

Tools for Parents

Strong American Schools believes that strengthening America's public schools is a responsibility we all share. It's long past time to start demanding action from our leaders. But if we expect much, then we should be prepared to participate, too.

If you have a student in school, here are some concrete steps you can take to help shape your child's education – and his or her future.

Get the Facts

- How are your local schools doing?
- Get information and rankings about graduation rates, test scores, course offerings and more at websites like these:
 - SchoolMatters.com
 - GreatSchools.net
 - [National Center for Education Statistics](http://NationalCenterforEducationStatistics)
- Attend local PTA and school board meetings.
Being part of the process shows teachers and administrators that you care about quality learning and that you intend to be involved in your child's education.

Talk to Your Student

It may seem obvious, but talking with your children about school is one of the very best ways to judge the quality of education they are getting. It will help you learn many telling details of their experience and give you the opportunity to stress the importance of education in your home. Make sure they understand the connection between education and being prepared for a life after school.

Here are some conversation starters:

- "Do you know what you want to do?"
- Does your child have a mentor, guidance counselor or teacher who is helping them decide this – and helping them understand the courses and extracurricular activities they need to succeed?
- "Do you plan to go to college?" If so, is there a counselor or teacher who is helping them prepare for success in college? Do they know the course requirements for your state's colleges? Are they preparing for entrance exams like the SAT and ACT?

Talk to Your Student's Teachers

Parent-Teacher night is not a formality to be endured. It is an opportunity to talk to the mentor and educator who can give you critical information about the success of your child's individual education.

Here are some important questions to ask:

- “Is my child performing at grade level in English, math and reading?”
- “Is my child on track to complete his or her grade and – eventually – graduate high school?”
- “What additional support in the school or community is available if my child is falling behind?”
- “If my child goes on to college, is he or she prepared for collegiate academics so that remedial college courses will not be required?” Ask specifically if your child is taking the proper English, math, lab-based science, social studies and foreign language courses required for entrance to most public colleges.
- “What resources are available to help my child be prepared for college study?”

Learn to Navigate the System

Help your child through the school system by understanding what high school options are available in your district.

Schoolmatters.com is a great way to find the high school that is best suited to your child’s needs. Researching school options with your child is good practice for the type of research and preparation you’ll want to instill in your student as he or she moves toward college. For example:

- Starting with freshman year, help your teenager plan for life after high school. Visit a local college with your child early on so he or she can see the possibilities. It is also a good idea to help them connect with someone who works in the career they want to pursue.
- By junior and senior year, you should be visiting specific campuses of interest and identifying key dates and deadlines such as ACT/SAT application and test days, college application deadlines, financial aid deadlines, recommendation letters and essay due dates.