



Parent Education: Successful Strategies for Middle School

“Successful Study/Homework Strategies for Middle School”

HANDOUT #2

Panelists:

Marti Coppage
Rebecca Kim
Julie Ludwig
Jim Realini

Moderator: Brian Brown

Brian Brown – 6th Grade

Brian was born in San Jose and has lived in the Bay Area his whole life. He is a graduate of Leigh High School and the University of California Santa Cruz, and earned his teaching credential at San Jose State University. This is his sixth year at Sunnyvale Middle School, where he has taught sixth grade English, math, history and science. He is also currently in his third year of teaching drama to 7th and 8th grade students. Brian strives to bring energy, enthusiasm, and fun to each and every lesson that he teaches, and he believes that making a positive personal connection to each student he meets is the most important thing he can do as a teacher. If Brian is in his classroom, the door is open, and you can often find a room full of current and former students laughing and chatting with him before school begins for the day.

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Marti Coppage – 6th Grade

Mrs. Coppage has taught at SMS for the past sixteen years, all but one in the sixth grade. She does it because she has a deep and abiding love for teaching and for SMS, because sixth grade offers an interesting curriculum to teach, and because, honestly, kids this age are really, really fun.

Marti Coppage has been married to the same great guy for thirty years, and together, they have three amazing children, all alumni of Sunnyvale schools. Nearly empty nesters now, the Coppages have lived in the Cherry Chase neighborhood for the past

thirteen years. She can often be found conducting parent-teacher conferences in the frozen food section of our local Safeway.

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Mrs. Coppage's Top 5 Strategies for Success in Middle School English

1. Read
2. Read
3. Read
4. Read
5. Read

In teacher talk, reading widely and deeply builds “complex schema.” In English, it means that your brain is like a gigantic file cabinet and as you live your life, you are encountering information that goes into it. The whole time, your brain is organizing the drawers, creating those hanging files, and file folders that go into them. And your brain is deciding what information to toss, what to keep, and where to keep it - so you can go back and get it when you want it.

For example, a baby first learning to talk learns a word, kitty, that means “four-legged animal,” and then any four-legged animal has that name, cats, dogs, cows, whatever, they’re all kitty. That baby has a drawer for “animals” in her brain and just one folder, kitty. Shortly, she learns that kitty means kitty-cat, but that one is a doggie, and that other one is a cow. And, then she learns that cow goes with “four-legged animals” but also with “farm animals.” So her brain is organizing information in all kinds of ways. She is building complex schema.

Here is how reading helps you build complex schema:

1. Read. Reading helps you learn stuff. It just does and you can’t help it. Because as you read, your brain is processing and sorting what you’re reading and filing it all away in your “file cabinet.” And the funny thing about that is, the more stuff you know already, the easier it is for you to learn new things. That’s because your brain has already created a place to put that new information. But don’t take my word for it, please. Go look it up!
2. Read. Reading builds your vocabulary. It’s possible to acquire thousands of new words without doing any “work” to learn them. Just read.
3. Read. Reading fuels your imagination. Reading allows you to visit other places, other worlds, other times, and experience life there. Reading lets you “make friends” with all kinds of people. And the whole time you are taking this mental vacation, your brain is building complex schema for you.
4. Read. Reading is a good, lifelong habit. And it’s fun.
5. Read. And finally, reading teaches you to think for yourself. Through reading, you create for yourself a vast storehouse of knowledge and information. You have it, you

know it, it's yours. So when you encounter something new, you have the background you need to evaluate that new piece – keep it and add it to what you have and know, or toss it 'cause it's too weak, or outright false. How cool is it to have that much power? And all from reading.

Rebecca Kim – 6th Grade

Rebecca Kim graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Industrial Engineering Operations Research and earned a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential from San Francisco State University. This is her 6th year teaching 6th grade at Sunnyvale Middle School and she loves the enthusiasm and ideas each incoming class brings to SMS. While she currently teaches English, pre-algebra, and science, during her time at SMS she's been able to teach every core 6th grade subject, including P.E. She also coached Cross Country this year and is known to cheer as loudly as she can at student sporting events.

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Ms. Kim's Top 5 Successful Strategies for Math

1. SHOW ALL YOUR WORK, ALL THE TIME.
 2. Take notes well in class!
 3. Ask for help as soon as you realize you need it.
 4. Math is like sports: you have to practice daily to get better at it.
 5. Try to do all the homework problems.
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1. SHOW ALL YOUR WORK, ALL THE TIME.
 - Show your steps neatly and in an organized manner.
 - It will you practice what you learned.
 - It will help you see where you made your mistakes.
 - It shows your teacher that you really do understand the whole concept and weren't just copying off of a friend.
 2. Take notes well in class!
 - Use a notebook; loose-leaf paper is too easy to lose.
 - Write neatly: notes will not help you if you can't read them!
 - The examples and processes explained in class will help you practice on your homework, so have the notes out while you do your homework to refer back to.
 3. Ask for help as soon as you need it.
 - Ask questions about homework problems you got wrong from the night before. You need to correct your thinking/learning as soon as your realize there's an error.
 - Regardless of what question it is, even if you just want the teacher to repeat how to solve the problem they just solved, ask it!
 - Ask to meet at with your teacher as soon as you realize you are struggling with a concept. The longer you wait, the more confused you will get. Put in the effort to

make an appointment before school, at brunch or lunch, or afterschool if there isn't enough time in class to get the help you need.

4. Math is like sports: you have to practice daily to get better at it.

- To build muscles, you have to work out. To have a better jump shot, you have to practice. To build your math knowledge, you have to do more math problems.
- To study for a test, do EXTRA problems that help you practice what you learned in that unit. Focus on the types of problems that you had a hard time with during the unit. The more problems you do, the more automatic the calculations become and the more confidence you have when attacking new problems.

5. Try to do all the homework problems.

- Do all the homework problems you know how to do first.
- Go back and TRY the ones you're not sure about. Trying is better than skipping it all together. Homework is about practice, so it's ok if you get the problems wrong. If you try a problem, then you have somewhere to work from when you get help from your teacher. Leave all the work that shows your thinking, even if you didn't get an answer.
- If you've spent more than an hour on the math homework alone, STOP. Go to sleep! You're brain will keep processing as you sleep.

Julie Ludwig – 7th Grade

Julie Ludwig has taught at SMS for the past 16 years. She has taught 6-8 grade Spanish, and 7th grade Social Studies. Before starting her career here, she taught English in Switzerland and ESL/Social Studies at two different private schools in Santa Clara County. She grew up in the Bay Area and graduated from Cupertino H.S., De Anza College, UC Davis, and San Jose State University. She lives in Sunnyvale and her first grader attends Cumberland Elementary School.

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Ms. Ludwig's Top 5 Successful Strategies for Social Studies (and Science)

1. Have balance in your life, too much of anything can be bad.
2. Don't eat Coco Puffs for breakfast.
3. Be kind to EVERYONE.
4. Be prepared for school.
5. Homework is for you, not your parents.

1. Have balance in your life.

You should make school your main priority, but you should also have time for friends, family, and some extra activities. "Texting" is not a subject matter that you will be tested on.

2. Don't eat CocoPuffs for breakfast.

Breakfast it is very important. It is like putting gas in the tank before you go on a trip. If you don't have any healthy food in your body it is hard to pay attention and learn. Last week I had two students goofing off in class and when I asked them what they had for breakfast, one had Coco Puffs, and one had only had his ADHD medicine.

3. Be Kind To EVERYONE!

Sometimes students in middle school are not very nice to each other. You should be the exception. You will be working with these kids in groups, seeing them every day in class and in the hallways. You want people to see you for the wonderful person you are. You should be helpful and sweet to your teachers also. Be VERY NICE to subs as that is a very tough job! They will really appreciate the extra help that you can offer.

4. Be prepared for school.

*Bring your school supplies every day! Your teachers are no longer a store in 7th grade. You are responsible for having a pen or pencil every single day! You need paper to write on!

*Be on time! We start on time, and if you are late, you miss the start of the day, and you don't know what we are doing.

*Clean up after yourself! If you leave your work on the desk, it probably will not be there tomorrow. You no longer are the only person in that desk. The other 5 students who sit there do not want your stuff left on "their" desk. Your work will be lost, and you will not get credit for doing it.

5. Homework is for you to do, not your parents as they have already taken 7th grade.

The purpose of homework is to help you learn the subject matter better. In Social Studies we have to cover the history of the world, and we can't cover every aspect of it in the limited amount of class time that we have. We expect you to do some extended learning on your own. It doesn't help you learn if your parents do the work. The grade is supposed to reflect your knowledge, not your parents. If you miss one homework assignment, it will not determine your college or career in life.

Jim Realini – 8th Grade

This begins Jim Realini's 7th Year at Sunnyvale Middle School, his 11th year of teaching after a 30-year career as a US Army Special Forces Officer. It's always exciting to be teaching 8th Graders about United States History and showing them how to understand and appreciate how our country was born and more importantly how we grew into a new world power by the 20th century. As the Advisor to the Student Council and teacher for the Leadership Elective, Jim helps organize a myriad of outstanding opportunities to have fun, reward and recognize student achievement, and provide opportunities to serve

our Sunnyvale Community. This year we made significant upgrades to the quality of our daily Spartan TV program (made possible by the hard work of the students and the generosity of the PTSA). Room E9 is always open, come by and chat or go to Jim's school website for a wealth of historical and student activity information. GO SPARTANS!

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Mr. Realini's Top 5 Strategies for Success in Middle School and Beyond

1. Put school first.
2. You are all going to High School after 8th Grade.
3. It is not the due date; it is when are you going to do it?
4. Read as much as you can each day.
5. In order to learn to write 100 words in five minutes without stopping, you must write every day.

1. Put school first. School is not the only thing in life, but it should come first each day. "What do I have to do today to accomplish my school tasks?" "What else do I have to do today and how will I get my school work done?" Ask these questions when you get up, when you get home, and when you go to bed. These are healthy study attitudes you need before you start high school. Speaking of health, what are you doing to train your body for the future? Physical activity is not just PE & one occasional support. Physical health depends on quality food intake and getting rest. Physically active middle schoolers will play until they drop, that's not good. Getting up at 7-730 means sleeping from 1030-11, not going to bed at 1030, but being in the bed at 1030. How you treat your body until you are 22 is what you have to work with for the rest of your life.

2. Hello! You are all going to High School after 8th Grade. No exceptions! K-8 prepares you to be a student. A high school student must be able to comprehend what they read; communicate in written form your thoughts, i.e., what do you know with details, facts, and conclusions; and to use mathematical operations and numbers to solve problems, read charts, and interpret graphs. High school is also where you begin your adult life. All the silly immature attempts to grow up in Middle School will be put behind you. In high School, you finally accept the responsibility to mature into adult life and begin a career or go on to study at the baccalaureate level, but you must put school first in order to succeed.

3. Read as much as you can each day. Read something from each subject each day, not just the 20 minutes the District Policy recommends. Read a magazine regularly (weekly); the content is irrelevant so long as you become involved with what you read. Read the newspaper daily, especially the opinion page. Reading is still the best way to acquire knowledge and knowledge is the wealth of the 21st Century.

4. Learn to write 100 words in five minutes without stopping. To do this you must write every day. 100 words in five minutes is the average length of a correct answer on a high school test. 100 words is the average length of an informative paragraph for a high school student. Five paragraphs is the standard for an essay in high school. Reports are just a lot of informative paragraphs demonstrating your

comprehension of a subject. Start a journal! Yeech! Really, writing each day for 5 minutes about something is a great way to refine, develop, and improve anyone's writing skill. The problem is sticking to it! Blogging (not texting) could be a solution. Do you know how valuable 365 continuous days of blogging by a teen-ager on anything could be? Just watch the G4 channel or MTV.

5. It is not the due date; it is when are you going to do it? Planning and organizing is the ultimate life long learning skill for any student. Teach your children not only to write everything down about assignments before they leave class, but more importantly to take a few minutes right after school to review their assignments and figure out how to put school first. Go over long range projects with them and make sure your family calendar reflects and respects their plan. Check on this plan the day before a milestone to keep them on track. Give your children the time they need, to study, grow, and rest and they will succeed!