

# OVERVIEW

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## The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

**"Better Education Is Everybody's Business"**

—U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley



PARTNERSHIP  
for Family  
Involvement  
in Education



### What We Do

#### The Partnership's mission and activities

- Increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children's learning at school and at home.
- Strengthen schools and improve student achievement levels.

**Who We Are** We are thousands of partners joined together in a growing grassroots movement to support student learning according to high standards. We come from families, schools, and a variety of businesses, communities, and religions, and are organized into four groups: Family-School Partners, Employers for Learning, Community Organizations, and Religious Groups.

### The Benefits of Joining

- Connect with other groups to share ideas about educating our nation's children;
- Work together to increase and improve efforts to help children learn;
- Get the latest information about family involvement in education and related activities; and
- Receive recognition for visible commitments to education at the local, state, and national levels.

### Local Activities of Partners

At the local level, partners support efforts to:

- Strengthen family-school partnerships through good communication and mutual responsibility for children's learning;
- Adopt family- and student-friendly business practices;
- Provide before- and after-school learning activities for children;
- Make effective use of facilities-schools, community buildings, churches-for children and families; and
- Give parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn, and teachers and principals the tools they need to engage families.

### Nationwide Activities of the Partnership

In addition to the numerous local activities in which Partnership members are involved, many participate in nationwide activities such as the following:

**Helping children read throughout the summer and the school year.** Known as the *America Reads Challenge*, this activity focuses on maintaining and developing children's reading skills during the summer months and before and after school. Participating children read and write for thirty minutes every day with teenage and adult partners who share a love of reading with them.

**Supporting learning right from the beginning of the new school year.** Known as *America Goes Back to School*, this activity brings Americans together during the months of August through October to share their experiences and talents with children in schools across the country. Going back to school with children sends the message of participants' year-long commitment to helping students learn and supporting schools in their efforts.

**Planting the seeds of college attendance.** Known as *Think College Early*, this initiative helps increase awareness about the importance of attending college and builds support for middle and high school students to take the courses needed to enter college and to be prepared financially.

**Keeping kids safe and smart all the time.** Supported by the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers* grant program, before- and after-school planned activities expand learning opportunities for children in safe and drug-free environments.

To join and for more information call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Web site at <<http://pfie.ed.gov>>.

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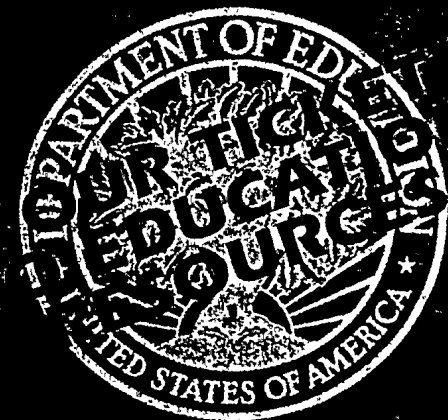
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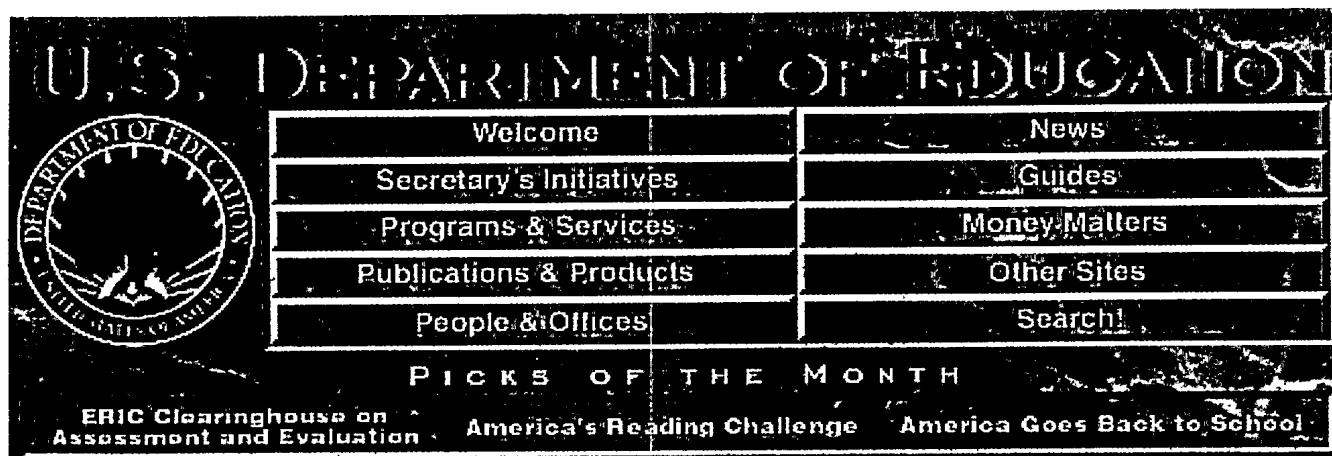
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- Press releases & speeches

## Searchable Collections

- The full text of the entire online library
- ERIC, world's largest education database
- Research syntheses
- State resource map of education organizations
- Guide to ED programs
- Staff directory

## Links to Other Sites

- AskERIC
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# FIRST DAY<sup>SM</sup> NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 1999  
ISSUE NO. 8

## FIRST DAY FOUNDATION

The First Day of School "Holiday": A gentle and effective tool to build appropriate parental involvement in and community support of education.

The First Day of School America Campaign offers FREE Do-It-Yourself information and planning kits, promotional materials, networking opportunities, media support, and more to participating schools.

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## Peace-Building Starts on the First Day of School

Salinas, California

When you're cultivating peace to reduce violence in your community, the schools are a logical place to start. That's what Bob Rice, President of Partners for Peace in Salinas, California, concluded after attending an Education and Business Partnership Conference in San Francisco last May.

"We'd sent four people to the conference, two from the community and two educators. And we came back with a half-dozen ideas we wanted to consider implementing," Bob recalls. "We'd talked with Terry Ehrich at a breakfast meeting and his excitement about the First Day of School Holiday was contagious. Even though the school year was almost over, we decided to go ahead and start with some pilot programs. The success of the grass-roots peace efforts in Salinas has been based on 'doing it now' as much as on long term planning. So that's what we did."

Together with Ken Feske, a local minister, and Bill Deeb, an educator with the Alisal School District, Bob started the wheels in motion. "We contacted

*continued on page two*

## Keeping Families Involved Throughout the Year

Now that your First Day of School festivities are over and the tone has been set for continuing parental involvement, what happens next?

Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, believes that successful partnerships depend on schools, families and communities first understanding their overlapping spheres of influence, then taking action to work together effectively. In her book, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, she outlines six types of involvement and how each of these can benefit the different parties involved. She further emphasizes the need for partnership practices that are purposeful and well planned.

### TYPE 1. PARENTING: Basic Responsibilities of Families

Schools can assist families by providing programs to help them better understand child and adoles-

*continued on page three*



Vermont Governor Howard Dean (center) and Terry Ehrich discuss First Day activities with children and parents at North Bennington Graded School.

## First Day Firsthand - Lafayette, Indiana

### Parents and Students Learn Side by Side

"Our main goal was to get parents into the school early, to make them feel comfortable, and to encourage them to come back anytime," says Timothy Schirack, Principal of Wea Ridge Elementary School in Lafayette, Indiana, whose initial First Day of School Programs for Parents were actually held over the course of the first two weeks of the 1999-2000 school year.

"We started on a Wednesday, and all the parents of kindergartners attended school that day, as they always have. Then on Friday, the parents of students in grades one, two and three were invited to come to school with their children and participate in a classroom activity. The following Wednesday, our fourth grade parents came to school and that Friday was the fifth grade parents' turn. The turnout was tremendous," says Tim, "even better than we had expected. And I praise our parents for actively participating. 97% of the parents of children in grades 1-3 came out for the program, and we had a 75% turnout in the fourth and fifth grades. Our parking spaces were at premium!"

Each program lasted about an hour-and-a-half, enough to give the parents a sense of their child's classroom in action. "The comments have been so positive," Tim reports, "and most of them have to

*continued on page two*

## Peace-Building Starts

*continued from page one*

the superintendents of three separate school districts. They liked the idea of this campaign coming from the community, and agreed to identify at least one pilot school from each district," Bob says. "We ended up with six schools — four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Now, we had to get employer buy-in."

With the help of the Business/Education Committee of the Violent Injury Prevention Coalition, Partners for Peace sent out letters to area employers, then followed up with phone calls to secure their "family-friendly" commitments to the First Day of School celebrations. "By school opening, we had 45 workplaces on board. One employer, the Pebble Beach Company, was so intrigued with the celebration, they encouraged all of their employees to spend the First Day of School with their children even if their children's schools weren't officially participating," reports Bob.

Why such a surge of support? "I think part of it has to do with people's desire to get behind something they feel will make a real difference in reducing violence and building peace in our community," Bob says. "Parental involvement is key to a child's success in school, and success in school is key to a reduction in violence. When kids are engaged with their family, their school, and their community, they are less likely to get in trouble."

In a comprehensive Salinas community report entitled "Cultivating Peace in Salinas," Partners for Peace helped identify sixteen essential strategies for violence prevention, seven of which, Bob says, are met by the First Day of School initiative:

1. Promote positive community values.
2. Develop early childhood and parent support initiatives.
3. Initiate positive media coverage ("good news" stories).
4. Improve literacy rates for children and adults.
5. Encourage community-wide dialogue on discipline (this was addressed by all of the principals in their opening First Day remarks).
6. Reduce truancy.
7. Promote family-friendly practices.

"One mother told me she felt OK about coming to the school, but said that she had wanted to feel invited," says Bob. Another felt it was so important to learn about the resources available to parents on the First Day, rather than to have to seek

them out in a moment of distress. That kind of response was typical of the nearly 800 parents who took part this year."

Partners for Peace is now helping to keep that momentum going by working with the schools on worksite-based educational Programs for Parents. "About 50% of our community is Latino and Latina, so diversity education is important in reducing barriers and cultivating peace," says Bob.

First Day of School 1999 clearly struck a chord in Salinas, so much so that Bob envisions the movement growing well beyond his scope by next year. "I'll be disappointed if we don't have 25 more schools sign on by that time," he says. "One school district has already committed its 15 schools for First Day 2000, and we can see it expanding into other parts of Monterey County. Our middle school principal had such a positive experience, he's talking about doing a First Day of the Semester program midyear."

"This just gets the community's energy focused in such a positive way," says Bob. "And thanks to great media coverage, which included a half-dozen newspaper articles, a lengthy editorial, and a series of local television features, what started in Vermont is now working in Salinas, and hopefully will continue to spread throughout California as people realize the benefits to be gained." ●

## First Day Firsthand

*continued from page one*

do with parents appreciating the chance they had to be in the school during the day-time. There's just no way to re-create that atmosphere at an evening open house."

Teachers sent invitations home one to two weeks before school started so that parents could make release time arrangements at work. "As we expand our Programs for Parents in the future, I'm sure we'll be in touch with our community employers," says Tim. "We're hoping to structure it so that part of the day includes time for parents to meet with their children's teachers — as they do now at evening open houses. And that will mean a longer time commitment from them and from their places of business."

In this first year's series of Programs for Parents, each of the teachers at Wea Ridge was responsible for designing a session that would involve parents and students working together. "Our second grade teachers do 'All About Me' books at the beginning of the year," says Tim, "in which each student completes a page with information about themselves, their fami-

lies, pets, favorite foods, and other interests. The teachers then bind the pages together, and students take a copy home. This year, parents were helping with that project, adding in pieces of information to make the books even more complete."

The fifth grade students and their parents also participated in a joint writing project, this one involving State reports. "Parents went to the library or computer lab with their children, worked with them at the Internet stations, and otherwise helped them get started on what will be their first big report of the year. It was a chance for parents and students to learn alongside each other, which we always want to encourage."

In third grade, the subject was Math, and parents studied the new program with their students. The third grade teachers prepared lunch for the parents, so dubbed their session "Lunch and Munch." Not to be outdone in the name game, the first grade teachers held a "Pignic" during which they played pig activities to learn math facts and vocabulary. Their day was topped off by a visit from the pot bellied pig who lives with the farmer down the road.

"Parents had a chance to experience our teachers' creativity hands-on," says Tim, "and as a result they're that much more excited about what we're doing here. Starting the year this way helps everyone to see things differently and to value education in a whole new light. These were the opening weeks for our brand new building. It was quite exciting and satisfying to have parents share our excitement as the school and school year opened."

Having had such success with their first offering of First Day of School Programs for Parents, Wea Ridge Elementary School is looking forward to an even bigger First Day of School 2000! ●

## Last Call for 1999 Honor Roll!

Don't miss out on the 1999 First Day of School Honor Roll. If your school hosted a First Day of School Program for Parents — whether it was a simple open house, a parenting workshop, or an elaborate parade — please let us know so that we can include you on our 1999 Honor Roll of Participants. By listing your school with over 360 others across the nation, you'll help send an important message to everyone who reads this newsletter: that family involvement in education is critical to our students' success! ●

## Keeping Families Involved

continued from page one

cent development, and to set home conditions which support children as students. Essential home conditions include a sense of security within the family, healthy nutrition, well child visits to the doctor, clothing, and safe housing. Families, in turn, need to share information with the schools about their children's background, culture, talents, goals, and needs.

**Results for Students:** Balance time spent on chores, other activities and homework; regular attendance; awareness of the importance of school.

**Results for Parents:** Self-confidence about their parenting skills; greater knowledge of child and adolescent development.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Understanding families' goals & concerns; respect for families' strengths & efforts.

### TYPE 2. COMMUNICATING: Basic Responsibilities of Schools

Schools communicate with families about school programs and student progress through clearly written memos and notices, report cards, parent-teacher-student conferences, newsletters, phone calls, and computerized messages. By inviting families to contribute to the design and content of ongoing communications, they help foster a climate for two-way communication.

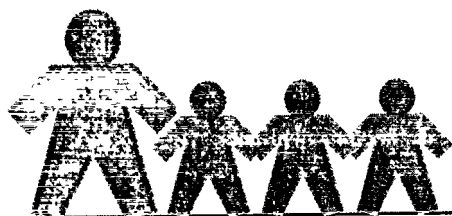
**Results for Students:** Awareness of academic progress; knowledge of how to maintain or improve grades; awareness of their need to communicate effectively.

**Results for Parents:** Support for children's progress; responsiveness to problems; comfortable interaction with school and teachers.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Effective communication network ensures that families will have greater understanding of and support for educational objectives.

### TYPE 3. VOLUNTEERING: Involvement at and for the School

Families and other community members may volunteer in schools and classrooms as tutors, coaches, guest lecturers, or chaperones. By attending special events, and school-wide celebrations, they further help to support the school's goals and children's learning.



**Results for Students:** Greater skill in communicating with adults; specific skills learned from a volunteer tutor.

**Results for Parents:** Satisfaction in contributing to school and children; better understanding of the teacher's role; may be inspired to enroll in programs to improve their own education.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Readiness to involve all families in new ways; ability to provide more individual attention to students because of help from volunteers.

### TYPE 4. LEARNING AT HOME: Involvement in Academic Activities

Teachers involve families with their children in learning activities at home: shared homework assignments, other curriculum-related activities, or shared skills and talents. Parents of teens may participate with their students in academic goal setting and course selections, and in sorting through college and/or employment options.

**Results for Students:** View parent in role similar to teacher, so home and school are more in sync; greater self-confidence in ability as learner; positive attitude about school; higher test scores; greater skills and abilities linked to homework completion.

**Results for Parents:** More opportunities to communicate with children about school, class work, homework, and future plans; better understanding of curriculum and how to help.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Satisfaction with family involvement and support; recognition that ALL families (single parent, dual income, low income) can encourage and assist their students' learning.

### TYPE 5. DECISION MAKING: Participation and Leadership

Schools can involve families through school advisory councils and committees, the PTA/PTO, Title I councils, school site management teams, and other parent-teacher-student groups.

**Results for Students:** Awareness of family's involvement in school decisions; specific benefits from policies and programs initiated by parent organizations.

**Results for Parents:** Awareness of and input into policies affecting their children's education; shared experiences and connections with other families and with school staff.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Awareness of families' perspectives on policies and school decisions; recognition of and respect for parents' leadership skills.

### TYPE 6. COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordination of Resources and Services

Schools and families work with businesses, agencies, cultural groups, clergy, health services, recreation programs, and others to coordinate resources for families, students and the school. Students, families and schools contribute to the community and work to solve local problems through service learning projects.

**Results for Students:** Increased knowledge and skills from enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences; opportunities for career exploration.

**Results for Parents:** Greater knowledge and use of local resources; interactions with other families; sense of contribution to the community.

**Results for Teachers and Schools:** Better knowledge and use of community resources for curriculum and instruction.

The National Network of Partnership Schools, with over 1200 members from across the country, builds on these six types of involvement and uses an action team approach to improve partnerships. There is no fee to join the Network and membership is open to all schools, districts and states that agree to use the NNPS framework to create strong programs of school-family-community partnership. The National Network supports its members by supplying a FREE copy of Dr. Epstein's book, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*; conducting annual training workshops at Johns Hopkins; distributing its semiannual newsletter, Type 2; and providing other technical assistance, research and evaluation opportunities.

To learn more about the National Network of Partnership Schools, check out their web site at: [www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000). You may contact them by phone at 410-516-8818 or e-mail: [nnps@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:nnps@csos.jhu.edu).

To order *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* directly from the publisher, call Corwin Press at 805-499-9774 or submit your order via e-mail to: [order@corwin.sagepub.com](mailto:order@corwin.sagepub.com). The price of this paperback handbook is \$29.95. ●

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# FIRST DAY NEWSLETTER

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OCTOBER 1999, ISSUE NO. 8

A Tool to Encourage and Enhance Parental Involvement in and Community Support of Education

## Parenting Tips - Special Pullout Section

We've included a pullout section in this newsletter, which schools may copy and distribute to parents. Many of the tips for parental involvement were taken from the *America Goes Back to School* 1999-2000 Activity Calendar. This calendar is part of a complete organizer's package which is available free of charge. To request your copy, contact: U.S. Department of Education, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-8173. E-mail: [agbts@ed.gov](mailto:agbts@ed.gov) or call: 1-800-USA-LEARN. And check out their web site at: [www.ed.gov/Family/agbts](http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts).

## First Day on the Road

- October 14, National Rural Education Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Break-out session and exhibit.
- October 20-21, Vermont-NEA, Essex, Vermont. Exhibit.
- October 27-31, National Middle School Association, Orlando, Florida. Break-out session.
- October 29-30, Vermont School Boards Association, Stowe, Vermont. Exhibit.
- November 5-6, Foundation for Excellent Schools, Stowe, Vermont. Break-out session and exhibit.

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NEWSLETTER NO. 8

## Media Roundup

From Maine to California, the First Day of School Holiday has been making headlines! Here are a few excerpts:

Ellen Goodman, a nationally syndicated columnist with the *Boston Globe*, wrote in her August 29 column: "The immediate beauty of this small idea is that parents and teachers meet right at the beginning, when the slate is clean. But in this climate, First Day also makes the statement that the entire community — from the employer to the parent to the principal — is invested in that piece of public property known as the public school."

Kevin O'Connor, a staff writer with Vermont's *Rutland Herald*, wrote in the August 11 edition: "It began when Terry

Ehrich, publisher of *Hemmings Motor News* in Bennington, wanted to turn parents into spark plugs for their children's education.... Ehrich spoke with educators at his local Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, who invited families into classrooms [for First Day activities]. He also talked to employers, who gave parents time off to attend. They called it the First Day of School Holiday. It worked so well two years ago, they're now celebrating statewide... Upward of 170 Vermont schools will invite parents to opening festivities."

Matthew Chin, a staff writer with *The Californian* in Salinas, wrote in the August 26 edition: "Mission Park School expected a full house Monday for the First Day of School celebration. But by 8:30 a.m., five minutes after classes had started for

their children, parents could only find standing room at the back or outside the front door... 'I'm just amazed,' said Eddie Lopez about the surprising turnout. The school received confirmations from 127 parents... final attendance was 205.... More than 50 local businesses allowed their workers time off to participate in [Salinas's] first day activities."

We'd love to receive copies of your clippings, and to hear about radio and television coverage your event may have drawn. Please call Denise Goodwin at 802-447-9625 or toll-free at 1-877-FIRST-DAY or send clippings to: First Day Foundation, PO Box 10, Bennington, VT 05201-0010.

We'll have a special "First Day in the News" column in next month's issue, so please be in touch as soon as possible. Thanks!



# Tips for Effective Parent Involvement from:

PASTE OR TAPE  
YOUR SCHOOL NAME HERE

## Helping Children Learn to Love Learning

In the classic scenario, as Grandpa reminisces about his own school days during the Great Depression, he recalls not only the five mile walk that was "uphill both ways," but also the simple pleasures that were to be found in evenings spent "making our own entertainment."

Among the many benefits to making do during hard times were the creativity and teamwork it engendered. Before the allure of television, the Internet, video and computer games, children and their families had fewer distractions from each other and so were more likely to spend time sharing stories, sharing meals, and otherwise interacting face-to-face.

The *America Goes Back to School* campaign, initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, offers helpful tips to families, schools, and communities who are looking for ways to excite children about learning. In their 1999-2000 Activity Calendar, they include three "make your own

entertainment" suggestions that would do Grandpa proud!

**Family Story Night.** Spend the evening reading stories to your children. If they are old enough, have them read to you. Ask everyone to act out his or her favorite scene from the book, or make up a new ending to the story. Tell stories from your childhood or make up new stories together. Be creative, ask questions about the characters and pictures. And most importantly, have fun!

**Library Visit.** Take your kids to the library. Sign up for a library card if you don't already have one, and make sure your kids have their own cards, too. Introduce them to the librarian and ask him/her to help your children select books. Get book ideas from other families, neighbors and teachers. Check out a book for yourself and show your kids that reading is important.

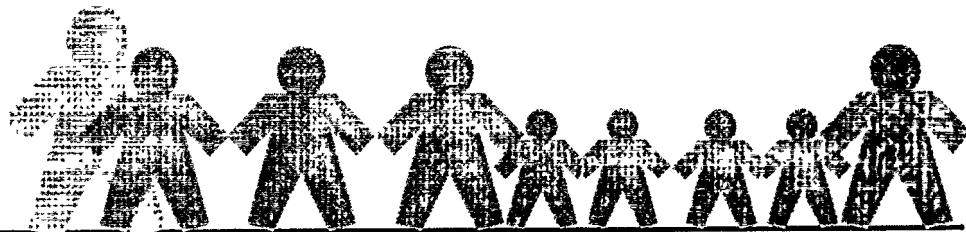
**Family Game Night.** Pull out those board games — or come up with a new game — and spend some quality time with your children. Try to play something that is age-appropriate, or adjust the rules so that everyone in

the family can join in. Make some popcorn, relax, and enjoy the fun.

The common threads linking these recommended activities are the opportunities they provide families to connect with one another in playful ways which strengthen their relationships. A child whose creative spirit is nurtured at home will have an easier time relating to adults at school, and may well begin to view math and vocabulary exercises, spelling tests, geography bees and history lessons as still more playful extensions of his or her learning. ●

The *America Goes Back to School* 1999-2000 Activity Calendar is published by the U.S. Department of Education, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The *America Goes Back to School* initiative helps strengthen ties between families, communities, and schools. For more information, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or browse the web site: [www.ed.gov/Family/agbts](http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts).

Distributed by First Day Foundation, Bennington, Vermont.





## Parenting At Home To Help Children Do Well At School

**W**e've all heard it said, "It's not what you say, it's what you do that counts." And any parent who has observed his or her child mimicking adult behavior understands how true this saying really is.

As a parent, you want your children to succeed in school, to achieve their potentials, and to value their education. To help make this happen, you must set the tone — at home, consistently, throughout the year.

Does this mean you need to be an ace scholar yourself? No.

Does it mean you can support your child's learning by setting numerous positive examples at home? Absolutely!

Following, are some easy guidelines that will help you send your child off to school, ready and eager to learn each morning.

**Make sure your child is getting adequate rest.** Late nights may happen occasionally, but they should be the exception rather than the rule.

**Provide healthy food choices and make sure your child has a good breakfast every morning.** Avoid high sugar cereals and snacks, as these can give children a surge of energy followed by a "sugar low." Your child's ability to concentrate is directly affected by his or her blood sugar

level and the best way to keep this stable is to offer a balanced variety of foods — low in sugar and high in nutrition!

**Encourage your child's outside interests, but know when to draw the line.** If your child's nonacademic activities are so time- and energy-consuming that he or she is often tired during the daytime, then it's time to reevaluate those activities. Setting priorities and making choices are important life lessons, and your

child may find that he or she is enjoying extracurricular activities more when the schedule is less hectic.

**Set aside a quiet space and regular time for homework.** Turn off the TV and sit down to read, yourself. Talk with your child about his or her assignments; help out by asking open-ended questions ("What do you think might happen if....?" or "How else could we look at this?"). You don't need to know the answers, but your curiosity can be contagious! ●

### Parental Involvement Makes The Difference

**T**hirty years of research has proved that parental involvement in education is the single most accurate predictor of children's academic success.

The First Day Foundation promotes Family-School-Community Partnerships and positive parental involvement through First Day of School "Holiday" Programs for Parents. These programs are developed by each participating school, and are custom tailored to fit local needs and interests. For more information, contact:

First Day Foundation  
PO Box 10  
Bennington, VT 05201  
802-447-9625 or  
toll-free 1-877-FIRST-DAY  
e-mail: [firstday@sover.net](mailto:firstday@sover.net)  
[www.firstday.org](http://www.firstday.org)

