


Making the Grade



Summer vacation is a chance to help your children continue to learn as they have fun and explore new interests and activities. As North Carolina schools raise achievement levels with Student Accountability Standards, it is especially important that children continue to learn over the summer. Making vacation fun and a rich learning experience, however, takes some planning for parents and children. This parent's guide has been designed by the Public Schools of North Carolina and Newspapers in Education to help you help your children make the most of their summer vacation. You will find numerous suggestions here, so choose the activities you think will be most enjoyable for you and your family.

READING

The Importance of Reading

Reading is one of the most important activities your child can engage in. Through reading, children can learn new things, develop new vocabulary, and explore interesting places. In addition, they can improve reading skills and develop a life-long love of reading—which will lead them to read more often.

North Carolina students who score well on End-of-Grade Tests report that they often read outside of school. The same is true of students who score well on national tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Your children do not have to read “classics” in order to improve their reading skills. They can become better readers, as well as more motivated ones, by reading newspapers, magazines, comic books, recipe books, maps, brochures, etc.

Parents can encourage reading by making sure that children have a variety of reading materials in their homes, including:

- books,
- magazines,
- newspapers, and
- resource materials such as dictionaries.

Adolescents, as much as younger children, need to have a variety of reading materials available. As your children grow up, continue to make sure they have lots and lots of diverse reading material.

Give your child both **Choice** and **Guidance** in selecting reading material



Motivation is extremely important for developing reading skills, and a love of reading is fostered when children have choices in what they read. While children cannot always be allowed to select what they want to read, summer is a wonderful time to give them lots of choices. Children are not only more interested and engaged in reading when they can choose their reading materials, they are learning that reading is the way to explore new interests and to answer real questions.

However, children do need guidance in making good choices. Reading material should not be too difficult for the child’s reading level. Generally speaking, a reader needs to read words with 90% accuracy. Less than 90% accuracy means the reading material is too difficult and will frustrate the child.

Children also need guidance in choosing books, magazines, or newspapers that are interesting and well written. Here are some ways to help guide your child:

- Ask your child’s teacher to make a list of books he or she would recommend for summer reading, based on his knowledge of your child’s reading ability and interests. Allow your child to choose from the list.
- Before you go to the library or bookstore, you and your children can make a list of their interests and the kind of book, magazine, or newspaper they most enjoy. Then, ask a librarian or a bookstore clerk to make suggestions based on that list.
- Explore text with your children. Read (or listen to them read) aloud the first few paragraphs of a book to see how interesting and readable they find it.

What you can do to encourage reading

- **Give gifts of books or subscriptions to magazines and newspapers.** This reinforces the idea that reading is fun and special. Give your child reading materials as gifts, and suggest them for friends and relatives to give on special occasions. Don’t forget that yard sales, consignment stores, and used bookstores are excellent resources for inexpensive books.
- **Teach your children to take care of their collections of books and reading materials.** You can select a special place for the books so they are easy to find. A cardboard box that you and your children can decorate together might make a good bookcase. Or clear a shelf and make a special place for them to put their books with the family books. You may want to have a special box or basket to keep library books separate and easily accessible.
- **Help your children arrange their reading material in some order** – favorite periodicals, books by the same author or about the same topic. Use whatever method will help them find the reading materials quickly and easily.
- **Set aside a special time for the entire family to share a good book.** There are many books that everyone can enjoy. Classics like Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* were intended to be read aloud. Have family members read different parts, using different “voices” for different characters.
- **Find interesting newspaper articles to read aloud and discuss with your children.** Ask your children to find articles they are interested in, and let them know you would like to read and discuss those articles together.
- **Set a goal for yourself and your child – spend 30 minutes each day reading.** Plan a certain time that is convenient, perhaps right after the evening meal. Turn off the television while all family members read!
- **Take favorite books, newspapers, or magazines with you wherever you go.** Use time at doctors’ offices, while waiting for ordered food, or in line at the grocery store to read together.
- **Help children organize a neighborhood magazine swap.** Neighbors can “bring one and get one.”
- **Help your child read for information.** Read and talk about road signs, advertisements, menus in restaurants, etc.
- **Take your child to the public library.** You can set up a schedule and make your trip to the library a regular outing.

Variety is very important

While choice is motivational, variety is also important. Children need to read different types of text—fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. In addition, they need to read books, magazines, newspapers, and resource materials. Finally, they need to read text on different topics. Choice and variety, however, do not have to be mutually exclusive. For example, if your child is interested in sports, guide him/her to newspaper articles, sports magazines, biographies and autobiographies of favorite players or coaches, histories of a favorite game, and short stories and novels that deal with sports and sports figures.

Finally, make sure that children have experience in reading for information. Since children often have more difficulty with informational text than with fiction, they need both opportunities to read for information and guidance in understanding what they are reading. Use your newspaper as one of the most common and convenient sources of informational text in the home. For example, you may:

- Read and discuss news articles with your children, allowing them to ask and answer questions. Discussion helps them understand and prioritize main ideas and details or examples that support those big ideas.
- Discuss the different purposes you have in reading the newspaper and how the purpose affects the way you read. For example, you may scan the headlines looking for familiar names, read a front-page article carefully to understand and remember the information, and then skim the sports page to find the result of a particular game.
- Use editorials, news articles, and political cartoons to talk about the differences between fact and opinion.

Reading aloud to your child

One of the most important things you, as a parent, can do to foster success in reading is to read aloud to your child. The benefits of reading aloud are greatest when the child actively participates in conversation or discussion about the text being read. The greatest success usually comes when parents:

- Ask numerous questions, not just one or two.
- Ask questions that require the child to think about what was being read, not just repeat factual information.
- Either relate the episodes to real life events in the child's life or ask questions that ask the child to make a connection.

Older readers, even those in high school, can benefit from being read aloud to. They can increase vocabulary and become familiar with ideas they can understand but may not be able to read for themselves. Of equal importance, children get to see and understand how experienced readers enjoy and value text.

Talking with your child

Engaging in talk with your child is fun and educational, especially if the discussion encourages the child to:

1. think about ideas
2. exercise memory
3. reflect on what has happened
4. make connections between ideas or events
5. tell a complete story
6. give complete descriptions

Children love to hear stories about family and family members. You can begin family conversation in the following ways:

- Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents or others who are special to you and your family.
- With your children, read your local newspaper to find and discuss important events for neighborhood families, for example, weddings, graduations, and visits from family members. Use these news stories as models for you and your children to write your own "family news articles."
- Talk about your own childhood. Make a story out of something that happened, like a family trip, a birthday party, or when you lost your first tooth.
- Ask your children to tell you about something that happened to them in the past. This could be an early memory or a particularly vivid one.
- Have your children tell you stories about what they did on a special day, such as a field trip at school.



Fun things to do at your public library

Library cards are free! Every county in North Carolina has a public library with books, magazines, newspapers, audiotapes, and an Internet connection. The following are suggestions for making the most of your public library:

- Make a list of questions that your child asks, for example, "What happened to dinosaurs?" or "What are clouds made of?" Take the list with you to the library and look up the answers together—or ask the librarian to help you find the answers.
- Surf the net at your local library. Or ask if your library offers computer classes for kids (and parents).
- Most libraries offer videos on loan for free or at nominal fees. You may choose current features, informational videos, or popular films. Or you may choose a children's classic and read the book together before watching the video.
- Borrow audiotapes of books, stories and songs to play in the car or before nap or bedtime.

Fun things to do at your public library

- Learn about your community—its history, architecture, and economy. Then take a "walking" or "driving" tour of your hometown.
- Plan a vacation together. You can take an "imaginary" vacation through reading. Explore new places by finding information and reading books, brochures, maps, and websites in the library. Plan and discuss your trip with your child.
- Research and read about the summer sky and then find the stars and planets with your child. Constellations are fun to identify, and the myths they have inspired are great reading!
- Take advantage of the many different science guidebooks at the local library to learn how to make interesting summer projects:
 - > Make (and label) a pressed leaf collection of trees common to your area.
 - > Create a summer science collection box. Search for bird feathers and determine their former owners. Identify and collect interesting minerals, insects, or wildflowers.
 - > Set up a bird feeder to observe and record visiting songbirds. Keep a journal of the many different species that stop in.

MY SUMMER CALENDAR

JUNE

Post this calendar in a convenient place, for example, on the refrigerator or a family bulletin board. When you have completed any activity suggested in "Making the Grade," write down what you did in that day's space. Try to fill in at least 3 spaces each week.

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JULY

WRITING

Parents can be very powerful influences on how well and how often children write. Summer writing should be fun and informative, but it can also build important skills. Use the following suggestions to help your child become a more confident and enthusiastic writer!

Share your own writing with your child—for example, notes, shopping lists, personal or business letters you write and answers you receive.

Put a bulletin board or chalkboard in a convenient and noticeable place and use it for messages for the entire family.

Ask your child to help with any writing that needs to be done in the home—shopping lists, instructions for babysitters, notes to family members, plans for family outings, and directions to visitors.

Help your children write notes to relatives and friends to thank them for gifts or to share their thoughts. Encourage them to answer your children with a note.

On a family trip, write a trip journal with your child to make a new family story. Writing down the day's special event and pasting its photograph into the journal ties the family story to a written history. You can also include everyday trips like going to the store or the park.

Use articles in your local newspaper as models and write an interesting newspaper article about your family trip.

Encourage children to write stories or poems to send to grandparents and other relatives. A story or poem and a handmade card would be cherished gifts.

Help your children write letters for various purposes—a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, letters asking for information on interests and hobbies, requests for travel brochures for vacations, fan mail to people they admire, requests for free samples, and letters of complaint or praise to a business.

Ask your child to “interview” an older relative who has lived through an interesting experience, for example, the Great Depression or the Vietnam War. Help your child form good questions and then to write a summary, newspaper article, or story describing the experience.

Write down and collect family stories into a “family book” that you can illustrate with old photographs. Family stories let your children know about the people who are important to them. They also give them an idea of how one thing leads to another in a story.

Help your children make holiday cards and party invitations with special messages.

Read book reviews and other types of reviews in your newspaper. After reading a book, write a review that is similar.

Encourage your children to write daily journals. Suggest that they start by simply telling everything they do each day. Allow them to select notebooks or blank books to make the journals special. Or you could help them decorate their own “covers” made of cardboard.

Plan a special treat such as visiting a children's theatre or museum, a zoo, a bus or train station, an airport, a farm, or an exhibition. Talk with your child about his/her (and your) favorite part of the day. Then, both of you can write a brief description of the event—and share your writing.

Make a “family newspaper” to send to grandparents and other relatives. Have a family meeting to decide what events should be described and who will write each “news article.” Use your local newspaper to teach children how newspaper reporters answer five basic questions:

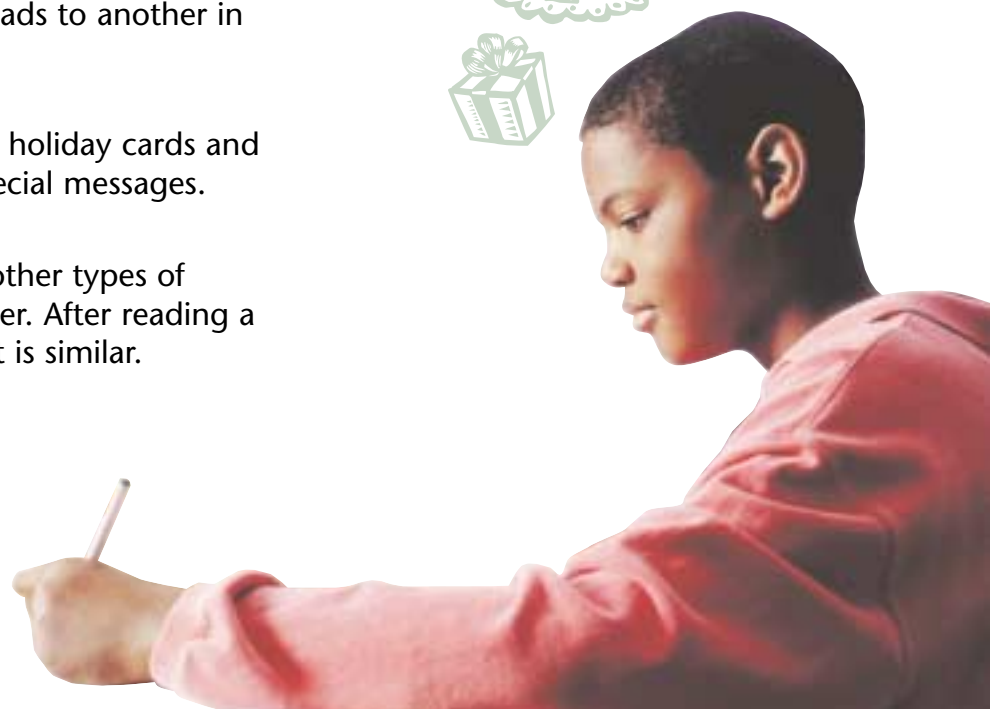
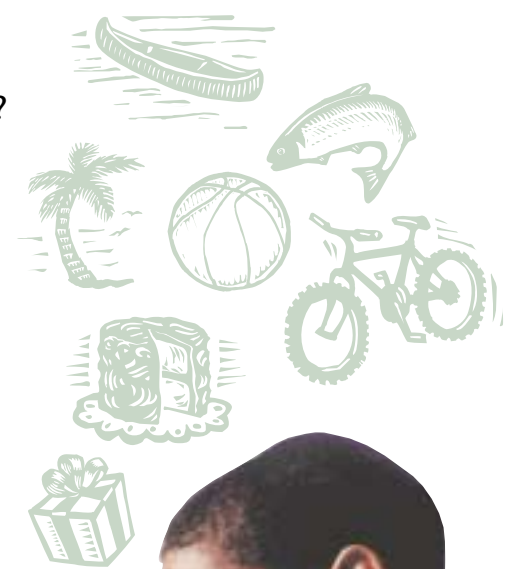
Who?

What?

Where?

Why?

How?



MATH AND THE REAL WORLD



Parents can help children understand math concepts as well as how math is used in everyday life. Children need to explore and talk about math using real objects. They need to practice math in fun ways. They need to understand that there can be many ways to solve a problem and that math is useful and important. Finally, they need to become confident that they are good problem solvers and mathematicians. Use the following suggestions to show your child math in the real world:

On trips (including trips around town), ask your children to point out different shapes of signs (squares, rectangles, triangles, hexagons). Which shapes did they see most often? Least often?

Find a question your children are interested in asking friends, neighbors, or relatives. (For example, they may want to know "Which basketball team is your favorite?") After they have collected answers to the question, help them make a chart or graph showing the results.

Look for ways to teach and talk about mathematics in the real world. For example, with younger children who are taking pictures with a camera, have them figure out how many pictures are left by subtracting the number of pictures that have been taken from the number of pictures on the roll of film.

When you take a trip with older children, have them figure out how much longer it will take to get there if you drive 50 miles per hour instead of 70 miles per hour.

Find or make games that use mathematics skills. Cards, dominoes, board games such as checkers or chess, and computer games encourage mathematical thinking as well as reasoning.

Find mathematics in your local newspaper. Read the newspaper with your child and discuss all the mathematics used - from opinion polls, baseball batting averages, and grocery prices to classified ads.

Have your child interview store clerks, engineers, pilots and plumbers to find out how they use mathematics daily.

Play math games and use consumer math. For example, when you go to the grocery store with your child, keep a running total of how much the groceries will cost. Have your child estimate the number of apples (or grapes or cherries) it takes to make a pound. Compare prices of items, including price per ounce, to calculate which size package is the better value.

Develop a secret code (where numbers substitute for letters) with your child and then write notes to each other using that code.

Discuss charts and graphs in the newspaper. Ask what they mean and how they add to a story.

Making the Grade: A Parent's Summer Guide for Helping Children Continue to Learn is one in a series of publications produced by North Carolina Newspapers in Education with support from the North Carolina Press Association and the Public Schools of North Carolina (State Board of Education/Department of Public Instruction). Watch for other tips for helping your child during the coming months.



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What about TV?

TV can be both enjoyable and educational for children. However, because children learn from what they see and hear, parents should think about and decide how often children should watch television and what shows they should see. Think about your child's age and choose what types of things you want him to see, learn, and imitate. In addition:

- Set limits on the time your child watches TV. Too much television cuts into important activities such as reading, playing, and talking with family members.
- Monitor the type of shows your children watch. Generally, look for television shows that teach something new, introduce them to new experiences, teach new or interesting vocabulary words, and make them feel good about themselves.
- Watch TV with your children when you can. Talk with them about what you see. Ask them questions and allow them to ask you questions. Try to point out the things on TV that are like your children's everyday lives.

- When your children watch TV programs without you, spend some time talking with them about what they watched. Ask questions about the program. See what they liked and didn't like. Find out what they have learned and remembered.
- When you talk with your children about TV programs they have watched, ask them questions about the characters, their qualities, and actions. Focus on important traits such as honesty or kindness and talk about those qualities in people you know.
- Make a weekly viewing schedule with your children, using the television guide of your newspaper to read about shows and make good decisions about what to watch. The schedule should include some of their favorite shows as well as programs you would like them to see.
- As a family, make your own television shows using a video camera. You can write, perform, and record family news reports, storybook dramatizations, or commercials. Use this activity to teach your children how television programs are created by people—and thus reflect their own ideas and perceptions.

SPRINGBOARDS TO CONVERSATION

Another way to engage in rich conversation is to talk about what your child has read or what you have just read with your child. There is no one way to do this. You may find the following questions to be good springboards into an interesting conversation.

If you are discussing non-fiction (informational books, books of true experiences, biographies, autobiographies, historical documents and speeches, newspapers, magazines, essays), you may ask:

- Was the information easy to understand?
- What else would you like to know?
- What are the author's qualifications for writing this text?
- Is the information recent? Do you think we could find a better source?
- What were the main points the author made?

If you are discussing fiction (picture books, comic strips, fables, folktales, myths, novels, short stories, historical fiction, mysteries, science fiction or fantasy), you may ask:

- Where did the story take place? How would you describe the setting?
- Which characters did you like or dislike? Why?
- Choose your favorite character and tell me why that person was important in the story.
- If you could change the ending of the book or story how would you change it? Why?



Resources

The website of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (www.ncpublicschools.org) is an excellent resource for information for North Carolina parents. This web site also allows you to access other web sites, including the American Library Association, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National PTA. The website of the NC Press Foundation is another good resource, visit www.ncpress.com.