



Bulletin

Parents Learning About Children's Education



Getting Ready for College Early: Taking the Right Courses for College Starts in Middle School (Second in a series)

By the time a child is in sixth grade, families should start talking about going to college. Make it clear that you expect your children to go to college, and together start planning how to get there. Everyone knows that high school courses and grades count for admission to college, but many people don't realize that a college education also builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier years. Your child should plan a high school course schedule early, in the sixth or seventh grade.

Challenging courses help kids get into college.

Research shows that students who take algebra and geometry early (by the end of the eighth and ninth grades) are much more likely to go on to college than students who do not. In a national sample, only 26 percent of low-income students who did not take geometry went to college; but 71 percent of low-income students who took geometry went to college. It is common in other developed countries for students to have mastered the basics of math, algebra, and some geometry by the end of the eighth grade. By taking algebra early in middle and junior high school, students can enroll in chemistry, physics, trigonometry, and Advanced Placement courses before finishing high school.

Just as employers want workers who have certain skills, most colleges want students who have taken certain courses. Many of these courses can be taken only after a stu-

dent has passed other, more basic courses. The most important thing a student can do to prepare for college is to sign up for the right courses and work hard to pass them. As parents, you should get involved in choosing your children's schedule for the next year, and make sure that your children can and do take challenging courses. College-bound middle and junior high school students should take:

- **Algebra I (in eighth grade) and Geometry (in ninth grade) or other challenging math courses that expect students to master the essentials of these subjects.** Algebra and geometry form the foundation for the advanced math and science courses colleges want their students to take in high school to prepare for college. These courses give students the skills they need to succeed on college entrance exams, in college math classes, and in their future careers.

- **English, Science and History or Geography.** Together with math, these courses make up the "core"—the basic academic classes every student should take every year, in middle school and in high school. Students can take a variety of English, science and history classes – all of them good preparation for college. See chart for examples of recommended courses.
- **Foreign Language.** Many colleges require their students to study a foreign language for at least two years, and some prefer three or four years of one language. Taking a foreign language shows colleges that a student is serious and willing to learn the basics plus more, and shows employers that he or she is prepared to compete in the global economy.
- **Computer Science.** Basic computer skills are now essential, and more and more jobs require at least a basic knowledge of computers. Make sure your child takes advantage of any opportunities the school offers to learn to use computers.
- **The Arts.** Many colleges view participation in the arts and music as valuable experience that broadens students' understanding and appreciation of the world around them. It is also well known and widely recognized that the arts contribute significantly to children's intellectual development.

There's no substitute for taking challenging courses and working hard. The chart to the left lists some of the courses students should take.

Get a "Leg Up" on College Preparation and Save on Tuition

High school students can also take courses
continues on page 4

High School Courses Recommended for College

English—4 Years

Composition, American Literature, English Literature, World Literature

Mathematics—3 to 4 years

Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Pre-calculus, Trigonometry, Calculus

History and Geography—2 to 3 years

Geography, U.S. History, U.S. Government, World History, World Cultures, Civics

Laboratory Science—2 to 3 years

Biology, Earth Science, Chemistry, Physics

Visual and Performing Arts—1 year

Art, Dance, Drama, Music

Challenging Electives—1 to 3 years

Economics, Psychology, Computer Science, Statistics, Communications

Foreign Language—2 to 3 years



Summer Learning Activities! ... p. 2

Back to School Tips ... p. 3

Summer Learning Activities!



MATH

Grades K-3: LAUNDRY MATH. Sharpen skills by doing a necessary household job. Ask your youngster to sort laundry—before or after washing. How many socks? How many sheets? etc.

Grades 4-5: A TRIP TO THE SUPER-MARKET. Plan ahead with the 3 R's. Ask your child to choose a dish to prepare for a meal—a pudding, a salad, a sandwich. Have your child check to see what supplies are on hand and then make a shopping list. At the supermarket, let your child select the food on the list. First, your child decides which items are the best buys and makes selections. Have your child write the price of each item and if possible figure the total, checking the prices against the sales receipt.

Grades 6-8: HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? Help your children understand living costs by discussing household expenses with them. For example, make a list of monthly bills—heat, electricity, telephone, mortgage or rent. Fold the paper to hide the costs and ask your kids to guess the cost of each item. Unfold the paper. How do the estimates compare with the actual costs? Were they close?

READING

Grades K-3: DRESS ME. Increase your child's vocabulary. Teach the name of each item of clothing your child wears—shirt, blouse, sock, shoe—when your child is dressing. Also teach the body parts—head, arm, knee, foot. Then print the words on paper and ask your child to attach these papers to the clothes in the closet or drawers. Trace your child lying on a large sheet of paper. Ask your child to attach the words for the body parts to the right locations.

Grades 4-5: STREET SMARTS. Put reading skills to practical use. Gather bus and subway route maps and schedules to a special place in your area—the zoo, a museum, a football stadium. Let your child plan a trip for friends or family. Figure out the travel time, the cost, and the best time to make the trip.

Grades 6-8: FOLLOW THE NEWS. As a family, choose an important news event to follow for a day or two. Ask each person to find as much information on the topic as possible—read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch TV news. Then talk about what everyone learned.

For Teenagers: The Problem-Solving Habit

Teenagers can get used to sizing up a problem and coming up with common-sense ways to solve it. Here's a six-step method that works and can be done easily at home by parent and child.

Step 1: What Is the Problem? This is a first, often overlooked, step in problem-solving. You have to be able to state the problem and, if there's a conflict, the opposing views. For example: For a teen, it might be whether to go to a certain party; for a parent, whether to ask for a raise.

Step 2: What Can Be Done About It? This is when you come up with a variety of solutions. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible without judging which ones are better than others. Just keep the ideas coming.

Step 3: What Are the Good and Bad Points of These Solutions? This is when you judge the different solutions. What are the pros and cons of each one? You're making judgments, assessing the possible solutions in light of your experience and the way the world works. And in this process you may well come up with a new and better solution than any you originally thought of.

Step 4: What's the Decision? This is the moment you choose a solution to try. Pick one or perhaps two based on the decisions made in Step 3. Talk about why you selected these solutions.

Step 5: How Can You Put the Decision Into Action? Now you put your decision to the test. In advance, talk about what will happen and what might be expected. What obstacles can you anticipate? What helps can you expect? How can traps be avoided by building on the helps?

Step 6: How Did It Go? This is the follow up, the evaluation of your solution. How did it work? What changes must be made in it so that it will work better? What would you try next time? It's possible that a decision that sounded good will not work as well in real life. Overall, there is a greater chance for success when decisions and solutions are selected in this way.

After going through the process with one problem, ask your teenager to try another. Review the six steps so that everyone will be able to keep on using them afterward. The goal is to help teens get into the habit of this kind of problems solving.

The Problem "Bank"

Just in case you don't have enough problems of your own to solve, here are a few you can use to practice the problem-solving method:

- Who gets to use the car?
- Why is it bad to smoke?
- When does the garbage get taken out?
- What happens when I go for a few days with little sleep?
- How much TV are we going to watch?
- Who has to baby sit the younger kids?
- What happens when I take a test without studying for it?
- Why can't I go to that after-school party?

The home learning "recipes" on this page have been tested and developed by Dr. Dorothy Rich, author of MEGASKILLS (R), for the National Education Association. Reprinted with permission of the National Education Association and The Home and School Institute, 1994.

For more information on other publications to help your children learn call U.S. Department of Education as 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Back to School Tips



MAKE THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL EASIER

Remind your child that she is not the only student who is a bit uneasy about the first day of school. Teachers know that students are anxious and will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible.

Point out the positive aspects of starting school: It will be fun. She'll see old friends and meet new friends. Refresh her memory about previous years, when she may have returned home after the first day with high spirits because she had a good time.

Give your child some strategies for coping with bullies. He should not give in to a bully's demands, but should simply walk away or tell the bully to stop. If you have to, talk with the teacher about a persistent bully.

Find another child in the neighborhood with whom your youngster can walk to school or ride with on the bus. If your child is older, have him offer to walk with or wait at the bus stop with a new or younger child.

If you feel it is appropriate, drive your child (or walk with her) to school and pick her up on the first day.

FIRST-DAY CHECKLIST

Is your child registered? When is the first day of school? What time does school start?

How is your child going to get to school? If your child is biking, does she know the school rules for bicycles? Have you reviewed safety precautions with her regarding traffic and strangers?

What time is lunch? Can your child buy it at school, and how much will it cost? Will he need a snack?

What clothes will your child need to wear? Are there any restrictions on what can be worn? Will she need a different set of clothes for physical education or art classes?

Have you filled out all the health forms or emergency contact forms that have been sent home?

Have any new health problems developed in your child over the summer that will affect her school day? Does the school nurse know about this condition, or is an appointment set up to discuss it?

If your child will need to take medication at school on the first day, have arrangements been made for this?

Does your youngster know where he is going after school (e.g., home, babysitter)? Does he know how he will get there? If you will not be there when he arrives, does he know who will be responsible for him, what the rules are, and how to get help in an emergency?

STARTING A NEW SCHOOL

In addition to the tips listed above, your child may need some extra support if he is starting a new school. Talk with your child about his feelings, both his excitement and his concerns about the new school.

Visit the school with your child in advance of the first day. Teachers and staff are usually at school a few days before the children start. Peek into your child's classroom, and if possible, meet the teacher and principal.

Try to have your child meet a classmate before the first day so they can get acquainted and play together, and so your child will have a friendly face to look for when school begins.

Don't build up unrealistic expectations about how wonderful the new school will be, but convey a general sense of optimism about how things will go for your child at the new school.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Review the basic bus safety rules with your youngster: Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb. Do not move around on the bus. Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing.

These safety tips were developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Please feel free to excerpt these tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics or use them in their entirety for any print or broadcast story, with acknowledgement of source.



Homework Tips

Provide a positive homework atmosphere for your child that is free of clutter and distractions, including television.

Show your child you are interested in her work. Re-explain assignments if necessary, and check to see that homework is completed.

Having trouble fitting homework into your child's schedule? You may need to cut back on his activities, or see that after-school care includes supervised time.

If your child is struggling with a particular subject, and you aren't able to help her yourself, a tutor can be a good solution. Talk it over with your child's teacher first.

Getting Ready for College Early:

continued from page 1

for credit at many colleges. These courses—Advanced Placement and Tech-Prep—are available in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Middle school and junior high school students who plan ahead and take algebra, a foreign language and computer courses by the eighth grade are better prepared for Advanced Placement and Tech-Prep courses in high school.

- Taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Advanced Placement courses are college-level courses in 16 different subjects that help students get ready for college during high school. Students who score high enough on the AP exams can get advanced placement in college or college credit. This saves time and money, as students may be able to take fewer classes in college. Your child's teachers, guidance counselor or principal can tell you if your local high school offers AP courses. If they are not offered, work with other parents to get them included as a part of the core curriculum.

- Taking "Tech-Prep" courses. Students who want to pursue a technical program at a community, technical or junior college may want to prepare by taking some technical courses in high school in addition to the core courses. Talk to someone at your child's school or from a community, junior, or technical college to find out the best high school courses to take for tech prep involvement. "School-to-work" and "school-to-career" courses can also help connect students to colleges and the workplace. Work with your school counselor to find local businesses or school-to-work councils that can provide your child with these opportunities.
- Getting ready for college admissions exams. Most colleges require students to take either the SAT I or the ACT in their junior or senior year of high school. Ask your guidance counselor how your child can best prepare for these exams.

Don't go it alone: Help for parents

Some parents—especially those who did not go to or finish college themselves—may worry that they cannot provide their child the guidance and support needed to get ready for college. But remember, getting

ready for college is more work than anyone can handle on his or her own, and you don't need to have gone to college yourself to help someone else get ready for college. To provide children extra opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need for college, many schools offer before- and after-school programs, where children can learn more about the subjects that interest them, under the care and guidance of adults. Some schools also have mentoring programs, where an adult who has studied or worked in the same field in which a child is interested can provide extra help and advice about, for example, the challenging math and science courses college bound students need to take, and how to plan for a college and a career connected to their interest. Ask your child's teachers or guidance counselor for information about such programs in your local schools. Ask your child's principal about opportunities for teachers or others who have graduated from college to come into the classroom to talk with students about their experiences and success.

For more information, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the U.S. Department of Education's website at www.ed.gov.

Call now to schedule fall 2002 workshops for families & schools!

877-471-0980 x 113

Parents' PLACE Bulletin is a quarterly publication of the Federation for Children with Special Needs, 1135 Tremont St., Ste. 420, Boston, MA 02120. 617-236-7210. Parents' PLACE Bulletin contents are copyrighted by the Federation for Children with Special Needs; some material may carry other copyrights as well (noted where appropriate). Permission is granted to quote from us at length, while giving credit to Parents' PLACE Bulletin, a

publication of the Federation for Children with Special Needs (and original author, if appropriate). Funding for Parents' PLACE, including *Parents' PLACE Bulletin*, comes from the U.S. Department of Education under Grant #S310A990012A. The views and opinions herein do not necessarily reflect views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, or of the Federation for Children with Special Needs.

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO.
50539

Parents' PLACE
at the Federation for Children
1135 Tremont Street, Ste. 420
Boston, MA 02120
877-471-0980

Parents Learning About
Children's Education
PARENTS
PLACE