

# ELEMENTARY edition

A PUBLICATION FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS



## School Preparation

Each school year poses challenges and changes



From students' first backpacks to the moving-up ceremony that marks the end of elementary school, the early years are filled with lots of changes. Some children dive into these new experiences and responsibilities year after year with ease and excitement; others have difficulty getting their feet wet in the unfamiliar waters. With a little encouragement and guidance from you, your children can better understand where they are headed and can replace their apprehensiveness with eagerness.

Here are some of the more common changes and challenges your children will encounter each new school year, as well as some steps parents can take to prepare children for these changes.

### New teachers

Elementary school children can easily become attached to their teachers and take comfort in their familiar classroom settings. It's no wonder, then, that some children become fearful, anxious, or irritated at the thought of "losing" their teacher as a school year starts to wind down.

Here's what parents can do:

1. Before the current school year even ends, begin talking about the teachers who will be teaching in your child's grade next year. Explain to your children that they will be in one of those teachers' classrooms next year, and how exciting it will be for them to learn from a new teacher.
2. Put a friendly face to teachers' names by using the yearbook or Web site to show your child pictures of the teachers in the next grade. If there's an opportunity at the school (such as meet-the-teachers night), introduce your child to those teachers.
3. Older siblings or neighborhood kids are a great resource to

find out more about teachers in higher grades. Ask them to talk to your little one about some of the things they really like about their teacher, as well as some of the fun and exciting things that happen in those classrooms.

### New students

Along with meeting new teachers every year, your children may also be in a classroom with students they haven't met yet.

This can be especially tough for children who are shy and/or have trouble meeting new people.

Here's what parents can do:

1. Explain to your children that they can continue friendships with classmates they no longer routinely see. Allow your children to set up regular "get-togethers" (after school or on the weekends) with their friends. Encourage them to join an organized club together (Brownies, Boy Scouts, etc.) or start a club of their own (book club, art club) that meets regularly. "This frequent contact with friends that they don't get to see everyday in the classroom can help children form lasting relationships," says a mother of an eight-year-old who hosts a weekly "Star Wars" club for her son and three of his friends.
2. Talk to your children about the importance of making friends with other kids in their classroom. Remind them that everyone is nervous about meeting new people (even adults), but that they just might find a few new best friends. Explain to your children that as they move from grade to grade, some of their school assignments will likely be group projects that require collaboration with their classmates outside of school. "Children will be more successful and productive—as well as have more fun—if they have a good working relationship with their class-

mates," says a K-12 instructional leader. Additionally, knowing how to meet and get along with new people is a skill that will help your children now and in the future. Research shows that employers seek to hire employees with good social skills.

### Growing personal responsibilities

As children grow and mature, so should their personal responsibilities. They begin to care for themselves (bathing, choosing their own clothes) and their environment (keeping their room clean, making their bed) without constant reminders from parents. Personal responsibility also carries into school, where teachers expect students to follow school and classroom rules and instructions. However, too much responsibility too quickly can be a tough adjustment for some children, especially those who do not live in a household as structured as a classroom.

Here's what parents can do:

1. Being on time for school and ready to learn is a must. Teach your children how to prepare for school the night before. Have them lay out their clothes and make their lunch before going to bed. Book bags, footwear, and outerwear should be placed in the same location each night so there's no scrambling around in the morning. "Good attendance and timeliness is a trait that students should learn early and carry with them forever," says one elementary school principal.

2. Use a family calendar or personal planner (some schools provide these) to get kids organized. If Mondays are library days and Thursdays are P.E. days, it should be written on the calendar to remind children to pack the necessary items. Include on the calendar when school projects are due so that your children aren't scurrying around the night before to complete what they could have been working on all week.

3. Daily homework should be completed and ready to hand in. As much as possible, try to set aside the same time each day specifically for homework and/or studying. Ask to look at your children's completed homework or help them study, and then be sure they pack their work so it's not forgotten the next morning. "It happens, children forget things," says a fifth-grade teacher. "But when a child repeatedly leaves his completed homework on the kitchen counter, he has to be held responsible. It's not fair to the other children who follow the rules. For younger children, many teachers provide a daily "take-home" folder, which typically contains the day's homework assignment along with any announcements, permission slips, and other notices. Set aside a time each day when you and your child go through the folder. Afterward, put it back in your child's bag so she's prepared when the teacher asks for each item.

mark your **Calendar**

# Making the grade at test time

## Preparing for classroom and state tests

Even at the elementary level, preparing for the school day sometimes means preparing for a test. Most tests are created by teachers based on classroom material, but several are created by the New York State Education Department. These two broad categories of tests are used and prepared for quite differently.

Tests are an assessment tool, one of several in the classroom. Teachers generally use them to determine which students need to focus more on particular topics and to gauge whether a different approach might help students better understand a concept. For fourth-grade teacher Jessica Melchior, the tests she creates help her figure out where students are stumbling.

"The results drive instruction because they demonstrate students' comprehension and mastery," said Melchior, who teaches at Jefferson Elementary School.

Before a test, many teachers devote some classroom time to test preparation. This might involve having a student create a mnemonic device, make a study sheet or take a pre-test to help determine what areas he or she still needs to work on. Parents can assist in the test preparation and help their children build study skills.

"I have parents who create study guides and quiz their children on the material at home," said Mary Zanta, another fourth-grade teacher at Jefferson.

She said she believes there is a link between students' success on tests and parents' involvement in the preparation process. One of the most important things parents can do to help their children prepare for a class test is to show an interest. "The child learns that being prepared is of value, not just from the teacher's perspective, but from the home perspective, too," said Zanta.

Parents' best resource for staying on top of upcoming tests is the student planner. At the start of the school year, elementary students receive a planner with space for writing homework assignments, test dates, special event information, and more. Some teachers have students write their own notes about upcoming tests. Others staple in a piece of paper with the information. Teachers also sometimes share test schedules at open houses, in homework packets or on Web sites.

"It's hard to say, 'In a month, we'll be done with this unit, so expect a test,'" said Stacy Barron, a third-grade teacher at Mariaville Elementary School. "In my class, about a week before we finish the unit, I have the kids write down that we'll have a test."

When it comes time to prepare for a state test, such as the NYS math exams for grades 3-5 in March, many teachers have to shift their focus. "Our classroom tests are driven by the language we use

### March

- 2-6 **Grades 3-5 NYS Math Exams**
- 2-30 Woestina – Parents as Reading Partners
- 3 Mariaville – After-school Program, 3:05 p.m.
- Woestina – Afternoon Activities, 3 p.m.
- 4 Jefferson – Preschool Story Hour  
Jefferson – After-school Program, 3 p.m.
- 6 Woestina – Family Dessert Night and Book Swap
- 9 Board of Ed. Meeting, 7 p.m. @ Woestina
- 10 Jefferson – Kindergarten registration  
Jefferson – PTO meeting, 7 p.m.  
Mariaville – After-school Program, 3:05 p.m.  
Mariaville – PTO Meeting, 6:30 p.m.  
Woestina – Afternoon Activities, 3 p.m.
- 11 Jefferson – Preschool Story Hour  
Jefferson – After-school Program, 3 p.m.
- 12 Woestina – Kindergarten registration, 1:30 p.m.
- 13 Mariaville – Family Movie Night, 7 p.m.  
Woestina – Morning Program, 9:15 a.m.  
Woestina – Spring Picture Day
- 17 Mariaville – After-school Program, 3:05 p.m.  
Woestina – Afternoon Activities, 3 p.m.

- 18 Jefferson – Preschool Story Hour  
Jefferson – After-school Program, 3 p.m.  
Woestina – PTO Meeting, 6 p.m.
- 20 Mariaville – PTO Sock Hop, 3:05 p.m.
- 23 Board of Ed. Meeting, 7 p.m. @ MS LGI
- 24 Woestina – Afternoon Activities, 3 p.m.
- 25 Jefferson – Preschool Story Hour  
Jefferson – After-school Program, 3 p.m.
- 27 **NO SCHOOL**
- 30-4/9 Woestina – Spring Fundraiser

### April

- 3 Mariaville – Talent Show, 7 p.m.
- 6 Board of Ed. Meeting, 7 p.m. @ Jefferson
- 7 Jefferson – PTO Meeting, 7 p.m.
- 8 **Elementary Report Cards Distributed**  
Jefferson – PTO TV Turnoff Activity  
Mariaville – Family Movie Night, 7 p.m.
- 10-17 **NO SCHOOL – Spring Recess**
- 21-23 Grade 4 NYS Science Exams
- 22 Jefferson – PTO TV Turnoff Activity
- 23 Jefferson – Grade 1 Play, 7 p.m. @ HS
- 24 Mariaville – Family Fun Night, 6 p.m.  
Woestina – Family Science Night
- 27 Board of Ed. Meeting, 7 p.m. @ MS LGI
- 28-29 Jefferson Learning Fair
- 28 Mariaville, Woestina – Grades 4-5 Concert, 7 p.m. @ HS
- 29 Jefferson – PTO TV Turnoff Activity

in class. The state tests use different language every year, so we have to adjust to the test vocabulary," said Zanta. "We really have to teach students test-taking strategies more than material because we don't know in advance what's on the exam," added Barron. "That may mean teaching them how to figure out what a question is asking or how to use the process of elimination to answer a multiple choice question." The results of state tests generally are not available for several months. For that

reason, they are most often used by teachers in the grade level above the one in which the test was administered. They are also used by special education staff to determine if a student needs additional instructional services.

No matter the type of test, elementary students are likely to see greater success with the support of their parents. Parents are encouraged to contact their children's teachers for more information on upcoming tests and test preparation tips.

Don't forget to sign up to receive the latest elementary school news through Schalmont's School News Notifier at

[www.schalmont.org!](http://www.schalmont.org!)

SPRING 2009 • Elementary Edition

Jefferson Elementary  
355-1342  
Principal, Joby Gifford  
Assistant Principal, Beth Bini  
Mariaville Elementary  
864-5411  
Principal, Brian Hunt  
Woestina Elementary  
887-5600  
Principal, Shari Lontrato  
Schalmont Central School  
District  
355-9200  
Superintendent, Dr. Valerie Kelsey  
Produced in cooperation with the Capital Region  
BOCES Communications Service.



**Schalmont** CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
401 Duaneburg Road  
Scheneectady, NY 12306

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 703  
Scheneectady, NY