

CLASSROOM connections

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A FREE, ANNUAL PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES BY THE WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

COMMIT TO SUCCESS

Tips for Every Day

HOMEWORK

How to Help

BULLYING

What You Need to Know

HEALTHY CHOICES

You Can Start Today



an NEA affiliate

helpful hints
for success in
the classroom

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Dear Families,



Wisconsin's parents and WEAC have something special in common. Our union of educators want the best for every child in the classroom and in life.

Wisconsin has a proud tradition of providing a quality public education because we know that strong schools create successful students, improve our economy and make our communities great places to live. When we work together to support our schools, we're all doing our part to move Wisconsin, and our nation, forward.

Working together also means sharing ideas. That's why the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) asked some of our members - the people teaching and helping your kids - to contribute their best tips and information about some of the latest developments in education and life skills.

This issue of Classroom Connections is brought to you by educators from your community and throughout the state. In it, you'll find dozens of ideas to help your family become a full partner in education. You'll discover how to foster a love for reading, prevent bullying, keep your child safe on the Internet, and much more.

Wisconsin's educators want to know your thoughts, ideas and advice for making the family-school partnership successful. Visit our Parents and Community page at weac.org to join the conversation and to learn more about what you can do to get involved in your local schools.

Have a great school year,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Mary Bell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mary Bell
WEAC President

Set Up For Success

BE THERE FOR YOUR CHILD FROM CRADLE TO CAREER

Study after study shows that parental involvement is the most critical factor in a child's educational success. Here are a few tips to get you started toward a more enjoyable education experience for you and your child.

BE INVOLVED.

Inspire your children to do well in school by showing them that school is important.

- Join the PTA/PTO. Visit Wisconsin's PTA website at wisconsinpta.org.
- Volunteer to help with field trips or in the classroom.
- Ask your child's teacher what is needed in the classroom, such as snacks, supplies, etc.
- Talk with your children about materials they bring home.
- Ask the teacher his or her preferred method of contact and keep an open line of communication between you, your child and teacher.
- Know the school's policies and academic standards.



Connie Scantlin, a reading specialist at Kate Goodrich Elementary in Merrill and WEAC member.

BE DILIGENT ABOUT HOMEWORK.

Some parents and guardians are a bit nervous about not being able to help their children with homework because it's been a long time since they opened a textbook. Homework help is everywhere: teacher assistance and homework hotlines for students, mentoring sessions and limitless resources on the Internet. This is particularly important in middle school and high school when students need continued motivation to succeed.

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS.

Give your child a great start each morning with a few simple steps:

- **Make sure they get enough sleep.** All children need a good night's sleep.
Regular bedtimes are just as important for teenagers as they are for elementary school students.
- **Help children get organized.** Lay clothes out the night before and prepare any meals and sign any forms so things aren't frantic in the morning.
- **Provide healthy breakfast food so they have the energy to pay attention in school.**

What are some of your tips for success? Share them online at myclassroomconnections.org

Shutting Down the Bully Pulpit



Bullying may be one of the most underreported safety problems in American schools. Once thought of as a rite of passage or as relatively harmless behavior, bullying is now known to have long-lasting effects for both victims and the bullies themselves. Awareness of bullying in the United States is improving somewhat with recent reports that in nearly two-thirds of recent school shootings, the attackers had previously been bullied.

WHAT IT IS

Bullying occurs when someone keeps doing or saying things to make another person feel powerless or fearful. It's done in many ways: name calling; excluding a student; threatening; saying or writing nasty things about a student or taking or damaging a student's property.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Laura Vernon, paraeducator and safety assistant in Milwaukee Public Schools and member of the Milwaukee Educational Assistants' Association, has spent more than 35 years working on desegregation and cultural issues for the Milwaukee Public Schools and is currently working on programs to keep schools safe.

"Children bring issues from their communities into the schools," says Vernon. "In my experience, 99% of the time, kids get bullied because parents don't pay attention. Some parents believe that if a child is quiet, everything is okay. But I'm here to tell you: If they're quiet, check it out."

WHAT TO DO

Vernon says there are a few simple things that parents can do to make sure their children are safe.

"Most importantly, check in with your child every day. Ask your child how the day went. If he or she hesitates at all, pursue it." says Vernon.

"Be sure to show up at your children's schools to observe the environment, meet the teachers and find out about their safety policies. Some parents rarely or never show up; others show up only when their child is in trouble."

"Pay attention to your child's friends. Your child may be associating with someone who is in trouble. Watch for behavior changes in your child and in his or her friends."

NEW CONCERNS

It was once believed that bullying took place between home and school, not in school or in other places. Today, there is a great deal of cyber-bullying taking place on the home computer and on electronic devices.

Pay attention to social media sites: Facebook, MySpace and others. Do you monitor your child's accounts? How much do you really know about what's going on in these online communities?

"Some parents give their children complete control over their cell phones. Parents need to take back control to keep their children safe everywhere," says Vernon.

In addition to online sources, most school districts have bullying prevention programs, and teachers have resources they can provide to parents. Many local police departments also have bullying prevention programs as well as materials to share.

"Check in
with your child
every day."

Ready, Set, Read

SOME SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD DISCOVER A LIFELONG LOVE: READING

Reading is the most important skill children will learn. Children first learn to read and then read to learn. Anne Gallagher, retired fifth-grade teacher and Northwest United Educators–Retired member, says “Without strong reading skills, children may struggle in science, math, social studies and even the arts. As adults, we must read every day, no matter what type of job.”

5 TIPS (to help your children develop a lifelong love of reading)

- 1 Share reading.** Reading time is a great bedtime ritual and a middle-of-the-day treat. Talk about the pictures and read in funny voices. As your kids get older, keep reading to them if they enjoy it. Sometimes it might be the same book 50 or 100 times, but let them know that their favorite is also one of your favorites.
- 2 Use their interests.** If they like baseball, find baseball books. If they love dinosaurs, then dinosaurs it is. Even if it's snakes, share the wonders of the reptile world. Don't make them finish material they might not enjoy, or they'll come to think of reading as a punishment.
- 3 Read what they read.** Make sure the content is age-appropriate, and you also want to be able to have a conversation with your children about the book.
- 4 Get your child a library card – and use it often.** Librarians are great resources for recommending books for any age. Check out your local library and see what resources are available.
- 5 Write your children special notes.** Keep the notes simple, using words they know. Place them on their beds, in their lunchboxes or in special, secret places. It's reading and it's fun.



Need a little inspiration?

The best place to start is with your children's teachers who have age-appropriate reading lists. The key is to help your children look for books that are connected to topics they want to learn more about. Their passions should be the primary driver in helping them select books.

- Reading lists from the National Education Association and Wisconsin Education Association Council
- Your local librarian
- Internet resources

Anne Gallagher, retired fifth-grade teacher and Northwest United Educators-Retired member.



Get Ready for What's Next

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HELP YOUR CHILDREN DISCOVER WHAT THEY LOVE

WEAC member Art Preuss counsels students about their futures at Indian Trail Academy in Kenosha.

In 6 industry sectors, 75-90% of future jobs will require post-secondary education, which can be a 4-year college, vocational school or trade school. Your child will have many options to consider, including:

- Information Services
- Private Education Services
- Government/Public Education Services
- Professional and Business Services
- Financial Services
- Healthcare

Between 2008 and 2018, employment is expected to increase by 15.3 million jobs, according to federal Bureau of Labor Statistics projections. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce shows that 63 percent of all jobs will require at least some post-secondary education. The good news? The jobs will be there when your child is ready to launch.

The report also shows that 23 percent of all occupations will require a bachelor's degree by 2018, compared with just 9 percent in 1973. That means that there will be a great need for a variety of skill sets. Vocational education and other trade-specific education options are gaining in popularity among students of all ages. Millions of students are choosing skill-specific education so they can join the work force faster and do something they truly enjoy.

Art Preuss, a school counselor at Indian Trail Academy in Kenosha, says the key to helping your child discover life after high school is to find something the student enjoys. "It shouldn't be about prestige or making a lot of money," says Preuss. "It should be about helping them find something they love. It's their life. Let them live it."

So how do you know which kind of education is best for your child? Preuss says to start conversations with your child in elementary school. "It's never too early to start talking about what they want to do after high school," he says. "Expose them to many different kinds of careers and help them understand that what they do now can make a big difference in their future plans."

By your child's junior year, it's time to sit down and start writing. Ask your teenager to list their career goals, as well as their accomplishments – even if they haven't decided what they want to do next. "What do they love to do?" asks Preuss. "After all, they'll be doing it for 40 to 50 hours a week for the next 40 to 50 years. It better be something they enjoy."

Ask your teenager to write down a list of:

- Academic and personal strengths
- Extracurricular activities
- Awards
- Grade point average (GPA)
- Class rank
- SAT, ACT, or AP scores

Next, ask them to think about and list the qualities they're looking for in a college or vocational school. Do they prefer to:

- Go away to school
- Stay close to home
- Take online courses

Once you have the preliminary information, begin your research. School counselors are a great place to start. They have many tools, catalogs and information about the types of post-secondary education. There are also guidebooks and resources on the Internet to help you identify options that are best for your child. Most experts recommend narrowing choices to about six to ten schools. Then, ask your teen to fill out the applications, complete the essays and obtain the necessary recommendation letters.



Jessica Stevens, math teacher and basketball coach at Bradford High School and WEAC and Kenosha Education Association member.

5 STEPS

to a Healthier Tomorrow

According to the Centers for Disease Control, childhood obesity rates are soaring. The results from the 2007-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey indicated that an estimated 17% of children ages 2-19 years are obese.

The statistics are staggering – and carry real-world, lifelong consequences. One such consequence, according to Betsy Kippers, WEAC vice president and physical education teacher from Racine, is a decreased ability to learn.

“You need a healthy body to learn most effectively,” explains Kippers. “Healthy children are more alert and ready to learn.”

The solution, according to Kippers, is not a radical diet change but rather a few simple things you can do at home to help your children.

1 Give options

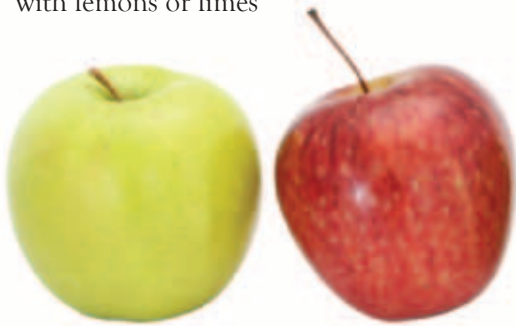
Kids want choice. You're in control of what they eat, so make sure they have healthy choices for meals and snacks. Take a fresh look in your refrigerator and cupboards to see if you have healthy options. And if you need to bring a treat to school, consider healthy alternatives.

Instead of:

- high fat/salty snacks like chips
- diet or regular soda

Healthier Options:

- apples, carrots or granola bars
- 100% fruit juice or water flavored with lemons or limes



THINK SMALLER PORTIONS FOR GOOD CHILD NUTRITION:

- 1/2 of a cup of fruit, vegetables, cooked cereal, pasta or rice = a small fist
- 3 ounces of cooked meat, poultry or fish = a deck of cards
- 1 tortilla = a small (7-inch) plate
- 1/2 of a bagel = the width of a small soft drink lid
- 1 teaspoon of margarine or butter = your thumb tip
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter = a golf ball
- 1 small baked potato = a computer mouse
- 1 pancake or waffle = a music CD
- 1 medium apple or orange = a baseball
- 4 small cookies (like vanilla wafers) = four checkers
- 1 and one-half ounces of cheese = six dice

Check with your child's doctor if you have questions about proper nutrition for your child. There are also many good resources on the Internet that can offer some good ideas such as www.bbblocks.samhsa.gov/Family/Time/kitchen

2 Lead by example

Kids are watching. If you want your child to be healthy, model the behavior you want to see. That means eating well, turning off the television and computer and being more active.

3 Limit screen time

Kids who spend a lot of time in front of the computer or television also snack more. Monitor the amount of time (and snacks consumed) in front of electronics. Less computer and television time provides more time to be active outdoors.



4 Stop the "Clean Plate Club"

If you ask your children to clean their plate before they leave the table, it may contribute to obesity. Children tend to stop eating when they're not hungry. Offer them portions that are appropriate for their ages. And don't speed-race your meals. Sit down and enjoy your meals.

5 Be active together

A little exercise makes a world of difference. Find daily activities you can do together. Walk the dog. Take a bike ride. When shopping, choose parking spots that are farthest from the door. Shovel or walk in the snow. There are hundreds of little activities you can do with your children that add up – and can make a big difference in making their bodies stronger.



Duane Simmons, a guidance counselor at Lincoln High School in Manitowoc and WEAC member.

Pay Attention, **IT'S A WIRED WORLD.**

Cyber-bullying. Sexting. Fraud. Identity theft. Parents all over the world read the headlines and worry about their children's online safety. Yet a computer is an essential learning tool and turning off the computer is not always practical.

There are steps you can take to ensure your children are using the Internet safely. The National PTA and Facebook have recently joined forces to develop safety tools for the most-used social networking site; more than 50 million teenagers are on Facebook.

Wherever your child is on the age spectrum, here are tips for setting boundaries at home.

BOUNDARIES UP TO AGE 10

Young children need supervision and clear rules when it comes to Internet use.

- Microsoft recommends that you sit with your children when they use the Internet until they are 10 years old.
- Set clear rules. Make sure they don't share personal information, such as their real name, address, phone number or passwords with people they meet online or friends. Help them create fun nicknames instead.
- Use family safety tools to create appropriate profiles for each family member and to help filter the Internet.
- Protect your children from offensive pop-up windows by using the pop-up blocker that's built into many browsers.

BOUNDARIES AGES 11-14

Children this age tend to be savvier about the Internet, but it's still a good idea to supervise. It might not be practical to physically supervise their use at all times, but there are tools such as Windows Live Family Safety, Windows 7 Parental Controls, or Windows Vista Parental Controls.

- Set safety tools on the medium security setting, which will have some limitations on content, websites and activities.
- Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area to easily supervise your children's activities.
- Encourage your children to tell you if something online makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. Stay calm and remind your kids they are not in trouble for sharing that information. Praise their behavior and encourage them to come to you again if the same thing happens.

BOUNDARIES AGES 15-18

Teenagers in this category will most likely have almost limitless access to content, websites or activities. But there are still things you can do to keep them safe.

- Keep talking about online lives, friends, and activities, just as you would about other friends and activities. Encourage your teens to tell you if something or someone online makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened in any way.
- Create a list of Internet house rules for your family. Include the kinds of sites that are off-limits, hours, social networking privacy settings, etc. Be aware of the photos that teens post of themselves and their friends.
- As much as possible, keep Internet-connected computers in an open area and not in a teenager's bedroom.
- Know which websites your teenagers visit and whom they talk to. Encourage them to use monitored chat rooms and insist they stay in public chat room areas.
- Tell them never to agree to meet an online friend.
- Teach your children not to download programs, music, or files without your permission.
- Teach your kids responsible, ethical, online behavior. They should not be using the Internet to spread gossip, bully, or threaten others.
- Make sure your teenagers check with you before making financial transactions online (including ordering, buying or selling items) and potential risks.
- Require your child to "friend" you online.

In the fast-paced environment, how do you help your children navigate online?

Continue the conversation at [Facebook.com/myweac](https://www.facebook.com/myweac).

Celebrate Learning

BE YOUR CHILD'S BIGGEST CHEERLEADER

If you want to motivate your children to be great learners, open their eyes to a world full of ideas and experiences. But most of all, says Roxanne Starks, president of the Wisconsin Parent Teacher Association, you need to be their biggest fan. "It's easy to be a cheerleader when your child does something good," says Starks. "But you must also be their cheerleader when things go wrong. Helping them understand that some days aren't so good is an important part of growing up and lets them know you're in their corner, no matter what."

Starks offers a few other tips to help you become your children's biggest fan.

ASK QUESTIONS. Sit down every evening and go through their day. Try to get beyond what they had for lunch. What went well? What didn't go so well? Look for learning opportunities each and every day.

GO BACK TO SCHOOL WITH EACH CHILD. It's hard to be a parent, but it's so important for you to literally go back to school again by visiting the school and paying attention to the curriculum. When your child sees you participating in their journey, it makes a huge difference in their motivation to learn.



Wisconsin PTA President Roxanne Starks.

REWARD YOUR CHILDREN. Positive reinforcement is the best medicine there is when you want to motivate children. Look for little successes. Let them know that tomorrow will be better.

STAND WITH YOUR CHILDREN, ALWAYS. Don't dwell on negative things. Focus on the positive and move on from negativity. Help your children to release negative moments and let them go. "This is how we can make things better" is a powerful motivational phrase. As a parent you must recognize that you are your children's greatest cheerleader from cradle to career.

{ DID YOU KNOW? Kids with engaged fathers do better socially, emotionally & academically. }

HOMWORK HELPER ALERT:

“Connections Matter”



WEAC member Geri Stenstrup teaches second grade at Royal Oaks Elementary School in Sun Prairie.

Studies show that children who are supported by their families with homework are likely to perform significantly better than those who are not supported.

Geri Stenstrup, second-grade teacher and Sun Prairie Education Association member, has seen it firsthand. A veteran teacher with more than 30 years in the classroom, Stenstrup engages parents early in the school year.

“We have a parent night every fall to lay out the year,” says Stenstrup. “Parents not only see what their children will be doing all year but also participate in learning activities. For instance, the way we teach math now is very different than parents might remember. Our goal is to prepare parents so that there are no surprises. If they know what’s happening, they’re better able to help their children stay on track. For many parents, it’s an eye-opening experience.”

Stenstrup says children of parents who attend consistently do better in school than children whose parents don’t participate in the event. And while not every teacher is able to offer this kind of program, you can certainly speak with your child’s teacher to learn more about the curriculum and learning tips.

3 TIPS TO BECOME MORE ENGAGED IN LEARNING:

- 1** Turn an assignment into real-life. For example, if your children are working on calculations take them grocery shopping. Have them practice rounding up on your next shopping trip.
- 2** No more memorizing. Use word chunks to help children see word patterns. For instance, “think.” Kids would spell th... then ...ink. For longer words such as “beautiful,” encourage them to say the words in syllables and spell it that way. Beau...ti...ful.
- 3** Look for resources that help you help your children. Ask your teacher, local PTA and school librarian for favorite online references and books. Some YouTube videos provide short “how-to” videos to walk you through more complex strategies and other types of homework.

How do you help your children with homework? We’d love to hear at [Facebook.com/myweac](https://www.facebook.com/myweac).



Mixed Sources

Product group from well-managed forests, controlled sources and recycled wood or fiber

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WEAC wishes to thank the families and educators who contributed time, talent and information for this publication. Together, we wish you a happy, healthy school year!

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