

# Helping students succeed

BY STEPHANIE LONG

Special to the Record-Eagle

Making the transition from one grade or school to the next can be scary and intimidating for students of all ages.

For parents, what to do to help children deal with these changes can be unclear. Navigating new buildings, teachers and homework requirements can be frustrating for the entire family without some strategies ready.

Having taught for 14 years, I've learned a few things about helping families get through the first stages of these transitions.

First of all, everyone needs to understand that things will be different.

Parents and students must accept that fact and be open-minded to whatever changes await. Change doesn't mean bad — it just means different and that should be a good thing. The more experiences your child has, the more well-rounded he'll be. Help him get excited for these changes by being excited for him. He'll see your enthusiasm and come to see the changes as an adventure rather than a source of fear.

Second, if your child is going to a different school, the easiest way to help her overcome the first hurdle is to make an early visit to learn the building's layout and walk through her class schedule. Find her locker, the cafeteria, the library,

the offices and most importantly, her classrooms. That will ease much of the tension of the first day.

Third, encourage your child — no matter how young — to ask questions when he's uncertain. Whether he's not sure of a homework assignment or just confused about what time he eats lunch, before you pick up the phone to call the school to ask for him, teach him how to advocate for himself.

While it is a teacher's job to explain things, teachers can't be helpful if they don't know a need exists.

For students who are too afraid to initiate questions, one strategy that will help regardless of age is role-playing. Once he sees that he can get his own needs met on a small scale, like buying lunch, he'll be more willing to try to get his needs met on the big issues, like fractions and percents. Parents can practice by role-playing teacher and student with their children.

Every child needs to learn to ask questions and process answers. Those two skills are the essence of all learning. As parents, it's hard for us to let go and watch our children navigate in new territory, but we must. When we jump in and solve our kids' problems for them, we're telling them that they are not capable of solving problems for themselves and we don't trust them to figure things out.

Of course there are appro-

priate ways to ask for help. Talk to your child about how to get her needs met. If she's disappointed about a score on a paper, encourage her see the teacher after class to set up a private time to talk about the paper.

What if your child is feeling overwhelmed by the workload or frustrated and confused in class? Our knee-jerk reaction is to pick up the phone and call the teacher. We shouldn't, though. Not yet. Again, we need to give our kids the chance to work things out before we intervene. They might need to change their work habits at home or develop some in the first place.

Often, kids will come to me and say that last year they breezed through English and had no trouble, but this year they're dying. How much are you studying or reviewing each night, I ask, and how many times? I get blank stares in return. I've never had to study before, comes their reply, and often, therein lies the problem.

Each year will bring new demands, more difficult material and higher expectations. Students need strategies to adjust to these changes.

With communication from all sides, going back to school can be a rewarding adventure.

**Stephanie Long is a local freelance writer and teacher at Traverse City West Senior High School.**

# Children's diet is crucial

BY ERIN ANDERSON

Special to the Record-Eagle

While preparing children for another year at school, one item should be at the top of parents' back-to-school list. Children have to eat. And what they eat is more important than ever.

In the last 20 years, the proportion of overweight children between the ages of 6 and 19 has tripled to a staggering nearly one in every three youngsters. This is not just an appearance issue. It could be the difference between developing into healthy, vital adults or unhealthy, inactive ones.

In fact, overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. This makes them prime candidates for health problems such as high blood pressure, sleep apnea, heart disease and certain cancers.

Even Type-2 diabetes, once thought to be an "adult's disease," is no longer a threat to which kids are immune. The occurrence of this disease in children under 18 has skyrocketed in recent years, with overweight being one of the major contributing factors. These sobering statistics are evidence of what many experts in the health/nutrition field are calling a national crisis.

Yet, with the frantic pace of today's family life, it is often hard to make wise food choices that promote a healthy diet and encourage

children to make positive decisions regarding their health.

That's especially true where lunch is concerned. Lunch is the one meal nearly all children eat at school — whether brought from home or from the cafeteria — and federal studies have shown it's where they get about one-third of their daily calories.

"You have to keep in mind what your kids will really eat," said Patti Hennrick, a dietitian at Munson Medical Center in Traverse City. "Having them play a part in packing the lunch, as well as even participating in the trip to the grocery store, will clue parents in as to what their kids actually like."

Heidi Keckemethy, a dietitian and researcher from the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, DE, suggests avoiding hasty, unhealthy lunch choices by planning weekly lunch menus ahead of time.

As for beverages, her first choice is milk.

"It doesn't matter if it's white or chocolate milk," said Keckemethy. "When a child drinks milk at lunch, they are getting the proper nutrition."

Of course, chocolate milk will have more sugar, so that should be considered, as should low-fat or skim milk with less fat and fewer calories. Juices should be 100 percent juice, rather than juice "drinks," punches or sodas made with high-fruc-

tose corn syrup.

Snack time is another consideration. Many schools are now recognizing the importance of offering snack time, usually mid-morning and especially for younger kids. Often the morning is the longest portion of a child's school day. With hours to go until lunch time and their blood sugar dropping, they can often get hungry, tired and lose their focus.

Keckemethy has one rule of thumb for school snack packing: simple, neat and healthy. She proposes foods like pretzel sticks, trail mix with dried fruit and nuts, individually packaged applesauce or fruit, yogurt or low-fat pudding. She advises parents to stay away from cookies, cakes and other pre-packaged sweets.

A guiding principle for healthy eating in children is to stay away from extremes.

"Don't go overboard," said Hennrick. "I really try to stay away from saying 'Don't ever eat this food' when I'm working with kids."

Instead, Hennrick encourages parents to make sure that as many food groups are represented as possible and that most lunch ingredients are good sources of vitamins and minerals.

"Having a cookie once in a while isn't going to hurt anything as long as the majority of the meal is nutritious."

**Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer and author.**

## Tips for student success

BY STEPHANIE LONG

Special to the Record-Eagle

Here are tips for students that apply to any age:

1. Sit down each night and spend 10 minutes reviewing each subject covered in school that day. Students can also be doing any assignments and organizing their work during this time.
2. Break study sessions into

small chunks of time: 10-20 minute chunks for younger kids, up to 45 minutes for older kids. No one should be studying for hours on end. We tend to remember what we give our brains at the beginning and end of study sessions. Smaller sessions allow for more beginnings and endings.

3. Review each night even if there's no homework assigned. If a child sits down

to review a lesson from class and tries to explain it to you and can't, he's just discovered what question to ask the teacher the next day. If I ask my students if there are any questions and I get no response, it's because they haven't thought about the information, so they don't know what to ask.

4. Break big projects into smaller pieces. It's a kid's job to procrastinate and it's

our job as teachers and parents to show them how to manage their time. Again, 10 minutes a day on a week-long project is going to save the whole family a lot of heartache on the day before it's due.

5. Be suspicious when you hear the line, "I'm failing because my teacher hates me." That's the easiest way for a child to excuse herself from taking responsibility

for learning. Even if the teacher isn't fond of your child or vice-versa, she can still learn valuable lessons, like how to manage conflict. If your child feels like the teacher doesn't like him, tell him to talk to the teacher privately. If that doesn't work, then intervene.

6. Nip stress in the bud. Talk to your child about what she's unhappy about and what she would consid-

er a good experience. Then, talk to her teachers, counselor and principal during the first week of school and hammer out a positive plan for this year.

6. Call or e-mail your child's teachers within the first grading period and check in regularly. Let him know that you and the teacher are working together to help him in his learning.

**RECORD-EAGLE**  
**NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION**

The Newspaper in Education (NIE) program is a cooperative effort between the

- Record-Eagle
- Area schools
- Local businesses,

providing in-classroom interaction with the daily paper. Through this living textbook, dynamic and updated every day, NIE creates a bridge between the classroom and the community.

**In addition to classroom newspapers, NIE provides:**

- Curriculum materials that support the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks
- Original language arts, math, and science programs.
- Economical, effective and exciting teaching vehicles
- The Mini-Page, a weekly, educational children's section in the Sunday paper
- Tours of the Record-Eagle production and distribution facility

**NIE Funding**  
The Record-Eagle and sponsorships from local businesses fund the NIE program. Subscribers can also help by contributing to the "vacation donation fund." For more information on sponsorships or donations, call NIE at (231) 933-1402.

**THINK**  
**BACK-TO-SCHOOL**

Send your kids back-to-school in style...Shop and Save at designer and name brand Outlets at Horizon Outlet Center.

**REGISTER TO WIN \$500 MALL SHOPPING SPREE!**

See Stores for Details

**HORIZON**  
**Outlet**  
**CENTER**  
Traverse City, MI

US-31, 4 Minutes South of Downtown

For more information call 231-941-9211

## NIE and Your Classroom

For more information or to register your classroom, call NIE at (231) 933-1402.