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Parents Should Get Ready, Too

NEW JERSEY - It's that time of year again; back to school. But amid the shopping trips for sharpened #2 pencils, crisp notebooks and new shoes, parents should start thinking about what they can do to become the best possible support system for their child this school year. The beginning of the new academic season is often the most important, as it sets the tone for a meaningful and successful year. Research shows that students are more equipped to thrive academically and socially when parents are actively involved in their child's education. The following tips will help get you started:

Parents should try to attend the first day of school with their elementary or middle schooler depending on their child's comfort level. Your child may be filled with anxiety and apprehension during the first few days of school and your presence alone may make a difference in their confidence. If your child would rather attend the first day independently or if your schedule does not permit you to be there, you'll want to call or e-mail your child's teacher to introduce yourself. It may also be a good idea to inquire about the teaching style of the instructor and what is to be expected of your child this year.

Every school in the state of New Jersey is expected to provide its students with a certain set of academic skills according to their grade levels. These skills are called the Core Curriculum Content Standards. You can pick up a copy from your child's school or school district office for your reference, or download the state standards at www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/. Make sure you also receive a school or district handbook and any other important policy information during the first week of school. For more information on parental rights and what you should expect from your school and school district, visit the New Jersey Department of Education's Web site at www.nj.gov/education or our Parent Information and Resource Center at www.njpirc.org/.

Probably the most important thing you can do for your child's education is to get actively involved. Do your best to attend school and school district meetings, events, parent/teacher conferences, activity fairs and any other opportunities to become more involved in supporting your child this school year. You will become a familiar face in the school, which may lead to more resources and opportunities for you and your child. It's a known fact that children go further in their education, make wiser decisions and have better career options when their parents are involved.

These are just a few tips you can use to prepare your child for a great year. But keep in mind the most essential things you can offer are love, encouragement and understanding. Our growing children face many challenges, so it's important to make sure they have the best educational resources and opportunities available to them. They will be forever grateful for your support and you'll feel good about yourself in the process.

Remember: "When parents believe, students achieve!"

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