



Encourage the ‘spark’ and watch your child light up

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There has always been something magical about the start of a new school year.

As a father of two FCS students starting new journeys, I saw firsthand the spark in their eyes. As I traveled to visit schools, I continually saw that same spark.

But where does that spark come from? Is it the opportunity to meet new friends?

Is it the beginning of something new? Is it the opportunity to showcase a new backpack or pair of shoes?

I think similarly to a Disney excursion, it is an opportunity to have a new experience.

All of us, especially our students, are on a journey to learn more. People are the greatest universities, and the magic of Disney lies within its people.

In Franklin County Schools, we possess some of that same magic. Our community has always been a hub for family connection and that is no different in our schools.

Our bus drivers are the first face many of our students see every morning and the smile and joy they bring to doing their work matters. It sets the stage for a child’s day.

Dare, I say, it metaphorically sets the stage for their journeys. Each school day is a part of that life journey. Dr. Suess says it best, “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”

But learning is more than just curriculum and textbooks. Learning happens when there is a genuine human connection. I remember being a middle school business teacher and the phrase that always resonated with me was, “students won’t care what you know until they know that you care.”

That still applies many years later. The spark in our students eyes is a craving for caring teachers, administrators and staff members.

It is a sense of belonging and matter. It is purpose in action. Imagine the possibilities when the spark of a child is plugged into the light socket that a caring teacher provides.

That’s the power, that’s the magic, and that is what the staff of FCS strive to see happen each day.

The influence of a good teacher can never be erased. The power of a caring person will never be forgotten.

As the 2026-2027 school year begins, we say thank you to every staff member for choosing education and for answering the call to care for others.

To our parents, thank you for entrusting us to help guide your child on this journey.

To our students, thank you for bringing us your spark. Together, we will have a magical school year.

How to minimize distractions during study time

Digital technology may have impacted life for the better in many ways, but the same devices that educate, entertain and connect users can distract students at every turn. According to a 2026 study on the habits of highly effective students published on Research.com, students are distracted for roughly 35 percent of their total study time on average. But smartphones, tablets and gaming systems are not the only distractions that students face.

Learning to turn attention away from distractions is a key to a successful study session. Here are some ways to manage distractions while studying for academic success.

- Gatekeep digital distractions. Students can move their phones entirely out of arm’s reach or into another room while studying. When studying on tablets or laptops, students can use software to disable non-academic platforms so they’re not

tempted to check social media or browse the internet.

- Avoid cognitive fatigue. Study blocks should be a maximum of two hours per course before switching subjects to keep the mind fresh. Trying to maintain intense concentration for hours on end often ends with attention waning and the brain seeking other stimuli.
- Study during the day. People naturally get tired after dark, which means moving study times to daylight hours may lead to greater success.
- Set aside a dedicated study area. Students should establish a consistent, quiet and remote study spot that is physically separated from visual and auditory disruptions. Also, a study area should be separate from relaxation spots so the brain automatically switches to focus on the task at hand.
- Advise others not to disturb. Students can establish boundaries with roommates



Especially with technology today, it is easy to get distracted.

or family members to ensure study sessions are not interrupted. Ask roommates or family members to avoid a designated study area and to silence phone notifications and alerts.

- Quiet the environment. Some students prefer complete silence for studying, and can benefit from noise-canceling headphones. Others may prefer ambient noise or instrumental music to drown out background

noise.

- Build in breaks. Study sessions can be broken up with breaks to provide a change of scenery and also to grab snacks and beverages or make a trip to the restroom.

Minimizing distractions while studying requires students to determine what works for them in a study environment. Additional measures to reduce external stimuli also may need to be implemented.

Encourage healthy eating

Growing bodies require lots of TLC so kids grow up to become healthy adults. According to the Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national research program dedicated to improving children’s nutrition and preventing childhood obesity, school-aged children between the ages of five and eight are ready to learn about healthy eating.

Parents also might benefit from a rundown of what constitutes healthy eating for school-aged kids.

Serving sizes

Parents accustomed to reading food labels undoubtedly recognize that serving sizes are a key component on packaged goods. But what about fruits and vegetables that come without labels? HER notes the following are the standard serving sizes for kids between the ages of five and eight.

- Fruits and vegetables: 3/4 cup. A 3/4 cup serving of bananas equates to one medium-sized banana. Seven to eight broccoli florets is roughly 3/4 cup, and one-half of a large potato is roughly 3/4 cup as well.
- Grains: 1 ounce. A single slice makes up a 1-ounce serving of whole grain bread. Half of a whole grain bagel and 1/2 cup of brown rice also equals a single serving of grains for kids between the ages of five and eight.
- Protein: 2 ounces. A two-ounce serving of protein equates to two eggs or 1/2 cup of chicken breast.
- Dairy: 1 cup. A single serving of dairy can be between six and eight ounces of unflavored milk (or a fortified soy beverage). Roughly three one-inch cubes of natural cheese or six to eight ounces of yogurt also comprise one cup of dairy.

How many servings do kids need?

HER notes that children between the ages of five and eight require multiple servings of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein each day.

- Fruits: Two to three servings
- Vegetables: Two to four servings
- Grains: Two to three servings. HER advises that half of these servings should be whole grains, such as whole



START HEALTHY. Make sure your child’s school year is off to a great start by serving well-balanced meals.

wheat bread or brown rice.

- Dairy: Three servings
- Protein: Two to three servings

What about snacks?

Snacking is perhaps a bigger part of modern kids’ lives than it was when their parents were youngsters. HER urges limiting kids’ consumption of foods and beverages with added sugars and foods high in saturated fat and sodium. That’s something to keep in mind at snack time, when it’s easy to reach for something unhealthy but premade, like salty chips paired with a juice box loaded with added sugars, rather than something more nutritious that requires preparation. But HER urges parents to pick snacks that include items from two of the food groups noted above.

School-aged kids are old enough to start learning about nutrition and how to use food as healthy fuel throughout the day.

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BACK TO SCHOOL Safety

Review these safety tips with your kids

1. Opt for a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and keep it light. You may want to consider a rolling backpack for heavy books.

2. At the bus stop, wait for the bus to reach a complete stop before approaching it.

3. Stay seated on the school bus until it arrives at your stop, and remember to wear your seatbelt. Always keep your head and arms inside the bus.

4. Use the handrail when exiting the bus, and cross in front of the bus so the driver can see you. Remember to check both ways for traffic before crossing the street.

5. If you walk to school, go with a buddy, and avoid crossing through any empty lots or fields along the way.

6. If you ride a bike or scooter to school, remember to always wear your helmet.

7. Don’t talk to strangers, and never accept gifts or rides from strangers.

8. Cross the street only at designated crosswalks, and obey school crossing guards.

9. If you’re bullied or see somebody being bullied, tell a teacher or trusted adult.

10. Memorize your home address and phone number. In case of an emergency, call 911.

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How students can improve reading comprehension

Students will encounter a wide range of obstacles over the course of their academic careers. As students progress through academia, many learn to overcome new challenges by looking back on past experiences when they faced obstacles and ultimately prevailed.

Younger students do not necessarily have that history of overcoming academic challenges to help them when faced with fresh obstacles. When reading for school, young students may not have identified an approach that can help them more easily comprehend texts. When such situations arise, parents and educators can encourage students to employ various strategies designed to strengthen reading comprehension.

- Encourage young students to monitor their comprehension. The national public media literacy initiative Reading Rockets notes that comprehension monitoring teaches students to recognize what they understand when reading a text and what they do not understand. Monitoring comprehension encourages students to be active readers who check what they do and do not understand while they're reading. Young students can be taught to ask themselves, "Do I understand this?" when reading a text. Students also can summarize each paragraph as they finish it to further monitor their comprehension.
- Employ metacognitive strategies. Reading Rockets defines metacognition as "thinking about thinking." While young students may hear the word "metacognition" and run for the hills, the process is far simpler than its name might suggest. Prior to reading, students can be encouraged to identify why they're reading. A brief preview of the text, such as the synopsis on the back of a book or the inside jacket of the cover, can help students clarify what the book is about. As children begin reading, they can monitor their own understanding of the text relative to the preview they read. Thinking ahead about a text and how they can process it can help students understand it better than they might if they just start reading without giving the text and what to look for any prior thought.
- Teach students to ask themselves questions while they're reading. Reading Rockets notes questions encourage students to combine information from different segments of the text. While reading, students can ask how a newly introduced character might relate to text or a storyline introduced earlier in the story. Or students can ask questions about characters previously introduced who they do not recall. Going back and searching through previous chapters or text to answer questions can make it easier to comprehend the text.
- Summarize the text upon completion. Reading Rockets notes that summarizing requires students to determine the important aspects of a text and to explain that importance in their own words. Summarizing also helps students identify the main ideas, connect themes throughout the text and eliminate unnecessary information. All of that helps students remember what they read, which is the foundation of strong reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension can be challenging for young students. But various strategies can help kids develop strong reading comprehension skills.



READING FUNDAMENTAL. Make sure your child understands what they are reading, and follow these tips to help reading comprehension.

Signs a student might be too busy



SCHOOL / ACTIVITY BALANCE. It is important not to overwhelm your child with too many activities and commitments.

Many students pack all sorts of activities into their schedules in an effort to be as fulfilled and well-rounded as possible. Parents may urge even the youngest of children to join activities in an effort to make friends and "be involved." Colleges may require students to participate in a certain number of sports or clubs in order to be considered

for acceptance, and students may even carry these extracurriculars into their higher education years to boost résumés they ultimately send to prospective employers.

While music lessons, soccer practice and dance classes are enriching activities that can offer an array of benefits, a packed schedule can quickly be-

come too much. Overloading a schedule with school work, a part-time job and other activities can keep a student involved, but it is essential that students and their families learn to recognize when they may be too busy for their own good. According to the University of Rochester Medicine, studies show that children need free time to decompress, use their imaginations and develop thinking skills. A study published in Frontiers in Psychology found nearly half of 128 surveyed students reported feeling very stressed on a daily basis. Here are five signs a student is taking on too much.

1. Not getting enough sleep: According to a national study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about seven out of 10 high school students report that they do not get enough sleep. Students who are staying up later and later to get things done because of jam-packed schedules may be too busy.
2. Grades are slipping: Sudden difficulty with school is another sign of being over-extended. Activities may be taking up too much time and grades can start to drop as a result.
3. Newly occurring health problems: Students who complain of stomach pains or headaches may be stressed out. These problems can arise from anxiety, irregular meals and lack of sleep. Kids also may become more moody from having too much to do.
4. Complaining about tasks: Students who start to complain regularly or show diminished joy about participating in extracurriculars may have too much on their plates. There may be mention of not getting a break to hang out with friends or family.
5. Parents are stressed, too: Adults who are responsible for managing kids' schedules and getting them to and fro also may feel the stress of a schedule that is too hectic to handle.

Scaling back a student's activity list might be just what is needed to alleviate anxiety and avoid additional side effects of being too busy.

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Subtle signs of bullying



PAY ATTENTION. Caregivers and parents need to be aware of subtle indicators that bullying is taking place.

Bullying is a pervasive problem that continues to affect children of all ages. According to the initiative StopBullying.gov, about 20 percent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 experience bullying. Bullying happens most often during the middle school years and frequently will not be reported by the targeted children. Kids often feel embarrassed, fearful or hopeless about speaking up about bullying. That can compromise parents' ability to identify when a child is being bullied. Kids also can be bullied when they would traditionally have been safe, as the rise of digital connectivity means bullying no longer is confined to the schoolyard; cyberbullying allows harassment to follow kids into their homes. Caregivers and parents

can look for these subtle indicators that bullying is taking place.

- Physical symptoms: StopBullying.gov notes that unexplained physical indicators often are the most direct red flags that a child is being bullied. Bullied children frequently experience cuts, bruises, or scratches that are unexplained. Complaints of frequent headaches, stomach aches, or feeling sick, especially on school mornings, also can indicate children are being bullied.
- Missing or damaged items: Bullied children may return home from school with damaged or lost belongings, or missing school supplies. If a child is especially hungry when returning home from school, that could indicate that lunch money or the lunch itself was stolen.

- Emotional changes: Drastic changes in mood and daily routines may signal bullying distress. Many children who were once outgoing will become withdrawn or clingy if a bully is affecting them. Outbursts or defensive behavior also can occur.
- Loss of interest: Self-esteem wanes when a child is being bullied, so the child may step back from sports or other activities.
- Avoidance of technology: A child who is being cyberbullied may begin to eschew using a phone, tablet, or computer.

There is no single sign that a child is being bullied, but a pattern of subtle changes often means something is awry. A non-judgmental and supportive conversation can help kids feel supported and safe.

Tips to become a better test taker

Tests are an integral component of the academic experience. Tests assess how well students have absorbed lessons in the classroom. A two-year study conducted by the Council of Great City Schools examined testing practices in 66 public, urban school districts across the country. Findings indicated students take about 112 standardized tests between pre-K and 12th grade. This number doesn't factor in the other tests that students take as part of the general curriculum. Testing varies based on school district and whether or not a school is public or private. Taking tests can be a source of stress for students, particularly when they do not do as well as they would like. Pop quizzes, exams and standardized tests likely aren't going away anytime soon, but students can look to various methods to become better test takers. Mastering some test-prep skills also can relieve anxiety and reduce stress. The following test-taking tips, courtesy of the University of Arkansas, Huntington Learning Center and Harvard Summer School, might help students perform better on their exams.

- Develop good study habits. The more effectively one studies, the greater the propensity to do well on a test. Students should review notes daily, write their own study guides, and take advantage of any practice tests the teacher offers.
- Read all instructions carefully. Some students know the subject matter but get confused because they do not read all the directions thoroughly. Students should read every word of every question and pay attention to details before attempting to answer.
- Stop cramming. Cramming for a test is not productive. One is less likely to retain the information, and cramming can

increase stress and adversely affect a student's ability to sleep.

- Begin practicing pacing. Another area some students struggle with is running out of time on the test, or finishing too soon. Tests are timed, and that means that students need to work efficiently. Practice enables students to learn how long they spend on each question, and how they can cut down that time to finish in a more timely fashion.
- Hire a tutor. Some students can benefit from some extra assistance through a tutor. Professional tutors are skilled in conveying test-taking tips, like identifying which questions to guess on and how to narrow down multiple choice options.
- Read over the entire test. If possible, students should review the whole test before getting started. Doing so will help them understand the structure and identify areas that may require more or less time.
- Write out formulas. Particularly on math and science exams, using a scrap piece of paper to write out any memorized formulas or data at the start of the test can be helpful.
- Don't agonize. Students should move on from questions they don't know instead of getting locked on one question.
- Go back and review. Students who finish early can be encouraged to go back over the test and check their answers.
- Learn from mistakes. When the test is graded and returned, students should look over the questions they missed and compare them to the right answers. This will show whether mistakes were careless errors or reflective of a lack of knowledge of the material.

Mastering test-taking strategies can help students feel more confident and perform better on their exams.



Play It **SAFE** this school year by following these smart tips!

- Make sure you know your full name, street address and phone number including area code. If you can't remember all of these things, carry them on a piece of paper. In case of emergency, call 911.
- Know how to use the telephone for help in case of an emergency.
- Never get into anyone's car without your parents' permission.
- Always tell your parents if you are going somewhere after school.
- Cross streets only at corners or crosswalks, and always look both ways before crossing.
- Observe and obey traffic signals as well as crossing guards.
- Walk, don't run, across streets. If you are riding

- a bike, walk it across the street. Always wear a helmet when you ride your bike or scooter.
- If you are walking where there are no sidewalks, walk on the shoulder of the left side of the road, so you are facing oncoming traffic.
 - When walking to school, stay away from parks, vacant lots, fields and other places where there aren't many people around. Always walk with a buddy. Follow a familiar route to school. Never talk to strangers along the way.
 - Exercise caution with unfamiliar animals you may see on your way to school. Remember, not every animal is friendly.
 - When waiting for the school bus, stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop



- and the driver signals you to enter. Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.
- Seat belts should always be worn, even on the bus. Never get out of your seat while the bus is moving.
 - When leaving the bus, walk ten giant steps away from the bus before crossing in front of it. Never cross behind the bus.
 - Tell your parents, teacher or another trusted adult if somebody at



- school is making you feel uneasy or doing something you think is wrong.
- If you're bullied or see somebody being bullied, tell a teacher or trusted adult.
 - Don't talk to strangers, and never accept gifts or rides from strangers.
 - If you are home alone after school, be sure to lock the door and call a parent as soon as you arrive. Never open the door for anyone you don't

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