



UNLOCKING SUCCESS

Communication is the key to helping your children learn good study habits

By Debra Dominguez-Lund For the Journal

Lynne and Rod Starkweather are firm believers that children need structure in their lives, particularly when it comes to studying. That's why Lynne, a business representative with Sandia National Laboratories, and Rod, an area attorney, take study time at their home very seriously. "We have three girls — Isabella, a fourth-grader; Rachel, a fifth-grader, and Madeline, a sixth-grader — who are, fortunately, disciplined self-starters," Lynne Starkweather said. "But we still have a rule in our house: 'as soon as you come home from school, you relax maybe 15 or 20 minutes or so, eat a healthy snack and then get started on homework. There will be no activities, including music or TV or other distractions, until homework is done.'" "Right after school is a good time for homework because the kids aren't too tired from their long day, and neither am I if they need my help." The Starkweathers, whose children go to Eastern Hills Christian Academy, are on the right academic track, according to area educators and tutors, who emphasize that effective studying for students of all grade levels involves organization, time management, setting priorities, concentration and motivation. Most important, they say, is parental involvement, which is crucial in helping students master effective studying. Studying, they said, is a skill that it is never too early to learn, one that evolves over time and is vitally important for academic success into the high school and college years. Tamara Fitzgerald, center director of East Albuquerque's Sylvan Learning Center — a tutoring service that offers tips to help children prepare for school and minimize academic stress — said parents can help children prepare for school by encouraging a structured routine and staying actively involved in their education. It's important, she said, to understand what your child is learning and how you can help. During the early educational years, homework is assigned to help students review what they learned during the day and to gradually introduce homework into daily routines, she said. During this time, she said, parents should help children develop study habits and attitudes that will benefit them throughout their education.

"Children in secondary schools usually have heavier homework loads that typically last one to three hours daily," Fitzgerald said. "A foundation of good study habits developed during their early years will serve them well as the workload increases."

To help develop successful study skills, Fitzgerald advises parents to talk with their children about their fears regarding school and to maintain an open dialogue with them and their teachers throughout the year. Talk to your kids about any areas they find particularly challenging, as well as their upcoming homework assignments and tests.

She said parents should offer additional study skills support if their child is:

TRANSITIONING INTO KINDERGARTEN:

Fitzgerald said kindergarten is your child's introduction to elementary school and a first opportunity to learn basic math and reading skills, not to mention a first look at routines and expectations of group learning. "As a parent, you are your child's first teacher," she said. "The skills that he learns from you — how to get along with others, follow directions and listen to directions — will help him start the year off right."

TRANSITIONING INTO MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL: "Organization becomes even more important in middle school and high school when your child must keep track of multiple subjects, homework, teachers, classrooms and books," she said. "You can help him to reduce stress by giving him a calendar/planner to help him organize these new items and encouraging him to build good study habits."

Toby Herrera, director of the Albuquerque Public Schools' Student Service Center, said grade-appropriate studying help and tutoring opportunities vary from campus to campus.

"At some schools, you'll find teachers who'll skip their lunch or stay after school to tutor students," Herrera said. "PTAs sometimes offer homework help, and so do after school homework clubs or honor societies. Some libraries and community centers also offer tutoring or academic study programs for various age groups. There are many resources for parents and students out there, and if all else fails, private tutors are often available for hire if more help is needed."

Also, schools that didn't meet "adequate yearly progress" are required to offer free tutoring, under the No Child Left Behind Act. Parents should contact school officials for more information. **Help your child study**

The key to a child's academic success, experts say, is mastering basic study skills. Here are some ways you can help your child become effective at studying:

Be involved: Don't be afraid to ask your student what happened at school during the day. Ask for specific details. Show them you care and want to be involved.

Use a planner: Students need to write down their assignments daily and should track when assignments are completed. Parents should keep track of the planner daily until students demonstrate accountability.

Establish a specific time and place for studying: Homework time needs to be structured and scheduled, just like a sports practice or music rehearsal.

Set goals for grades: Students rise as high as the bar is set.

Negotiate a system of rewards:

Consequences are a poor motivator. Tangible rewards for work well done inspire students to do their best.

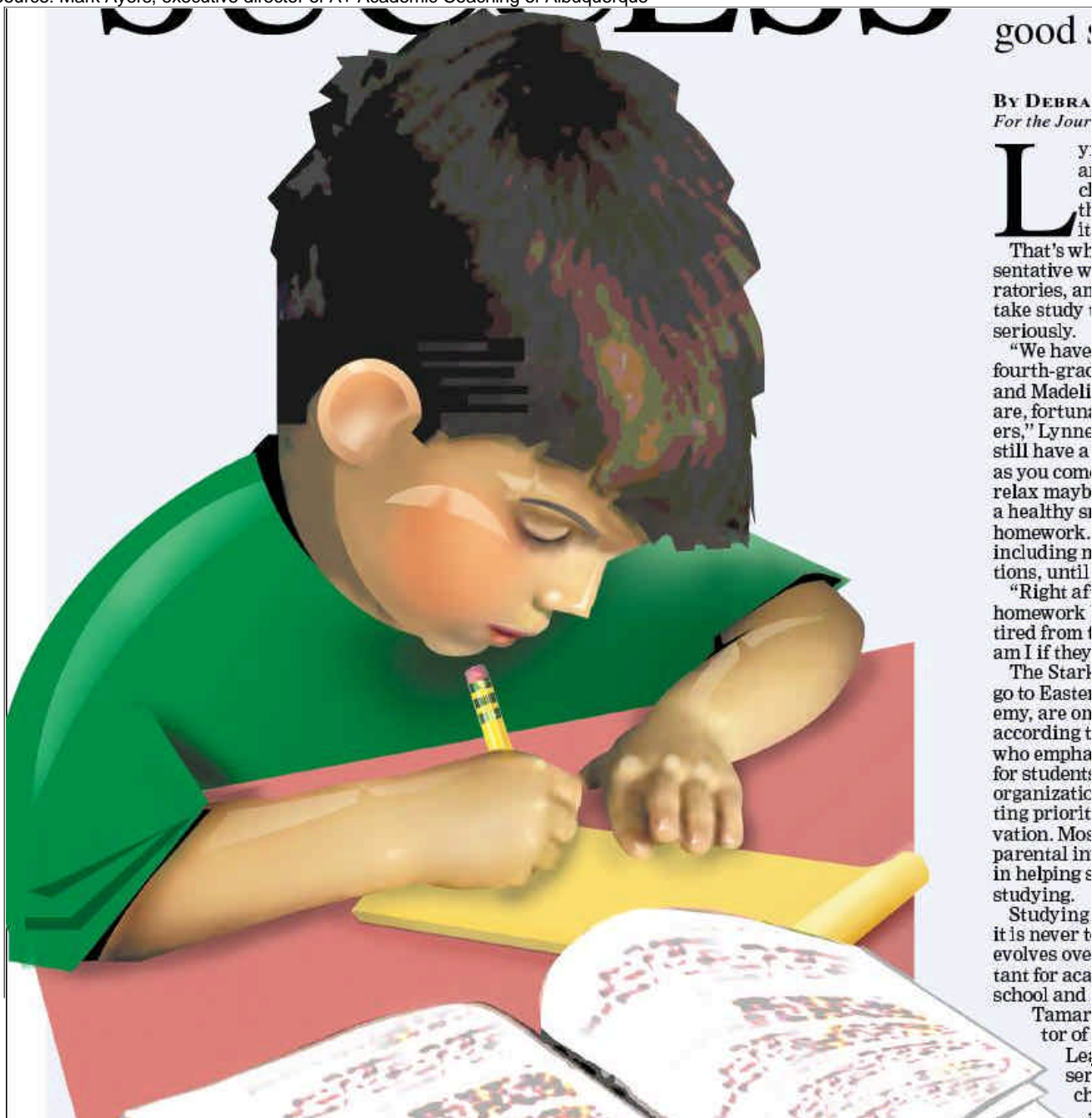
Encourage study groups:

Research has shown that studying together is often more effective than working alone.

Communicate with teachers and guidance counselors: Dialogue is a great tool for success. Questions, concerns and progress updates can easily be exchanged through e-mail.

Give students the support they need: Sometimes kids legitimately struggle with organization, test anxiety, motivation or proficiency in a specific subject. A competent tutor can make the difference between success and failure.

Source: Mark Ayers, executive director of A+ Academic Coaching of Albuquerque



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RUSS BALL/ JOURNAL



JIM THOMPSON/JOURNAL Experts say the Starkweather family is on the right track in requiring structure when it comes to homework time. From left, 9-year-old Isabella, 10-year-old Rachel and 11-year-old Madeline empty their backpacks as they get ready to do schoolwork.





Madeline Starkweather, 11, does her school work, following the family's rules that homework comes before TV, music and other activities.