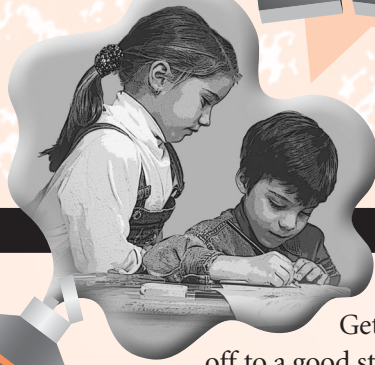


# ELEMENTARY

## edition

A PUBLICATION FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS



Getting your children off to a good start in the new school year involves more than simply stocking their backpacks with the proper school supplies and enforcing earlier bedtimes. In fact, parents have two important “back to school” events coming up that can help set the stage for a successful school year.

This issue of Elementary Edition looks at ways families can get the most out of open houses and parent-teacher conferences. It also suggests four important ways parents can support their child’s learning all year long.

### Back to school — for parents, too!

Open House is an annual event that gives parents the opportunity to meet the school administrators, special area teachers, teaching assistants, counselors and others.

But most importantly, Open House is the time to meet your child’s classroom teacher, learn what your child will be studying and what will be expected of him or her in the coming year. It’s also a good time to find out about opportunities to volunteer in the classroom and other school settings.

Keep in mind, Open House is a time to listen and ask big-picture questions. Save questions or concerns about your child’s individual performance for a private follow-up. A parent-teacher conference is an ideal setting for this.

### Getting the most out of your parent-teacher conference

Parent conferences are private meetings with your child’s teacher, and sign-up generally takes place at the Open House. The annual fall/winter parent-teacher conference is a prime opportunity for you to talk about your child’s personality and anything else you think will help the teacher gain insights about him or her. These conferences are also an important opportunity to hear about your child’s academic performance, how well he or she gets along with classmates and if there are any areas of concern.

The following tips can help you get the most value from upcoming parent-teacher conferences:

▶ **Have some advance discussions with your spouse and your child before the conference** to brainstorm questions or concerns. For example, do you have questions about the amount of time your child should be spending on homework or nightly reading? Are you wondering how to help your child prepare for the new state tests in grades 3-8 this year? Make a list of questions and bring it with you to the conference. If you run out of time, make a point to follow up later.

▶ **If a problem area is identified, think positive.** Talk about possible underlying causes that might be at play, such as social or emotional stresses—in school or at home. Ask for advice about how you can work together with the teacher to resolve any problems. Don’t be afraid to ask about school-

based resources to help your child be successful, such as academic intervention services (AIS) or help from a school counselor.

▶ **Once the conference is over, take a few minutes to jot down some notes.** Make a list of any ideas that the teacher gave you that will help your child be successful in school. At the same time, make a record of any actions you agreed to take (e.g., checking homework nightly) and write down any questions you may still have. If you’d like another meeting to discuss details, call or write the teacher to schedule it.

▶ **Let your child know what you talked about in the conference.** Knowing that adults were talking about them out of earshot makes some children a little anxious. Let your child know what kinds of things you talked about. Stress the positive points. If there are any problem areas, get your child’s perspective as well. Then be prepared to talk about what each of you — parent, teacher and student — can do to make things better.

▶ **Start a school folder for each of your children.** Include past conference notes, notes from the teacher and school staff, standardized test results and any notes you have made in the time between conferences. Then when conference time rolls around again next year, you’ll have quick reference materials to draw upon.

## Welcome back to school!

*It’s a family affair!*



### Working as a learning team all year long

Other than open house and parent conferences, there are other important ways to stay involved and up-to-date throughout the year. Listed below are four important suggestions from veteran elementary parents:

- Learn the best way to contact your child’s teacher and check in regularly. Whether it’s a note sent to school with your child, a phone call or an e-mail, establish a system for checking in with teachers between report cards.
- Look through your child’s take-home folder daily. Most teachers use “backpack mail” to communicate about topics that affect the entire class, such as field trips or health concerns, and deadlines, such as those for registering for after-school activities.
- Set a consistent time for homework and check that it is done nightly. Homework is designed to reinforce important lessons started at school. If the teacher recommends that families practice a specific learning task at home, make a commitment to invest the time. It will put your child that much further ahead academically.
- Offer to volunteer at the school. This can go a long way toward improving the educational environment for all children. Parent volunteers get to see, first-hand, how their children learn and interact with teachers and classmates. They also gain important insights about their child’s friends and often meet other like-minded parents. Volunteering also helps parents to forge friendlier relationships with teachers and other school staff. This can go a long way toward building trust and softening the tension that can arise if problems develop down the road.

## Volunteering can be an easy way to get involved in your child's education

The back-to-school list of "things to do" is a familiar ritual at the beginning of each school year. Some of the obvious items may include shopping for new clothes and school supplies or double-checking your child's bus route number and pick-up time. One element that is easy to overlook is how to get involved at your child's school.

A great start is marking down the dates for open houses and parent-teacher conferences and establishing new homework-time rules. Another way to push your involvement even further is to explore volunteer opportunities at your child's school. Volunteering is a great way to show that you value your child's education because you are actually becoming a part of it.

The Greater Johnstown School District offers many volunteer opportunities. The largest and all-encompassing organization is your child's elementary Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The following are some questions and answers to help get you started.

### "What are the benefits of joining the PTA?"

One of the major benefits of becoming involved in the PTA is that it is the easiest and most direct way to make the connection between yourself and the school. When going to a PTA meeting or volunteering for a PTA-sponsored event, you meet fellow parents as well as the school building staff.

"The most important thing is networking," said Cindy Lakata, Central Council PTA president. "You get to really know the parents, teachers and administrators. It is especially great for new people in the community."

Getting to know the people in your children's educational circle can benefit their academic success in many ways. If there is ever a problem that arises and you need to contact the school, you will more easily be able to put together the name and face of the administrator or teacher you are working with to resolve the situation. Also, the more you get to know other parents, the more you will find out about what is going on in your child's life, both academically and socially.

### "What if I just can't find the time?"

With everyone's busy work and personal-life schedules, it is sometimes hard to find the time to devote time to volunteering or to attend monthly meetings.

"It is so easy to get involved in your child's school, and you don't have to be a PTA officer to be effective," said Lakata. There is no need to go to every single PTA meeting, or even to go to any, to get involved, according to Lakata.

"You can volunteer just one time," she said. "Some things can be done outside of the school and at home." For example, Pleasant Avenue Elementary School started a Banking Club where parent and community volunteers made deposits at a local bank. Students and staff members who enrolled in the program could deposit their money on Tuesday mornings at the School Bank Window. During a typical Bank Day, trained school volunteers accepted the cash or coins. It can be a simple task, such as a first-grade

classroom teacher who may need assistance with 300 paper circles to be cut out for a lesson in counting. This activity could easily be completed at home by a volunteer.

### "Where can I go for more information?"

To find out more about volunteer opportunities within the PTA you can call your child's school building or contact a PTA representative. You can also find a list of PTA officers and up-coming PTA meeting dates online at [www.johnstownschoools.org](http://www.johnstownschoools.org).

September		October	
8	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., Knox	27	Glebe Open House, 6:30-8 p.m.
13	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., Jansen	28	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., JHS
15	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., Glebe	29	Pleasant Open House, 6:30-8 p.m.
19	Central Council PTA Meeting, 7 p.m., Glebe		Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., Warren
21	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., Pleasant	4	Jansen Open House & Book Fair, 6:30-8 p.m.
22	Voter Registration, Noon-4 p.m., Admin. Center		
	Capital Project Presentation, 6:30 p.m., JHS		
	Warren Open House, 6:30-8 p.m.		
		November	
		15	Capital Project Vote, Polls Open Noon-9 p.m.
		April	
		6	Elementary Early Dismissal, 12:05 p.m.
			Elementary Parent Conferences, 6-8 p.m.
			Elementary Parent Conferences, 4-6 p.m.

## District Web site offers many new features

The Greater Johnstown School District has started the new school year with some new and improved features to its Web site.

- IT NOW OFFERS:
- Printer-friendly breakfast and lunch menus, as well as a printer-friendly district calendar;
  - Online job applications that can be printed or e-mailed;
  - A publications link where parent newsletters, press releases and other district publications are posted;
  - A virtual tour of the Greater Johnstown School District Museum; and
  - A new "archives" portion for past school or district news and events.

Also be sure to check out the new staff welcome pages at each school building - some are familiar faces, others are entirely new to the district.

Go to [www.johnstownschoools.org](http://www.johnstownschoools.org)