

New School Year Advice from School Superintendent O'Connell

California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell offers the some timely advice for parents upon the start of a new school year.

1. Put your children in bed earlier. Doctors recommend children in the first to fifth grades get as much as 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night. Lack of sleep can affect children's ability to learn and may affect their immune systems.
2. Establish a routine. Get your children ready to start the day earlier before school starts so they will become accustomed to waking up in time to get ready for school. Children need to establish routines in order to feel secure and at ease.
3. Read to your children daily. Parents can help calm children at bedtime by reading to them. Books at bedtime also expose children to language, sounds, new ideas, and the love of reading.
4. Let your children pick out their clothes and lay them out for the next day. Allowing young children to make small decisions gets them engaged and excited about a new experience. As they get older, slowly increase the types of choices they can make. This will help them learn about responsibility and develop crucial skills in good decision making.
5. Make a list of school supplies your children need. This will help children learn how to organize their thoughts and prioritize. Set a budget and stick to it. This will help your children separate what they "want" versus what they "need." After you decide on the supplies that are necessary, shop with them and have them add up the prices so they can practice math.
6. Create a place to study in your house. Choose an area that is comfortable, quiet, well lit, and away from distractions like electronic devices, toys, and extracurricular activities. Make sure your children have time to study. This will help them concentrate and absorb more of what they are trying to learn. Overscheduled children have difficulty doing quality work when they are exhausted.
7. Plan your week out together. Discuss who will take the children to school, what they want for breakfast, where to eat lunch at school, and who will pick them up. This helps avoid unexpected circumstances that can make children feel anxious.
8. Let your children know you are interested in their studies. Ask about their homework. Talk to their teachers. Praise your children for doing a good job. Be enthusiastic about work they bring home to show you. Attend school events. Believe in your children. Success breeds success.
9. Have fun. Schedule fun time away from school to keep children physically active. Ride bikes to the park. Participate in walkathons. Studies show if children avoid harmful activities, eat a healthy diet, and are physically active, they are more academically successful.
10. Be enthusiastic about going to school. As that first day of school approaches, the more excited and confident you are, the more your children will be too. But be prepared if they react to separation. If possible, visit the new school setting with your children and introduce them to the teachers. Arrange play dates with parents of other children in the program, so your children will see familiar faces at school.