

BACK- TO- SCHOOL TOOLKIT

Back-to-school can be overwhelming. To help parents navigate this process, **NewMexicoKidsCAN** has put together a back-to-school toolkit for families. The toolkit includes tips, questions to ask and resources to help make the back-to-school process easier.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIPS

Here are some basic tips to help you start the year on the right foot:



Double-check your school schedule. Many schools and districts across New Mexico have changed their schedules to accommodate extended learning. Be sure to double-check your school's bell schedule and calendar dates for the upcoming school year, as they may have changed.



Nail down your routine. A few days or weeks before school starts, slowly introduce your child to the school year routine. This allows them to be better prepared for the first day of school.



Get your supplies. Make sure to check with your child's school for a supply list. New Mexico's back-to-school tax-free weekend is August 4-6, where you can save on those school supplies! For more information on this back-to-school tax-free holiday, click [here](#).



Is your child taking the bus to school? This is a great time to figure out the pickup and drop-off locations and times for the bus. Make sure you have a dialogue with your child about safety while waiting for and riding the bus.



Follow your child's school or district on social media. This is a great way to stay updated on important events or school closures that may happen during the year.



Have a positive mindset. We know this time is stressful, but remain positive and have a little grace. The first few weeks of school can be chaotic. If there is a concern after the first few weeks of school, then you should address it.



Schedule those important dates. Before school starts, take a look at this year's academic calendar. Make sure to save important dates like half days, school breaks and in-service days in your phone or family calendar.



Create a study or homework space. Whether it's in the kitchen, living room or their bedroom, create a well-lit and comfortable space for your child to study or complete homework assignments.



Ask your student(s) about their day. Make time to talk about how school is going. Be sure to ask questions that go beyond simple yes or no answers. It's also a great way to gauge their academic interest and find out where they are struggling.



Do a little review. The next couple weeks are a great time to do some review of what they learned last year. You can make it fun by using apps or games. The [Learning Heroes](#) site is an excellent resource to discover where your child is at academically and what they should know at their grade level.



Download the Literacy Toolkit. Make sure your student is on track to be a strong reader. [The Literacy Toolkit](#) contains easy steps to support your child's literacy development, resources to guide your child's reading, and more to ensure your student is on track to read by the end of third grade.



Complete the steps in our Literacy Action Center. As the school year gets underway, complete the steps in our [Literacy Action Center](#). These steps will help you understand the history of literacy instruction and support your child's literacy journey.

ELEMENTARY



Take a tour. If this is a new school or they are just starting their academic career, make sure to take them on a tour of their school.

MIDDLE SCHOOL



Talk about the transition between elementary school and middle school. Middle school brings a lot of changes. Having this dialogue can help with the transition.



Make sure they know their class schedule and introduce a day planner. This helps with homework assignments and after school activities.



Most kids start to have social media accounts during this time. Take a moment to talk about social media and the do's and don'ts. Here's a [great resource](#) for you to use.



Lockers! Middle school is usually when students are introduced to lockers. Take a moment and have them practice opening and closing a combination lock.

HIGH SCHOOL



Start planning for the future. Have a check-in with your child's guidance counselor. We recommend starting this freshman year. This is a great way to keep track of their progress and see where support is needed.



Set up a study/homework routine.



Start having the dialogue regarding post-high school plans. Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- What do you want to do?
- Where do you want to go?
- What does the track look like to get there?
- How can I help you succeed with your plan?

Start exploring college and career options. Planning for college or post-graduation career plans can be overwhelming, but the earlier you start, the better! Your student can explore career options including job growth and annual salaries using the [Career Clusters Guide](#).

If college is your student's desired path, you can find a [variety of resources](#) put together by the National PTA or [explore colleges](#) and [majors](#) to find the best fit for your student.



Make a master schedule. We know families can be busy, but take a second and map out the semester with your student (important due dates, college placement exams, extracurricular activities, application deadlines and more).

SPECIAL NEEDS PARENTS



Make sure to get your child's medical information in order. This is a great time to stop by and chat with educators and school nurses about your child's needs.



Take a second to talk about school norms with your child. Some students may need a reminder on what is acceptable behavior at school.



Start a communication log for this year. This log is for you to track all your meetings, phone calls and communication with your child's educator.



Take a moment to review your child's IEP or 504. It's important to understand what is in their IEP and the goals for the coming year.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR SCHOOL'S OPEN HOUSE

Most schools host an open house before school starts or at the beginning of the school year. These events usually happen during the first week of August. This is a great time for you and your child to get to know their teachers as well as tour the school. **Here are a few questions to ask during the open house:**

- What's the best way for us to communicate and how do you prefer to be contacted?
- How can I help you and my child have the best year ever?
- What can I do at home to extend my child's learning in the classroom?
- What can I do to assist you with classroom needs?
- Can you help me understand the curriculum and supplies my child will need?
- Can you provide me with resources to help with my child's reading and math skills?
- What information do you have about the PTA or support groups for parents?

We also wanted to share some other things to do while attending the open house:

- Figure out your child's bus transportation.
- If your child has an IEP or 504, ask to meet with the special education team.
- Ask about extracurricular activities and after school care.
- Ask about after school support such as tutoring.
- Set up an individualized parent-teacher conference.
- Meet with your child's counselor to set up a time to chat about your child's career pathway/college track for middle and high school.

We know open houses can be busy, so you may not get to ask all these questions, but we encourage parents to follow-up during their individual parent meetings.

QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRST PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

The last couple years of education have been difficult on students and families. That makes this new school year very important when it comes to connecting with your child's teacher. Most schools set up a conference within the first few weeks of school. This is an opportunity to start building a close relationship with your child's teacher as well as get some insight into their progress. **Here are a few questions to ask during that meeting:**

- Can you provide me insight into where my child is academically? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Can you share my child's state assessment results from spring of 2023?
- Is my child currently meeting proficiency benchmarks in reading? In math?
- What's the plan to address my child's weaknesses? What can I do?
- What can I do to help support their learning at home?
- What is the school or district's plan to address learning loss?
- Can you provide me an update every few months on their progress?

STRATEGIES TO BUILD A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Here are tips and strategies to help build a strong relationship with your child's school and educators this year.

Connect with your school's principal. Take a moment to reach out to your child's principal. Ask to set up a meeting. This is a good way to build a relationship with your child's school. **Here are some questions you can ask:**

- What can I do to help with parent engagement?
- What do you need to make this a successful school year?
- How do you want to be communicated with?
- What's your vision for the school year?
- How can I help make this happen?

Volunteer at your child's school. Take some time to volunteer, as this is a unique opportunity to help fill the gaps where staff needs support.

Be your school's ambassador. Whether it's online or in person, it is important to share what is working well. Highlighting successes can help build trust and support with other parents. Being an ambassador aids in sharing a better understanding of the school with parents and community members.

Join your school's PTA/PTO. Most schools have a PTA or PTO. These organizations help provide parent perspectives to administration or build financial support for your child's school.

If your school doesn't have one, please consider reaching out to your school's leadership team about starting one.

WRITE AN INTRODUCTION LETTER TO YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

The first few weeks of school can be quite busy, so to help with the transition, take a moment and write an introduction letter to your child's teacher. This is a wonderful way to share a little more about your child—including their strengths and weaknesses—as well as schedule some time to chat one-on-one. **We've put together a letter to help you get started:**

Dear (your child's teacher),

My name is (your name).

I would like to introduce myself. I'm the parent of _____ (your child's name). I'm excited about this school year, and I am reaching out to share a few things with you. First, I want to highlight some of (your child's name)'s strengths (list a few strengths). Secondly, here are a few things he/she struggles with (list a few weaknesses.)

I would love to schedule some time to chat about how we can work together to ensure (your child's name) has the best year yet.

I can be reached at (your phone number) or (your email). Let me know a date and time that works best for you to connect.

Sincerely,
(your name)

Some other things to add to this letter are:

- If your child has an IEP or 504.
- Ask the educator what is the best way to communicate with them.
- What can you do at home to support your child's learning?

