Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!
March 2026
Vol. 37, No. 7
Title I Program
Educational Service Unit #7



Make use of seasonal weather to teach essential science skills

In many parts of the country, March brings changeable weather—which makes it a great time to enjoy weather-related activities that build school skills. With your child:

- **Keep a temperature graph.** Have your child record and graph the temperature each day for a month. Or, use an online weather report for your area. Also note whether the day was sunny, cloudy or rainy.
- **Measure the rain.** You'll need a plastic jar with straight sides and a flat bottom, a ruler and a marker. On the outside of the jar, use the ruler and marker to mark off each quarter inch. Have your child keep track of the amount of rainfall.
- **Create a cloud journal.** Spend a few minutes outside regularly observing the clouds together. Have your child draw them, then research online to try and identify the type.Discuss how different types of clouds can predict different weather.
- **Make wind chimes.** You'll need four clean, empty cans, some string and a coat hanger. Make sure the edges of the cans are not sharp. Help your child punch a hole in the bottom of each can. Tie each can by a long string to the hanger. Each time the wind blows, the cans will make music!

To dive deeper, explore online resources together. A quick search on the Common Sense Media website will direct you to fun, age-appropriate weather apps, games and websites.

Help your child make a math strategy wheel



When students get stuck on a math problem, they often forget the simple steps that could get them back on track. A problem-solving strategy wheel empowers your child to be an active problem solver instead of giving up.

To make a strategy wheel, work with your child to brainstorm actions students can take to find the answer to a tough math problem. Start with the basics and then add more specific ideas, such as:

- **Reread the problem carefully.**
- **Draw a diagram or picture.**
- **Restate the problem** in my own words.
- **Guess and check.**
- **Think about how** I solved other problems like this one.

Then, have your child create a visual chart—like a pie chart or a wheel—with each strategy listed in its own "slice." Post the chart wherever your child works on math assignments.

The next time your elementary schooler is stuck, encourage your child to glance at the wheel, pick a strategy and give it a try.

Source: D. Ronis, *Brain-Compatible Mathematics*, Skyhorse Publishing.

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A three-step plan can help your child be more responsible



Some students struggle with taking responsibility for their schoolwork. This problem can cause stress at home, but by working on it together, you can help your child learn how to be more responsible.

Follow these steps:

1. **Involve your child** in identifying a solution. Start by asking, "You're having trouble remembering assignments. What could you do that would help you keep track of everything for school? Why don't you think about it, and we'll discuss it at dinner."
2. **Let your child** try to make the plan work—without jumping in to help. If your child leaves a book or an assignment at home, resist the urge to rush in and deliver it. Instead, let your child experience and learn from the consequences.
3. **Suggest changes** to the plan if it's not working, but let your child put them into action. You can offer an idea like, "How about we try placing a "launch box" by the door for school items? What do you think of that?"

"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Encourage your elementary schooler to become a leader



Some students seem to be born leaders. They have the self-confidence, friendliness and helpfulness that make other people want to work with them.

But all children, whether they are born leaders or not, have the ability to become leaders. Here are some ways you can help your child develop leadership skills:

- **Look at leaders in the news.** Whether you're watching a story about a winning football team or a community effort to build a park, help your child see that someone was the leader of that group. Talk about the qualities that make people good leaders.
- **Be a leader yourself.** When you take a leadership role—whether it's at school, in business or in your community—tell your child about what you're doing and why. "I'm volunteering to help your school raise money so they can purchase more classroom computers."
- **Teach your child to consider** other people's points of view. Good leaders aren't bossy. They make people want to work together.
- **Find leadership opportunities.** Children can learn leadership skills in youth groups, clubs, Scouts, athletic teams and many other organizations. Family meetings are another way to develop "home-grown" leadership. Give your child a turn chairing the meetings and managing family projects.
- **Don't push.** Pressuring children beyond their abilities destroys self-esteem. If your child seems stressed or unhappy, lighten the load. Encourage small steps that will build confidence over time.

Are you helping your student read fluently?



Studies consistently show that students who read aloud with fluency are most likely to have a strong understanding of what they've read. Children read fluently if they read aloud smoothly, accurately and with expression.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are helping your child develop this valuable reading skill. Do you:

1. **Set aside time** for your child to read to you in addition to the time you spend reading aloud?
2. **Let your child pick** what to read? Even if you think it's too easy, your child can practice reading faster.
3. **Read a passage** and then ask your child to read it to you?
4. **Offer help** if your child asks how to pronounce a word, and then continue reading?
5. **Discuss a book** after your child is finished reading?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're helping your child develop fluency. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Published monthly September through September.
Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute,
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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Show your child how to become a more confident test-taker



Test anxiety is often rooted in self-doubt. When students don't think they will succeed on a test, they often don't.

To replace your child's worry with confidence, try these strategies:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child that tests just show the teacher what students have learned so far, and what they need help with.
- **Find out what the test will cover.** Encourage your child to listen carefully and ask questions when the teacher talks about the test.
- **Create a study routine** to eliminate last-minute panic. Encourage your child to study several days before the test. Cramming the night before an exam rarely works.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Tell your child to focus on the not-yet-mastered material first.
- **Help connect new material** to information your child already knows. These connections improve students' recall ability.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** When stuck during a test, your child can say, "I am prepared and I know this. I will remember the answer."
- **Talk about your child's strengths.** Confidence in one area can lead to success in other areas.
- **Visualize success.** Have your child draw a mental picture all of the test questions answered correctly.

Source: S.M. DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School,* Free Press.

Research shows nutrition is linked to academic performance



Research shows that good nutrition has a positive effect on student performance. Eating a healthy diet helps students stay on task and recall information. And eating breakfast regularly is linked to improved overall school performance.

To ensure your child is getting the right fuel for the school day:

- **Make breakfast a priority.** If your child gets breakfast at school, discuss the importance of eating it. If your child eats at home, keep low-sugar, unprocessed foods on hand. For rushed mornings, have healthy, grab-and-go options ready so your child can eat on the way out the door.
- **Be mindful of lunch choices.** Whether you pack a lunch or your child eats school lunch, discourage high-calorie and high-fat choices. Meals that are high in fat and sugar often lead to a post-meal energy crash, making it difficult for students to concentrate in the afternoon.
- **Plan for after-school hunger.** Kids are typically hungry when they get home, so prepare a variety of healthy snacks. Let your child choose from fresh fruits, veggies, cheese, yogurt and whole-grain crackers.
- **Control the options at home.** The simplest way to encourage healthy eating is to buy only the food you want your child to eat. Your child can't eat unhealthy food if it's not in the house!

Source: C. St John, M.P.H., R.D.N., "Proof Positive: Breakfast Improves Kids' Grades, Mood and Weight," Healthy Eating.Org.

Questions & Answers

Q: The principal called to tell me that my fifth grader shoved a child to the ground at school today. As a result, my child is going to be suspended for one day. I know this is the school's policy; however, my child says the other student started the fight by name-calling. Should I go to the school to complain?

A: Children don't always make the right choices. What's important is the lesson they learn after they've made a poor choice. Arguing with the school on your child's behalf now can teach the wrong lesson.

Instead:

- **Discuss the reasons** schools need rules. They are necessary to protect the safety and well-bing of all students.
- **Ask about the incident.** Does your child admit to pushing the other child? It's important for your child to learn to tell the truth. Explain that pushing people is never OK—even if they are saying mean things.
- **Talk about other ways** your child could've reacted in that situation, such as by ignoring the child or saying *stop*.
- **Encourage your child** to tell the teacher if the name-calling continues. Reporting rather than fighting helps ensure the right child is in trouble.
- **Allow your child** to experience the consequences. On the day of the suspension, don't let your child spend the time on screens. Instead, expect your child to read, work on school assignments or write about this experience in a journal.

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It Matters: Student Wellness

Boost your child's well-being with family meals



Eating together as a family supports children's overall wellness. Sharing a meal strengthens relationships, which provides a sense of security and connection.

Here's how to get the most out of meals with your child:

- **Choose a time that works.** It doesn't always have to be dinner. If you work in the evening, have breakfast with your child or plan a weekend picnic or brunch.
- **Involve your child in planning** and preparing nutritious meals. Ask your child to choose the vegetable, toast bread for sandwiches or toss a salad. Having a say in what you eat and helping to get it on the table encourages healthy eating and teamwork.
- **Have pleasant conversations** on topics your child can enjoy. Mealtime is a great time to check in by asking about your child's day. Sharing something about your own day first may inspire your child to speak up.

  You can spark conversations by asking a "question of the day." The question can be silly or serious. Go around the table and have each person answer. Have family members take turns coming up with future questions.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Turn off the TV and put away those mobile devices. You'll be fully present and able to focus your attention on one another.

Source: "Increasing Family Meal Consumption to Boost Mental Health," The Food Industry Association.

Did you know that playtime is a proven stress reliever?

When children have fun, their brains release chemicals that cause happiness and reduce stress—which leads to improved mental health.

To get the most from playtime:

- **Encourage active play.** Your child needs at least one hour of daily exercise for physical and mental wellness. Active play (jumping rope, playing tag, etc.) counts toward that hour. Have your child keep a physical activity diary for a week—does it total at least seven hours?
- **Limit recreational screen use.** Hands-on, real-life play stimulates your child's brain better than passively staring at a screen. Together, make a list of screen-free playtime activities. When your child is bored, point to the list.



- **Play with your child.** Parent-child play strengthens bonds. Have a family board game night, act out a story together or ask to join in your child's pretend play.

Source: S. Wang, Ph.D. and S. Aamodt, Ph.D.,"Play, Stress, and the Learning Brain," *Cerebrum,* National Library of Medicine.

Teach your child how to recognize and manage feelings



All children feel worried or upset sometimes. Identifying of these feelings and thoughts is the first step toward managing them in healthy ways.

Here's how:

- **Talk about upsetting thoughts.** When your child seems sad or anxious, ask, "What are you thinking about right now?" Your child might say, for example, "What if no one will sit with me in the cafeteria at lunch tomorrow?"
- **Show understanding.** Put your child's feelings into words. "I know you're worried about finding someone to eat with at lunch tomorrow."
- **"Flip" thinking.** Tell your child to make negative thoughts do a "flip" so they're more positive or helpful. Your child might think, "I can ask my reading buddy to have lunch with me" or "I can tell my teacher I'm worried about sitting alone."

If your child often seems worried or upset, talk to the teacher, school counselor or pediatrician.

Source: "Catch, Check, and Change Your Thoughts," National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.