

THE Insider's Guide to School

For Parents and Caregivers



Hello! We're so glad you're part of the school community.

As a parent or guardian, you are a big part of your child's education. There are lots of ways for you to participate. When you do, you help your child learn and thrive!

Here are a few things to know.

Keep in touch. Call or email.

It's important for families to be directly involved with their child's school. It is always okay to call the school. They want to hear from you.



 **TIP:**

Add the number for the school office or “front office” to your contact list. If you have questions or need to reach out, you can always start by calling the office.



When should I call the school?

- Always call to let the school know if your child will be late or absent from school.
- Call if you have questions about how school works. For example, you might call to ask, “What do I need to pack in my child’s backpack?” or “How does lunch work at school?”
- Call if you have any questions or concerns about your child. You can ask to speak with your child’s teacher.
- Call if you would like to share about your family or child. You might let the school know about any big changes happening in your family.

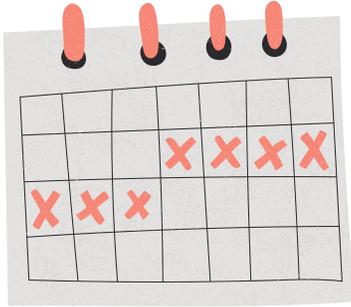


IMPORTANT: You can always ask for an interpreter who speaks your home language. For example: When you call, say, “I need an interpreter who speaks [Spanish].”

You can also reach out to a friend, community agency, advocate, or case manager for help calling the school.

Reaching out to the school can sometimes take a few tries. It’s always okay to keep calling back till you get through.

Check the school calendar.



The school calendar lists everything that is happening at school. It can usually be found on the school website. Knowing what's coming up helps you prepare and stay involved.



TIP.

You can ask for a printed copy of the calendar to hang at home.

What should I know about the school calendar?

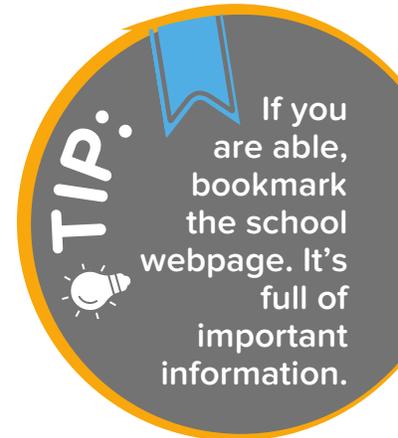
- Most schools in the US are in session Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. There is no school on Saturday or Sunday.
- Many schools take a long break over the summer. This will be noted on the calendar.
- The school calendar lists holidays when school is NOT in session. It also lists half-days when school gets out early.



IMPORTANT: Note any holidays or half-days in advance. You may need to arrange for childcare if you need to work on those days.

Read communications from the school.

The school will communicate with you in lots of different ways. They may reach out about events or school closings. A big part of supporting your child in school is reading and responding to communications from the school.



How will the school communicate with me?

Email is one way the school will likely communicate with you.

 **TIP:** If you do not have an email account, let the school know. They may be able to help you set one up.

The school may call you with general announcements or information just for you.

 **TIP:** Make sure to set up your voicemail so that they can leave you a message.

Text messaging is another way the school may communicate with you.

 **TIP:** Find out the number they will be texting you from so you can save it. Also, if your phone number changes, make sure to alert the school.

The school may send information home in your child's backpack.

 **TIP:** Check your child's backpack each day after school to see if the teacher has sent anything home.

The school may occasionally mail information to you.

-  **TIP:** Make sure you keep your home address updated with the school. If you don't have a mailing address, let them know you prefer to receive information by email or phone.

Your child's grades, assignments, and other class information may be posted online. School lunch menus may be posted too.

-  **TIP:** You may need a password to access this information. Ask the school or your case manager for help setting that up. Then, keep your password handy so you have it when you need it.



IMPORTANT: If the school sends home information that you don't understand, let them know. It's always okay to ask the school to clarify.

Also let them know if you are not receiving updates. If there's a different way they need to reach you, let them know that too.

Sign up for services and activities.



The school may tell you about these services. It's also always okay to ask about them. Ask, "Which services does my child qualify for?"



Many schools offer services and added support. This might include a bus to and from school, free lunch and breakfast, special clubs, sports, and after-school activities.



What should I know about school services and activities?

You have the right to some services. This can include things like English language classes and free lunch.

 **TIP:** You may need to fill out forms to sign up for services. It's always okay to ask the school, a friend, or volunteer for help filling out forms.

Your child may qualify for tutors or extra language support. The school may need to get to know your child a bit before these services are offered.

 **TIP:** If you think your child needs more support and is not getting it, let the school know.

Many schools offer after school clubs, camps, activities, and sports. These are fun ways to meet other children, play, and explore interests.

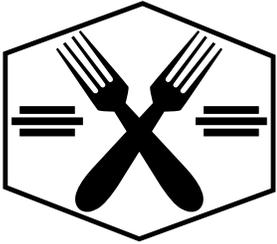
 **TIP:** Ask the school, "Are there free after school activities available to my child? How do I get more information?" Ask if there is bussing home from the activities too.



IMPORTANT: Your child will likely have a choice when it comes to school

lunch. They can eat the lunch the school provides or pack their own lunch. If there are things your child can't eat, let the school know.

Don't be afraid to ask for support.



Schools have special supports for families experiencing homelessness, facing food insecurity, and students in foster care.



What should I know about supports available at school?

Free and Reduced Lunch

 **TIP:** The federal government offers schools funding to provide lunch at a reduced cost or no cost to students in need. Parents often need to fill out basic paperwork. The information is often available online, or from the school or district office.

Access to Medical and Dental Care

 **TIP:** Community schools often offer medical and dental care on campus, along with mental health services. If your child needs care, reach out to your school's family liaison. The school may be able to help you find services even if they aren't able to provide services on campus.

Food and Clothing Banks

 **TIP:** School districts are committed to supporting children. This can mean helping families find important supports like food and clothing banks. Needing extra support is a normal thing — everyone has a hard time at some point. Don't be ashamed to reach out and ask for referrals to organizations that can help!



IMPORTANT: If you can't afford school supplies, be sure to

let your school's family liaison or principal know. The school can help you find the resources you need so that your child has everything they need to succeed.

Support learning at home.

Your child looks up to you. You are their first and most important teacher. When you ask about school and support learning at home, you show them just how much you value their education.



TIP: Sit with your child as they unpack their backpack. Ask about the things they take out. Even if the assignments don't make sense to you, you can still talk about them with your child. Try, "Can you tell me about this assignment? What's it all about?"



What are some things I can do to support my child's learning at home?

- Ask about their school day. "What was fun? What was hard? What's one thing that was interesting about school today? Would you change anything about school? What?"
- Reach out to the teacher and ask, "What are you learning this month? What can I do to support this learning at home?"
- Spend time just being with your child. Time spent with you helps them grow.
- Make sure they get a good night's sleep so they are ready to learn the next day.
- Listen as they share their feelings about school. Assure them that you are there for them.
- Notice all their hard work and mention it. Let them know, "I see how much you are learning and growing!"

TIPS FOR ELL FAMILIES:

- Share stories and songs from your home country.
- Speak and read in the language you are most comfortable with. You'll be supporting your child in every way.
- And let the school know about your culture too. The more they know, the more they can support your child.
- Kids often learn new languages even faster than adults. As a parent, this can be hard. You are not alone. Reach out to friends to share your experiences. Know that your child will always look up to you.



TIP: Celebrate your family and culture. Assure your child that they can learn new things and still stay connected to your traditions.

And Remember....

Starting school again, even after a short break, can be a big change. It's totally normal if your child has big feelings and is more emotional than usual.

Let your child know that even though things have changed, some things will always stay the same—like your love and support.

And, if your child's feelings are making it hard for them to get through the day (eat, sleep, learn), it is always okay to reach out to your child's doctor or nurse for support.

Remember, it's normal for you to have big feelings too. Make sure to take moments to care for yourself. Do something you love and/or reach out to friends and family from home. Give yourself a moment to take a few deep breaths or go for a walk. You've got this!

