

8 Smart Tips to Start the School Year Strong

The inevitable last minutes of summer are ticking away. The countdown has begun for back-to-school once again. And along with it, major retailers are bombarding parents, making sure they hurry out and buy the coolest new outfits, backpacks and gadgets for their kids.

But this hyped-up, commercial back-to-school rush to equip students with new garments and gear often gets in the way of the real preparations that parents and kids should focus on for a successful school year.

"The mad, back-to-school dash to purchase new clothes, backpacks, electronic devices and school supplies often overwhelms parents and children alike," said Julia Fitzgerald, Sylvan Learning's Chief Marketing Officer. "What is often lost in this scramble is the fact that school is about learning."

"Starting a new school year can be a daunting experience for many students, and failing to get off on the right foot can set the tone for the rest of the academic year," Fitzgerald said. "Parents need to take the right steps starting now to make sure their students are prepared to tackle new academic challenges with the right habits and daily routines. This includes trying not to be so consumed with showing up in the latest fashions; it's not that important. That's why Sylvan Learning has put together four simple tips for parents and four simple tips for children that can help boost student success in the new school year."

Here are four things parents can do to help their children achieve better academic results:

- **Impose the Two-Week Rule** -With later bedtimes over the summer, children need to ease back into their school routine rather than having a sudden change their first day of school. Using the last two weeks of summer to re-introduce a school year bedtime routine will make waking up on that first day a lot easier.
- **Reintroduce Regular Meal Times** - During summer months, kids tend to grab a snack several times during the day. Parents can start reminding students to get back into a three-meal-a-day schedule in order to regulate their system into the back-to-school mode. Nutrition is an important factor in academic performance, and eating a healthy, balanced breakfast and lunch keeps kids alert throughout the day.
- **Family Calendar** -Time management is tricky for everyone, especially kids and teens, but planning is an important way to save everyone's sanity. Having major deadlines, due dates, events and extracurricular activities in one place helps kids visualize their week, manage their time and stay on track.

- **Don't Ditch Good Habits** - If you and your child have established a good summer learning routine, when school starts try not to forsake all of the fun reading, writing and art activities that kept your child engaged all summer.

Here are four important things that students can follow to improve the academic quality of the school year, starting on Day One.

- **Organize** - Organization is not overrated. Keeping notes, projects and reading materials in logical order helps students find what they need right away, cutting down on time spent tracking things down, and allowing more time for actual studying.
- **Take good notes** - Yes, it does matter. Taking good notes helps keep kids' grades up, especially in middle or high school. To boost note-taking skills, students should practice picking out the "main ideas" in conversations, news reports, or magazine articles.
- **Concentrate** - Staying focused is easier for some kids than others. Students need to do their best to avoid distractions in class. This means keeping cell phones tucked away and being vocal if a chatty classmate is too distracting.
- **Speak up**- Students often can get tripped up by homework or test instructions. Students should know it's OK to speak up if they don't understand testing or homework directions. Students should also listen carefully and spend plenty of time reading directions.

Sylvan Learning also reminds parents that even with the best preparation many students still may need extra help to meet new academic challenges or to bolster study skills. Getting help at the first sign of trouble will prevent students from falling further behind as the year progresses.