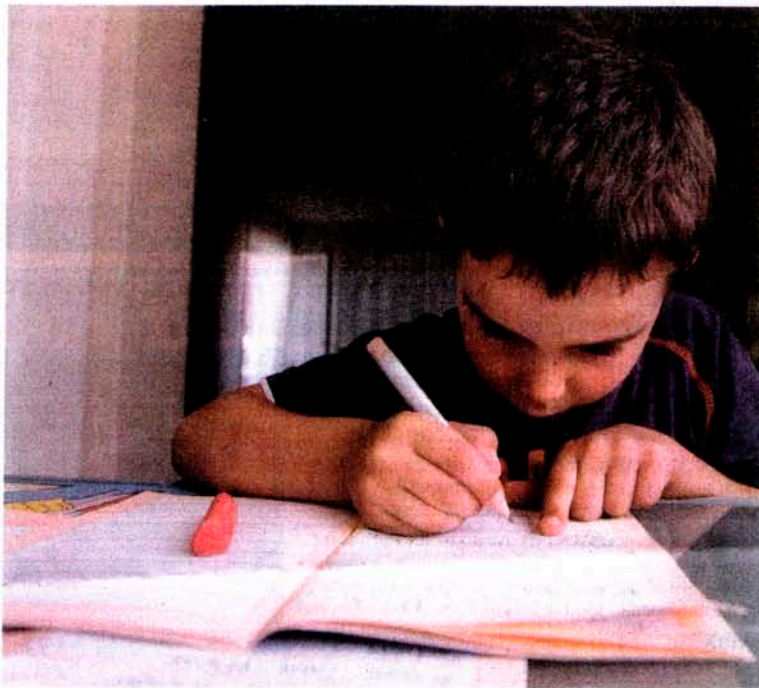


## LEARNING Beyond the Classroom



### How to help your student succeed where school leaves off

by Cynthia Curtis

As parents, we all want our kids to succeed academically. We send them off to school, make sure they have the right supplies, and stay involved to make sure they do their homework. But all too often parents are caught off guard by a disappointing report card or a less than glowing parent-teacher conference.

"Parents need to be an additional resource to help children reach their potential," says Ronald Fortune, CEO of Education.com, a free Internet educational resource for parents, "Schools can only do so much. Parental participation is the No. 1 factor in determining a student's ultimate success."

Valerie Henry of Riverdale learned that valuable lesson after her daughter Jazmeen's first seventh-grade report card. "It wasn't that her grades were that bad – I just knew that she could do better," she says.

Henry enrolled Jazmeen at Sylvan Learning Center and things improved immediately. "I decided then that going into the eighth grade, I was going to get ahead of the game and not wait for another poor report card," she says.

Henry also searched the Internet to supplement and enhance her daughter's education; the search was time-consuming and often frustrating. Then she learned of Education.com and is now an avid supporter of the site.

Launched in June, Education.com features more than 4,000 reference articles, online communities and editorial content entries written by parents and educators on a wide variety of subjects. A recent featured article, titled "Make History Fun," challenged parents to find out what their child is studying and then sending them on a fact-finding mission, or have the student take a virtual fieldtrip through a museum or using family photos to give history a personal perspective.

Henry found a list of activities and books that she and Jazmeen could work on this summer to better prepare her for the year ahead. "The site is very current and practical, and it's free! It showed me just where my daughter should be and how I can help her get to the next level."

Almost all childhood experts agree parents can enhance their children's education by reading to, or with, their children on a regular basis. If you find it more difficult as they get older, challenge your youngsters to read the books that many of today's popular movies are based on – before they see it! Or inspire your own young author by helping your child write a book complete with a colorful cast of characters, handmade illustrations and, of course, a surprise ending!

Another great strategy is to involve the whole family – take a family field trip to a museum, government agency, the great outdoors or historical site – anywhere that brings curriculum to life. You could also grab the camcorder and assign everyone a task in producing a home video interpretation of a book or historical event.

Where math and science are concerned, the world is full of teaching opportunities – in the grocery store, at a restaurant, in your kitchen, the backyard, at the pool, in the garage. Be creative and engage your child's imagination whenever the opportunity arises.

But with all the fun ways to keep kids learning outside the classroom, there will

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still be times when your child just simply needs homework help. When that's the case, consider tutoring.

Tutor.com is an on-demand tutoring service that's been around since 1998. Students simply log on and enter their grade level and the subject they need help in. Within minutes, a screened, professional tutor responds and, using a number of tools such as a whiteboard, instant messaging, file sharing and a resource search function, helps the student through the assignment. There are no time limits and users are charged by the minute, either in advance or as you go.

"Rather than making a long-term commitment to a tutor in one or possibly two subjects, Tutor.com allows kids to log on to the Web and find a professional tutor in whatever subject they're studying, whenever they're ready to learn," says CEO George Cigale.

Metrecia Terrell of Marietta learned of the tutoring service through a chat group and had her 13-year-old son, Jason, try it out when he needed help with advanced algebra. "The two things I appreciated most were that they didn't do his homework for him – they taught him to solve the problems on his own, and they provided a log of his tutoring sessions so that he and I could refer back to them when necessary. It was very helpful come exam

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time," says Terrell.

Other cost-effective resources parents can turn to are local libraries and a vast selection of study skills books and educational media collections, such as Homework Helpster by Play Bac or Smart Lab's Grade Challenges. These reference materials follow a general grade-level curriculum and feature homework help, study tips and test prep. Also available are subject-specific guides such as the series Be a Better Writer by Steve Peha and Margot Carmichael Lester.

Patricia Dollisch, youth services manager with the DeKalb County Public Library System, encourages families to use libraries' quiet study areas, computers and reference librarians, who are trained in searching out information. Most library systems offer access to extensive databases through their websites and some, like DeKalb, also have a "Homework Help" button, which features

a variety of photo libraries, reference materials, curriculum enhancement ideas and study tips.

Dollisch encourages students to bring their assignments and textbooks when visiting the library, as well as a valid library card. And don't wait until the last minute, she warns – because not all materials may be available when you need them.

For students who are in need of a bit more hands-on, long-term attention, learning centers such as Sylvan, Tutoring Club, Score Educational Centers and Knowledge Points, or personal tutoring services like Academic Advantage Tutoring, may be the best option for your child. At these centers, children may participate in small groups with other children who are facing similar difficulties, or they can take advantage of one-on-one attention. Personal tutors may cost a bit more, but with the improvement in grades and self-confidence in your child, the financial sacrifice is definitely worth it.

So parents take heart; there are many ways you can help your child succeed without hiring a tutor or buying expensive computer software. What's most essential is that you get involved, keep communicating and that you take advantage of everyday teaching moments. □

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