Growing Graduates:
From Cradle to Career

What Families Need to Know
Family engagement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and success. The research of Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) shows that when families are involved in their children’s education, students are more likely to:

- earn high grade-point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales
- enroll in more challenging academic programs
- pass more classes and earn more credits
- attend school regularly
- display positive attitudes about school
- graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary programs
- refrain from destructive activities such as alcohol, drug use and violence

During each developmental stage of a child, families will engage in their education in a variety of ways. From being solely dependent upon their family (cradle) to becoming independent contributing members of society (career), children will always need positive role modeling and support from the most important adults in their lives. The following pages provide families tips to engage in their children’s education beginning at birth and continuing through high school.
Young children benefit most from their school years if they enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Family support in these early years can help build a foundation for success that directly impacts a child’s school performance in a positive way, from birth to high school graduation.

- Talk to your child, beginning at birth. Babies learn language by listening to voices. Non-responsive voices, such as from a television or radio cannot replace a live person. The more babies are spoken to, the more they learn.

- Read aloud to your child every day. Children of all ages love to be read to, beginning at birth. Excellent reading skills are not required to enjoy reading aloud together. When children are read to, they associate warm feelings of being with you to a lifelong love of reading.

- Encourage your child to seek out extracurricular activities. Students who actively participate in and identify with their school are more motivated to stay in school and more likely to graduate than those who are not involved with their school. It is important for your child to develop positive relationships and have success outside of a classroom setting.

- Help your child establish graduation as a priority. Keep track of the credits he/she needs in order to graduate.

- Help your child explore career options that interest him/her and the education needed to be successful in those careers. Vocational education, career development, and work-based learning can promote successful careers for students.

- Encourage your child to pursue postsecondary schooling. Constant encouragement and discussions about school and higher education promote students’ college aspirations and preparation. There are many postsecondary opportunities your child could choose to pursue including: technical certification, apprenticeships, technical college, two-year community college and four-year university.

"The American family is the rock on which a solid education can be built. I have seen examples all over this nation where two-parent families, single parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles are providing strong family support for their children to learn. If families teach the love of learning, it can make all the difference in the world to their children."

— Former U.S Secretary of Education, Richard Riley
- Provide opportunities for repetition. It takes practice for a child to learn
to crawl, pronounce new words or drink from a cup. Children do not
get bored when things are repeated. Repetition helps children build the
confidence needed to try new things.
- Learn and use appropriate discipline. All children need to have limits
set for them. Help children develop good social skills by setting
reasonable limits.
- Children learn independence and confidence when they are allowed to
practice tasks such as dressing themselves and putting their toys away.
When a decision needs to be made, provide opportunities with limited
choices.
- Give your child opportunities to play. Play is how children learn. It is
the natural way for children to explore, to become creative, to learn to
make up and tell stories and to develop social skills.
- Encourage your child to play with other children and to be with adults
who are not family members. Preschoolers need social opportunities to
learn to see the point of view of others. Young children are more likely
to get along with teachers and classmates if they have had experiences
with different adults and children.
- Good television programs can introduce your child to new worlds and
promote learning. Learn about and make an informed decision about
what kinds of shows and how much television your child should watch
and watch them together!
- Provide opportunities for your child to do and see new things. The
more varied the experiences that children have, the more they will
learn about the world. Every community can provide new experiences.
Go for walks in the neighborhood or take the bus. Learn about and visit
museums, libraries, zoos and other places of interest.

— Compiled from the “Helping Your Preschool Child” booklet developed
by the US Department of Education

While students figure out their place in high school, parents have to find
their place, as well. Even if you feel like your efforts are going unnoticed
by your child … don’t give up! It is crucial to stay involved.
- Continue to practice the suggestions for the middle school years.
- Stay involved throughout high school. Go to every meeting that is
announced. Stay in contact with the teachers and counselors. If your
child participates in an activity, show your support by attending the
events. It is important to show your teenager that you are invested in
his/her life.
- Maintain high expectations for your child. Communicate with your
child the importance of setting and meeting challenges in school. Do
not let your child settle for less than his/her best.
- Tell your child that you care about his/her future. Caring,
knowledgeable adults can establish a climate of trust and support that
lets youth know someone is paying attention.
- Monitor school attendance. If your child is skipping school, it may be a
warning sign that he/she is having trouble.
Children begin to spend significant amounts of time outside of the home, attending school and participating in activities when they reach school age. Strong family engagement at both home and school is very important during this transitional time. Be sure to communicate that education is essential for a successful future.

- Continue to practice the suggestions for the early childhood years.
- Ensure your child attends school regularly and on time. When children miss school, an important opportunity to learn is missed.
- Note your child’s progress in school. Monitor grades, report cards and standardized test reports. Attend parent-teacher conferences. Perhaps most importantly, work with the teacher if your child is falling behind academically.
- Communicate regularly with your child’s teachers. When families and teachers share information about what’s going on at home or school, children benefit.
- Get involved at your child’s school. Whether volunteering in a classroom, sorting books in the school library, or planting flowers outside the building, donating an hour or two of time can show your child that you value education.
• Help your child with homework. When families guide children’s homework with helpful and appropriate support, children perform better in the classroom. Additionally, when families have a positive attitude toward homework and use homework as an opportunity to teach study skills and time management, children are more likely to believe that homework will help them learn.

• Read daily with your child. Family engagement in reading-related activities outside of school is strongly related to children’s positive reading performance.

• Talk with your child about future goals and current interests. Help your child see the connection between goals or interests and school subjects.

• Children have their own special thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. Listening to your child is the best way to learn about these feelings. It shows that feelings and thoughts are valuable.

• Set high standards and encourage your child to try new things. Children who aren’t challenged become bored and children who are pushed along too quickly or who are asked to do things that don’t interest them can become frustrated and unhappy. Work to establish a happy balance for your child.

Middle school can be a confusing time, for families as well as for students. Children become more independent, yet still need support. While families may decide to allow more freedom in some areas, it is important to stay actively involved in your child’s education.

• Continue to practice the suggestions for the elementary years.

• Get to know your child’s teachers. It’s a good idea to meet each of your child’s teachers. Ask about their expectations and the best way to get in touch if you have questions.

• Find a niche for yourself at your child’s school. Serve as an adviser for an extracurricular activity such as the school paper, chess club, or science fair. If you can’t be in school during the day, ask teachers and other school personnel to pass along some work that you can do on your own. Photocopy homework assignments; collect recyclables for a science or art project; serve on a parent-school advisory council; join your middle school PTO or PTA.

• Go to school meetings and events. Attending concerts, plays, assemblies, parent-teacher conferences, and other activities is a good way to become familiar with your child’s school community.