

ACTION INFORMATION SHEET

You and Your Elementary School-aged Child

The early school years are the foundation for school success. They are the time when your child will learn the basics of reading, math, and the other subjects on which later learning will depend. To make sure your child starts on the right track to learning, be involved with his or her education. Here are some ways you can make a difference in your child's future.

Learn about Your Child's School

Before the school year begins, visit the school your child will attend. Obtain a copy of the school's parent involvement plan, if available.

Before your child begins school, ask the principal:

- What is taught in the kindergarten program?
- How much time is spent teaching children reading and math?
- What tests does the school use to measure children's progress?
- How do parents know if the teachers are highly qualified to teach?
- Can I attend kindergarten orientation with my child?
- Is there a family center at the school?
- Is the school meeting the academic goals set by the state?

Ask the principal for a district or school report card to see if students are making progress. You also can visit <http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/index.do> for specific information about your school.

If the school to which your child would normally be assigned is not meeting the state's academic goals, your child may qualify to transfer to another public school, including a public charter school. Also, if the school is not meeting

the state's goals, your child may be eligible to receive free tutoring and other supportive services. Contact your school district to find out more about these opportunities.

Communicate with the School

In school, teachers are your partners in helping your child grow. They should be helpful and willing to meet with you.

Things to tell teachers and principals:

- Explain your child's needs so they better understand them and can help meet them.
- Share any problems at home which may affect your child's school performance, such as divorce or illness.
- Ask the school to arrange for someone who is bilingual to help you when you meet with your child's teacher if English is not your first language.
- Have the school provide materials in your native language if possible.

It is your responsibility to be actively involved in your child's education; the more presence you have in it and in the school, the more likely it is that your child will succeed.

Support Your Child in Elementary School

You can do several things to support your child's progress in the elementary grades.

Things you can do at home to help your child:

- Read together with your child. Let your child see you reading for pleasure.
- Use the local library and the Internet as sources for literacy activities, homework support, and opportunities to pursue outside interests.
- Make sure your child does his or her homework. Give your child the chance to be responsible and to work on his or her own. Encourage those efforts.
- Pay attention to how much your child watches TV, uses the computer, or plays video games. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests no more than one to two hours of viewing per day.

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- Listen carefully to what your child says and talk with him or her often. Research shows that children who talk with the adults in their lives are not only more successful students, but also healthier, happier people.

Be an Advocate for Your Child

Contact your child's teachers throughout the school year. Show them you are interested in your child's education, and set up a way to communicate with them.

Ways to show you are an advocate for you child:

- Find out what goals the teachers have for your child. At each grade level, the goals you and the teachers have for your child will change.
- Contact the teacher immediately if you notice a negative change in your child's behavior or school performance.
- Communicate with the teacher if your child has a problem cooperating and playing with other children. This allows you to identify and address problems at school before they become worse.
- Be persistent; if you do not receive an adequate response, you may want to consider meeting with your child's teachers, the school counselor, and the principal together.
- Contact teachers if your child regularly doesn't understand assignments or needs extra help, or feels uncomfortable with any situation.
- Attend scheduled parent-teacher conferences; be prepared to listen and talk. You may find it helpful to write out questions beforehand. The teachers should be very specific about your child's work and progress. Think about what the teachers tell you and check back with them to see how things are going as the year progresses.

Find More Ideas at the Minnesota Parent Center

The Minnesota Parent Center helps parents be strong partners in their child's education. It also encourages community involvement to help all children be prepared for school and to succeed when they arrive there. The center's multicultural staff can answer questions about early childhood learning and school-related problems for all children. It also provides helpful written materials and offers workshops on topics such as the No Child Left Behind Act, parental involvement, and more. All services are free.

Call 952-838-9000 or 800-537-2237 (toll free in Greater Minnesota) to see how you can help your child do well in school. You also can learn more online at www.PACER.org/mpc.

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PACER is a statewide nonprofit organization. It supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities. It offers workshops, individual assistance, written information, and more.