

## **Counselor Helps Parents Help Students**

Ravensworth school counselor Maureen Smith presented a guest lecture at the PTA's November meeting on how parents can help elementary-age children succeed in school. What follows is a synopsis of her presentation.

Every child absolutely has the power to be successful in school. I believe very strongly that we cannot take a position that a child can't do it. If we take that position, overtly or not, kids pick up on that.

I believe strongly that it is up to kids to do their homework, not their parents. Kids who come to school having already had those early learning experiences, tend to be more successful all the way through school.

There are many things you can do at home to help very young children prepare for learning. Putting away groceries, folding laundry, anything that involves counting, looking at patterns and following a process. Also reading signs. Those things that seem so simple and small, really do get your kids ready to be learners.

Here are other tips for helping children throughout elementary school:

- Teach kids that you have a job and they have a job, which is school. Start that when they are in kindergarten and before.
- Doing things together with your children is fine, but doing school-related work for them, is not. Parents must restrain themselves from trying to help child too much, which happens a lot when a deadline is looming.
- Communication with the school is very important. Don't assume anything or believe second- or third-hand information. If you're hearing something and you're not sure about it, talk to your child's teacher and find out directly what is the issue.
- Let your kids see you reading and doing things related to your own work.
- Get kids writing – anything. Early writing is just writing letters, it doesn't have to make sense. Could be simple things like writing a weekly chores or grocery list.
- Get kids to do things for themselves. It's OK to help them and give examples, but doing all their math problems with them is not going to help them. That will not help them become learners and independent thinkers.
- Help kids when it's needed with homework. Mostly they may need help with the management of it: help them break it down into small pieces; teach them to do a little before dinner, or a little more tomorrow. Kids get overwhelmed easily. Learning to break it down is a great skill to develop.
- Have an established study area. Doing work in the same place each night is important and it shouldn't be in front of the TV or with close access to computer games. Some older kids can do homework with music – not elementary students, they too distracted.
- Kids thrive on structure and have a great need for consistency. If you can develop a structure, they will fall into a routine more easily.

- Homework is their job, not yours. Let them learn the consequences of not doing it, which is the best thing that can happen, especially now in elementary school. This won't get into their transcripts for college.
- Make kids understand that homework is non-negotiable. It has to be done.
- Make a schedule for when you do certain subjects. Sometimes it's better to get challenging subjects out of way first.
- Be your kids' cheerleader. Let them know that even if you're frustrated, you're there for them. They want your encouragement. You have so much influence.
- Don't expect perfection. Homework may not be neat, or in the format you think it should be. But it's a process, not a product.
- Some simple things: talk to kids about the value of working hard in school. Kids will try if they understand it part of their family values to do well in school and work hard.
- Ask them every day about school – not a yes or no question. If they give limited responses, pick at it a little bit. The more they hear it, the more they will respond.
- Read all communication that comes from the school – look at the Blackboard 24/7 Web site at least once per week.  
<http://fcps.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>
- Participate in school activities. We know from research, that kids whose parents participate tend to do well in school and in their post-secondary education.

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