



Starting the New School Year Right

Suggestions for a Successful Start

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It's hard to believe that it's that time of year again! Transition from summer to another school year may mean a myriad of emotions: excitement, a little sadness saying good-bye to summer, anticipation jitters and wondering what lies ahead. Here are some suggestions for a successful start for the new school year.

Acknowledge that transitions are often a little challenging and can be made easier with everyone working together in a positive way. Talk about realistic expectations with your children. Discuss what to expect during the first week of school: catching up with friends, meeting new ones, learning how to navigate the Upper School schedule, finding your way to classes and listening to a lot of information from faculty! Remind them that it takes time to adjust and feel comfortable in any new setting. Setting the stage for a successful year with realistic and positive suggestions and tone can help everyone start off on the right foot. Remind students that first impressions often set an identity for the future.

Now is the perfect time to start encouraging students to develop new habits of mind especially in the area of "self-management." Time management, planning and organization will be key. Parents can be particularly helpful in assuring that students have a dedicated space and the materials they will need for successful studying at home.

While studies in the past showed that 80% of a student's study was done in his/her own room, the latest suggestion is to have a study area that can be somewhat supervised so that the student is not distracted by the temptations on the computer or ipods, etc. This study area could be the dining room table, in the kitchen or some other designated place. While some of the homework needs to be done on the computer, there is still much traditional reading and writing to be done. Research shows that studying in a consistent place and defined time each day, if possible, makes studying behavior easier and more automatic. If the studying is done in the bedroom, an open door policy is best and the computer need not be on the entire time.

White Paper Summary

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- Establish and discuss realistic expectations
- Remember - it takes time to adjust to new schedules
- Students should be reminded that first impressions often set an identity for the future
- Time management, planning and organization will be key to success.
- Create a study area that can be partially supervised so that the student is not distracted by temptations on the computer or ipods, etc.
- Studying in a consistent place at a defined time each day (if possible) makes studying behavior easier and more automatic.
- Parents can help by knowing the student's schedule to proactively plan ahead for important due dates and testing.
- Encourage students to approach long-term assignments by "chunking" - dividing the assignment into manageable "chunks."
- Positive feedback from parents has a lasting impact on self-confidence.
- Students must be their own self-advocate.



Parents can help students by understanding their class schedule and supporting the need to “plan ahead,” preferably for two days at a time since all classes do not meet daily. Using the School Planner faithfully is a necessary habit to learn. Students should carefully assess what needs to be done for the following two days, estimate how much time it will take and plan accordingly. We advise students to print out the class syllabi for each subject at the beginning of the week and clip them in the planner. At the same time, write the assignments in the daily spaces in the planner with arrows to the due dates or test dates. Some students find it helpful and rewarding to check off or cross out assignments as they are finished.

Students should set short-range, specific goals when studying and completing homework. “Chunking” is a term used to divide the assignment into subsections. Then try to set a time goal for each section. This strategy helps the ability to concentrate and provides time for short breaks in between sections.

The National Education Association literature reminds parents that the feedback you give your children about their abilities will have a lasting impact on their self-confidence. They need to believe in themselves. Create high expectations, yet reachable goals. Remind them that success will come in time with consistent and focused daily work.

Lastly, it is important for each student to be a self-advocate. Penn Charter encourages students to become independent learners and provides much support to that end. The student should know what each teacher expects and should ask for clarification, assistance or extra help at any time. Each student has a faculty advisor who can also assist them. The writing and math centers are open to all students. Others resources on hand daily are the dean of students, the guidance counselor and the learning specialist. It is our hope these contacts and suggestions provide helpful information as we all work together for a successful and productive new school year!

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