

Family Engagement in Schools Matters



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Thank you for taking on a very important leadership role in PTA. By doing so, you will make a difference in the lives of children and their families.

As a PTA member, you're a part of the largest children's advocacy group in the country that is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education.

You're also part of a nationwide network with millions of families, students, teachers, administrators and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools.

Thanks to your efforts as a PTA volunteer in California, we can better fulfill our mission: *To positively impact the lives of all children and families.*

We hope this guide will help you in your leadership role. We also have many other resources in English and Spanish to assist you, including:

- PTA trainings at the council, district and state levels
- The California State PTA *Toolkit*
- Bylaws
- *PTA in California*, the official newsletter of the California State PTA
- *PTA Connects*, an online newsletter
- PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide
- School Smarts Parent Engagement Program.

More information about all of these resources, in English and in Spanish, is available on our website: www.capta.org.

California State PTA connects families and schools, and has more than 800,000 members who are involved in local PTAs in more than 3,600 schools throughout the state, including more than 2,000 Title 1 schools. Membership is open to all. PTA members advance the mission to positively impact the lives of all children and families with the motto every child. one voice.

Learn more at www.capta.org.

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This Family Engagement Guide contains information on why family engagement in schools matters, how to grow family-school partnerships to enhance student achievement and ways to support student success and learning at home. Throughout the resource, the word “parent” refers to parents, guardians and caregivers who have the primary responsibility for raising children and are involved in their development, learning and growth.

For more information, tools and resources, visit the California State PTA website: www.capta.org.

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Family Engagement in Schools Matters

Well-informed, engaged parents make a difference for student success in school and beyond.

A home environment that encourages learning is a bigger factor in student achievement than a parent's income, education level or cultural background.

Whether it's reading together, monitoring homework at the kitchen table, talking to teachers about a child's progress, joining PTA or taking an active part in school governance and decision-making, parent involvement is vital to student achievement.

Decades of research indicates that students with involved parents are more likely to attend school regularly, perform better in school, develop better social skills and go on to post-secondary education.

As important stakeholders, engaged parents take part in all aspects of their child's education and development from pre-school to high school. This successful strategy is based on a shared understanding in a school community that parents are children's first teachers and key resources in their education and growth.

In addition, how California schools are funded make family engagement in schools more important than ever. With the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), school districts are required to engage parents in making important decisions about their schools to support student success.

This includes the requirement for parent involvement in shaping school districts' Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) by:

- Actively engaging parents in strategic planning and decision-making
- Seeking parent input on the needs, priorities, goals and spending in a districts' LCAPs.

With parent involvement as one of the eight key areas in LCAPs, authentic family engagement in schools is vital for school improvement and student achievement.

TAKE ACTION: Check out our resources including the LCFF/LCAP Quick Guides online at www.capta.org.

PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

When families, schools and communities effectively work together as partners, family engagement is a powerful strategy that boosts student achievement and better prepares our children to lead healthy, happy and productive lives.

That's the thinking behind PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

As research-based family engagement standards, they provide a framework to build stronger connections between home and school.

The six Standards, which focus on what parents, schools and communities can do together to support student success, are:

1. Welcoming All Families Into the School Community

Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued and connected to each other, to school staff and to what students are learning and doing in class

To Get Started: Focus on how to break down barriers at your school by putting in place:

- **Welcoming Committee** – To identify ways to make all families feel they are welcome and belong at your school
- **Bilingual Greeters** – To greet parents at PTA and school activities in home languages and interpret for families to better connect home and school
- **Community Meeting Places** – To hold PTA meetings in a variety of community locations such as the local library or community center to make them more accessible for all.

By promoting outreach and inclusion, family engagement grows in a school community.

2. Communicating Effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication and learning.

To Get Started: Set up different ways for families and school staff to connect by providing:

- **Multiple Channels** – To communicate in formats and home languages to reach all parents, using a variety of ways such as PTA and school websites, email blasts, signs, newsletters, social media, phone and texts as well as backpack express
- **Social Gatherings** – To build relationships with events such as school barbeques or pancake breakfasts that bring educators and parents together to interact socially
- **PTA and School Calendars** – To share information on upcoming events, parent-teacher conferences, class assignments and dates to check with teachers on students' progress.

With easy access to information, parents stay connected to what's happening at school throughout the year.

3. Supporting Student Success

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development, both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so.

To Get Started: Offer regular opportunities for parents to learn more about how to support student learning at home with:

- **Parent Surveys** – To identify what parents need to know and need to be able to do to support their children's academic success and their school's goals
- **Parent Education Nights** – To supply how-tos for parents and students on study skills, curriculum, standardized tests and college/career planning, and to address concerns affecting school climate and student engagement
- **Tips and Resources** – To share useful resources such as tip sheets for parent-teacher conferences, homework help and handling tough issues in raising children and teens today.

When PTA activities are linked to student learning, families are better equipped to support student success.

4. Speaking Up for Every Child

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

To Get Started: Organize activities and events to encourage:

- **Access and Equity** – To keep all stakeholders in the loop, publicize your school's parent involvement policy and work with your principal to update the policy to meet current community needs and help ensure access and equity for all students
- **Parent Feedback** – To shape school and program decisions by including a one-question poll in each PTA/school newsletter and posting parent feedback on the Web
- **Community Conversations** – To involve parents on topics such as being an effective advocate, identifying and supporting learning styles, resolving difficulties and fostering student achievement

Making it easier for parents, teachers and administrators to access information and exchange views gives parents the tools and skills they need to speak up for every child.

5. Sharing Power

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices and programs.

To Get Started: Work together to shape school policies, practices and programs to support student success by actively promoting:

- **Diversity** – To make sure your PTA membership and leadership reflects your school community and includes parents of all backgrounds
- **Collaboration** – To identify ways the school can engage parents in decisions, ways your PTA can support the school improvement plan and ways to work closely with your principal, teachers and school staff
- **Inclusion** – To develop a family engagement policy and action plan with input and feedback from all stakeholders: students, parents, educators and community and business leaders.

Building a culture of inclusion to share power and decision-making pays dividends for student learning, development and growth.

6. Collaborating with the Community

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.

To Get Started: Work with other local community and business leaders to organize:

- **Community Outreach** – To connect with a broad base of community partners to coordinate their support and contributions to achieve your school’s goals
- **Community Resource Fairs** – To support the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social and other needs of families
- **Community Volunteer Programs** – To encourage community members including alumni and retired neighbors to volunteer at your school or make a donation to your school.

Providing information, resources and tools to meet the needs of families at your school builds stronger communities with a shared vision for student success.

Make It Happen

To implement these Standards and embed family engagement in schools, PTA designed a turnkey resource, the *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide*.

As a rubric, it provides specific goals, indicators and examples to show what good practices looks like at different levels of development for family-school partnerships.

Anyone with a stake in improving schools and making sure children succeed will find that the *Assessment Guide* is a useful tool. It will boost family engagement at your school and help your school community meet the requirements for parent involvement in your school district’s Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

Share the *Assessment Guide* with your PTA members, school action team, principal, school board members, community partners, and others as you build family-school partnerships for student success.

TAKE ACTION: To get started, download the *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Guide Assessment Guide*, in English or Spanish, on our website: www.capta.org

Family Engagement – Parent’s Role

Parents, guardians and caregivers play a vital part in promoting children’s total development and growth so that they can thrive in school and beyond.

While active family engagement in schools takes many forms, parents’ key roles in supporting student success include:

Teachers/Nurturers – By providing a home environment that promotes learning and develops the skills and values needed by children to become physically, psychologically and emotionally healthy adults

Communicators/Advocates – By maintaining effective, two-way communication between home and school and open communication with their children to guide their personal and educational growth

Supporters/Learners – By boosting their skills to support children’s educational and social development and sharing their talents to enrich the curriculum and support school projects

Collaborators/Decision Makers – By partnering with school staff and educators to help make decisions, solve problems and develop policies at school.

In these ways, parents reinforce the home-school connection and help to better prepare students today for tomorrow’s world.

Parents’ Legal Rights

Parents, guardians and caregivers of students in California public schools have a number of legal rights to build stronger family-school partnerships.

Along with federal laws related to education and schools, these state laws promote inclusion of parents in student learning at all grade levels.

- **Parents’ Rights – California Education Code**

To enhance student progress, parents have the legal right to be included in the educational process with open access to the system on behalf of their children and teenagers.

As outlined in the California Education Code, parents have a right to:

Connect with Learning by:

- Visiting a school for classroom observation
- Participating in parent-teacher conferences
- Volunteering at school
- Reviewing curriculum
- Determining school selection
- Helping to establish and review standards.

Oversee Student Progress by:

- Checking their student's attendance records
- Receiving student test results
- Monitoring their student's academic progress
- Being informed about psychological testing
- Accessing their student's records.

Engage in School Governance by:

- Participating in the development of school rules
- Taking part in councils and committees
- Contributing to policy development
- Ensuring safe school environments.

With these rights, family engagement is identified as an effective way to help students stay on track academically and to improve our schools.

• Parental Leave – Family-School Partnership Act

The Family-School Partnership Act is designed to encourage parents and guardians to participate in school activities to support student success. It gives parents the right of parental leave from work to attend school activities from preschool to high school in California.

If you work for a business with 25 or more employees at the same location, you have a legal right as a parent/guardian to request and take time off from work:

- To participate in activities at your child's school or licensed day-care facility
 - Up to 40 hours/year as a full-time worker
 - Up to 20 hours/year as a part-time worker.
- To use existing vacation time, personal leave or compensatory time off to account for the time you use participating in your child's school or child-care facility.

Any activity sponsored, supervised or approved by a school, school board, or child-care facility is acceptable. This includes volunteering in your child's classroom, participating in parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, open houses, field trips or extracurricular sporting events and assisting in community-service learning activities.

TAKE ACTION: Download parent resources and get more information on the California Department of Education website: www.cde.ca.gov

Partnering With Teachers

Open communication between parents and teachers on what and how students are doing in class is an important factor in growing student learning, outcomes and achievement. Regular interaction between teachers and parents is also critical in creating a reliable support system for students.

By reaching out to parents for input and feedback, teachers gain a better understanding of students and their families. And, by communicating with teachers, parents gain more insight, information and updates on their child's progress in school.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

One of the best ways for parents and teachers to establish and reinforce the home-school partnership is to get together for a parent-teacher conference. It offers a great opportunity to focus on how well a student is doing at school by sharing information, asking questions and devising ways to better support student learning.

- **Before the Conference**

Take time to talk to your child about what he or she likes to do at school. Let the teacher know more about your child's strengths and challenges and what he or she likes to do with free time.

To ensure the success of the upcoming conference, prepare questions to ask the teacher about classroom activities, homework and your child's academic and social progress.

- **At the Conference**

Exchange views and information with the teacher about how well your child is doing in school and how he or she can do even better. Ask the questions on your list to learn more about your child's achievements, development and growth. Finding out more about what specific steps you can take to better support student learning at home is also an important part of your conversation with the teacher.

- **After the Conference**

Share what you have learned at the conference with your child, emphasizing the positive feedback from his or her teacher. Put together an action plan with your child on how you will help with learning at home.

As follow up, arrange to talk again with your child's teacher in the next few months to assess your child's ongoing progress in school.

Making the most of parent-teacher conferences lets parents, teachers and schools work together more effectively as a team to help students achieve their potential.

When students know parents and teachers are partners in their learning network, they see that education is a high priority requiring commitment and effort to have a successful school year.

TAKE ACTION: Download tips and checklists for successful parent-teacher conferences on the Harvard Family Research Project website: www.hfrp.org

Volunteering

Assisting with activities organized by your PTA, school or teacher supports student learning and achievement in schools.

Stepping up as a volunteer also signals to your child how much your family values education and actively supports the efforts of teachers and the school to nurture students' learning, development and growth.

How much time and commitment is involved depends on your availability. It can range from one time only assignments to monthly, weekly or daily volunteer activities to meet the priorities of a PTA or school to help ensure student success.

Volunteer assignments might involve activities such as helping to:

- Tutor and mentor students
- Supervise lunchrooms, playgrounds and field trips
- Assist in a class, library or school office
- Enrich classroom learning by sharing a special skill, talent or experience
- Plan or run a PTA or school program, activity or event
- Prepare classroom materials, mailings or newsletters at home
- Manage PTA websites and social media at home
- Coordinate class phone calls, texts and emails to other parents.

Find out more about what volunteer opportunities are offered on campus or at home by checking PTA and school newsletters, websites and social media. Sign up for volunteer jobs that fit well with your interests, availability and skill sets.

Learn more about your role and school policies related to volunteers and parent involvement by attending a volunteer orientation meeting organized by the PTA volunteer coordinator at your school. Contact your PTA president to get connected and find out more.

TAKE ACTION: Download PTA job descriptions for volunteer, volunteer coordinator, room representative and room representative coordinator from the California State PTA *Toolkit* online at www.capta.org.

Your Voice Matters

As a parent, you may not realize how frequently you are an effective advocate for your child.

Every time you stand up for your child or look for ways to improve his or her school experience, you are acting as an advocate by speaking up and affecting the decision-making process.

Working with others in your school community to identify and resolve an issue amplifies your voice as a parent. It helps ensure, too, that all students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities so that they can thrive in school and beyond.

By having a community conversation involving all stakeholders, you can help to resolve concerns and put policies in place so school systems are more responsive and equitable for all families.

To get started, work together to:

- Research issues and share information with your school community
- Raise questions for discussion at school or community meetings
- Participate in solutions by proposing possible remedies for problems
- Provide updates on the status of issues
- Empower and train other parents in how to share their stories as effective advocates.

When organized and united, parents are a powerful voice on behalf of children.

By developing a plan together with a strong message and effective strategies for communication and outreach, parents can make a difference as advocates to improve the education, health and well-being of all children.

Take Action: Find out more about how to be a parent advocate on our website: www.capta.org

More Ways to Speak Up

As a PTA member, you are a part of the largest children's advocacy group in the country that is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education.

Ways to ensure parents have a seat at the table as partners in school governance and decision-making include:

- Attending meetings and sharing the parent view on school-related issues with educators
- Serving on school site and district committees or running for election to the school board
- Keeping other parents informed about specific issues and laws that affect their children's schools as a PTA legislative committee member
- Providing a parent's perspective by taking part in committees that interview, hire and dismiss school staff
- Working with other school and community leaders as a PTA volunteer to devise programs, policies and practices that support student achievement.

By helping to guide decision-making at a school, well-informed and engaged parents can ensure that every child and teen has an opportunity to enjoy overall success in school and beyond.

TAKE ACTION: Find out more about how California's education system works and how you can make a difference on the Ed100 website: www.ed100.org.

School Smarts Parent Engagement Program

To build authentic family engagement in schools, California State PTA offers a research-based program, the School Smarts Parent Engagement Program, for school districts and sites.

Through the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, School Smarts began as a pilot program in 2010. Today, the program is available statewide and helps parents from all backgrounds advocate for issues that are most important to their children and schools.

It includes a seven-session Parent Academy that educates and empowers parents with topics that include understanding how the education system works, communicating effectively, advocating for a quality education and the importance of parent involvement.

The program's operating principle is inclusion, and curriculum is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Tagalog and Vietnamese. Each session includes instructional art activities that reinforce key lessons, which helps build a sense of community and underscores the importance of a complete education that includes the arts.

TAKE ACTION: Check out the School Smarts Parent Engagement Program on our website or contact schoolsmarts@capta.org to find out how to get involved in School Smarts.

Supporting Student Success at Home

As children's first teachers, parents make a difference for student success at every grade level.

Providing family support systems that nurture children's healthy physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth lets a child thrive at each stage of development to do well from preschool to high school.

How to Make a Strong Start

Children's early experiences shape their potential to succeed in school and beyond.

During the first three years of life, brain development is especially rapid with more than 700 neural connections created each second. This means that more is learned and at a faster rate than at any other time in children's lives.

That's why how parents, guardians and caregivers interact with infants and toddlers has a long-lasting impact on a child's development and functioning later in life.

Key elements to ensure overall, healthy growth include:

- **Nutrition** – Providing a properly balanced diet with healthy food choices affects children's physical and mental development, fosters good eating habits and helps prevent and overcome illness
- **Communication** – Interacting with young children by talking, reading and singing supports their language, cognitive and social development and provides a language-rich environment
- **Activity** – Playing, movement and physical activity develop children's muscles, bone density and coordination, reinforce good exercise behavior patterns and boost physical well-being
- **Assessment** – Ensuring early assessment, intervention and referral young children can help prevent, treat or manage many developmental challenges
- **Environment** – Raising children in positive, safe and loving environments has a profound impact on their emotional, physical and social growth and development.

When babies and toddlers have strong emotional bonds with parents and caregivers, good health and wellness care and positive early learning experiences, an enduring foundation is built to do well at school and beyond.

TAKE ACTION: For videos, podcasts and information on early learning, behavior and development, visit the Zero to Three website: www.zerotothree.org/child-development.

How to Help Kids Thrive

Success in school is heavily linked to children's self-esteem and self-discipline.

When children and adolescents feel good about themselves, they develop social skills and competencies to relate well to others, behave more appropriately and be more aware of the world around them.

Research shows, too, that high self-esteem has an even greater payoff over a lifetime of making decisions.

By providing everyday opportunities for your children and teens to learn how to make decisions that are age-appropriate, they develop more confidence and a sense of responsibility for their own actions and choices.

Self-discipline is equally important as a basic building block for student achievement. Helping children learn why and how self-control, perseverance and grit matter better prepares and empowers them for school readiness and learning.

As key assets from preschool to high school, self-esteem and self-discipline are nurtured in a children and teenagers when, as a parent, you:

- Show and express how much you care, love and value them unconditionally
- Set limits and rules that are important to the quality of your family life
- Provide guidelines with clear expectations to help meet their responsibilities
- Listen and are responsive to their needs and aspirations
- Notice and praise their efforts and problem-solving skills
- Spend individual time with them
- Create an atmosphere of honesty, mutual trust and respect.

Fostering healthy self-esteem and self-discipline gives children and teens a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth and promise to do well in school and beyond.

TAKE ACTION: See how key developmental assets support student learning and growth on the Search Institute's website: www.search-institute.org

How to Navigate the Teen Years

A teenager's need to be more independent, assert themselves and take risks is a normal and healthy part of his/her development.

As parents can attest, teens often seem to make impulsive decisions without thinking about consequences. Yet, studies show this is a natural outcome of this stage of growth since parts of the teenage brain responsible for impulse control only fully mature at about age 25.

Exploring their own limits and abilities, as well as the boundaries you set as a parent, is part of how teenagers develop their identity and become their own person.

Here are some effective ways for parents to navigate the teen years:

- **Keep Communicating** – Maintain easy, two-way communication and develop a supportive relationship that encourages your teen to talk openly with you
- **Set Family Ground Rules** – While teens often push against these rules, learn to be flexible in negotiating new limits as they mature and show they are ready for new responsibilities
- **Stay Connected** – Know where and how to reach each other by phone and who your teen is hanging out with
- **Reinforce Values** – Talk often with your teen about how decisions, behavior and actions reflect values and character and affect others in your community
- **Manage Risk-Taking** – Help your teen learn how to assess risk and channel risk-taking tendencies into more constructive, adrenaline-charged activities such as playing sports or performing in drama or the creative arts
- **Model Behavior** – Be a good role model to help guide your teenager’s behavior and actions as he or she matures and grows
- **Be There** – Show and tell your teen how much your family supports, loves and cares for him or her.

When parents encourage their teenagers to become more self-sufficient and provide strong, family support, adolescents are better equipped to meet the expectations, challenges and responsibilities they will face as young adults.

TAKE ACTION: For more tips and information on the development and growth of teens, visit the Kid’s Health website: www.kidshealth.org.

Student Learning

Every child is unique and learns in different ways.

Knowing more about how a student processes information supports learning activities at home and at school.

Decades of research identify the primary learning styles of students:

- **Visual Learners** – Gather and remember information by looking, reading and watching
- **Linguistic/Auditory Learners** – Learn well by listening, talking and discussing ideas
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Learners** – Learn by doing and gather meaning through touch, movement and physical interaction
- **Logical-Mathematical Learners** – Learn best by analyzing, breaking down and arranging information logically
- **Global Processors or Learners** – Absorb information by clustering it into wholes and focusing on the big idea underpinning the details.

While most children have a preferred learning style, all have a mix of styles. For this reason, teachers often use a multi-sensory approach in class.

When learning to read, for instance, a student who might not learn words or letters by looking at them (visual learning) will be encouraged to trace letter shapes with their finger (bodily-kinesthetic learning).

Since schoolwork is largely based on reading, non-visual learners need to rely on other approaches and methods of teaching.

If your child learns best by hearing, touching or other senses and is having difficulty in class:

- Ask the teacher and school how to best accommodate your child's needs
- Provide family learning experiences such as hands-on museums, theater or dance classes, or listening to audio books to enhance learning.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities create a gap between a person's true ability and his or her day-to-day performance. Many children with learning disabilities are very bright but perform poorly in school.

If a child experiences ongoing difficulty in learning basic reading, writing or math skills, it may indicate a learning disability. Some common types of learning disabilities include dyslexia, minimal brain dysfunction, attention deficit disorder (ADD), hyperactivity and autism.

With any type of learning disability, there are many strategies for helping students. Teachers and parents should get together to discuss students' individual learning styles, and then develop learning goals and strategies to better support learning at school and home.

TAKE ACTION: Get parenting tips on learning styles by visiting the Family Education website: www.familyeducation.com

Early Childhood Education Counts

High quality early learning experiences help a child get ready to learn and succeed later in school.

As research indicates, they have a positive impact on school readiness, learning outcomes and student achievement from preschool to high school.

Children who attend quality preschool are better prepared for kindergarten, behave better in class, have higher math and reading skills, and are more likely to graduate from high school and go to college.

A quality preschool provides the opportunity for children to learn and enhance a range of new social and developmental assets including how to:

- Interact, engage and socialize with peers and teachers
- Pay attention, follow directions and finish tasks
- Develop large and small muscles as well as gross and fine motor skills
- Practice new skills by him or herself and be persistent when learning something new
- Build a strong foundation in cognitive skills such as pre-reading and early math.

Acquiring these important assets and skills at preschool significantly benefits children's school readiness and later success.

TAKE ACTION: For tips and activities to support children's growth and development, go to the First 5 California website: www.first5california.com/parents/learning.

For preschools in your area, explore the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network website: www.rnetwork.org/parents.

To learn more about Early Head Start and Head Start Programs, visit www.prekkid.org.

For information on why and how early childhood education matters, check out the Early Edge California website: www.earlyedgecalifornia.org.

Classroom Learning

How we prepare students today for tomorrow's world has changed.

With the implementation of new standards for all students, called Common Core State Standards (CCSS), learning in class will look different for your child from kindergarten to high school.

The new standards mean deeper, richer, more relevant instruction for your child with:

- Clearly defined learning goals for each grade level that build from year to year
- A focus on key knowledge and skills, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

These academic standards are important because they help ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in college and the workforce.

They also help set clear and consistent expectations for students, parents and teachers, build your child's knowledge and skills, and help set high goals for all students.

TAKE ACTION: Find out what the Common Core State Standards are for each grade level in the *Parents Guide to School Success* on our website: www.capta.org.

Student Assessment

The overall goal of any student-assessment program is to identify what students know and how well they can apply that knowledge.

As part of the transition to the new CCSS standards, California is implementing a new testing system, called Smarter Balanced. It evaluates student achievement in a more meaningful way by leveraging technology to tailor questions to student responses.

It also measures student progress toward college-and-career readiness, enabling educators to diagnose any problems and intervene earlier.

A statewide assessment program is an integral part of the instructional process. When linked to established curriculum standards, it supplies information on the effectiveness of instructional delivery and curriculum support materials.

Assessment tied to standards also provides important information to students, families and communities about how students are progressing in their learning. It can also be used to identify and address inequalities in access to learning opportunities.

Some other statewide tests in California schools for students include:

- **Physical Fitness Testing (PFT)**

The physical fitness test (PFT) for students in California schools is the FITNESSGRAM®. The main goal of the test is to help students in starting life-long habits of regular physical activity.

Students in grades five, seven, and nine take the fitness test. The test has six parts that show a level of fitness that offer a degree of defense against diseases that come from inactivity.

Test results help students, teachers and parents better understand students' fitness levels.

- **California English Language Development Test (CELDT)**

Students in kindergarten through 12th grade whose home language is not English are required by law to take an English skills test, called the CELDT in California.

This test helps schools identify students who need to improve their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. Schools also give the test each year to students who are still learning English.

- **California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)**

All highschool students must pass a test, called the CAHSEE, to earn a high-school diploma in California.

The test was created to improve student achievement in high schools. It helps to ensure that students graduate from high school with grade level skills in reading, writing and math. Some students with disabilities do not have to pass this test.

Students first take this test in 10th grade and, if they do not pass it at that time, they have more chances to take the test. In 11th grade, they can take the test two times. In 12th grade, they have up to five times to take the test.

The main purpose of the CAHSEE is to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in college or the workplace.

- **California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE)**

The CHSPE is a test for students who need to verify high-school level skills. In some cases, students take the test and leave high school early to work or attend college.

Those who pass the test receive a Certificate of Proficiency from the State Board of Education, which is equal by law to a California high school diploma.

The test covers reading, writing and math. There is a fee to take it and it is given three times each year at many sites in California.

TAKE ACTION: For more information on student assessments and testing, visit the California Department of Education website: www.cde.ca.gov.

Arts Education Matters

The arts are critical for developing 21st-century skills, student engagement and creative expression, and play an important role in students' educational development.

Research shows that arts education closes the opportunity and achievement gaps between underserved students and those with greater access to resources. Students with a high level of arts engagement from kindergarten through sixth grade have higher test scores in writing and science by their 8th-grade year.

Having access to arts education also reduces the dropout rate for at-risk students from 1 in 4 (25 percent) to 1 in 25 (4 percent).

Making the arts part of every child's education helps ensure that students are college-, career- and citizenship-ready.

Take Action: See why arts education matters and what you can do on our SMARTS Parents for the Arts Network webpage at: www.capta.org

College and Career Planning

It is never too early for students to plan for the future and prepare for life after high school.

Students can begin to explore their interests, abilities and career goals by meeting with school counselors, starting in middle school. They can also get more information on what school programs and courses are available to help them reach those goals.

Attending career days and college nights and looking for information online also are good ways to learn more about what college and career options might be a good fit.

Students and their families should start early to ask questions and become better informed about:

Graduation Requirements – Minimum requirements for high-school graduation are set by the California Legislature. But students also need to know the graduation requirements adopted by their local school districts. With this information, students can better plan to enroll in the courses that they need to graduate.

Career and Technical Education – Opportunities for students to take career and technical education classes start at the middle-school level. These classes often reinforce the academic curriculum and prepare students for post-graduation options such as apprenticeships and formal employment training.

Linked Learning – Some high schools offer Linked Learning courses that bring together strong academics, demanding technical education and real-world experience for students. With this approach, students follow industry-themed pathways in a range of fields such as engineering, arts and media, biomedicine and health to connect learning with students' interests and career aspirations.

College Entrance Requirements and Tests – Many colleges and universities require students to take an entrance exam such as SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or ACT (American College Testing Program) as part of the application process. Check with school counselors to get more information about what the entrance requirements and tests are for colleges and universities that students are interested in attending. It is possible to take college entrance tests as early as junior year in high school. Go online to college websites to learn more about their entrance requirements and application process, including deadlines.

Financial Aid and Scholarships – College can be pricey. But there are a number of ways that students can obtain financial aid. Students should work closely with high-school counselors as well as college financial-aid offices to explore all possibilities for student support in both public and private colleges.

Early planning for college and career helps students stay on track to achieve their dreams. By enlisting the help of their family and school counselors, students can make a successful transition from high school to college and careers.

TAKE ACTION: To get started in college and career planning, check out the U.S. Department of Education websites: www.ed.gov and www.studentaid.ed.gov.

How to Support Student Learning at Home

Parents are children's first teachers and homes are children's first classrooms.

As key resources for learning and growth, parents help to shape children's social, emotional and physical development so they can thrive in school and beyond.

Supporting student success starts with a shared agreement among families, schools and the community to work together, and it involves committed actions to make it happen.

10 Tips for Parents

As a parent, you can do your part at home to reinforce this important family-school partnership.

To help prepare your children for school readiness to stay on track and expand their learning opportunities:

- Set up a daily family routine, including healthy eating and sleeping habits
- Provide a place and time at home for homework
- Check on assignments, homework and projects
- Talk each day with your child about his other activities
- Promote literacy by reading to your child and by reading yourself
- Limit and monitor TV watching, gaming, social media and computer time
- Express high expectations and standards for your child's learning
- Attend parent-teacher conferences, open houses and back-to-school events
- Participate in decisions that affect your child's education
- Tap into community resources with visits to libraries, museums, zoos or theaters and encourage participation in after-school clubs, sports and art activities.

Engaged parents are a key factor in helping students and schools succeed. With families, schools and communities working together as partners, student achievement is enhanced and children are better prepared to lead happy, productive lives.

Keep in the Loop

With pre-teens and teens, staying connected with student learning remains critical.

Whether it's checking homework, talking more about college and career choices, attending open houses or volunteering for PTA and booster clubs, your engagement as a parent makes a difference.

Effective ways to keep in the loop as your student transitions to middle school and high school include:

Supporting Student Success

- Go online regularly to check course outlines, class grades and assignments on the school website to monitor your student's progress
- Encourage teens to participate in college readiness forums and job fairs and to sign up for service-learning opportunities to prepare them for life after high school

- Learn more about what's happening on campus, how school climate affects students and with whom your teenager is hanging out.

Partnering with Teachers

- Find out how the teachers and school communicate regularly with parents and sign up for email blasts, newsletters and text messages
- Know more about teachers' expectations for their courses and how school activities link to what students are doing in class through academic standards
- Talk to teachers about standardized testing and academic achievement to learn why, when and how tests are given and how the school uses test results to improve student outcomes.

Staying Connected

- Attend school events such as open houses and parent-teacher conferences to know more about how to support student learning, development and growth both at home and at school
- Volunteer to help with PTA and school activities to share your skills and show that your family values education and supports the school
- Check the school website for school policies on attendance, discipline, dress code and conflict resolution and get information on how to handle concerns or problems at school
- Provide input on school policies, issues and decisions to ensure all students have access to school-sponsored programs, including academic and counseling services.

By knowing what's happening in the classroom and on campus, you can help your student to focus on coursework and school activities to ensure college and career readiness.

TAKE ACTION: For more ideas on how to support student learning at home, visit our website: www.capta.org

Boost Literacy Skills

Student success in school depends heavily on an ability to read and write at grade level from pre-school to high school.

Yet the starting line for many children is different, depending on their ZIP code. By age 3, there is a 30-million “word gap” between children from well-off and low-income families.

As studies show, this “word gap” can lead to disparities not just in vocabulary size, but also in school readiness. It can even affect long-term educational and health outcomes, earnings and family stability decades later.

By talking, reading and singing more to children, the “word gap” is reduced and their chances for later success in school and beyond improved.

Four Tips for Parents

You can give your child a strong start to build pre-literacy skills for school readiness. Whether at home, on a walk or doing errands, help him or her from an early age to become a successful reader by:

- Playing simple name games by asking “what is this?”
- Labeling things at home such as a door or a cup and reading the labels together
- Showing the ingredients as you cook and naming them together
- Reading aloud the words on signs and in stores.

TAKE ACTION: For hands-on, family literacy activities, download the calendar, *30 Days of Families Learning Together*, from the National Center for Families Learning, in English or in Spanish, at <http://30days.familieslearning.org>.

Raise a Reader

Everyday activities are a perfect setting for children to develop language skills and become lifelong readers.

When you make reading and writing a natural part of your day as a family, students acquire strong literacy skills and a bigger vocabulary to help them achieve academically. To build these skill sets at home:

Encourage Literacy – Encourage your child to help make shopping lists, draw and write thank-you notes, write grocery lists and create menus for meals.

Tap Into Your Community – Check out materials such as toys, CDs and books from libraries. Participate in activities held by libraries and bookstores, such as story time, writing contests and summer reading programs.

Make It Easy – Keep reading and writing materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, paper, markers, crayons, scissors, glue and stickers accessible at home.

Read Together – Read books and rhymes and play language games such as tongue twisters and puzzles with your child. Point out the letter-sound relationships your child is learning on labels, boxes, magazines and signs.

Share Stories – Keep a notebook and write down stories your child tells you so that the child may see the connection between oral language and text.

Be a Reader – Children observe and learn from people around them. Let your child know you are proud of his or her reading.

When reading and writing are part of your family routine, your child will enhance the skills needed to better prepare him or her to do well in school.

TAKE ACTION: For more ways to help ensure your child is ready to learn, download the U.S. Department of Education’s resource, *Parent Power: Build the Bridge to Success*, at www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/parentpower/booklet.pdf.

Make STEAM Count

Today, the fastest growing job sectors are related to science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) and 60 percent of college majors require a math background.

In our technology-rich world, acquiring strong STEAM skills matters more than ever for college and career readiness.

In elementary school, students start to develop confidence in their ability to do the basics of math and science. They also begin to learn more about visual and performing art techniques and how technology and engineering work.

As studies show, with steady encouragement, learning and practice, parents can help children excel in these subjects from preschool to college.

Five Tips for Parents

Make It Real – Connect math and science to the real world in your everyday activities as a family. When you go to a store, bank or restaurant, talk about how math is used on bills, deposit slips, menus or for tipping. At the park or beach, observe wildlife and plants, let your child draw what he or she sees and go online at home to discover even more.

Play Games – Encourage your child to play with puzzles and games that involve decision-making or strategy to build reasoning skills. Card games like “Go Fish” teach children to count, sort and use strategy. Games like Scrabble involve spelling and math. Playing games in the car that estimate distance or listening to music, audio books and podcasts help grow STEAM skills.

Feed Curiosity – Borrow science, technology, art and math books and materials from the library and explore these topics online. Visit science museums, zoos, aquariums, theaters and state parks to discover what excites and interests your child. Talk with teachers about your child’s studies to find out ways to reinforce STEAM skills at home.

Encourage Discovery – Teach children how to find information and encourage them to solve science and math problems on their own. As a child tries to solve a problem, ask helpful questions and let him/her take time to find out how to do it. Learning how to find answers helps to develop critical thinking.

Expand Horizons – While young children may want to be doctors or firefighters, widen their awareness of other interesting careers. Pilots, mechanics, software engineers, forest rangers, video-game developers and biologists, for instance, are all jobs requiring STEAM skills. Go online together to explore the range of career options available with a foundation in STEAM.

Making STEAM learning an everyday part of family life promotes student achievement.

Encourage your PTA or school to host activities such as career days, science fairs, math competitions, arts festivals and robotics clubs. That way, students will learn more about STEAM and how their interests can connect with career goals in these fields.

TAKE ACTION: Check out what fun, hands-on STEAM activities you can do at home on the PBS website: www.pbskids.org.

Monitor Homework

Parents and families play an important role in the homework process.

They can help children develop good study habits and attitudes that lead to becoming lifelong learners.

Teachers give homework to help students better understand, review and learn more about what has been covered in class.

By working on assignments, students learn how to find and use more information on a topic, how to follow instructions and complete tasks and how to be responsible and engaged in learning.

As a parent, your job is not to do the work for them, but to provide support, encouragement and ask questions that help them arrive at the answers themselves.

Homework time and strategies can vary from teacher to teacher and school to school. But most educators agree:

- For children in grades K-2, homework is more effective when it does not exceed 20 minutes each school day
- Older children in grades 3-6 can handle 30-60 minutes a day
- For kids in middle and high school, two hours of homework may be assigned.

Your child's teacher can tell you, usually at back-to-school night, how much time he or she expects students to spend on homework.

Find out, too, if class assignments, grades and attendance are posted online so you can check on a regular basis. This can be an invaluable source of information that allows you to keep on top of any issues before they become problems.

Ask your principal, school site council or PTA if your school or district has a homework policy, including how to handle homework if your child needs to be absent.

TAKE ACTION: For tips on homework help, visit the U.S. Department of Education's parent portal at www2.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml.

Check out practice exercises and instructional videos for students on the Khan Academy website at www.khanacademy.org.

Make Summer Learning Happen

All students need ongoing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills, especially in the summer, to succeed in school and in life.

Yet each year most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in reading achievement and math skills over the summer break.

This summer learning loss affects students' ability to build on what they are learning at school and to reach their potential. It also contributes to the achievement gap between students from low- and higher-income families.

As research indicates, more than half of this gap is explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, students from low-income families are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college.

Increasing access in a community to quality summer-learning opportunities is an effective way to avoid summer-learning loss.

By working together, schools, community organizations and families can make these anywhere/anytime learning experiences happen so all students can thrive.

TAKE ACTION: See why summer learning matters on the National Summer Learning Association website: www.summerlearning.org.

Check out *Six Signs of a Great Summer Learning Program* on the Summer Matters website: www.summermatters.org.

Tips for Parents

The summer months are a particularly good time for parents and families to bond and enjoy some quality time together with fun learning activities.

At home, at the beach or on a road trip, you can find everyday ways to support student learning:

- **Indoors**

Literacy – Make time every day for your child to read and talk about a story he or she likes best. Make a sock puppet of a favorite character and re-enact the story.

Math – Prepare meals together using measuring spoons and cups or kitchen scales for ingredients. Have kids feed pets using a measuring cup to dispense dog or cat food.

Art – Keep markers, pencils, paper, paint and other supplies on hand for art projects. Gather up recycled materials and clothing to perform skits, dances or plays.

- **Outdoors**

Physics – At the beach or in a sand box at the park, compare the depth of big and small footprints due to weight differences.

Science – Go on a scavenger hunt on a walk or hike to find and identify five plants, five animals and five birds together. Gather a few fallen leaves to take home to make leaf prints with paint and paper.

Health – Use a pedometer to count steps throughout the day, aiming for 11,000 daily steps (ages 6 to

17). Help your child choose an activity such as walking, basketball or bike riding and encourage one hour of exercise every day.

- **On the Go**

Literacy – Play word games in the car such as “I Spy” to strengthen skills in vocabulary, observation and description.

Geography – Keep a list of car license plates by state and see who can spot the most states.

Math – On an outing to a museum, beach or park, have your child show the way on the map. Estimate the distance, and then check to see how close you came.

Making family time for fun, learning experiences and staying active during the school break ensures children and teens continue to grow their skills for success in school and beyond.

TAKE ACTION: For ideas on fun art activities to do at home, check out the resources on our SMARTS Parents for the Arts Network webpage at www.capta.org.