask. Make notes on the answers.

Day 4:
Take a self-quiz. Apply formulas and write out answers.

Day 5:
Do a final review and repeat Day 4.

Central Valley Speech
STRONG START

The Central Valley Speech Team has been busy this January, competing at three meets over the past few weeks and continuing to build momentum as the season progresses under the coaching direction of Katie Davis. From individual event success to strong varsity team performances, the students represented Central Valley with confidence, effort, and growth at each competition as they follow this year's team motto of "One Team. One Voice

As the season continues, the Central Valley Speech Team looks forward to building on their early success. With each meet, students are sharpening skills, strengthening performances, and representing Central Valley with pride.

Adams Central,
January 10, 2026
Humorous Prose, Laretta Davis 5th-place
Also competing were Kerry Luscomb and Emalee Leth.

CNFL #1 at GISH,
January 17, 2026
(Central Nebraska Forensics League)
Laretta Davis: 7th place in Humorous Prose
10th place in Program Oral Interpretation.



Boone Central
January 24, 2026
Team Placing: 9th
Laretta Davis: Humorous Prose, 4th place, Entertainment Speaking, 3rd, POI, 6th place.
Emalee Leth: Poetry, 11th place,
Kerry Luscomb: Extemporaneous Speaking, 12th place.









One Team One Voice





Front row l-r: St. Mgr Annie Kriewald, Trasa Klein, Maggie Kriewald, Annaka Wood, Cayle Grossart, Bentleigh Dugan, St. Mgrs. Kwyn Cargill, Destiny Haynes

Middle row l-r: Head Coach Devon Beck, Assistant Coach Jordan Beck, St. Mgr. Charlie Ryan, Maci Ford, Addy Ryan, Laurel Mann, Taylor Rosander, Payton Kniss, Craytyn Wagner, Lydia Studley

Back row l-r: Assistant Coaches Garrett Mann, Aundrea Killinger, Adison Wood



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School February 2026

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10

Encourage your child to engage in more complex thinking

Memorizing a fact just scratches the surface of learning. To really understand something, students need to think about it in more complex ways—by evaluating, comparing and applying what they've learned. This helps them see how the material fits into the "bigger picture."



To give your child practice thinking in more depth:

- **Promote problem-solving.** If your student has forgotten how to do an assignment, ask, "How could you find out how to do it?" Could your child call a classmate? Look over work from class? Check a class website? Encourage your child to make a plan and put it into action.
- **Discuss issues and events in the news.** Have your child read an article on a topic with many sides, then talk about it at dinner. Find out what your child thinks about the issue and why. But don't stop there. After listening to your child, say, "I can see why you feel this way. But why do you think other people might think differently?"
- **Talk about the learning process.** After your child completes a big project for school, help your child consider how it went. Ask, "How difficult was this to finish? What did you learn about how to do projects that will help next time?

Keys for raising disciplined learners

Maintaining discipline and developing students' self-discipline contributes to a positive learning environment. Effective discipline helps children learn from poor choices and make better ones in the future.

These discipline strategies can help you teach positive behavior:

1. **Establish rules** and consequences you can consistently enforce. It won't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Give in just once and you'll likely face an argument every day.
2. **Speak calmly** when responding to misbehavior. Yelling teaches children that it is OK to lose control when feeling upset.
3. **Describe misbehavior,** rather than criticizing your child. Saying "It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't stop your game," is more helpful than "Don't be so selfish." Then, offer a reminder of the rule ("We take fair turns") and the consequence ("No more games today.").

Model social interactions



Children who lack social skills can have trouble learning and succeeding in school. Be a social skills role model for your elementary schooler. Let your child see you introducing yourself, staying connected to friends, sharing and being kind to others. Read books about friendship and cooperation aloud. Then, talk about the stories together.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement, *Evidence for Education*, NICHCY.

Help with test preparation

Your child will have to do the studying for tests. But you can help your student be physically prepared to do well. To support test success, ensure that your child:

- **Sticks to a healthy sleep schedule.** Staying up late studying increases anxiety, which interferes with thinking.
- **Eats a nutritious breakfast.**
- **Dresses in comfortable layers,** so that clothes won't be a distraction.
- **Relaxes and knows you care.** Take deep breaths together and send your child out the door with a big hug.

Meaning boosts memory



When students link new information to something meaningful to them, they recall it better. To encourage this, help your child create a story that weaves new material into familiar situations and locations. For example, to recall the first three U.S. presidents in order, your child might say, "One day, George Washington went to the park. He met John Adams by the seesaw. Then, the two of them ran into Thomas Jefferson by the slide and all three played tag."

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Helping Children Learn®
Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School **February 2026**

Q&A What can I do to convince my child to speak in class?

Q: My second grader is outgoing at home but very shy at school. My child doesn't like answering questions in class for fear of being wrong. How can I help my student become more comfortable participating in the classroom?



A: First, talk with your child's teacher. What is the teacher's perspective on your child's reluctance to speak in class? Ask what the teacher does to encourage your child to participate. You can also ask if the teacher can give your child opportunities to speak up without pressure—in small group situations, for example. After mastering a skill, could your child "tutor" a classmate?

Next, talk with your child. Say that everyone makes mistakes—and your child probably will, too. But emphasize that mistakes are not the end of the world. What's more, they provide opportunities to learn from them and get smarter.

Don't make too much of this right now. Some children are hesitant to speak up in the early grades. As they gain confidence, they open up and join in class discussions. You say your child is outgoing at home. That's great. Feeling safe speaking up at home bolsters the confidence to do the same in school. And remember, some children are just shy by nature—and they often do just as well as their more outgoing peers in school.

Parent Quiz Do you make following directions easy?

When children follow instructions carefully they achieve better results—in the classroom, on schoolwork and at home. Are you helping your child practice this elementary skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you ask** for your child's attention before giving instructions?

___**2. Do you divide** complex directions into steps your child can follow one by one?

___**3. Do you encourage** your child to reread or repeat directions before beginning a task?

___**4. Do you make** and post checklists of tasks your child can follow?

___**5. Do you praise** your child for following instructions carefully and completely?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are teaching your child the importance of paying attention to instructions. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Our instructions need to include both what to do and why it is important."
—Belinda Letchford

Spark interest in history

Does history seem lifeless and remote when your child reads about it in textbooks? Quality historical fiction offers a vivid view of the human side of history's facts, dates and statistics. To bring history to life for your child through reading:

- **Look for titles** that present events and details accurately. Check reviews or ask your child's teacher for suggestions.
- **Read books aloud** that are a little too challenging for your child to read alone.
- **Encourage your child to read** more than one book about the same era. Discuss the similarities and differences.

Source: E. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading,* Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

Build a world of knowledge

It's a big world out there! Help your child discover it with these activities:

- **Collecting.** Suggest that your child collect objects from countries around the globe, such as stamps or postcards, and learn about where they come from.
- **Mapping.** Help your child find places where relatives live on a map. How many ways are there to get there from your home?
- **Sourcing.** Have your child read labels to find out where items in your home were made and locate the sources on a map.

Love and learn together

This Valentine's Day, share a love of learning with your child! As a family:

- **Read** tales of caring and love.
- **Estimate.** Fill a jar with red candies. Ask family members to estimate the number of pieces, then let your child count them.
- **Learn** to say "I love you" in several different languages.



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MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School February 2026

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10

Building financial literacy and math skills is a great investment



Most middle schoolers think it would be great to have lots of money. But they are just beginning to learn what goes into making it. Your child is probably familiar with the concept of working at a job for pay. To introduce the concept of investing—and provide math practice and a lesson in risk at the same time—have your child play a stock market game.

First, explain that stocks are small pieces, or *shares,* in the ownership of a company. If lots of people are buying shares in that company, the value of a share goes up. But if people are selling off their shares, the price goes down. Show your child where stock prices are listed online or in a newspaper. Then, to start the game:

1. **Assign your child an imaginary amount of money** to invest. Have your student pick several familiar companies and decide how much of the pretend money to "spend" on each company's stock.
2. **Have your child chart the value** of the investments each day for a month. On day one, buying 100 shares of a company's stock at $10 per share gets your child $1,000 worth of its stock. If the stock later goes up to $11 per share, your child would have $1,100 worth. But if it goes down to $9, your child would have only $900.
3. **Ask your child to report on results** at the end of the month. What would your child do differently next time, based on this experience?

Share an organized approach to tests

Study habits like organization make a big difference in school. In addition to keeping supplies and papers tidy, organized students also take a structured approach to schoolwork and studying.

When preparing for a test, spending some time figuring out what the test will cover and gathering all the materials needed to study effectively will improve your child's chances of doing well.

Few middle schoolers can keep all the relevant information for every test in their heads, so help your child create a test-prep checklist and fill out a copy each time.

When a test is announced, your child should answer these questions:

- **What class is the test in?**
- **When is the test?**
- **What format will it take?**
- **What is the relevant reading** material to study?
- **What else do I need to have** in order to study—notes, past quizzes and assignments?

Use report cards to plan

Chart a positive course for the rest of the school year by using your elementary schooler's latest report card as a guide. Sit down with your child and:

- **Discuss what is going well.** What is your child doing that's working?
- **Talk about issues.** What does your child think are the reasons for a disappointing grade?
- **Set goals** for keeping up good work and improving in areas that need it. Define steps your child will take to reach them.

Talk about commitments



Responsible students honor commitments, so it's important for them to think before agreeing to do to something. Whatever the request—to tutor a friend, help a neighbor shovel snow, etc.—encourage your child to consider, "Will I be able to follow through?" before saying *yes*.

Choose motivating words



The way you talk about your child to others can provide a motivation boost—or discourage further effort. For a positive effect:

- **Do assume** your child is listening if within earshot. Kids pick up on tone and context as well as words.
- **Do praise** your child for demonstrating things that are important to you: learning, responsibility, persistence, etc.
- **Don't make** critical remarks about your child to family. Think about how it would feel to hear people you love discuss your flaws. Pointing out strengths and weaknesses to siblings fuels rivalry.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL
Helping Students Learn®
Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School — *February 2026*

Q&A How can I convince my child that honest effort matters?

Q: I caught my middle schooler copying all the answers from a friend's assignment. My child claimed it was no big deal and said all the kids do it. What should I do?



A: Students do a lot of collaborating in school, so begin by asking your child if working with others was part of the assignment. If not, it's time for a serious talk about cheating.

To prevent a one-time mistake from snowballing into a major academic problem for your student:

- **Ask why your child cheated.** In middle school, students become more aware of how they compare with their peers. Some turn to cheating as a way to keep up. Others think it is just easier than doing the work themselves. Many students are worried about disappointing their families.
- **Explain that learning is what matters,** and by cheating, your child is missing out on learning. Say that learning takes effort and sometimes involves mistakes. Make it clear that your love doesn't depend on grades.
- **Seek help if your child is struggling** or has fallen behind. Consult your child's teachers about help sessions or other available resources.
- **Help your child improve study habits.** Then your student can earn higher grades without cheating.

Parent Quiz Are you preparing your child for new kinds of relationships?

Many children become interested in romantic and physical relationships in the middle school years. Are you providing facts, guidance and values your child can use to navigate these tricky waters? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you discuss** the subject calmly and ask about your child's knowledge, opinions and feelings?

___**2. Do you explain** your family's values and expectations about appropriate behavior?

___**3. Do you talk** about the consequences of risky behavior?

___**4. Do you emphasize** the importance of self-respect, respect for the other person, kindness and consideration?

___**5. Do you set** rules about social activities and remind your child that schoolwork comes first?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child learn to handle romance responsibly. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about."
—Angela Schwindt

Encourage future thinking

Life after high school is years away, but middle schoolers can start strengthening key skills now to prepare for a successful future. Help your child practice:

- **Speaking and writing clearly.** If your child wants you to allow something or modify a rule, ask to see a presentation about why you should.
- **Thinking analytically.** Students often see things they would change. Help your child think of how to be part of a solution.
- **Making well-reasoned decisions.** Suggest making a T chart with the reasons *for* a choice on one side, and the reasons *against* it on the other.

Source: B. Cook: "College and Career Ready: What it Means for Middle School Students," Association for Middle Level Education.

Quench fiery outbursts

Preteens are known for their strong feelings. But overreacting to a blazing outburst just adds fuel to the fire. Instead:



- **Wait to talk** until you are both calm. Avoid imposing punishment in the heat of the moment.
- **Stick to your decisions.** Make it clear that pleading won't change your mind.
- **Offer choices.** "You can work on your report before or after dinner. You choose."

Make learning engaging

Middle schoolers often seem to care about their friends more than school. To boost your child's interest in learning:

1. **Make it personal.** Link school topics to your child's life.
2. **Encourage imagination.** "What might it have felt like to be at Valley Forge?"
3. **Use humor.** Share silly cartoons, GIFs or videos about things your child is learning.

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HIGH SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School February 2026

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10

A five-day plan helps teens take an organized approach to studying

When your teen has a big test to study for—whether it's a history unit test, a math exam or an essay test in English—organization is key for effective and thorough preparation.



Encourage your student to follow this five-day study program:

- **Four days before the test,** your teen should gather relevant class materials, including notes, outlines, quizzes and handouts. Arranging them by date will make them easier to follow.
- **Three days before the test,** your teen should read everything over and make notes on facts, formulas and definitions likely to appear on the test. Then your teen can practice recalling the information, by using flash cards or a self-quiz app such as Quizlet.
- **Two days before the test,** your teen should review the assigned readings. Using the headings as a guide, your teen can list essay questions that may show up on the test and make notes about how to answer them.
- **One day before the test,** it's time for a self-test. Your teen should try to recall and write memorized facts correctly, create an essay outline or apply math or science formulas by using them to solve sample problems.
- **The day of the test,** your teen should repeat the previous day's tasks and collect and bring allowed items (notes, calculator, etc.) to class.

Careful writing includes proofreading

Your teen just wrote the last sentence of a paper and is happy to be finished. But turning it in without proofreading is a mistake. And relying on technology to clean up writing is, too. It can miss—and even introduce—errors.

Proofreading helps students ensure their writing is free of careless errors. Encourage your teen to:

- **Schedule time** to proofread before an assignment is due.
- **Read each word slowly.** Our eyes tend to fill in missing letters or words. Reading aloud can help your teen catch mistakes.
- **Look for common errors.** If your teen is unsure when to use *affect* or *effect*, for example, that is something to double-check before turning the paper in.
- **Proofread at least twice.** Reading from back to front can make spelling errors stand out.
- **Avoid getting discouraged.** With practice, your teen will develop not only proofreading skills, but also a better ability to write clearly from the start.

Show support at study time

Buckling down to schoolwork isn't easy for teens when the people around them are all relaxing and having fun. At least part of each evening, "study" along with your teen. Read a book or do some paperwork. Your support shows that education is a family priority.



Make a learning connection

When struggling with a subject in school, many teens say things like, "I'm just not a [subject] person." But they are missing the vital connection between practice and results.



Make it clear that your teen *can* learn, get smarter and do well—by putting in effort and practice. Talk about skills your teen has improved this way, like free-throw shooting or guitar playing. Praise your teen's determination. Having a can-do attitude motivates students to face—and overcome—challenges.

Offer tips for useful notes

Taking detailed and complete notes in class promotes active learning and improves students' ability to recall the material later. Share these strategies with your teen:

- **Use two columns—**take notes in one and add topic headings in the other.
- **Take notes by hand,** rather than on a keyboard. Studies show that this helps students process information better.
- **Create a list of abbreviations** for frequently-used words.
- **Review notes daily.** Your teen can jot down questions or clarify points while the memory of the class is still fresh.

Source: J. Gonzalez, "Note-taking: A Research Roundup," Cult of Pedagogy.

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HIGH SCHOOL
Helping Students Learn®
Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School — *February 2026*

Q&A My teen would rather argue than talk. What can I do?

Q: We were close once, but now my teen gets annoyed and makes a face when I ask about school or anything else. I want to be involved, but our conversations always seem to turn into arguments. What can I do?



A: You are right about the value of staying tuned into your teen's life. Family engagement has a positive effect on school success and also on teens' overall well-being.

It sounds like your teen is going through a typical phase—similar to one you've likely seen before. As a toddler, your child may have shouted *no* and thrown tantrums. Now, you get attitude and arguments. With a few adjustments, the same things that worked then can work now:

- **Try not to take it personally.** Your teen is figuring out how to be an individual, separate from you. Your student still needs you, but probably won't admit it. Stay calm, and avoid responding to anger with anger.
- **Maintain limits.** House rules such as *No insults* and *No yelling* should always apply. Say that you will listen when your teen speaks respectfully.
- **Affirm that you will always be there** for your teen. But unless you suspect something is seriously wrong, let your teen figure things out independently for now. Given room, your teen may grow closer to you again.

Parent Quiz Are you warding off a senior slump?

In the second half of senior year, many students start to coast. They don't want to study or even attend school at all. Are you helping your teen avoid this self-sabotaging behavior? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___1. **Do you track** your teen's attendance so you can take action if it slips?

___2. **Do you talk** with your teen about why grades still matter? Colleges can and do take back offers of admission if students' performance drops.

___3. **Do you plan** activities with other senior families that will give your students a reason to stay engaged with school?

___4. **Do you find** real-world ways to help your teen engage with school topics?

___5. **Do you suggest** learning opportunities such as volunteering and interning?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are keeping your teen focused on learning. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Starting strong is good. Finishing strong is epic."
—Robin Sharma

Point to media examples



It's often easier to teach teens to think about the link between actions and consequences when the examples aren't personal. Look for media stories about students, celebrities and others making poor life choices. Show them to your teen. Then, ask questions like:

- *What was the person doing that led to the negative consequence?*
- *How could this affect the person's future?*
- *How will others be affected by this outcome?*

Lessen the effects of stress

Stressful life events can derail students' progress and even lead to dropping out. To help keep stress from stopping your high schooler:

- **Counter negativity.** If your teen thinks things will never change, discuss how small changes can make a difference.
- **Help your teen divide** overwhelming tasks into parts and pick one to do today.
- **Suggest taking a break** for some outdoor exercise.

Hand over responsibilities

Assuming more responsibility for themselves helps prepare teens for independent adulthood. Make it your teen's responsibility to:

- **Use a calendar** to track commitments and plan time.
- **Make appointments** for medical and dental care, hair care, etc.
- **Create a budget** for saving and spending, and stick to it.
- **Follow the news.** Learning what world and local leaders must deal with provides perspective on teens' own responsibilities.

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