



A Union of Professionals

Literacy

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Tips for Middle School Parents





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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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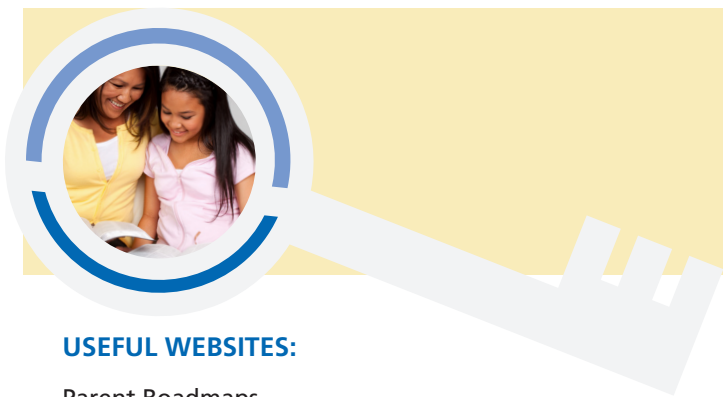


To Parents and Caregivers:

Thank you for supporting your child's education. You are a vital partner in your child's learning,

We are pleased to provide you with information to explain the standards (or expectations) for what students should know and be able to do in reading, writing, language, speaking and listening. Students will use these literacy skills across subjects; therefore, parents should expect to see evidence that students are reading, writing, speaking and listening, and using appropriate language and vocabulary not only in the language arts classroom but also in content areas, including science, math, history/social studies, technology, foreign language, vocational arts, physical education and the arts.

This booklet provides examples of some of the important skills students will be expected to learn and demonstrate, as well as some suggestions on how you can help support your child's learning at home. We also have provided the links and web addresses to some helpful sites where you can find more information and resources, including videos.



USEFUL WEBSITES:

Parent Roadmaps

(from the Council of the Great City Schools)

<http://www.cgcs.org/Page/328>

Parent-friendly grade level videos

(from GreatKids Milestones)

<http://milestones.greatkids.org/>

Parents' Guides to Student Success

(from the National PTA)

<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

LITERARY AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS:

Goodreads

<http://www.goodreads.com/>

ReadWorks

<http://www.readworks.org>

READING GOAL:

Students become independent and proficient readers able to learn from and think, talk and write about complex narrative and informational texts*.

STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Read a variety of grade-appropriate complex texts. At least 60 percent of them should be informational texts.
- Use thinking skills to understand and analyze text.
- Comprehend texts deeply. Determine main ideas and supporting details.
- Summarize text without adding personal opinions or judgment.
- Use evidence from the text to support responses to reading.
- Identify different text structures and use that knowledge to understand the text better.
- Recognize the author's point of view and how it affects what is in the text.
- Make connections between texts.



*When either “text” or “texts” is used, it refers to stories, drama, poetry, speeches, articles, reports, books (in print, online or digital format) as well as videos, maps and other types of graphics. All texts should be at a level of difficulty consistent with the demands of the Common Core standards.

HOW PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS CAN HELP:

- Read with and to your child several times a week. (Even older students like and benefit from having someone else read to them.) While reading with your child, stop often to talk about what the author is saying.
- Encourage your child to ask questions about the text, and then explore the answers together; afterward, reverse roles and have your child ask you questions about the text.
- Encourage your child to read several books on the same topic and then to find connections between the books.
- Engage in discussions with your child about what the author is saying in the texts. Ask your child to support responses about the text with actual evidence from the text.
- Ask your child to identify and point out to you the text structure(s) and features of the text.
- Expect your child to be able to identify key points from the text and also to summarize what's been read.
- Have your child talk about how different texts are related to one another and/or how two or more texts about the same topic differ.
- Visits museums, theaters and other educational sites to give your child opportunities to build new knowledge and vocabulary.
- Encourage your child to read daily, choosing from among literature, including stories, poetry and plays as well as a wide range of informational texts related to history, social studies, science and other content areas.

WRITING GOAL:

Students will write frequently to different audiences and for different purposes. Students will use writing as a tool through which they learn and also demonstrate their learning across content areas. Writing is in response to and centered on the text. Students use evidence from the text to support their claims and arguments and to reinforce their explanations.

STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Write, with attention to audience and purpose, clear and well-organized arguments that support claims with evidence from texts.
- Write informative/explanatory texts that examine a topic and convey ideas.
- Write clear, well-organized descriptive narratives.
- Cite evidence from literary and informational texts.
- Plan, revise, edit and publish their writing.
- Write in response to what they've read.
- Complete short research projects.
- When available and appropriate, integrate technology to support and enhance their writing as well as to produce and publish writing.



HOW PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS CAN HELP:

- Encourage and model writing at home, including writing stories, book reviews, guides and opinion pieces about a current event or situation.
- Have your child show you examples of argumentative, narrative and explanatory/informational writing found in books, magazines and online.
- Encourage your child to draft, write, review, revise and edit his or her writing.
- Have your child read news articles and editorials (in the newspaper or online) to see and identify the different kinds and purposes of writing.
- Encourage your child to state a position about something of importance and then to write an argument supporting that position.
- Encourage your child to read and then to write about a topic of interest, providing information and knowledge about that topic, citing evidence from the texts read.



LANGUAGE GOAL:

Through exposure to complex texts and direct instruction, students will develop, build and use general academic vocabulary as well as vocabulary specific to particular subject areas. Students will learn and use grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization rules.

STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Know and use grade-level conventions of grammar when speaking and writing.
- Use strategies to figure out the meaning of new words.
- Learn and use grade-appropriate and content-specific vocabulary in writing and conversations.
- Learn and use general academic vocabulary from grade-appropriate reading and content.
- Understand how words may be related to one another, for instance by categories like feelings, animals or plants.
- Understand figurative language, which uses words to mean something different than expected (as in “It’s raining cats and dogs.”).
- Understand when groups of words are related by “shades of meaning”—for instance “cold, chilly, cool.”



HOW PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS CAN HELP:

- Read aloud with and to your child and then discuss what has been read; reading exposes your child to rich language and vocabulary.
- Have your child try to identify new words from the context of the text and/or through word analysis.
- Use technology to help build your child's interest in reading books and other texts online.
- Have conversations with your child about how words are related to one another and then challenge each other to come up with the longest lists of related words.
- Listen for and identify instances where figurative language is used in everyday conversations or in the media.
- Play word games with your child, for instance, by asking how two or more words (for example, "surprised" and "disappointed") are related to one another. (Both refer to feelings when something other than what we had expected happens.)
- Play word games where you and your child ask each other for synonyms or antonyms of words found in the text or words that you've used in conversations. Ask for examples of words that fit into the same category; then explain why you think so.
- Have a contest with your child to see how many times your child uses and hears the new words in conversations.



SPEAKING AND LISTENING GOAL:

Students will work collaboratively with their peers. Students will participate in and learn from discussions with peers. Students will demonstrate appropriate speaking and listening skills.

STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Prepare for and actively participate in discussions with classmates.
- In small and large groups, participate in conversations with classmates about grade-level topics and texts. Follow agreed-upon rules about how to respond to others, ask questions and use details from the text when answering.
- Develop and give formal oral and written presentations.
- Learn from and summarize presentations given by classmates.
- Include evidence from presentations to support responses to those presentations.
- Integrate, evaluate and use print media (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.); oral media (recordings, music, etc.); visual media (art, videos, etc.) and other media in presentations.

HOW PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS CAN HELP:

- Have conversations with your child about the text using words and phrases from the text (character names, places, events, etc.)
- Set aside some time for you and your child to actively take turns participating in discussions about shared interests, current and upcoming events, or desires and plans for the future.
- Ask your child to select and read about a current event or topic of interest and then to prepare a formal oral presentation about it to deliver to the family.
- Remind your child to choose and use print media (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.); oral media (recordings, music, etc.); visual media (art, videos, etc.) and other media in the presentation.



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