Family Engagement Newsletter

Getting Ready for the New School Year

By Wendy Overturf

Getting ready for a new school year can be daunting, especially for children with disabilities and their parents. To make the process a little easier, here are some tips to help prepare for the new year — whether they're starting school for the very first time or returning after the summer break.

Start talking about the school year
The end of the summer break may provoke sadness, but this can be eased by getting your child excited about the new school year. One way to do this is to begin talking about school before the first day back. You might ask them what they're most looking forward to, such as a subject they'll be studying, which teachers they hope to have or even just discuss practical arrangements like transportation to and from school.

Reintroduce your child's normal routines
If your child has specific routines during the school year, it's a good idea to reintroduce these before the first week of school. This will help ease them back into their normal schedule while also ensuring that their first week back isn't too overwhelming. Often sleeping and eating patterns are not consistently routine during the summer, so it's important to start reintroducing those routines.

What are Your Concerns?
Write down the questions you have for school staff. Consider what worries you most about the new school year. This will help you figure out where to begin and who to contact first.

Who's on Your Child's IEP Team?
Do you know who your child's teachers and aides are for this fall? If not, call the principal and introduce yourself and your child, and ask if you can be connected with your child's new team. Ask to meet the case manager, and/or email the teacher. This will give you the chance to share ideas, suggestions, and tips for working with your child. IEPs or other plans do not always provide a complete picture of your child.

Special Supplies
If your child brings special supplies, make sure that they are at school for the first day. If the school is providing those supplies, call or email the teacher to make sure that they will be available on the first day.

Consider What Might Help on the First Day
For example, it might be helpful for your child to meet the bus driver, take a tour of the classroom, or visit the lunchroom.
With some planning, the first day of school may be less stressful for you, your child, and school staff.

(Adapted from Sept 2018 **Family Voices of Wisconsin Article**)

Statewide Events

Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative (WSPEI) Training Opportunities for Families of Children with Disabilities-2018-2019
Parents in Partnership (PIP) is a statewide program which deepens the ability of families and educators to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. PIP is a leadership development training for parents who have children with disabilities ages 6-14 that takes place over five weekend sessions during the year. Visit the **WSPEI website** for more information about PIP and for locations and dates of the 2018-2019 PIP trainings .

Youth in Partnership with Parents for Empowerment (YiPPE)
YiPPE is an opportunity for youth with disabilities (ages 14-21) and their parents to learn about the transition process in a unique way. **Learn more** about YiPPE and the dates and locations of free 2018-2019 trainings.

CESA 5 Mental Health & Behavior Summit
A two-day conference, providing information and techniques to assist with behavior management and mental health needs specific to the school setting for a variety of school-aged students. Featuring a variety of speakers, that are "practicing experts in the field", and providing opportunity for educators to network/collaborate.
Dates: September 25-26, 2018
Location: Glacier Canyon Lodge, WI Dells

State Superintendent's Conference on Special Education & Pupil Services Leadership Issues
Sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction to provide local directors of special education and pupil services and other interested parties , including parents, with opportunities to network with stakeholders from the state as well as consultants and administrators from the DPI's Division for Learning Support. Presentations will include information about current issues and changes in state and federal policy related to meeting the needs of students with disabilities and students facing other challenges to success in school.
Dates: October 9-10, 2018
Location: Glacier Canyon Lodge, WI Dells

Autism Society of Wisconsin Fall Conference
In this 2018 training led by Carol Gray, the founder of Social Stories, participants will learn how to research, develop, and implement Social Stories for all age and ability levels with an emphasis on writing for adolescents and adults. Registration deadline is October 1, 2018
Date: October 11, 2018
Location: Bridgewood Resort Hotel and Conference Center, Neenah, WI

Wisconsin Statewide Transition Academy
Providing information relating to all areas of transition to a wide audience, whether you are an educator, paraprofessional, parent, youth, or agency member.
Dates: October 16-17, 2018
Location: Glacier Canyon Lodge, WI Dells

29th Annual Children Come First Conference
The 2018 conference theme is: Collaboration. Keynote speakers will be Dr. Ross W. Greene and Dr. Tina R. Goldstein.
Date: November 12-13, 2018
Location: Glacier Canyon Lodge at Wilderness Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

At Home Learning Strategies

Brain Building for Young Children

No matter a parent's background or education, they already have what it takes to boost their baby's brain — they just need to talk with their child, engage them in their world, and listen. It does not take extra time to add "brain building" into everyday routines, say the organizers of the **Talk/Read/Play initiative**.

- At mealtimes, talk about what the child is eating or talk them through the steps of making the meal.
- At bath time, talk about different colors and shapes of bath toys and bubbles.
- On a walk, talk about the shapes of buildings and trees.

Make your child's mind stretch. Even when they seem too young to understand, their minds are building a foundation for learning everything from math to communication to reading. It is not just about learning to talk, research shows. When children hear language and interact with their parents/caregivers verbally, they are actually building the connections in their brains that will help them learn languages and will boost their brain power later on.

Yes, adults should talk with their children, but they should also listen, experts note. Listen, acknowledge and respond to children's words and actions. Talk/Read/Play organizers liken the exchange to a game of tennis: the adult serves, the child responds, and the conversation bounces back and forth.

For more easy tips and daily activity suggestions, people are invited to download the free **"Daily Vroom" app** and start "brain-building" today. Every day, a fun Vroom tip for you and your child is delivered right to your phone. You'll get tips chosen for your child's age. Explore tons of tips and find ones that are just right for your family. There's brain science behind every Vroom tip. With each short activity, you teach your child the life skills that help them thrive.

Back to School:
Homework, projects, research and writing!

If you are feeling a bit rusty after summer break, it would be smart to start by reviewing dependable homework assistance sites you've used in the past, and then find some new ones to help you with technologies or equipment that may be introduced this school year. Be sure to bookmark useful resources to assist you with questions you may have. These sites can help you get started:

Mr. Nussbaum
Featuring over 3,500 content pages, this site is one of the most popular destinations on the internet for parents, homeschoolers, teachers, and students.

BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper
Education and homework resources site for students, teachers and parents. Many links added to this site are intended to help parents and teachers.

Study Geek
Where PhD experts help with Math Homework.

Online Resources: Assistive Technology

Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)
The website offers numerous resources related to assistive technology. It also has links to checklists that IEP teams can use when considering assistive technology.

Center on Technology and Disability
Assistive and instructional technology (AT/IT) allows children across the ability spectrum to participate fully at home, in school, and in the community. The Center on Technology and Disability provides a wealth of free resources – personal and professional development (PPD) webinars, articles, guides, training materials and more.

National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)
This site focuses on how schools can serve students who are unable to read or use standard print materials, through the use of specialized formats (braille, audio, large print, and digital text). There are articles and research about effective practices, technical information, tutorials, webinars, online forums, and more.

Bookshare
An online library of more than 170,000 digital books for children and adults with qualifying disabilities. Schools can download textbooks, books, and periodicals, which their students can access on computers or mobile devices using software or apps that read the text aloud. For students with visual impairments, schools can also download files for use with braille devices.

Learning Ally
Featuring a collection of more than 70,000 audiobooks, recorded textbooks and literature titles, for children and adults with qualifying disabilities. Audiobooks are available as digital downloads, as well as CDs, and free apps are available for popular mobile devices. Learning Ally works with volunteers to record books that its users request.

SETT Framework
Student, Environments, Tasks, and Tools—all of which need to be fully explored when assistive technology tools are considered or selected. The website offers a set of forms for collaborative decision making.

Tech Finder
This website has a search function that helps teachers and parents to find Apps that promote learning in specific subject areas. The website also has links to numerous other sites related to assistive technology to the child's individual needs, abilities, and experience.

Free Assistive Tech Tools Make Learning Accessible to All
This website has a long list of tools and articles related to assistive technology. It also includes links to tools to support Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.

Reading Rockets
This link will introduce parents to the role of AT in helping their children with a learning disability. Parents will learn how to choose AT tools that are reliable and to select technology that is tailored to the child's individual needs, abilities, and experience.

Learning Opportunities

Instructional Trends

Welcoming Families from Day One
(adapted from article on Harvard Graduate School of Education website)

Strong family-teacher partnerships are key to student success. Families make sure homework gets done and kids are ready for school each morning. They are critical to children developing a love of learning. And perhaps most important, families have unique insight into their children: how they thrive, where they struggle, and what they know.

Your initial conversations and interactions with families are critical for setting the tone of your relationship for the entire school year," as Karen Mapp, Ilene Carver, and Jessica Lander write in their book, *Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success*. If the first a father hears from his daughter's teacher is bad news — for instance, an email that she hasn't been doing her homework — he may not want to listen. Parents can grow defensive about their children's behavior, and, especially in low-income or minority communities, many families may have years (if not decades) of negative associations with school systems.

Here are two effective ways to **establish strong family-teacher partnerships.**

A Welcoming Phone Call
A welcome call before the school year begins, or just after, can build the foundation for this partnership. Calls home generally have a bad reputation, but they don't have to. An introductory phone call can open the door to collaboration and trust, demonstrating to families that teachers value their insight on their children and expect their engagement throughout the year.

A Letter of Hopes and Dreams
By restructuring the fall Open House so that teachers are learning from families, rather than just talking at them, teachers can continue to foster partnerships. One activity to try is a "hopes and dreams letter," in which parents write a letter to their children. As Mapp, Carver, and Lander write, "Our children need to know that our goals and expectations for them this year are deeply rooted in the hopes, dreams and expectations of their families, that home and school are not two separate worlds."

Research to Read

Assistive Technology in Special Education and the Universal Design for Learning

Alnahdi, G. (2014). Assistive Technology in Special Education and the Universal Design for Learning. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 13, 18-23
Article Link

ABSTRACT: Using technology can help students with disabilities to enhance and improve their independence in academic and employment tasks, their participation in classroom discussions, along with helping them to accomplish some difficult academic tasks. This paper discusses the role and benefits of using assistive technology in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), in academic skills, and in transition services. A summary of the important principles that need to be considered in the integration of technology in educating or training students with disabilities is provided.

Contributions to the Newsletter

Upcoming newsletter topic: **October: Learning Disabilities**
November: Emotional Behavioral Disabilities
December: Communication

To submit contributions, you may use either the attached word document for contributing articles, events, or resources. Send submissions to woverturf@wifacets.org. If unable to access form, send you may send information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.