

Envisioning a Smart Start

by Joe Bruzzese, MA

Getting the school year off to a great beginning.



What is your vision for the school year? Is academic achievement at the top of the list, or will this be the year your child breaks out of his social shell? Will your family grow closer or more distant while facing the challenges of another school year? Who will guide your child's development?

A vision defines a direction toward a goal. Realizing a vision requires support from a motivated group of individuals—a team of people who band together through adversity, inspire motivation and acknowledge achievement.

Who is on your team? According to the United States Census Bureau, today's generation of school-age children spend the majority of their waking hours in the care of someone other than their parents. Given the influence that teachers, coaches, mentors and extended family members have on a child's development, the necessity for building a relationship with this group of people has never been greater. Creating a team of focused and motivated individuals who will continually support the ongoing growth of your child requires a new set of parenting skills.

5 Steps to Building Your Support Team

- 1 Create a roster.** Who will impact your child's life this year? Write out a list of the adults who will connect with your child during the first month of school. Teachers, school administrators, coaches, mentors and extended family members are key players on most team rosters.
- 2 Position the players.** With a completed roster in place, identify when and where your child will see these critical people. Teachers and school personnel typically fall within a specified seven hour time block on a regular Monday through Friday schedule. However, the afterschool hours are equally important. Identifying who will supervise your child beyond the conclusion of the school day creates an accurate picture of your child's life and the role that each adult will play this year.
- 3 Connect.** The beginning of a school year marks the start of many new and inspiring relationships. During the first few weeks of school, take two minutes to communicate with each person on your roster. Send a note, write an e-mail message or share a quick conversation in person. The message to convey is short yet sincere, "Hi, I just wanted you to know how excited I am to have you in my child's life this year." This quick introduction sends a powerful message to everyone on your team about the importance of his or her role in your child's life.
- 4 Check in.** Don't wait until a problem arises to initiate a conversation. Every two to three weeks, check in with each of the people on your roster. Start the conversation with, "How are you?" and then let the discussion flow. Beginning with an open-ended question allows the conversation about your child to evolve naturally. Leading questions like, "How was my daughter's behavior today?" or "Were there any problems?" bring immediate focus to a potentially negative set of comments. This could result in creating greater distance between a parent and a key adult in the child's life. Stay positive, even if it's helping to find a solution for problematic behavior, to keep conversations upbeat and motivational.
- 5 Celebrate.** Reaching milestones and achieving goals is cause for celebration. Placing a quick call to your child's teacher after the conclusion of a long-term project or class play shows acknowledgement and appreciation—two characteristics of a supportive team. The more often team members celebrate together, the stronger the relationship grows. As a teacher and a mom, Dee Moran knows the importance of celebrating achievement. "Our 6 year old likes being recognized for his achievements," says Moran. "The simplest words of praise and acknowledgment leave him proud for days. Julie, our 13 year old, typically opts for a more subtle approach to celebration, preferring to spend a night out with friends at the movies after bringing a successful semester to a close. Celebrating achievements both small and large keeps everyone moving forward."

Bringing the valued members of your team together both at home and in the community allows your vision for a successful school year to become a reality. Celebrating the fulfillment of a vision inspires motivation for continued success. Enjoy the year ahead with your family.

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