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## Advice helps students get off to good start

### Special to The Clinton News

With the school year beginning, millions of students are preparing for that push to raise their grades - and parents are looking for ways to help.

Here are some tips to boost your child's scores.

- Exercise the body to give the brain a boost.

Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, feeding it with oxygen and learning-boosting nutrients like glucose.

"Exercise in many ways optimizes your brain to learn," says John Ratey, a Harvard Medical School professor.

Getting students to work out greatly improves their classroom performance. One study found that 15 to 45 minute exercise before class reduced fidgeting among children by half.

In a study that looked at three groups of students with different physical education routines, the group that exercised the most did the best on tests, even though they spent the least amount of time in class.

- Create a healthy study space.

Where kids study is almost as important as what they study, so designate a specific spot for studying. Doing so sends the message that your household takes academics seriously.

Aesthetics matter. One study found that grades were 25 percent better for students who study near a window; natural lighting promotes concentration.

- Encourage interactive learning.

An ancient Chinese proverb goes: "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand." Students perform better when actively engaged with the material. A great way to ensure that engagement is to hire a personal tutor or use online tutoring services.

- Get plenty of sleep.

Sleep is essential to the brain's ability to learn. Teenagers should get at least eight hours each night, and grade schoolers need at least 10. Late-night cram sessions don't produce much long-lasting knowledge, and they compromise the ability to analyze and recall information during tests.

A study by Harvard psychiatry professor Robert Stickgold found that after learning a new skill, student performance didn't improve until after at least six hours of sleep. "It's as if you have to wait for the dough to rise," he said.

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Psychology professor Pamela Thacher cross-referenced college grade-point averages with sleeping habits and found that "you can't do your best work when you're sleep-deprived. If you use all-nighters, your GPA is slightly lower on average."

- Encourage communal learning.

Group learning is more exciting than thumbing through a textbook. Social psychologists David Brandon and Andre Hollingshead said, "Interaction with others leads to active processing of information by the individual."

Thanks to the Internet, kids don't need to confine their study partners to people in their immediate area. There are plenty of online forums for kids to talk to each other or adult experts.

As psychology professor Rena Palloff and international studies professor Keith Pratt noted, the "keys to the learning process are ... the collaboration in learning that results from these interactions."

- Have a study plan.

Creating a study plan is an effective way to manage stress and use time efficiently. A recent study by the American College Health Association rated stress as the No. 1 impediment to academic performance among college students:

Luckily stress can be substantially reduced with just a little bit of planning. By creating a realistic study schedule and breaking down assignments into small, manageable pieces, students can avoid stress leading up to an exam.

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