



Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Road, P.O. Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307
(805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 967-2234 • Direct Dial: 964-4710 plus extension

Service and Leadership • sbceo.org

Bill Cirone op ed column

To: All newspapers
Aug. 2, 2016 —Col. 16/17-03

For information: David J. Lawrence
964-4710, ext. 5282

A new school year: off to a good start

By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

Some children are excited about a new school year beginning, while others seem to dread the end of summer vacation. Either way, parents have an important role in preparing their children for a smooth start of the school routine.

For students of all ages there are certain basic areas where parents can play a role in supporting school achievement throughout the year. This is a good checklist to repeat:

Breakfast: Children should begin each day with a good breakfast, and then have healthy snacks and other meals at regular times. This helps small bodies adjust and react at maximum capacity.

Schedules: Children should know their parents' or caretakers' schedules at home and on the job. This helps establish a sense of time, but also reassures children about consistency and order.

Reading: Children should be read to every day that is possible. Newspapers, short stories, books, and poetry can all be the basis of enjoyable shared experiences — whether it's around the breakfast table, after school, or before bedtime.

Homework: If possible, a specific time each day should be set aside for homework. Children should know that homework is a number one priority but should also be granted flexibility if soccer practice or band tryouts fall during homework time. Together set a new time for that day.

The adults in a child's life should resist the temptation to do a children's homework for them, but it's important that children know an adult, serving as a "consultant," is available for help. If children seem to be asking for help because they want someone else to do the thinking, a good response is: "I think you can figure this out on your own. You try first."

Tests: When children are studying for a test, they should be discouraged from "cramming" the night before. Instead, children could be asked to bring a textbook home every other night and teach you what they have learned in school. These discussions could be held at the dinner table for everyone's benefit.

When children are preparing for a test, help them avoid panic. Advise them to study one section at a time. Encourage a good night's sleep and a nutritious meal before the test.

A voice recorder is a great study aid for children whose parents are short on time. One technique is to record a definition or question, pause for about five seconds, and then record the answer. Children can then play it back, have a chance to test their knowledge, and get immediate feedback. Virtually every computer and smart phone has some kind of recording application, so this technique is readily available.

If children are having trouble with an assignment, be careful not to criticize. Find out what the problem is and try to help solve it.

The most important point for adults to remember, at all times, is that their positive attitude toward homework, teachers, and school can have great influence on a child's success. That's the bottom line for all of us, and reaps great rewards in the future.

A parent's checklist

- Did my child get a good breakfast this morning?
- Did I provide a nutritious lunch or money to buy one?
- After school, did my child have a chance to tell me about what happened today and to share concerns or exciting events?
- Did my child use the agreed upon time to complete all homework?
- Did I make time to help my child with any problems that arose?
- Does my child have any tests tomorrow? If so, has the necessary studying been completed?
- Have I read with my child today? Has my child read alone?
- Will my child get to bed at the regular time tonight?

###