MENTOR TOOLKIT

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Section 3

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

activities 23-31

» The activities in this section will allow you to learn how to get help for your student in specific subject areas, and enable you to teach your student important organizational and academic skills. Your student's College Success Coach is a great source of information about your student's academic status as well as resources available in the school and community. **Your goal as a mentor** is to assist your student in higher scholastic achievement through the use of proven strategies and techniques.

» **improving academic skills,** Activities 23-31

This group of activities is designed to teach your student the basic organizational skills necessary for academic success. Colleges report that two of the main causes of poor academic performance among freshmen are inadequate organizational ability and lack of self-discipline. These activities target these basic needs. Students who are encouraged to improve their academic skills do much better in school than those who do not.

» Resource List:

The following websites may help you continue to explore academic skills with your student:

khanacademy.com Learn for free about math, art, computer programming, economics, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, finance, history, and more.

funbrain.com Educational activities & games for students.

familyeducation.com Mentors can use this site to learn more about adolescent issues. Students can use it for academic purposes.

powa.org Instructional site for students who want to learn how to improve their writing skills.

www.educationcorner.com/study-skills.html Provides resources for developing stronger study skills.

www.howtostudy.org Offers resources for studying, organized by academic subject.

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improving academic skills
IDENTIFYING YOUR STUDENT'S NEEDS

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ACTIVITY

You can get a fairly clear picture of your student's school performance by reviewing their progress reports and report cards, both present and past. You can obtain these from your College Success Coach. These reports have information such as absences, tardies, unexcused absences, suspensions, grades, and effort. Many reports also include specific comments and recommendations made by your student's previous teachers.

FOR THE MENTOR

Below are some recommendations to identify your student's specific academic needs.

» ***Obtain your student's progress report and/or report card.***
Compare academic progress from one grading period to the next. Look for trends in achievement, attendance, and conduct. As you look over the report, ask yourself a few questions: Is there a problem with attendance or conduct? Is the student always prepared for class? Is adequate progress being made? Are my student's grades what they should be? If there are areas where improvement is needed, address these with your student.

» ***Pay close attention to your student's grades on an ongoing basis.***
Grades are the key performance indicators for your student. Waiting for a report card can sometimes lead to a challenging situation to resolve. Students who have below a 2.0 grade point average are underachieving. We want our students to perform at the highest possible level in order to be prepared to succeed in college.

» ***Consult with your College Success Coach and school liaison.***
If you notice a marked drop in your student's academic progress or grades, the first thing you should do is share your concern with your ***Take Stock in Children*** College Success Coach. Your College Success Coach can assist in arranging a parent-teacher conference to address the question of your student's needs.

» ***Plan to participate in a parent-teacher conference.***
The parent-teacher conference is intended to inform parent(s)/guardian(s) about their child's progress and to address concerns about poor performance, but it can accomplish a great many other things with proper leadership. It is important that both the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the student attend this conference. Students need to hear that their performance might jeopardize their chances of receiving a scholarship or succeeding at the college level and what steps they can take to improve their grades. Parent(s)/guardian(s) should be told what they can do to help their child succeed in school.

Feel free to share your contact information with your student's teachers. It will show that their student has a strong support system and will allow the teachers another point of contact for the student.

WHAT WORKS FOR ME

Learning Objective:

The student will identify the academic strategies that work best for him/her.

Materials Needed:

Internet access.

Instructions:

Students learn in a variety of different ways, and everyone has different strategies and techniques that will work best for their personality and preferences. Go to one (or more) of the links below, and review the suggestions and habits identified with your student.

https://oedb.org/ilibrarian/hacking-knowledge/
https://www.goconqr.com/en/examtime/blog/good-habits-for-students/
https://vlacs.org/top-10-study-tips-students/
https://thinkeracademy.com/21-study-tips/

Once you and your student have reviewed at least one of these lists, discuss the following questions:

- Based on the suggestions given, what are some new ideas you could incorporate into your study habits?
- Which habits are most appealing?
- Which habits do you already have but could improve upon?
- What (if any) resources or supports do you need to incorporate each of these habits into your life?

It may be helpful to create specific SMART goals around each of the habits your student would like to work on, as well as a timeline for when to check in regarding progress. (For more on setting SMART Goals, see Activities 6 & 7 in this toolkit).

USING A PLANNER

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ACTIVITY

Learning Objective:

The student will learn how to utilize their planner to facilitate academic success through efficient time management.

Materials Needed:

Copy of "Using a Planner" activity sheet, student's planner, your planner, pen/pencil

Instructions:

The typical high school student spends approximately 2 to 2.5 hours per day on homework. Help your student determine whether or not they are using their time wisely in their day to day activities by completing the activity below. Help them to identify the most efficient use of their time by showing them how they can input tasks and assignments and keep track of their daily schedule in their planner. Use your planner as an example.

How much time do you spend doing the following per week?

» Study/homework at school _____

» Extracurricular activities _____

» Study/homework at home _____

» Family responsibilities _____

» Part time job _____

» Volunteering _____

Total for all activities per week _____

Using your planner

1. Use your planner to record your tasks, assignments, daily schedule, due dates, etc. week to week.

» Put tasks with the most importance at the top of your list to be completed first.

» As you complete the task, check it off so that you see your accomplishment.

2. Make sure that you are making effective use of your time.

» Identify all available spare time in your day.

» Fill in gaps with short, easy tasks you can complete quickly.

» Downtime can be used to review notes and study for upcoming tests and quizzes.

3. Communicate with others.

» Share your schedule with your parents, making them aware of your needs and giving them the opportunity to make suggestions to accommodate your family responsibilities.

» Inform your friends of your schedule. This way they respect the time you need to accomplish your tasks.

» If you are active in sports or other extracurricular activities, keep your coach informed of your weekly academic schedule.

Help your student make using their planner a habit by asking to see it when you visit. This way you can make sure that they are meeting their deadlines and are on track for academic success.

improving academic skills

THE TRICK TO NOTE TAKING

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ACTIVITY

Learning Objective:

The student will evaluate their note taking habits and review some note taking tips.

Materials Needed:

A copy of "The Trick to Note Taking" activity sheet, pen/pencil

Instructions:

Effective note taking is important for students to retain information learned in class. Use the discussion questions below to determine whether your student is taking effective notes.

- Do you review and edit your notes within 24 hours after each of your classes?
- Do you try to write down everything your teacher says?
- Are you able to understand your notes when you study for a test?
- Do you tend to miss a lot of information when you take notes?
- Do you read ahead in your textbooks?

Use the tips below to help your student improve their note taking habits.

Be selective. Avoid trying to write down every word or writing in complete sentences.

Abbreviate. Reduce common words/phrases to symbols and eliminate connecting words like: is, are, was, the, and would. Drop the last few letters of words; eg., "approx" for "approximately." Try using "formula" statements to take notes. For example, the teacher says, "The diameter of the earth is four times greater than the diameter of the moon." You write, "Earth=4x>diameter of moon."

Focus on the main points. Use "significance" statements. Identify main concepts and state why they are important. If the information being given is important, a speaker will usually do one of the following: pause before or after an idea, use repetition to emphasize a point, or write an idea on the board.

Identify significance. Ask yourself, is the information being discussed new or is it covered in the text? You can do this by looking over the class assignment prior to class. To be successful, make sure you are a step ahead and have a working knowledge of the topic.

Ask questions. Make sure you clarify areas that are unclear or confusing.

Reference examples. Concrete examples are often the best way to clarify complex ideas.

Review notes ASAP. The sooner you review your notes, the better you retain the information.

MY STUDY HABITS

Learning Objective:

The student will analyze their study habits and devise a plan to improve their study skills.

Materials Needed:

Copy of "My Study Habits" activity sheet, pen/pencil

Instructions:

Good study habits are a key building block to academic success. It is important for students to understand the relationship between studying and good grades.

Use this questionnaire to assess your student's study habits.

» I never study more than an hour for tests.	true___	false___
» I only study the night before a test.	true___	false___
» If I study too much, I cannot have time for fun.	true___	false___
» If I study, I do not have time for anything else.	true___	false___
» I study with music or the television on.	true___	false___
» I do not have a quiet place to study.	true___	false___
» I cannot sit and study for long periods of time.	true___	false___
» I often doodle or get distracted in class.	true___	false___
» I have trouble taking notes.	true___	false___
» I do not use class notes to study for tests.	true___	false___
» I never organize my class notes.	true___	false___
» I have trouble keeping up with my reading.	true___	false___
» I do not always get my homework done.	true___	false___
» I cannot recognize the main ideas in a chapter.	true___	false___
» I would like to read faster.	true___	false___
» I have trouble writing papers.	true___	false___
» I do not know how to create an outline.	true___	false___
» I put off difficult assignments.	true___	false___

Review the statements with your student. If your student answered "true" to any of these statements, discuss practical solutions for improving their habits. Studying and homework are their practice for test day. Your student should review their notes daily. The more they read them, the more they will learn, and the better they will do on a test.

TEST TIME!

Learning Objective:

The student will become familiar with different types of test taking strategies to use when studying.

Materials Needed:

Copy of "Test Time!" activity sheet

Instructions:

There are many different types of tests: essays, true/false, and multiple-choice to name a few. Knowing how to study for them can help your student sharpen their test taking skills. Review the various test preparation tips below with your student.

General test prep tips:

- Concentrate on learning what you do not know
- Ask your teacher for help, if necessary
- Anticipate the questions
- Create a study outline
- Ask questions
- Make a test schedule
- Know what will be covered
- Get a good night's sleep before the test

Essay Tests

» *Keep Track of Your Time* If you have five questions to answer in 40 minutes, for example, make sure you do not spend too much time on any one question.

» *Read Through the Questions Once* By familiarizing yourself with all the questions first, you will have much more time to consider your answers.

» *Identify the Directive Words* Read the directions carefully and pinpoint the key terms. If a teacher wants you to describe, then do so; if she wants you to evaluate, then do not worry so much about description.

» *Outline Your Answer First* Teachers are greatly influenced by the coherence and structure of your answer. To list facts in random order makes it seem as if you do not have a clear grasp of the material. Try to organize your answers as well as you can.

» *Take Time to Write an Introduction and Conclusion* A strong introduction and conclusion are essential parts of a good essay. They give your responses the structure of logical arguments.

True/False Tests

» Look for any word in the question that could make it false.

» Look out for extreme modifiers that tend to make a question false: all, none, never, only, etc.

» Identify qualifiers that tend to make questions true: usually, frequently, often, probably, etc.

Multiple-Choice Tests

» Read each question with the intention of answering without looking at the possible answers.

» Use educated guessing: Eliminate two choices quickly and then decide between the remaining two.

» Choose the numbers that are in the middle range, not the extremes, when guessing.

» When in doubt choose answers that are longer and more descriptive.

» When two similar answers appear, one is likely correct.

Review these test-taking tips with your student when they have an upcoming test. Make sure to ask them what type of test it will be and if they need help preparing for it.

MORE TEST-TAKING TIPS

Learning Objective:

The student will evaluate their test readiness.

Materials Needed:

Copy of "More Test-Taking Tips" activity sheet, pen/pencil

Instructions:

Ask your student to complete the evaluation below by putting a mark by each question that is true for them. Your student should be answering "yes" to all of these questions.

When preparing for a test, do you:

__ Concentrate on what you do not know?
__ Ask questions?
__ Ask your teacher for help, if necessary?
__ Create a study guide or flashcards?
__ Get a good night's sleep before the test?
__ Know what will be covered?
__ Anticipate the questions?
__ Go over any material from class or previous quizzes?

When taking a test, do you:

__ Read and understand the test directions?
__ Look over the entire test first?
__ Make sure you know how much time is given?
__ Know how much each question counts?
__ Notice key words in the directions?
__ Do the easiest questions first and return to the unanswered ones?
__ Proofread your essay and/or short answers?
__ Watch out for careless mistakes?
__ Write down important formulas, facts, or key words in the margin first so you will not forget them?
__ Pace yourself?
__ Read the whole question and all possible answers?
__ Make sure you have answered all the questions and that your name is on the test?

After taking a test, do you:

__ Look for any grading mistakes?
__ Look over the test and make sure that you understand your mistakes?
__ Look up missed questions or ask a friend or the teacher for correct answers?
__ Take notes when the teacher reviews the test in class?
__ Save the test as study materials for future cumulative tests?

Review any questions that your student did not check off. Discuss with your student how using each of the tips will help them to improve their test taking skills.

PREPARING FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS

Learning Objective:

The student will gain an understanding of effective preparation for all standardized tests.

Materials Needed:

Copy of "Preparing for Standardized Tests" activity sheet

Instructions:

By this time, your student should be familiar with taking standardized tests. Use the information below to help your student prepare for their standardized tests.

Preparation Before the Test:

- Long term preparation should include enrollment in more academically challenging courses to further develop your studying skills.
- Familiarize yourself with the content of the specific test.
- Refresh your knowledge and skills in the content areas.
- Identify the content areas you have studied.
- Take any and all pre-tests that are available.
- Visit the appropriate websites for the different tests and utilize the resources that may be available to you.
- Know the different strategies for the specific tests, for example, knowing when it is best to give an educated guess or omit a question.
- Get a good night's sleep before the test.

Preparation for the Big Day:

- Eat well. A good meal the night before and a good breakfast with protein, carbohydrates, and fruit will jump start your brain, keep you focused, and maintain your energy.
- Take a calculator and two sharpened pencils.
- Learn and understand the test directions for each type of question.
- Notice key words in the directions.
- Make sure you know how much time is given per section.
- Pace yourself – do the easier questions first and return to the unanswered ones.
- Check your answer sheet regularly to make sure you are in the right place.

Helping your student prepare for their standardized tests can result in increased confidence and better overall testing performance.

Learning Objective:

The student will gain an understanding of standardized tests and their registration procedures.

Materials needed:

Copy of "Standardized Tests" activity sheet

Instructions:

Standardized tests are used by colleges and universities to determine college admissions. Familiarize your student with the different tests, including the preliminary tests that are available.

	Why take this test?	What does it test me on?	How do I register?
PSAT/ NMSQT	• Provides feedback on your strengths and weaknesses in the different subject areas necessary for college and beyond. • Serves as a great indicator of what to expect on the SAT. • It must be taken in order to be considered for the National Merit Scholarship, the National Hispanic Scholarship, and the National Negro Achievement Scholarship.	The test has three sections: Reading Test, Writing & Language Test, and Math Test. Many questions focus on important, widely used words and phrases. You'll be asked to interpret and use evidence. The math skills that matter most on the PSAT are problem solving, data analysis, linear and complex equations.	Registration can only be done at your local high school. THERE IS NO ONLINE REGISTRATION AVAILABLE. To learn about test dates visit ***collegeboard.org*** . Fee waivers are available for 11th graders taking the PSAT/NMSQT, but there is no waiver available for PSAT 10 or PSAT 8/9.
SAT	• Helps to compare your academic knowledge with other students throughout the country. • It also allows college admissions judges to evaluate your readiness for college. • There is no penalty for guessing on the new SAT. The test focuses on college and career ready knowledge and skills.	This is a three-hour test made up of the following sections: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (100 minutes) • includes Reading Test and Writing and Language Test Math (80 minutes) Essay (Optional, 50 minutes)	Registration for the SAT can be done via the internet or by mail. Most **Take Stock in Children** students will qualify for a fee waiver. Visit collegeboard.org/sat/register/fees/fee-waivers for more information. Students who use a waiver for the SAT automatically receive four college application waivers. Look for more information via e-mail from the College Board.

planning for high school graduation

continued STANDARDIZED TESTS

	Why take this test?	What does it test me on?	How do I register?
WORK KEYS	•Demonstrate your readiness for careers with a score and credential recognized by Florida's "Ready to Work" program •Research skills needed for a variety of careers	The test measures three major areas and issues a nationally recognized career readiness certificate. •Applied Mathematics •Locating Information •Reading for Information You can take additional sections that measure applied technology, business writing, listening for understanding, and workplace observation.	Work Keys is administered at assessment centers across Florida. Visit ***floridareadytowork.com*** to find your nearest assessment center.
ACT	•Helps to compare your academic knowledge with other students throughout the country •Allows college admissions judges to evaluate your readiness for college	This test is made up of the following sections: •English: 45 minutes,75 questions -Measures standard written English and rhetorical skills. •Mathematics: 60 minutes, 60 questions -Measures mathematical skills typically acquired by the end of the 11th grade. •Reading: 35 minutes, 40 questions -Measures reading comprehension •Science: 30 minutes, 40 questions -Measures interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. •Optional Writing Test: One prompt, 30 minutes -Measures writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.	Registration for the ACT can be done via the internet or by mail. Most **Take Stock in Children** students will qualify for a fee waiver, which has to be mailed in with the paper form of the ACT registration. To register by mail, you need to get the Student Registration Form from your school's guidance office. If you are paying for the exam yourself and wish to register online, simply visit ***actstudent.org*** and follow the registration instructions.

Be sure to check your registration forms for test dates, registration deadlines, instructions, test center codes, and other related information.