

# FOR PARENTS:

## TIPS FOR STARTING A NEW SCHOOL YEAR —

### How to support student success: the right way

By Dr. Robert R. Neuman

**What is the right way for parents to involve themselves in their children's education? How do you help without interfering or doing too much?**

"It's like teaching your kids to swim," says Robert R. Neuman, PhD, former Associate Dean for Academic Development in the College of Arts and Sciences at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Neuman's insights grow out of 25 years of working one-on-one with literally thousands of college students, many of them in trouble. His experiences reveal the importance of parental guidance during the middle school and high school years. These are formative years that can have long-term consequences.

Neuman says that the right guidance during these years can help teens acquire the self-management skills needed to succeed in college — where students must independently organize themselves and their time, making daily decisions that will affect their futures. (See *College graduation rates tell the story*.)

#### THEIR EDUCATION IS YOUR EDUCATION, TOO

A college education is a major expense in a family's life, as well as an investment in a child's future. Since mom and dad may foot this sizable bill and add debt, parents should actively help their children prepare to succeed.

According to Neuman, the key word is "prepare." Parents can and should help teens get ready to manage themselves, their time, and the learning process long before they get to college — by nurturing practical life skills, such as taking initiative, managing time, working independently, evaluating progress, and solving problems. "These are a few of the self-management skills that lead to success in college," says Neuman, "and they are sadly lacking, as college graduation rates confirm. Many students discover



#### SIDEBAR

**College graduation rates tell the story**

The lack of self-management skills in handling the learning process contributes to the nation's low college graduation rate: only about 35% of students graduate in four years. Nearly 40% take seven or more years or never graduate.

Parents have a vested interest in preparing their children for college. Those students who need six years increase the cost of their degree by 50%, an unanticipated financial burden for families and students.

Ironically, families are often unprepared for the added expense because a great many of these students earned excellent grades in high school. Yet college is very different — self-management is the name of the game.

they cannot manage their courses in their first year; 25% don't return to their original campus sophomore year, often because they cannot cope."

### **PRACTICE EARLY**

Neuman has identified a common set of problems that undermines student success in college. His new book, **Are you really ready for college, A college dean's 12 secrets for success — what high school students don't know**, gives parents concrete ways to nurture needed skills in their teens while they are in middle school and high school. Teens practice and strengthen these skills early, so that they are prepared when they get to campus.

Neuman compares guiding teens in their early years to teaching kids to swim. You don't simply throw children in the deep end of the pool and hope that they figure it all out. Instead, you start in shallow water, teaching them how to breathe, use their arms and legs, and coordinate these movements. The same is true for learning to manage and coordinate the independent learning process. You start in middle and high school — the shallow end of the pool — and you coach them, letting them practice until they're ready for the deep end: college.

### **HOW PARENTS CAN HELP**

- **Help your child control the number of activities that fill his/her days.** Guide your child in choosing a few activities that really interest your teen rather than signing up for many that squeeze out study time. Note: colleges look for in-depth participation in a few activities.
- **Together, set boundaries for after-school entertainment:** when and how much time will be allotted to TV, video games, cell phone conversations, Internet socializing. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that high school seniors spend more than 40 hours each week on such activities. Teens often multi-task, doing several things at once.
- **Set up a schedule for study — a time that is uninterrupted.** Create a schedule

on paper. It could change from day to day to fit other commitments. However, study time should be a blackout time for socializing. Avoiding electronic communication takes determination, but teens can do it. And they're building discipline that will pay off in college where, if they allow it, their time can be filled with non-stop interruptions.

- **Help your teen create a study area,** a place where he or she can be efficient and productive, away from distractions: noise, siblings, music, and TV.
- **Talk about the difference between homework and study.** Studying means processing the course material, not just "doing homework assignments." Students must retain this knowledge and bring it to college. Mastering/retaining the material takes time: for example, reading and rereading chapters, organizing notes, and thinking about the material.
- **Reward your student, as you see fit,** for self-management efforts or educational accomplishments. If motivating your child is difficult, monetary rewards may work, and perhaps that's okay. After all, as adults, we are rewarded financially for our efforts in the workplace.
- **Make school your teen's responsibility.** Students need to learn to take care of their days: manage a busy schedule, work independently, complete assignments, take initiative, and talk to their teachers when problems arise. Don't fight their battles for them. Rather, ask to hear how they intend to resolve their dilemmas. You might help them fine-tune their plans, but they should create them.

Unfortunately, a great high school grade point is not an indicator of college success. In college, students are given independence and responsibility for themselves, their time, and the learning process. Students need to develop management skills to succeed. Parents can help with these very important lessons. It's sink or swim. ●

#### **Note:**

Dr. Neuman's book, *Are you really ready for college. A college dean's 12 secrets for success — what high school students don't know* is available only at [www.anyoureallyreadyforcollege.com](http://www.anyoureallyreadyforcollege.com). Written especially for teens, the book is an "active" book, using questionnaires, student stories, quick tips, and tactics. Parents can use the book as a guide to help students prepare for college.

