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YOUR CHILD, YOUR SCHOOL, AND YOU

Rev. James R. Deneen & Russell Shaw



A Parent's Guide to the Parish School



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INTRODUCTION

There are at least two days in a person's life, it's said, which nobody ever forgets: his own first day at school and his first child's first day at school. Starting school is a great adventure for everyone concerned, not least for parents. It is a time of great hopefulness—and not a few anxieties.

This booklet aims to remove some of the anxieties, and thereby help fulfill the hope. No printed guide, of course, can answer all the questions of a parent whose child is starting school. Each parent has questions that relate specifically to *his* child and *his* school; he will have to find out the answers for himself.

Questions Parents Ask

But some things are common to every start-of-school experience. Perhaps the most important questions of all relate to attitudes. What can a parent reasonably expect — of his child, of his child's school, of himself? What can he do to ensure that his child's school experience is precisely what all those involved want it to be: a happy, relatively trouble-free adventure in spiritual, mental, emotional and physical growth and development?

The authors hope this booklet will be of use to parents and to school officials: pastors, principals,

teachers, members of boards of education. Each school should have its own orientation program, tailored to its own special situation. This booklet is not meant to take the place of such a program, which ideally should be conducted by parent-teacher groups or school officials at the start of the new school year. However, this manual can be a valuable part of such a program, when supplemented by particularized information about the objectives and methods of the individual school.

A Plan to Follow

The plan of the manual is simple. Beginning with a discussion of parents' expectations, it moves on to an overview of the organization of the Catholic school system and then focuses on the individual school. It tries to explain the goals and programs of the typical Catholic school, suggests standards by which a school can be judged, and points out ways in which parents can be of help to both their school and their children.

There is one very encouraging thing about schools — all schools. Almost without exception, everyone involved in a school — children, teachers and parents — is hoping and working for the same good results: learning and growth. The best recipe for success, then, is to harness these energies into a single cooperative effort. If that is done, and done early, the outcome will be satisfied children, satisfied teachers and satisfied parents.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

What Can You Expect of Your Child?

Expectations often have a strong influence on results. The man who expects success is well along the way to achieving it; the man who expects failure may be guaranteeing it. This is no less true in the school setting than in other areas of life.

Don't Be Negative

If you expect your child to have trouble with math or reading or to turn out to be a "behavior problem," he will probably conform to your prophecy. There is nothing mysterious about this. In various ways, some direct, some indirect, parents convey to children their expectations for them. The children usually behave accordingly. The parent whose expectations about his child's performance in school are negative can blame himself when things turn out badly.

Getting A's Not Basis for Acceptance

Some parents give this matter of expectations an added twist. They let their children know, sometimes subtly but sometimes with shocking directness, that how they do at school will determine whether or not they are accepted at home. This is a tremendous burden to place on a child. If he comes to feel that his standing in your eyes and in your affections hinges on a row of A's on his report card, he will develop fears and anxieties that may hamper him for years to come.

Some children, to be sure, may respond by actually producing that row of A's — but the marks have been bought at a frighteningly high price in emotional health and attitudes toward schoolwork. Other children may simply not have the ability to earn A's under any circumstances,

and life becomes bleak for them. In either case, the child whose parents make him believe that he has to “produce” in order to be loved is unlikely to be happy either at home or at school.

An emotionally secure child is, after all, likely to do better in school and be happier in doing it. An emotionally secure child knows that he is loved and valued for his own sake, not for what his report card says about him.

How Important Are Grades?

Grades are important, but not *that* important. A parent has a right to expect his child to do as well in school as he is capable of doing, but he should have a realistic idea of how well that is. Don't pressure your child to get A's if he is a B student at heart. Above all, don't make him feel that grades are going to change the way you feel about him or that he has to come up with high marks in order to win your love.

This is sometimes hard for parents to understand, particularly the parent who was an A student himself and whose child doesn't seem to have the same talent for getting high grades. But parents should be fair in what they expect of their children, and in no circumstances should they make their love a “reward” for good marks. To do otherwise is to invite disaster.



What Can You Expect From Your School?

This question is easier to answer if you see your school and its teachers as an extension of yourself. (It is also easier to answer if teachers and administrators see themselves in the same way — but that is subject matter for another booklet.)

The school, in other words, is not a separate entity to which parents turn over their children once and for all, with either an anxious prayer or a sigh of relief. A responsible parent shouldn't want to get off the hook that easily. A school is a helper — an essential one, of course, but still

only a helper to which parents entrust part (but by no means all) of the responsibility for the education of their children.

You Can't Dodge Responsibility

The responsibility is in the first place the parents'. It is the parents who brought the child into the world, the parents who raised and formed him, and the parents who, in sending him to school, *delegate* some of their responsibility to the school.

Looked at this way, it is obvious that parents cannot be indifferent toward the school. But neither can they be unfairly demanding. As a parent, you should make the same demands on your child's teachers — and the same reasonable allowances for them — as you make on and for yourself.

What can you expect? You can certainly require that your child be loved and treated as an individual, that his behavior be regulated by consistently enforced discipline, that he be given adult models of Christian behavior, that he be taught respect for himself and for other persons, and that his natural, undisciplined curiosity be patiently directed toward a productive love for learning.

That, after all, is what parents do, isn't it? At least most of the time? And it is what they have a right to expect of teachers. Moreover, it is what they are likely to get. If your child's

teachers didn't want these things for him, they would scarcely have chosen the difficult profession of teaching. There are certainly easier ways to make a living.

There Are Bound to Be Differences

Still, no one can pretend that agreement on basic goals settles the matter. Teachers, like parents, differ on the best way to achieve these goals. Just as there are strict parents and permissive parents, parents who rely on authority and parents who rely on persuasion, so there are teachers who fall into different categories and, by reason of personality or educational theory, use different methods of achieving the same goals. They differ among themselves and some may differ with you. The reasonable parent will anticipate this and not expect every teacher to do everything in the same way that he would.

Furthermore, teachers, like parents, have their good days and their bad days (and some even have their perfectly terrible days). Like you, teachers sometimes fail to act toward their children as they really intend — and as, under better circumstances, they would act.

It's not uncommon, for instance, to hear from a child that he was punished in school for something he didn't do ("It wasn't me who was talking, it was Billy!"). In this case, there are two possibilities. You may be getting only part of the story (true, Billy talked first, but Johnny an-

swered). Or the child may be right and he *was* unfairly punished.

What Then?

What does a parent do then? Before flying off the handle and phoning the teacher, it may be well to consider how often you, in moments of stress, have made the same mistake in disciplining your children. Parents and teachers both try to be fair, patient and understanding. But, being human, they all sometimes fall short of the mark.

Parents have a right to expect their children to be taught by professionally trained teachers whose mental attitudes equip them to carry out their desires for their children. Parents, however, do not have a right to expect teachers to be any less imperfect than they are themselves.



WHERE LEARNING BEGINS

Preschool Learning

School is a place where children learn things, but it is not the place where children *begin* to learn things. No child arrives at his first day in school with a mind like a clean chalkboard. He has already acquired many attitudes and skills and much information, all of which he brings with him to school and most of which have a strong bearing on what he does in school.

A sensible parent will do his best to see to it that the emotional and intellectual equipment his child brings with him to school will enable him

to do well in — and get the most out of — school. This is not a plea to teach children to read by the age of three and do the “new math” by the time they are four. It stands to reason, however, that the child will make a happier adjustment to school if he does not have to spend time learning certain basic attitudes toward himself and others—or, worse, unlearning other attitudes which will hamper him.

A Question of Attitudes

Attitudes are immensely important. Parents can compile a simple check list on attitudes by answering such questions as these: Does the child have a rudimentary concept of the right of other children to the attention of adults — is he, in other words, prepared to “let the other children have a turn”? Does he have some familiarity with the physical surroundings of his school? Few of us enjoy being thrust totally unprepared into a new environment, and the experience can be particularly upsetting for young children. If you can take a quick tour of the school with your child, fine. If not, at least you can walk past the school with him a few times and show him where it is situated in relation to home.

Has your child had a chance to meet the adults he will deal with in the school? Try to arrange for him to meet his teacher before school starts. (But remember that teachers are busy people and often are not available during the

summer months. It might be better for you to bring Johnny or Susie by to say hello sometime before the end of the previous school year.)

Does your child have a few acquaintances among his new classmates? Usually this is no problem, since other children from your neighborhood will probably be starting school along with him. If not, you may have to arrange a few introductions — and play sessions — before school starts.

While helping their children acquire good attitudes toward the new adventure of school, parents should be equally careful not to encourage bad attitudes. Has your child been threatened with dire predictions of how his teachers will deal with him? (“Maybe you think you can get away with that stuff at home, but I can tell you right now your teacher won’t put up with it next year!”) It’s very easy to give a child the notion that school is really a kind of jail where the teachers act as wardens. And this is sure to be a major roadblock to his success at school.

Should He Be Taught to Read?

There are some skills a child need *not* bring to school with him — those that he will be taught there anyway. Much time can be wasted and many anxieties fostered by trying to force preschool children to learn skills the school is better able to teach him.

This is not an argument against the preschools

and preschool programs which have become so popular in recent years. They can do a lot of good, provided parents have a clear idea of what to expect from them and do not make unreasonable demands on either the preschool or the preschooler.

Unfortunately, having a child who can read by the time he is four seems to have become a sort of status symbol with some parents. There is nothing wrong with a child's reading by age four, provided he is ready to read and actually wants to read. But children do not all progress at the same rate, and putting pressure on your child — directly or indirectly — to "perform" may turn him against the whole idea of learning. If you do enroll him in a preschool program, be sure it is one which makes allowances for individual differences among children; and be even more sure that you do not start the "Why didn't you get an A?" routine before he has even reached first grade.

If you do not enroll him in a preschool, by all means don't substitute home pressures of your own. Thus, if your preschooler wants to know what words on a printed page mean, tell him. But don't imagine that either his curiosity or his lack of it is your signal to launch a systematic program of reading instruction. Tell him what he wants to know and seems capable of absorbing, but don't push him beyond that point. Read to him when you and he feel like it, give him pic-

ture books and lots of blank paper and colored pencils. But don't try to grade the results in terms of your expectations or a school program.

Basic Skills May Be More Important

You can, however, teach your child other, more basic skills which will be immensely helpful to him in school. They may not have the prestige value — for parents — of reading at age four, but at that point in his life they will be more important to him.

Speaking and listening skills fall in this category. When you listen to your child and respond to him, you teach him a great deal about himself, about the means and value of communication, and about your respect for him. It is very important to children to be taken seriously when they have something to say — and to be taught to say things in a way that will cause them to be taken seriously.

Help your child to learn how to listen, too. The child who can't "hear" instructions, who can't "sit still" long enough to take in explanations, is handicapped in school. Such activities as reading aloud, simple word games and games which involve giving and carrying out instructions all develop learning skills.

Out-of-School Learning

Most of the above remarks apply to children beginning school. Most, too, relate to parents'

influence in developing the attitudes and skills of their children. But parents must also recognize that a great deal of children's learning — both before they start school and perhaps especially after — takes place beyond the influence of both home and school and can be entirely controlled by neither.

“Peer-Group” Influence

Sociologists speak of a child's “peer group,” which mean basically the other children with whom he associates: his friends, playmates and classmates. Children within a given peer group are constantly instructing one another in attitudes and skills, and as the child matures the influence of the group is likely to become very strong indeed.

This is not in itself either surprising or undesirable. Parents may sometimes resent it, particularly when the accumulated wisdom of an eight-year-old down the block seems to carry more weight with their Billy than their own does, but it is a fact of life for which they should be prepared and which they will have to learn to accept.

Information or Misinformation?

More upsetting to parents may be the nature of the information — or misinformation — which children pick up from other children. Parents are often quite disturbed, for instance, when they

discover that their children are getting a substantial, though frequently distorted, indoctrination in the facts of life from other youngsters.

In this situation neither anxiety nor anger is the appropriate parental response. Indeed, if the parents "blow up," the child is likely only to become confused and disturbed about sex. Instead, parents should anticipate the possibility that their children will be given misinformation about sex by other youngsters and should head off trouble by getting there first with accurate facts and healthy attitudes on the subject.

This in fact is the best parental response to the whole matter of "peer-group" influence. Anticipate it, don't fight it directly, but make sure to give your child proper information and attitudes.

Where You May Have to Step In

There is, of course, an exception — the problem that arises when other children seem to be influencing yours in grossly inappropriate and even dangerous ways. If, for instance, your son's or daughter's friends are intensely opposed to the whole idea of school and schoolwork and seem to be undermining your own child's attitude toward school, then more direct steps should be taken, perhaps even to the point of seeing to it that your child no longer associates with this particular set of youngsters.

In this area there are no easy-to-follow rules,

and much will depend on the parents' good sense and their relationship of mutual trust and respect with their child. One thing won't work, and that is raving and ranting. These days the parent who "loses his cool" with his children has already lost the battle, too.



YOUR CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Every parochial school is part of a diocesan school system. Although the extent of centralized control varies from one diocese to another, the organization of each diocesan system is basically the same.

At the center of the system is the diocesan school office, headed by a diocesan superintendent (the title may vary from one place to another).

The diocesan office is comparable in its functions and authority to the central office of a public school district. Individual schools have a good deal of autonomy and the school office does not decide each and every detail of each and every school's program. It does, however, require a certain necessary uniformity in various matters.

Typically, the diocesan superintendent of schools will regulate the following areas for your parish school: textbooks (sometimes allowing a choice from among several officially approved texts), the length of the school day and school year (again allowing for local adjustments), teacher standards and the conditions of teacher employment, diocesan examinations such as those given for admission to high school, and general standards for the admission and discipline of pupils.

Diocesan Boards Increasing

At this writing about 110 of the nearly 150 American dioceses have diocesan boards of education which set broad policies governing the administration of the diocesan school office. The nature of the authority exercised by these boards varies. In some dioceses bishops have turned over to the boards the entire responsibility for policy-making in school matters at the diocesan level. In other dioceses the bishops have retained the right to review and amend decisions reached by the boards.

The diocesan board and the diocesan office deal with pretty much the same problems your parish school faces, although at the diocesan level. Among these are limitations of funds and the problem of properly staffing the schools.

Centralization Gaining

A number of forces are now influencing dioceses toward greater centralization in school matters. These include inequities in parish incomes (obvious in the contrast between poor inner-city parishes and wealthy suburban ones), the shortage of religious teachers and the difficulty of finding well-prepared lay teachers. Such challenges can be dealt with more efficiently and more fairly by a central diocesan authority responsible for distributing funds and teaching personnel among parishes.

Generally speaking, most parents will be primarily concerned with their own parish school and not too interested in the school picture throughout the diocese. Still, it doesn't pay to be too parochial. Catholics have a duty to be interested in the well-being of the entire diocese as well as their own particular parish. Furthermore, the problems of somebody else's parish today could be your parish's tomorrow.

A good deal more needs to be done in Catholic education to achieve centralization and cooperation. Those with experience in the field feel, for example, that centralization in financial

matters will be increasingly necessary for Catholic education in the future. The idea of regional schools—combining resources and enrolling children from several neighboring parishes — is also being examined seriously. Catholics need to inform themselves on such matters and be receptive to new ideas designed to strengthen the whole Catholic school system.



YOUR PARISH SCHOOL

Goals

As was said earlier, the school is an extension of the teaching authority of the parents. Your parish school, therefore, should be what parents want it to be and should do what parents want it to do. (This has to be qualified, however, by the fact that the state and the Church have legitimate rights and purposes in education, and the school must recognize them also.)

In general there are two reasons why parents entrust a child to a Catholic school. First, they are confident that the child will there acquire

basic skills and information needed for a happy and productive life. Second, they are confident that the child will there be exposed — through the example of adults and other children, the physical environment, the curriculum and other programs — to values, motives and attitudes which will enable him to grow into a mature Christian.

If a school consistently fails in the first of these aims, it is not a good school. If it consistently fails in the second, it does not deserve to be called a “Catholic” school.

Organization

At this writing, policy in more than one-fourth of the parochial schools in the country is regulated by a parish board of education or its equivalent. While boards are a feature of long standing in American public education, their appearance in large numbers in American Catholic education is relatively new.

Methods of selection of board members vary from place to place. Ideally, they should be chosen by the parishioners themselves, but many parishes have found it more practical to begin with boards appointed by the pastor. The pastor is himself a member of the board and sometimes reserves the right to review its decisions, but more typically — and properly — the board’s decision is final within the framework of policies set by the diocesan board of education.

The principal of the parish school is the executive officer of the parish board. Her position is comparable to that of the diocesan superintendent in relation to the diocesan board. The principal therefore is the administrative head of the school, responsible to the parish board for carrying out its policies and to the diocesan school office for administrative direction and supervision. Unless the functions are completely under diocesan control, the principal should be responsible for hiring and supervising the teaching staff, in line with standards set by the diocesan and parish boards.

In parishes without boards of education, the pastor usually has the final say on parish school policy. This has been the typical pattern for parochial education in the past and remains so in many parishes today. While it has often worked well and may continue to do so, there is a growing feeling that boards represent a more effective and up-to-date response to the needs of Catholic education.

Becoming Involved

There are many advantages to boards, best summed up in the word "involvement." They represent a practical implementation of Vatican II's directives on giving lay people a greater voice and more active role in Church institutions. They are in line with American educational tradition and emphasize the fact that

Catholic schools are in fact "community" schools — schools, that is, which serve the community and are in turn responsive to it. They have proved to be effective instruments for the improvement of educational practices and facilities. Most important, perhaps, they provide a direct link between school and parish and thus foster parish support for the programs of the school.

The Learning Program

A high degree of uniformity and regimentation is necessary for learning in the early years. Today educators are stressing — quite rightly — the need to tailor programs to the abilities of individual students; but the fact remains that fundamental skills in language and mathematics must be acquired by all youngsters.

Uniformity also serves a useful psychological purpose in the early school years by helping to create in children a sense of community. The feeling of "belonging" to a group helps the child to mature, fosters in him a spirit of altruism — willingness to give up his own immediate satisfactions for the good of the larger community, and gives him the emotional reassurance of order and group approval.

Discipline is needed in order to achieve all of these goals. In the early school years, discipline centers on giving the child a strong sense of his obligation toward the group. In the middle and later grades the emphasis shifts to place more

stress on the individuality and personal responsibility of the child. An understanding of these concepts should help parents to appreciate more clearly what it is the school is trying to accomplish and how.

In every school the content of instruction in the early grades will focus on a “core” of language and math. Beyond these areas, there is a good deal of freedom and variation concerning which other subjects are included in the curriculum.

Openness to Change

Today’s good school environment is marked by openness to change — new ideas and new methods. Certainly things have changed a lot since you were in school and they are still changing. It is important to realize that these changes are not mere arbitrary tinkering with the school program but result from intensive investigation of how children can be helped to learn in the best possible way.

The modern educator understands that methods of teaching need constant review, as more effective means are discovered of achieving the same basic goals of learning. Typical of the techniques found in today’s elementary schools are “task assignments” with children working cooperatively instead of competitively in small groups rather than alone, and “team teaching” in which several teachers pool their strengths and

the children are exposed to a variety of adult models.

Don't be disappointed, though, if your child's school doesn't happen to have the latest educational innovation — whatever it may be — that you may have read about. Your child's teachers are professionals who know their business, and it is usually safe to leave the details of the educational program to them.

Some Common Worries

There are several things which parents — and others concerned about the quality of education in a particular school — commonly worry about. Obviously this booklet can't deal with specific situations. But a few remarks can be made in a general way about these matters of concern.

A great deal has been said and written about class size. Actually there is no conclusive research showing what the "best" size for a class is. It depends — on what is being taught, to whom, by whom and in what manner.

The key seems to be the quality of the teacher and the nature of the learning activity under way at a particular time. A poor teacher will teach any number of children badly. A good teacher will know how to divide the group according to the learning activity then in progress and will use individual, small-group and large-group activity as appropriate. Obviously, adequate space and sufficient time and/or assistance are needed for

this, and if the class is simply *too* large (or perhaps too small) some worthwhile activities will be ruled out.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is very difficult to assess. State standards (usually a four-year college degree with teacher training) more or less guarantee a certain minimal ability. But they don't really do much more than that.

For instance, the fact that a teacher meets minimum standards says nothing about his or her personal qualities, ethical standards and intelligence. It doesn't even tell much about the quality of the professional preparation the teacher has received, since the standards of teacher-training institutions differ.

The best test of teacher quality lies in the answer to this question: "Has this person taught or is she now teaching successfully according to the reasonable criteria of the profession and of parents?" In teaching more than in most fields nothing succeeds like success.

Lay Teachers

A word should be said here about lay teachers in Catholic schools. Some Catholic parents seem to have a peculiar prejudice against lay teachers, as if their children were being shortchanged if they are not taught by a sister. The fact is, however, that some 40 percent of the teachers in

Catholic elementary and secondary schools are now lay people, and there simply are not enough sisters, brothers and priests to go around. Catholic schools have to rely on their dedicated lay teachers in order to stay in business.

There is no reason to think that the lay teacher is inferior to the religious teacher either in personal qualities or professional preparation. Lay people who teach in Catholic schools generally do so at considerable financial sacrifice — a pretty good sign that they are dedicated to their work. And there is a real advantage in having children exposed in school not only to religious but also to devoted lay people who serve as living models of the high ideals and dedication that are possible in the layman's life. A school isn't "Catholic" because sisters teach there; it is "Catholic" because of its goals and its program. Lay teachers are a necessary and welcome part of the Catholic educational apostolate.

Religious Education

Religion is generally regarded as the chief "plus" factor in a Catholic school — the thing that makes it most different from other schools and causes most parents to send their children there. The teaching of religion in a particular school may be either good or bad, but it is always incomplete. The school is only one factor in the religious education of the child, and parents cannot fairly expect it to do the whole job.

To be sure, the school is probably the child's chief source of information about religion, at least in the later school years. But "information" is only a part of religious education. In the matter of religious behavior (like attendance at Mass and reception of the sacraments), both the home and the school are highly influential. And in the formation of religious attitudes and motivation (probably the most important part of "religious education"), the school is only one agent, along with the family, the child's friends and acquaintances, television and movies, and other influences.

Most parish schools today do a good job of conveying religious information, and most are improving their understanding of how they can influence religious behavior. More and more thought, too, is being given to forming religious attitudes. Many Catholic educators today feel that the school is most effective in this area when it is seen as — and operates as — a Christian "community" within which the child not only learns *about* religion but learns to *live* his religion.

Very definitely this implies a change from the past, when religious education was thought to consist of memorizing answers to catechism questions. The Catholic school today is likely to put more emphasis on exploration and experience. One evidence of good religious teaching is the way in which the school consciously and systematically works and uses the home and other

environmental influences in forming the child's religious attitudes and motives.

Evaluating Your School

Every parent is concerned — sometimes too concerned — about the quality of his child's school. There are several ways of evaluating a school. Remember, though, that there is no absolute connection between the "quality" of a school, as measured by particular criteria, and how well your child will learn in that school.

One evaluation method is by fixed criteria. State departments of instruction and many diocesan school offices have standard evaluation forms for schools. It is doubtful that either of these agencies would send an individual parent completed reports on a particular school, since these contain personal judgments on individual teachers and administrators. But either would probably send a blank form upon request.

A typical form covers the school's physical facilities (buildings, grounds and furnishings), instructional materials, especially the number and quality of textbooks, library books and audio-visual aids, the organization of the school, its teaching methods and curriculum, and the teachers and administrators. Information on faculty covers the number of staff in relation to the number of students, and their certification (based primarily on educational background and secondarily on their teaching experience).

Observing Results

A more useful but probably more difficult evaluation of a school can be made by observing the results it achieves. Significant here — although admittedly based on very subjective judgments — is the reputation the school enjoys in the community. Do thoughtful, sensible people believe your school does a good job? If so, why do they think so?

Another sound but difficult variation of this approach is to compare the results achieved by your parish school with those of other schools with a *comparable* student body. How well have graduates of your parish school done in the next school they attended? Have they won their fair share of honors and awards? Have they scored well on standard tests of academic achievement?

A combination of the methods outlined above would be preferable to either alone in evaluating your school. But not even both together will answer that fundamental question: How well will your child do in this particular school? In the last analysis, parents must answer this for themselves. Each of your children differs from the others, and from all other children. In judging a particular school, ask what you can reasonably expect it to do for this unique child. And, to be realistic, you must also ask what alternatives — what other schools — are available and how each of them would measure up.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

The point of this booklet has been to suggest ways in which you as a parent can help your child and your school to get the most out of their encounter with each other. Here are a few additional suggestions:

1. Realize that the combination of home and school is the major influence in your young child's life. One is handicapped without the other; and when one is fighting the other, both are less effective. Take a positive approach and work to further the goals that you share with your school for your child.

2. Help your child enjoy school. Even though a good school can minimize them, there are some things that all children dislike about school: sitting still, disciplined conversation, being tested. Still, the fact remains that children are generally eager to learn. Encourage that eagerness — not by making school a threat or a setting for humiliation, but by showing your child that school can be an exciting and rewarding experience.

3. Don't let homework time be the most traumatic part of the day for either you or your child. Some schools, often in response to the demands of overanxious parents, give homework assignments that are absurd and painfully burdensome in length and content. Protect your child against unreasonable demands and you will be helping him in school.

4. Take part willingly in programs designed to foster cooperation between home and school. Attend home and school meetings and meetings of your parish board of education. Get to know your child's teachers (but in a relaxed and friendly way, not as a nagger or a pleader for special favors). Try to understand what your school is doing for your child, and how and why. Be reasonable when problems arise — and grateful when they don't.



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