

# Parent & Teacher

RESOURCE GUIDE



# What's Their Learning Style?

Figuring out how students best learn can unlock their true potential.

Styles can be broken down into three main categories — auditory, visual and tactile.

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency has created an online quiz, with 20 questions meant to help determine which learning style is best.

## WHAT THEY MEAN

Visual learners do best with reading material or pictures. Their memory involves creating a mental picture of the lesson. Auditory learners do better when they hear details or speak them out loud, rather than through reading material. Tactile learners are hands-on, preferring to touch, build, move or create something in order to best understand it.

## SUGGESTED APPROACHES

In some cases, changes might be as simple as sitting as near as possible to the front of the class for visual learners. Encourage flash cards as a memory aid for visualizing what is heard and read. They should write everything down, adapt a color-coding system and consider drawing pictures. They do best on assignments involving written essays and research, but may need more time to absorb the course material. The



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Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency also recommends that these students stay current with their eye exams.

For auditory learners, sitting close to the front is also recommended, to aid in hearing everything that's shared. They should study by reading out loud when possible. Recordings of assignments,

key material and other homework are helpful. For tactile learners, related art projects may stoke memory, as can tracing words to aid with spelling and recall. They should take regular breaks to walk or do other physical activities during study or reading times. For a section on Shakespeare, for example, they may retain more by act-

ing out a scene. They should be recommended to physically type assignments, notes and homework into a laptop or other computer device.

## HOW IT WORKS

Once a child's learning style has been decided upon, these methods can be suggested and developed in order to play to their strengths. With a proper-

ly crafted lesson or homework plan, they could begin to learn and retain at a much higher rate. Class size, funding and other constraints may make it difficult to implement every strategy at school, unlike adapting new habits at home. But tailoring a specific approach to their unique learning style should open new doors.

# Making the Most of Libraries

They're an incredible resource for students with much more than books.

Libraries offer internet access for those looking to do school work or research, or even to apply for those first jobs.

Students can access magazines and newspapers to learn more about current events, or a treasure trove of music and movies. Libraries may also play host to special classes, field trips, and Wi-Fi hotspots.

Unfortunately, in some cases, school libraries are faltering with lack of funding or staff issues. Some are closing all together. That makes utilizing your local public library to the fullest all the more critical. Studies show that library programs increase literacy, which plays a critical role in school performance but also ensures greater career opportunities and civic participation down the road.

Here's how to get the most out of your library:

## AUDIO/VISUAL

Look past the written page, and libraries typically feature a robust collection of compact discs, DVDs and vinyl recordings. Many are available to check out. But even if they're only for in-library use, these audio/visual aids add another dimension to studying, preparing a syllabus or relaxing after a busy school day.

## TAKE A CLASS

For those who are interested in learning more about a classroom topic that's not offered at school, the library is often home to free or lower-cost programs devoted to computer technology, foreign languages, local history, even yoga or chess.

Most libraries include infor-

mation about their various offerings on the main website. Students, their parents and teachers can also drop by your nearest library branch to learn more.

## EVENT SPACE

Libraries are a great place to meet, and not just for friend groups who love to

read. The typical branch also has space allotted specifically for meetings, studying or other local gatherings. These spaces are particularly useful if your campus lacks a quiet place to complete homework or develop lesson plans.

## OTHER SPECIAL ITEMS

Some libraries go a step fur-

ther, loaning out things like artwork or tools. Someone studying art or history may have an opportunity to examine these pieces up close back home.

And all of this is free, with your library card. You'll just need proof of local address in the form of things like photo identification or a utility bill.



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# There's An App For That

Smartphones can help schools, parents and students to better communication.

With so much happening during a typical day, it's easy for some details to be forgotten along the way. These apps can help.

They're a calendar resource to remember when a class assignment is due or the next holiday break gets underway. Apps can also provide a direct line to teachers, an archive of previous work, even a quick way to check to see what's being served at lunch today.

Privacy and security are obviously front of mind in this situation, and these apps follow through with security codes for signup. These codes keep others from gaining access to any personal information.

Here's a look at some of the most popular school-related apps, which offer various customization or integration options to increase engagement for all of the stakeholders in education.

## **BLOOMZ**

Bloomz is a streamlined app that helps teachers quickly and easily contact parents on everything from grades, classroom activities or future deadlines. Announcements can be set to remain visible for a specified time, with alert overrides for urgently sent



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messages. Teachers can also confidentially send grades or other information electronically. There's a calendar syncing function for parents, as well as volunteer and donation signup capabilities and student behavior tracking.

## **CLASS DOJO**

Think of Class Dojo as a social-media equivalent app for schools and families.

Teachers add their students to the app, and parents enter with a special access code. That gives them access to teacher-posted information like photos, scheduling information and videos. Teachers can send private messages to individual parents, who in turn can comment on and like teacher posts. Homework assignments, class and other school announcements can

also find a home on Class Dojo. The app is adaptable for older students, who can create their own account to create an online portfolio of their work.

## **REMIND**

This app's best-remembered marketing slogan says it all: "School communication shouldn't be so hard." Remind allows students to work together virtually, teachers to

post PDFs, photos and voice files, and parents to coordinate with other parents on school volunteer projects. That's quite an improvement over the jumble of handouts kids used to be sent home with to inform mom and dad about parent-teacher conferences, picture day or various fundraisers. Teachers can even set important messages to be sent later as a reminder.

# Supporting Disabled Students

Making sure they succeed isn't just the right thing to do — it's the law.

Students with learning or medical disabilities have special protections put in place to eliminate discrimination.

These laws also help level the playing field so that differently abled children have a chance to reach their maximum potential.

## KNOW THE LAW

There are, in fact, three federal laws put in place to protect those with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires public schools to make accommodations and modifications in Title II so that they can be accessed, according to the U.S. Department of Education. This includes physical access, but also policies, procedures and practices that may also be exclusionary. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973's Section 504 deals specifically with any programs that receive financial assistance from the federal government, ensuring a "free and appropriate public education" — or FAPE — for all. Finally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act includes language codifying FAPE so that children with disabilities may take advantage of special-education services and related programs.

## IN THE CLASSROOM

Parents have two main tools to ensure this "free and appro-



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priate public education," a 504 plan and an IEP. Any child with learning and medical disabilities who requires special accommodations should have a 504 plan in place. This legal document describes in detail what the school is required to do, including but not limited to modified textbooks or other educational materials, special seating, nurses assistance, and physical or speech therapy. The IEP, or individualized

education plan, sets a curriculum and measurable goals, while also noting any needed accommodations. The IEP may also outline time needed for therapy, other needed support, and information on how to integrate the student with other students and for how long.

## TAKING ACTION

If your child has already been diagnosed, reach out

directly to teachers and school administrators. If they can't help, they will connect you with someone who's specifically assigned to special education. If you suspect a child is differently abled, there is a federal framework in place for testing at public schools. Students will be assessed on a variety of levels, including educational, psychological, socioculturally and developmentally. They should also

meet with physical and speech therapists.

## REPORTING ISSUES

Parent Training and Information Centers have been specifically created to outline what children are entitled to and how to access benefits under the law. Check [parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center](http://parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center). If there are still concerns, consider hiring a private advocate.

# Getting Homework Help

Students may think they've grasped a point — until they get home.

Here's how to get needed help so students can get back on track with their homework assignment.

In some cases, students may be struggling with organizational issues or procrastination. Begin with a conversation about taking responsibility for their own learning. If they continue to struggle with a particular task or subject, they may need additional help with their homework.

Touch base with teachers about extracurricular resources — and look around at what your local community offers. There are a variety of programs that may be available.

## TEACHERS

Teachers should include tailored homework resources in course material, either in printed form and over the internet via emails or education apps. Online learning tools and digital textbooks can help fill in the blanks when material is simply too complex to adequately cover in an hour-long setting. The best of these apps or programs include games and video with the modern-day student in mind. Encourage your school or school district to subscribe to helpful online services geared to home learning.



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## FINDING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Libraries may offer helpful after-school programs specifically meant to help with stubborn homework issues. Various states provide toll-free homework hotlines, as well. Community programs like the Boys and Girls Club may offer tutoring services, since that's part of their larger mission. Meeting with fellow students

to form a homework club, or just to focus on a critical upcoming test, can sometimes be a big help, too.

## WHAT'S NEXT

If a student continues to struggle, they may be dealing with a learning disability. If so, testing may be needed. Should they be diagnosed with an issue, school systems have special programs and required

curriculum changes in place to get them back on track. If they're not determined to have a learning disability, consider whether they simply have too much homework.

Students shouldn't be assigned more than 10 minutes of homework per grade level per night, according to the National Education Association. They're often given much, much more. In

fact, the American Journal of Family Therapy has determined that some elementary students may be being assigned three times as much. Teachers should consider dialing back so that children aren't overwhelmed, while parents should contact instructors and school administrators to voice their concerns about these assignments.

# Taking Standardized Tests

These critical tests tell us a lot about students and their schools.

Usually referred to by familiar acronyms, these regularly administered tests come with their own challenges.

## WHAT THEY ARE

The exams feature consistent questions, administering conditions and procedures for scoring. Everything happens in a standard, pre-determined manner with the hope of getting a consistent result. Standardized testing has been part of the U.S. system of education since the 1800s, though its widespread use didn't begin until the 1970s. National assessments followed in the '80s.

## WHY WE TAKE THEM

Standardized tests are meant to fairly measure student achievement by asking certain questions under equal and monitored conditions. The results help form a universal standard not impacted by local schools or towns. It's easier to evaluate progress when everyone takes the same test. Initiatives like Common Core and No Child Left Behind are based on these educational standards. Problematic districts and schools can also be identified early, so that changes can be made. These tests may also be part of a student's adult life, so it's best to begin famil-



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iarizing themselves early on. Those seeking a career in medicine, teaching, the law, engineering and many other fields must take part in a very similar certification process.

## FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF

Before they begin study, have students familiarize themselves with how the exam will happen. Determine how many sections are

offered, and the focus of each section. Find out how much time is given for the sections, and for the overall test. Are they allowed to ask questions? What's not allowed in the exam room? How will scoring be done – and when will the results be posted? Creating a framework of understanding about the process will help with the inevitable anxiety associated with these high-

stakes tests.

## TEST STRATEGIES

Adopting specific test-taking strategies may help students with exams like the ACT, GRE and SAT, giving them a better chance to do well in what can be a stressful situation. Test-specific workbooks and guides, and practice tests are often very useful. Encourage students to prac-

tice breathing and relaxation techniques to ward off anxiety. Discuss positive affirmations, rather than indulging in negative thoughts about testing poorly. They should get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy, nutritional breakfast on testing day. Encourage them to return to what was learned on practice tests and breathing exercises while taking the exam.

# Transitioning Into College

These final steps to adulthood aren't easy for students — or their parents.

Resist the temptation to do too much for children as they transition out of high school. They'll be more successful if you do.

College students typically find themselves out in the world for the very first time, meaning they need to have already developed skills in money and time management, organizing and social etiquette. If they haven't, some things may have to be learned the hard way — through experience. That's part of the process, too.

## FRANK DISCUSSIONS

Talk to your child about the huge changes that are on the way. The main challenges for them will be a greater sense of responsibility to go with their newfound independence. As a parent, you'll also have to adjust to having less contact and information about their daily lives. Encourage teens to talk about their expectations and fears about college life. Ask what they are most concerned about, how they're feeling about leaving their childhood home, and how these new responsibilities might present a challenge.

## FINDING THEIR WAY

Teach your college-aged child to find needed resources, but allow them to fail.



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They'll rely on these memories to complete a journey toward maturity. Self-reliance plays a huge role. So those having trouble with coursework may have to locate helpful resources on their own college campuses. Those stuck on the side of the road may have to change their own tire. If they get in real trouble,

you'll still be there to provide expert advice and assistance, as required. But in the meantime, allow them to make mistakes — and recover from them. They'll need these lived experiences to succeed on their own.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Going away to college can

be isolating at first, in particular if the campus is far from home. Talk to your student about issues like anxiety, stress and disappointment. They'll be learning to cope with those challenges apart from you, and it can become overwhelming. One study by the University of California at Los Angeles recorded the

highest-ever stress levels among college freshmen, especially women. Remind them that reaching out for help is always the right thing to do. Counseling services are typically offered on campus; discuss hotlines devoted to mental health and suicide prevention, as well.