



What Parents Need to Know This Back-to-School Season

California State PTA Shares Six Key Tips For All Parents

Well-informed, engaged parents make a vital difference in helping students and schools succeed. When families, schools and communities work as partners, student achievement is boosted and children are better prepared to lead happy and productive lives. As the 2014-15 school year approaches, here are six key tips all parents need to know this back-to-school season.

1. **It starts with attendance.** Children need to be in school to learn – it's that simple. If children don't show up for school every day, they miss out on developing fundamental skills. Data shows children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are far less likely to read proficiently at the end of third grade. Parents and families are essential partners in making sure students attend school, and play a key role in identifying the barriers to attendance as well as what motivates students to go to school. For more information on the importance of school attendance, check out the new [toolkit](#) from [Attendance Works](#).
2. **Support learning at home.** Parents are their children's first teachers and are key in creating a home environment that helps a child succeed. Families can help children develop good study habits and attitudes that lead to becoming lifelong learners by having a special place where children can do their homework, setting a "regular time and place" to study. Parents can also ask questions about school activities. Ask "what are three new things you learned today?" rather than "how was school?" It's never too early to start talking to your children about their dreams for college and career to show how much your family values education and what they do in school each day. Engage in educational conversation by turning ordinary time together into "teachable moments." Provide children access to books, magazines and newspapers as well as art supplies such as crayons, markers and colored paper either in your home or through a local library or community center. Also, limit access to TV, computer and video games. Additional resources for supporting learning at home are available in multiple languages online at www.capta.org.
3. **Understand the important link between health and student achievement.** Active and well-nourished children have better attendance, stay in school and are ready to learn. Ensuring your child has a healthy breakfast and plenty of exercise is a great place to start. Oral and general health check-ups are also important. Adolescents with poorer general health are less likely to graduate from high school on time or attend college.

Chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, obesity and tooth decay affect about 20-30 percent of children in California, which leads to more absenteeism and lower school performance. [Team California for Healthy Kids](#), an initiative of the California Department of Education, provides additional resources on the connection between health and learning.

4. **Establish a relationship with your child's teacher.** Working together, parents and teachers give kids their best chance to learn. Establishing a relationship and open channels of communication with your child's teacher is a must. Attending your school's back-to-school night is one opportunity to meet and talk with your child's teacher – but building a relationship should be year-round. Understand how information will be shared and how you can be informed about assignments. Ask if the school has an online portal for checking grades and staying up-to-date on classroom information. Ask about how well your child is doing in school and how you can support learning at home. Find out more about how grade level and school expectations affect your child's progress. Your child's teacher can also tell you how much time he or she expects students to spend on homework. Ask your principal, school site council or PTA if your school or district has a homework policy, including how to handle homework if your child needs to be absent. California State PTA has a strong stand in support of homework quality and recently passed a resolution titled, "Homework: Quality Over Quantity." [Learn more](#) about this newly adopted resolution.
5. **Learning in the classroom will look different with the implementation of Common Core State Standards.** California is updating the way we prepare students for the future. We don't know what tomorrow's jobs will be, but we know that our future depends on a strong workforce in which critical thinking and problem-solving skills can be applied in any context. That's the idea behind the Common Core State Standards; they are guidelines that will help schools focus on deeper, richer learning to prepare students for the 21st century workforce. As part of the transition to new standards, California will also implement a new testing system, called Smarter Balanced, which will evaluate student achievement in a more meaningful way by leveraging technology that tailors questions to responses. To learn more about what your child will be learning in each grade level, check out PTA's [Parents' Guide to Student Success](#) and additional resources online at www.capta.org.
6. **Get engaged: Your voice matters in school decision making.** The new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) offer an historic opportunity to usher in a new era of greater parent and family engagement in our schools. Parents have a seat at the table when important decisions are being made at your child's school and in the school district – and there are opportunities for you to have a voice and get engaged! Learn more about how the LCFF and LCAPs work at www.capta.org. You can also take a deeper look at each of the eight state priority areas in California State PTA's [LCAP Quick Guides](#).

For more back-to-school tips for parents and information on the importance of family engagement, visit www.capta.org.