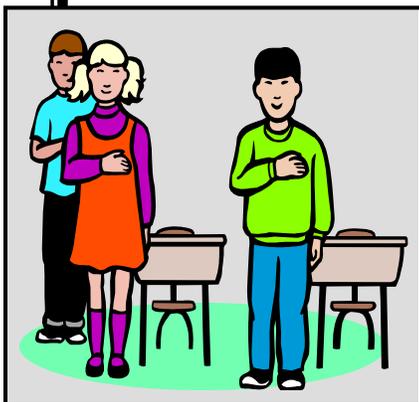


# A GUIDE TO YOUR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS



A Parent's Handbook to  
New Jersey Schools



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## **A Parent's Handbook to New Jersey Schools**

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## **ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Every parent wants their child to succeed in school. In order for children to succeed in school they need a lot of support from their parents or guardians. Children are often more successful when their parents or guardians get involved within their schools, help them with homework and encourage them to do their best work. You can help your child succeed by letting them know that you are interested and asking questions of your child, their teachers and their schools.

This guide is designed to answer some of your questions and to give you important information about the United States and New Jersey school systems. If your family is new to New Jersey or the United States you may find useful general information in this guide to help you get accustomed to New Jersey schools. For more specific questions you may have to call your child's school, however we would like this guide to help you and your child make the most of their educational experiences.

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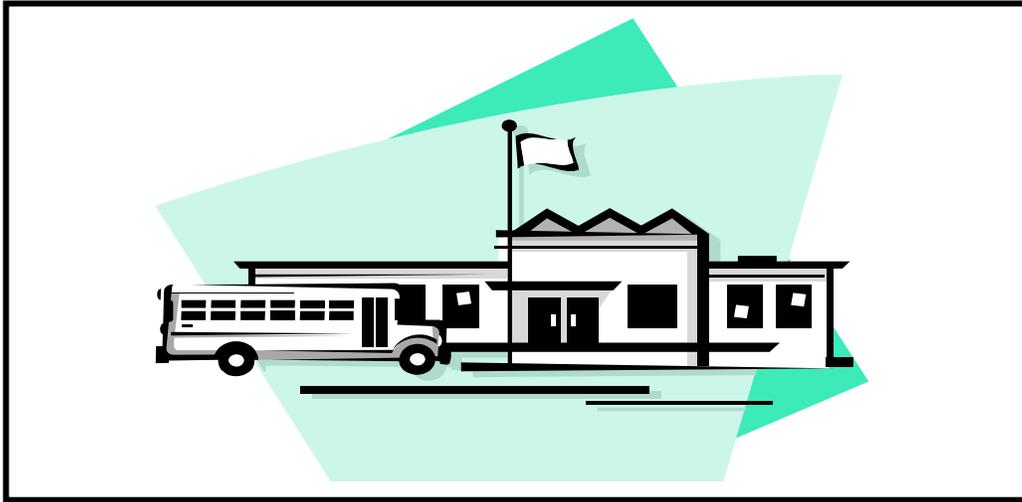
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# I. THE UNITED STATES SCHOOL SYSTEM



In New Jersey all children from the age of 6 to 16 must go to school. The school year begins in early September and ends in June. There are about three months of summer vacation in June, July and August.

In the United States there are public schools and private schools. Public schools are free and private schools charge a fee called tuition. The money to pay for the public schools comes from property taxes in your community. If you own your home, part of your property taxes helps pay for public schools. If you rent an apartment, the building owner pays the property taxes. The building owner uses part of your rent for these taxes. The government also helps pay for public schools with other money.

## 1. How are schools organized in my city or town?

### School Districts and School Boards

In the United States, the public schools are divided into districts. Some school districts include only one city or town, but other districts include more than one city or town. To find your local school, you can look in the New Jersey School Directory. <http://education.state.nj.us/directory/>

Each school district has a school board. The members of the school board live in their school district. The school board makes decisions about the schools in the district. For example, the school board decides if the district needs to build new schools. The school board also chooses a superintendent. The superintendent is the director of the school district.

## 2. What kinds of schools are there in the United States?

There are several kinds of schools in the United States.

**Pre-school (ages 3 or 4):** In pre-school, children play with other children and learn basic skills that will help them prepare for elementary school. There are a lot of types of pre-schools; some are private and others are public. In New Jersey we have the Head Start program. You can learn more from the New Jersey Department of Education. Some public school districts offer pre-school programs. You can find more information at: <http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/about/>.

**Kindergarten (age 5):** In the school year after children turn five, they can start kindergarten. Children do not have to go to kindergarten, but it is a very valuable educational experience. Children who attend kindergarten go Monday through Friday. Many kindergarten classes are half-day, and some are full-day. You can learn more about kindergarten from the Department of Education. [www.nj.gov/education/ece/k/truth.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/k/truth.pdf)

**Grades 1 - 8 (Elementary/Middle/Junior High School):** School years in the United States are called “grades”. Children attend school 5 ½ - 7 hours each day from Monday through Friday. Younger children usually stay in one classroom and have one teacher for the whole school year. Older students usually have 6 to 8 different classes during the day. They might change to different rooms and they might have different teachers for each subject. Schools for children in grades 5 or 6 through 8 are called Middle Schools or Junior High Schools.

**Grades 9 - 12 (High School):** Children usually enter high school at age 14 and graduate at age 18. However, a student can remain in high school up to age 20. High school students change classrooms and have different teachers during the day. High school prepares students for jobs or for studies at a college or university.

**Before and After School Programs:** Some schools have child care programs before school. At these schools, parents can bring their children to school before school starts. Some schools also have programs for children after school. At these schools, children may enroll in an after-school program for music, sports, homework help, or other activities. Some schools charge a fee for these programs. You must enroll your children in special programs and give your written permission before your children can come early or stay late after school.

**Summer School:** Many elementary and high schools offer summer school. Some classes in the summer are for students who need additional help in school. Some classes are for special activities or topics, such as computer classes. There may be a fee for summer school.

**After High School:** When students graduate from high school they usually continue their studies at a college or university. Some students may also choose to begin working full-time or enlist in the military.

There are thousands of private and public four-year colleges and universities in the United States. Private and public colleges and universities can be expensive. Some students may chose to attend one of New Jersey’s quality state (public) institutions. Public institutions are generally less expensive than private universities. Students can apply for scholarships and loans to help to pay for their education. All students should fill out the Free Application for Student Aid at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> which can help them with financial aid for college.

 **HELPFUL HINT** 

Here is a list of ethnic scholarships that high school students may be eligible for: <http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/resources/EthnicScholarships.pdf>

Community colleges are two-year public schools that are funded by property taxes and the government. They are less expensive than private or public universities. After attending a community college, students can receive an Associate of Arts degree or transfer into a four year university to continue their education.

Your child’s high school guidance counselor can help you with the college application process and can also help your child make decisions regarding other post high school plans. You can learn more about higher education from the New Jersey Department of Education. <http://www.nj.gov/highereducation/index.shtml>

**3. Are there schools for students who don't finish high school?**

Children must attend grades 1-12 to graduate from high school. It is very important to graduate from high school. Most universities and employers require a high school diploma. Some students leave high school before they graduate. They drop out of school. There are different programs for these students:

**Evening Classes:** Some high schools have evening classes for students who drop out.

**Alternative High School:** Some districts have alternative high schools. These are usually small schools in a different building from the regular high school.

**HSE Classes:** There are day and evening classes to help adults pass high school equivalency (HSE) tests. Adults can use HSE diplomas like a high school diploma.

Most universities and employers accept HSE diplomas. Local branches of public libraries usually have information about HSE classes. You can also get information from the Department of Education and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/adulted/cp/centers.htm>  
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/adulted/>

## II. ENROLLING IN SCHOOL



### 1. How can I enroll my children in school? What papers do I need?

#### Papers that you may need for enrollment:

- Proof of birth date if available (preferably a translated birth certificate).
- Health Documents: Medical Examination/Immunization Form and Dental Examination Form
- Proof of address: (utility bill, apartment lease, valid driver's license, or notarized affidavit (sworn statement) of residency)
- Transcripts from previous school(s) if available. For example, parents may have school records from other U.S. schools or from schools in their native countries.

Ask the school for the list of papers to bring for enrollment.

### 2. Which forms and examinations do my children need before they can begin school?

The school has medical and dental forms you need to have filled out and brought back to the school. It is very important that you fill out the forms that your child's school requests.

When children enter school for the first time, they must have a physical examination. The doctor will fill out a medical form. The medical form includes immunization records. Children may also have to have additional

physicals to play sports. If children do not have the necessary medical forms completed, they will not be allowed to attend classes when school begins.

**Immunizations:** Almost all students must have immunizations (vaccines) for the following diseases:

- Diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT)
- Influenza (6 months and older prior to attending a licensed day care center or pre-school)
- Polio
- Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine (2-11 months before enrolling and attending a licensed day care center or pre-school)
- Measles
- Rubella (German measles)Mumps
- Hepatitis B (for children entering preschool or 5<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Haemophilus influenza type b (for children under 5)
- Meningococcal (before entering the 6<sup>th</sup> grade)

If an immunization is against your religious beliefs, you may be able to apply for an exemption. You can find more information about vaccines from:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>

After the medical forms are completed, students are tested and placed in the class that is best for them, such as bilingual education class or ESL class. You might also fill out a “[Home Language Survey](#)” to help with this placement. Here is the sample of the Home Language Survey that you may be asked to complete: [http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/ell\\_mainstream/worddocs/home\\_language\\_survey.doc](http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/ell_mainstream/worddocs/home_language_survey.doc)

Based on the Home Language Survey, your child’s school might suggest that your child be placed in an “English as a Second Language” and/or a Bilingual Education program. This program can be very useful in helping your child learn English and do well in school.

### **3. What if my children had these immunizations in our home country or another state?**

If a child had some of these immunizations in another country or state, parents have to show a medical record to the doctor at the child’s physical examination. If there is no medical record of the immunizations, the child may have to have the shots again.

#### 4. Do my children need to see a dentist before enrollment?

A school district may request a dental examination. Check with the school district to see if your child should have one.

#### 5. What other examinations do my children need?

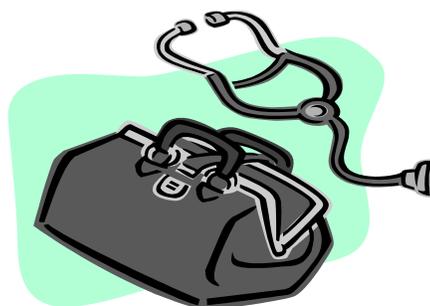
In most elementary schools, children receive screenings for vision (eye), hearing (ear), and back problems like scoliosis. If the screening shows a problem with the child's vision, hearing, or back, the school sends a letter to the child's parents. If you receive a letter from the school, you should then take your child to a doctor or clinic for a complete examination.

#### 6. Where can we go for a physical examination?

Children can have physical examinations and immunizations in a doctor's office or at a clinic. Most schools have information about free or low-cost examinations and immunizations. If you cannot afford health insurance for your children, you may be eligible for **New Jersey Family Care**. New Jersey Family Care offers free or low cost health plans for children under age 18 whose parents qualify. Your eligibility is based on the size of your family and the amount of money your family makes each month. NJ Family Care is NOT a "welfare" program and recipients are not considered to be "public charges." <http://www.njfamilycare.org/>

New Jersey Family Care covers services such as:

- Doctors Visits
- Eyeglasses
- Hospitalizations
- Lab Test
- X-Rays Prescriptions
- Regular Check-ups
- Mental Health
- Dental (for most children)



NJ Family Care is available to qualified legal immigrants. Any legal immigrant to the U.S. is eligible to receive services regardless of amount of time in the United States. NJ Family Care also has the **“Medical Emergency Payment Program for**

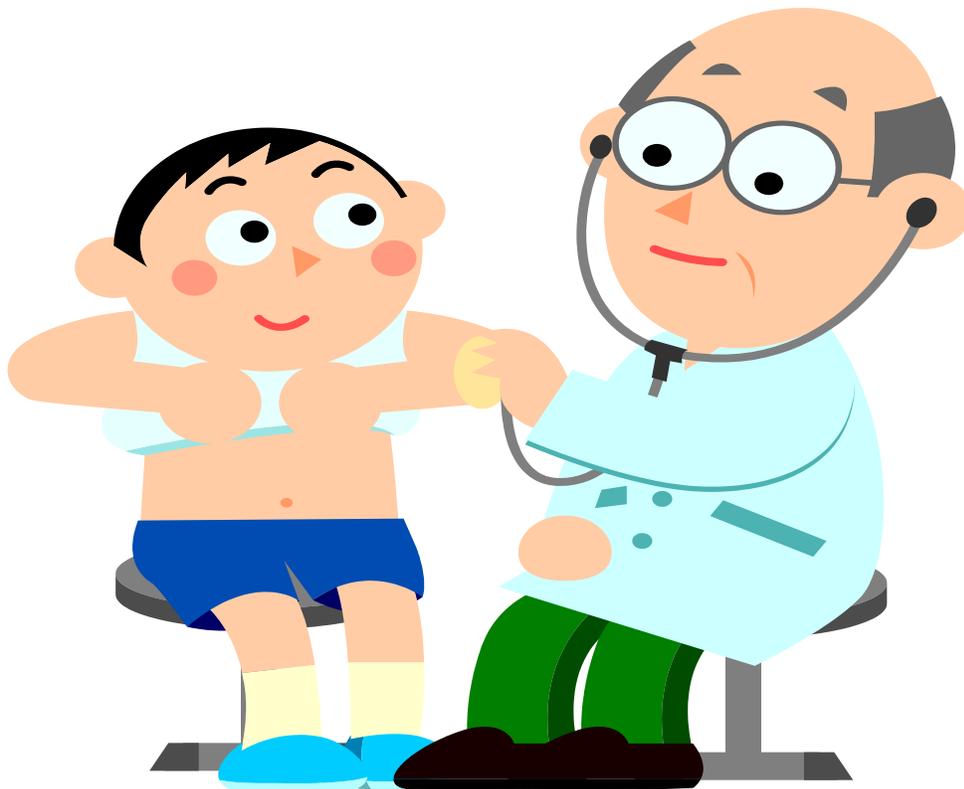
**Undocumented Residents.**” You can find more information about the program by calling NJ Family Care or visiting their website.

If you are an undocumented resident in a medical emergency, you should inform someone from the hospital staff that you wish to apply for the Medical Emergency Payment Program and they will either give you an application to fill out and/or notify the County Welfare Agency.

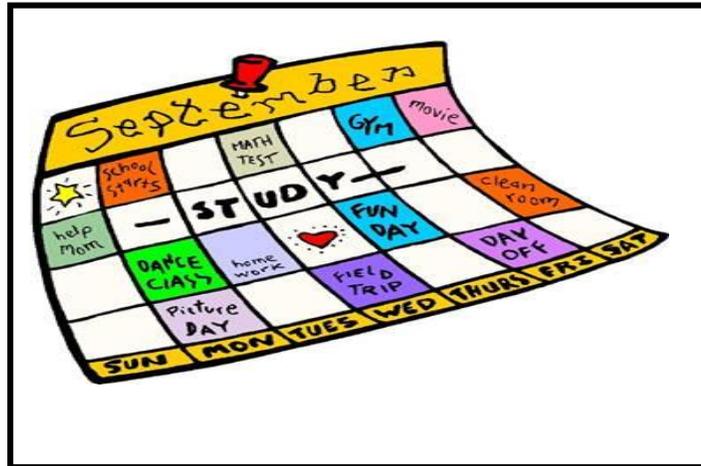
\*Do not be afraid to call about the NJ Family Care program if you do not speak English well, their 800 number offers translation services.\*

**NJ Family Care: 1-800-701-0710**

- In Spanish: [http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts\\_spanish.pdf](http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts_spanish.pdf)
- In Korean: [http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts\\_korean.pdf](http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts_korean.pdf)
- In Arabic: [http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts\\_arabic.pdf](http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts_arabic.pdf)
- In Portuguese: [http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts\\_portuguese.pdf](http://www.njfamilycare.org/docs/facts_portuguese.pdf)
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# III. THE SCHOOL CALENDAR AND THE SCHOOL DAY



## 1. How long are my children in school each day?

Most schools begin in late early September and end in June. The school day is usually about 5 1/2 - 7 hours long. Students usually eat lunch at school. Some children bring lunch to school. At some schools, children can buy their lunch at school, many schools offer free or reduced lunch for students. You can find out more information about eligibility for free or reduced school meals from the United States Department of Agriculture.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/FRP/frp.process.htm>

## 2. Are there holidays or special days when children are not in school?

Most schools have a winter vacation from late December to the first week of January. They also have a one-week vacation in the spring. Some national holidays schools might be closed for are:

- Labor Day: the 1st Monday in September
- Thanksgiving: the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in November
- New Year's Day: January 1<sup>st</sup>
- Martin Luther King Day: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday in January
- Presidents' Day: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday in February
- Memorial Day: the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday in May

Schools are closed for other days too. Schools set some of their own holidays. There are special meetings for teachers on staff development days. Sometimes there is no school on development days, and other times children go home early. When children go home early, it is called “early dismissal.” The school calendar lists when children stay home for staff development days, holidays, vacations, or have early dismissal. If your child needs to stay home for a religious holiday, or for any reason, when school is not closed, call the school to report your child’s absence.

**School Closings:** Sometimes schools close when the weather is very bad. For example, if there is a lot of snow outside or flooding, the school may close. You can listen to the radio or watch the television news in the morning to see if your children’s schools are closed. You can listen to KYW Newsradio 1060 if you live in Southern New Jersey or WOR Radio 710 if you live in Northern New Jersey. You can also find out through News 12 New Jersey’s local news: [www.news12.com](http://www.news12.com)

↙ **HELPFUL HINT** ↘

**Ask for a school calendar when you enroll your child.**



## IV. GETTING TO SCHOOL



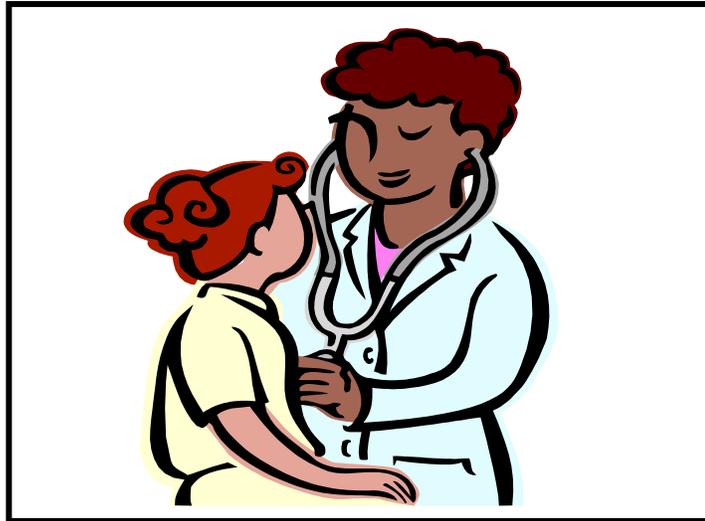
### 1. How can children go to and return from school each day?

Children who live close to school usually walk to school. Children who live far from school usually ride a school bus or take public transportation. School busses are free or low cost. If your child takes the school bus, you need to know:

- The number of the school bus
- The place and time your child gets *on* the bus
- The place and time your child gets *off* the bus



## V. SCHOOL PROCEDURES



### 1. What should I do if my child is sick?

If children are sick, they should stay home. Sometimes parents send a sick child to school because they have to go to work and can't stay home with the child. But a sick child often makes other school children sick. Do not send your child to school if:

- The child has a fever of 100° F or higher
- The child threw up the night before or in the morning before school
- The child is coughing a lot
- The child has a skin rash or sores
- The child has lice (Lice are tiny white bugs found in hair. Parents must wash the child's hair with a special shampoo and remove the lice eggs from the hair.)
- The child has chicken pox (Chicken pox are round, itchy sores, usually brown or red found on children's skin.)
- The child has "Strep" throat (Strep throat usually appears as white or yellow spots in the back of the throat, a fever and difficulty swallowing. Your child can go back to school after taking an antibiotic for 24 - 48 hours.)
- The child has scarlet fever (Scarlet fever is very rare; it usually appears as red spots on the skin and a bright red tongue.) The child can go back to school after taking an antibiotic for 24 - 48 hours.)
- The child has conjunctivitis (pinkeye)

- Schools usually send a letter to parents if a student in their child's classroom has a contagious illness such as chicken pox, strep throat, scarlet fever, or lice. This letter will tell you what to look for so you will know if your child catches the illness.

## **2. What if my child must take medicine in school?**

Parents should not send medicines to school with children unless it is absolutely necessary. Children are not allowed to take medicine by themselves at school. If it is necessary for a child to take a medicine in school, parents should write a note to the school nurse. The child should bring the medicine to the nurse's office. Some schools may need a doctor's note.

Parents should send medicine to school in the original pharmacy bottle, not in a bag or an envelope. The bottle must have a label with:

- The child's name
- The doctor's name
- The name of the medicine
- How much and when to give the medicine

The child must come to the nurse's office to take the medicine.

## **3. Who should I call if I have questions about my child's health?**

If you have a question about your child's health at school, call the school nurse or health clerk. If you are reporting an absence, call the school secretary.

## **4. How can the school reach me if my child becomes sick at school or has an accident?**

If your child becomes sick or has an accident at school, the school will call you or the person on the "emergency card."

**Emergency Card Information:** The school will give you this form when you enroll your children in school. On the emergency card, write the name and phone number of the person to call if your child is sick or has an accident at school. It is very important to fill out the emergency card for each child and send it back to school.

It is important to write:

- The telephone number where you are during the day
- The name and telephone number of a relative or close friend
- The name and telephone number of your child's doctor or clinic
- Any special health needs your child has

If this information changes at any time, contact the school and fill out a new emergency card.

**Moving:** If you move to another apartment or house, you should contact the school and give them the new address and phone number. You should also fill out a new emergency card.

## **5. If my child must be late or absent from school, what should I do?**

**Late For School:** Children should come on time to school. If children come late, the teacher may mark them late or tardy. You should call the school in the morning if your child is going to be late. Or you can send a note with your child to the school.

**Absent From School:** When your child cannot come to school, call the school every day in the early morning before school starts. Some schools have an answering machine. Parents can leave a message on the school's answering machine.

When you call the school, you should say the following information:

- Your child's name
- Your child's grade and teacher
- Why your child is going to be absent
- Your name and phone number

Sometimes parents take their children out of school during the day before school is over. They may have to take their children to the doctor or dentist during the day. If you want to take your children out of school, you must write a note to the teacher. Your child should take the note to the teacher in the morning. The note should say:

- Why you are taking your child out of school
- What time you will take your child out of school
- The name of the person picking up your child if he or she is not a parent or guardian

When you go to the school to pick up your child, go to the office and ask for your child. The school will ask you to sign a paper so your child can leave.

**Extended absences:** If your child will be out of school for an extended time, you should talk to your child's teacher before you go. Children who are absent from school must do the school work and homework they miss. If a child is absent from school for more than two days, most schools want parents to call the school to get the make-up work. You or your child's classmate can go to the child's class to get the make-up work.

## 6. Can I visit my child's school?

**Visiting the School:** Parents are welcome to visit their children's school. When you visit the school, you must first go to the office for a visitor's pass. You can visit your children's classroom on special days, but you cannot talk to the teacher during the class. If parents want to talk to the teacher, they must make an appointment in advance. To protect the students, sometimes parents must give some form of ID to a security guard before they can walk in the building. If you are picking up your child early, you may have to prove that you are your child's parent. Your child's school would like to make sure that all students are safe, and they want to make sure that whoever comes to pick up a child from school was given permission to do so.

### **HELPFUL HINT**

If you are sending someone besides yourself (a friend, neighbor or family member) to pick up your child from school, make sure you let your child's school know that you have given this person permission to do so. You may also want to teach your child a special word for when someone else gets them, if this person doesn't know the special word, your child will know that you did not give this person permission to take them from school.

## 7. Do I have to pay for anything in the school?

There are fees for some school activities or materials:

**Books:** Most classes that your child will take will require a textbook. Usually your child's school will lend books to students for the school year, at the end of the school year; your child will have to return some or all of the books to the school. If your child does lose or damage the book that they borrowed, they may have to pay for it. You should encourage your child to take good care of school books.

**Extra activities:** Sometimes there are fees for extra activities such as sports, music lessons, or academic or social clubs. Many of these activities are before and after school.

**Field Trips:** Sometimes students go on field trips to museums, zoos, and other places. Parents must sign a permission form before the child can go on the field trip. Sometimes there is a small fee to help pay for the field trip. Sometimes parents are offered a chance to volunteer to go on the field trip to help the teacher watch the children on the trip.

**Lunches:** If children do not bring their lunch to school, they can usually buy lunch at school. Most schools have a free or low-cost lunch program for parents that cannot afford to pay. Parents must fill out a form about their family income for their children to receive free or low-cost lunches.

## **8. Whom can I ask about school procedures if I have a question?**

You can call the school secretary or your child's teacher if you have questions about school procedures. All New Jersey public schools have a website. You can find information about school closing, activities, events and more on your child's school's website. <http://education.state.nj.us/directory/>

## **9. When should I meet my child's teachers?**

You and your child's teacher can work together to help your child do well in school. It shows your child that you are interested in their education when you know their teachers' names and when you are involved in their schools. It is often helpful to contact your child's teacher during the beginning of the school year, even if you just call to introduce yourself or say hello. If you do not speak English, you can ask someone who does to help interpret for you.

In addition to when your child first starts in that teacher's class, there are certain times where it is very important to communicate with your child's teachers:

- If your child has special needs or health concerns
- If your child is not getting any homework and you believe they should be.
- If you and your child do not understand their homework
- If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude.
- If you have not received any report cards or interim reports and you believe they were distributed.
- If you would like to volunteer to chaperone a trip or help the teacher.

When you meet with your child's teacher, always approach the teacher with a cooperative attitude. Your child's teacher should want to help you and your children, so even if you disagree about something, try to come up with solutions that are in the best interest of your

child. It is also helpful to write down the questions you have for the teacher before meeting with him or her. During Parent-Teacher Conferences, be prepared to take notes, and feel free to ask the teacher if you do not understand something.

## VI. PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THE SCHOOLS



### 1. Who are the people who work in the school district offices and in the schools?

School personnel are the people who work in schools. There are three kinds of school personnel: administrators, teachers, and support staff.

**Administrators** do not teach students. They are in charge of the schools. There are different kinds of administrators:

- **Superintendent:** The superintendent is the administrator of the school district.
- **Principal:** Each school in the district has a principal who is the administrator of the school.
- **Assistant Principal:** Sometimes schools have assistants to help the principals.

**Teachers** teach the students in the school. There are many different kinds of teachers:

- **Homeroom/Division Teacher:** In middle, junior high and high school, students meet with their homeroom/Division teacher for the first 10 or 15 minutes of each school day. During homeroom, students hear announcements and get information about the school day.

- ***Classroom Teacher:*** In elementary school, students usually stay with their classroom teacher during the school day. The classroom teacher usually teaches many subjects such as reading, math, and science.
- ***Bilingual Teacher:*** The bilingual teacher teaches many subjects in the students' native language and in English.
- ***English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher:*** The ESL teacher teaches English to students who don't speak much English.
- ***Special Education Teacher:*** The special education teacher teaches disabled students with special needs.
- ***Gifted Teacher:*** The gifted teacher teaches classes with more difficult work.
- ***Music Teacher:*** The music teacher teaches rhythm, singing and how to play a musical instrument.
- ***Art Teacher:*** The art teacher teaches painting, drawing, clay modeling, and other arts.
- ***Gym Teacher/Physical Education (PE) Teacher:*** The gym teacher or P.E. teacher teaches physical education such as sports and exercises. P.E. teachers can sometimes teach Health classes.
- ***Librarian:*** The librarian teaches about the library and helps students borrow books from the library.
- ***Speech Teacher:*** The speech teacher helps students who have problems with pronunciation and speaking.

***Support Staff*** help the administrators and teachers do their work. Some of the support staff are:

- ***School Secretary:*** The secretary answers the telephone, types letters and notes, greets school visitors, and helps the principal.
- ***School Nurse/Health Clerk:*** The school nurse or health clerk takes care of sick children in the school.

- **Social Worker/Counselor:** The social worker or counselor helps students with problems they are having in school or at home. The social worker may work with the child, the parent or the whole family. For example, a social worker can help a family whose child joins a gang. In high school, the counselor helps students choose classes and gives them information about colleges and jobs.

**2. Who can I talk with at the school about my child?**

In elementary school, talk to your child’s classroom teacher first. He or she will help you or tell you who else can get you information. If you need more help you can call the child’s principal.

In middle, junior high or high school, you can call your child’s homeroom teacher first. If you need more help you can call the child’s principal.

At the beginning of the school year, fill out the information in this chart about your children. Use this chart in case you need to contact the school(s).

Child’s Name	School’s Name	School’s Telephone Number	Grade	Teacher’s Name	Principal’s Name

## VII. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS



### 1. If my children do not speak English well, what can schools do to help?

Students who have difficulty speaking or reading English may take English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual classes at school. ESL classes teach students to listen, speak, read and write in English. Bilingual classes are taught in the students' native language and in English. Bilingual classes teach subjects such as math, science and social studies, language arts literacy as well as English.

When students first enroll in school, the district will use a home language survey to determine which students speak a native language other than English. Students must be tested to determine English language proficiency. The test helps the school place the students in the right classes. Students in bilingual or ESL programs take an English test each year. Students take ESL or bilingual classes until their English skills are proficient. You can find out more information from the Department of Education's Bilingual Education and ESL Bureau.

<http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/>

### 2. What subjects do my children study in elementary school?

The school curriculum is the subjects children study in school. In elementary schools, children study many different subjects:

- Reading, Language Arts, and Math
- Health, Science, Social Studies
- Art, Physical Education, Library, Music

In elementary school, each class is about 30 or 40 minutes long. Children also have recess in elementary school. During recess, children usually play outside in the school playground.

### **3. What subjects do my children study in middle school or junior high school?**

In middle school or junior high school, children usually change rooms for classes. They usually have different teachers during the day. They usually do not have recess but they may go out for lunch. The subjects they study are:

- Language Arts
- Physical Education and Health
- Science
- Social Studies
- Foreign Languages (for example Spanish or French)
- Music
- Math
- Computers
- Art

### **4. What subjects do my children study in high school?**

High school students take required and elective courses. Required courses are subjects that all students must take to graduate. For example, English and Physical Education are required courses for all four years.

Some high school classes have different levels of difficulty. For example, an English class might be a basic, regular, honors or Advanced Placement class. Here are some of the different subjects in high school:

- English (sometimes they will take a Literature class)
- History
- Science (such as Physics, Biology or Chemistry)
- Mathematics (such as Algebra, Geometry or Calculus)
- Health
- Vocational Classes (such as Woodshop, Auto Mechanics or Cosmetology)
- Language Classes -high schools often have more Language choices, such as Italian and Chinese.



**HELPFUL HINT**

**Keep a folder for all school documents. Often children bring home school information for parents in their backpacks. This folder can hold information**

about the school calendar, bus schedule, school vacations, holidays, and other materials and announcements sent from the school.

**5. If my child has learning problems or special needs, what can the school do to help?**

- Special education is a program for students with certain problems in school. These students may have problems seeing, hearing, talking, walking, learning, or behaving in class. Schools provide special education services for disabled students to help them succeed in school. You can find more information from the Department of Education; [www.nj.gov/education/specialed/](http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/) If your child has special learning needs:
  - Ask about the services available in your child’s school.
  - Tell the school what kind of special help your child needs at school.
  - Ask for an interpreter at meetings if you do not speak English.
  - Keep all important documents and letters the school staff gives or sends to you.

 **HELPFUL HINT** 

**\*You can receive a booklet about the rights of disabled students from the New Jersey Department of Education. You can download the handbook, the “Parents Rights in Special Education” from the New Jersey Department of Education; <http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/form/prise/prise.pdf> You can also call the Office of Special Education at 609-292- 0147 for information.**

**6. Are there special programs if my child is doing very well in school?**

Students who have special talents or abilities or who are above average when compared to their classmates are sometimes called “Gifted” or “Talented”. These students can often take special classes with more difficult and creative work. If your child is in high school you should encourage them to take advanced placement classes. These classes are more difficult than general classes and they are designed to be college level classes. Sometimes students can take what is called the “AP Exam”. If they achieve above a certain score they may receive college credit for their AP classes. The College Board has more information about AP classes: <http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp>

Find out what AP courses your child's high school offers and find out if they are a good fit for you child. Make sure that you find out if they are "honors" courses (which do not count for college credit) or AP courses (which do count for college credit). If the school does not offer any, encourage the school to get an Advanced Placement program. If you need more help you can call the child's principal.

## VIII. PARENTS' ROLES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND LEARNING



Schools want parents to be involved in their children's education. Parents can be involved in their children's schools in many ways. They can:

- Talk to principals and teachers
- Attend school activities
- Help make decisions about the schools
- Volunteer at the schools

### 1. How can I learn about my child's school? Is my child a good student?

Schools have different ways to tell parents about school programs and their children's learning progress. Many schools have:

**Open Houses** are times for parents to meet their children's teachers, see their classrooms, and hear about what work their children are doing. These are usually held in the beginning of the school year.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences** are meetings between parents and teachers. The teacher meets privately with each child's parents to discuss the child's progress or behavior in the classroom. Usually teachers ask for at least one conference during the school year in the fall. However, if a child is having serious learning or behavior problems, a teacher will ask parents to come for a conference at other times during the year. Parents can also ask for a conference any time there is a problem. Parents can call the teacher or write a note to the teacher asking for a conference. Often conferences are held before or after the school day.

**Written Materials** are mailed home or brought home by the children. For example, schools may send these materials home:

- School Calendars about classroom assignments, classroom activities, holidays, or school programs
- Newsletters telling what has happened in the classrooms and school
- Surveys asking parents for their ideas and concerns
- Permission forms for students to take field trips
- Announcements for school meetings, conferences, honor assemblies, school closings, and other events

Sometimes parents have to answer written materials. For example, you must sign a permission form before your children can go on a field trip.

**Phone Calls and the Internet** are other ways schools communicate with parents. Teachers often use the telephone to talk to parents. Sometimes you can have a parent-teacher conference over the telephone. Some schools have homework hotlines. Parents call a specific phone number and hear a message about their children's homework assignments. Some schools also have a school website with information about school programs, classroom activities, homework, assignments, grades, and how to email a teacher.

Parents can call the school whenever they have a question and talk to teachers or the principal. If you want to visit your child's school, call the school first to make an appointment. You can call the school or send a note to the teacher.

**School Report Card:** The New Jersey Schools Report Card has been used to increase the accountability of school districts and to keep parents and communities informed on how their schools are doing. The School Report Card can give you information about how well students from your local schools are doing academically. It can tell you what percentage of high school students graduate, how they compare to other districts, how students perform on NJ state tests, and much more. You can find your child's school on the Department of Education website:

<http://education.state.nj.us/pr/>



***If you have problems talking to someone at the school or reading English, ask someone who speaks English to call the school to explain the problem. Schools may have translators to help parents who speak little or no English. The school won't know there is a problem unless you tell them.***

## 2. How do I know how my children are doing in school?

**Report Cards:** Report cards tell parents how their children are doing in school. Report cards list each subject children study. For each subject, there is a grade. Parents receive their children's report cards several times per year. Children usually bring the report cards home. Some schools give report cards to parents at Parent-Teacher Conferences. Other schools send the report cards to parents in the mail. When parents receive the report cards, they need to sign the report card or the envelope. Then their children return the report card to school.

**Grades:** Most schools use these grades to tell parents how their children are doing in each subject:

A Very good work	E Excellent
B Good work	G Good
C Average work	S Satisfactory
D Below average work (poor work)	N Needs Improvement
F Fail the subject	

A, B, C, and D are passing grades. The grade F means that the child does not pass the subject. If a student does not pass a subject, they may have to take the subject again or do extra work to earn a passing grade.

Teachers decide what grades to give to the children. Teachers take into consideration the children's school work, homework, and tests to help them decide what grades they have earned. Teachers also watch and listen to the children in class to determine how well they have learned the subject matter.

**Interim Reports:** Some schools give interim or progress reports. Parents receive these reports between report cards. In some schools, parents of every student receive an interim report. These interim reports tell parents how their children are doing in each subject. In other schools, only parents of students with problems receive an interim report. These reports tell parents about problems their children are having in certain subjects.

## 3. How can I help make decisions about the schools?

Parents can help school administrators make decisions about school programs. Schools invite parents to attend meetings for different parent groups. Parents can give ideas and advice about programs in their children's schools when they attend these group meetings:

- **Parent Advisory Councils** are groups of parents who give schools advice and ideas for improving special programs such as Bilingual Education.
- **School Improvement Committees/Teams** develop plans for how the school personnel, parents, and community can improve student learning.
- **Parent-Teacher Associations or PTA's** plan programs to earn money for a school. For example, a parent-teacher organization might plan a book fair to sell books. They could use the money they earn to buy computers for the classrooms.

#### 4. What special activities can I attend at my children's schools?

Schools often invite parents to special school activities. These activities give teachers, parents, and children a time to get to know each other. If you are able to, it is very important that you attend these types of school events and support your children.

Sometimes parents come to school to see their children in activities such as:

- **Sports Events** to see their children play sports such as soccer, volleyball, or basketball.
- **Plays and Musical Presentations** to see their children act, sing, or play an instrument.
- **Assemblies** such as graduations or honor nights to see their children receive honors and awards.

Schools also invite families to school to learn new information. Some of these activities are:

- **Curriculum Nights** show parents what their children will learn during the school year. The teacher may also explain what students have to learn for promotion to the next grade or to graduate.
- **Parent Workshops** give parents ideas about raising their children. Parents can learn how to help their children be healthy and successful. For example, a workshop may be about how to keep children in school and not drop out. Parent Workshops can also teach parents how to help their children learn. For example, parents can attend a workshop to learn how to read books to their young children.
- **School Orientations** are meetings for parents and new students. Often orientations are held for parents of kindergarten, eighth grade and high school freshman (9<sup>th</sup> grade) students. Parents receive information about

the new school their children will attend. For example, parents may learn about the new school's dress code. Parents may also learn how to help their children choose courses.

Sometimes schools have social activities for parents and families in the community such as international fairs, parent appreciation day, and school pride day. Families come to the school to have fun and enjoy themselves. For example, they can taste different foods from many countries at an international fair.

## **5. What are some ways I can volunteer at my children's schools?**

Sometimes the school needs help with school activities. Schools ask parents to volunteer for different activities.

**For Classroom and Learning Activities** you might volunteer to:

- Talk to a class about your job or your native country
- Go on a field trip with a class
- Read to a class or listen to students read

**For School Programs** you might volunteer to:

- Help with a school dance
- Bring in refreshments for a parents' meeting
- Plan a fund-raiser
- Help translate written materials

There are many ways for you to participate in schools. Schools need your help, ideas, and participation in your children's education. You are a very important part of your children's education. You are always welcome in the schools.



Schools may list volunteer opportunities in the school bulletin, on the school web page, or in a special announcement sent home from the school.

## **6. What can I do at home to help with my children's learning?**

Successful students come to school ready to learn and have good study habits. There are many ways parents can help their children do well in school. You can

help even if you speak very little English. You do not have to know English to help. Here are important things you can do to help your children's learning:

**Dress for the Weather:** Make sure your children's clothes are appropriate for the weather outside. For example, if it is cold outside, they should wear warm clothes such as coats, hats, and gloves.

**School Uniforms and Dress Codes:** In some schools students must wear uniforms to school. For example, a uniform might be white shirts and blue pants or skirts. Other schools do not require school uniforms, but they do have dress codes. Dress codes are special rules about the clothing children can wear to school. For example, in some schools boys cannot wear hats inside and girls are not allowed to wear short skirts. If your children are not dressed correctly for school, some schools will send them home.

**School Supplies:** Children need to bring school supplies to class. School supplies are paper, pencils, pens, and erasers. Sometimes children need other supplies such as rulers, scissors, or glue. Usually teachers will give students a list of the school supplies they need. If you are not able to buy the supplies, tell the teacher.



**Talking about Schoolwork:** Parents should ask their children each day, “How was school today?” “Do you have any homework tonight?” Schools want you to discuss schoolwork with your children. You can ask your children about what they are learning in their classes. You can also ask your children to bring home and show you their graded papers.

## 7. How Can I Help My Child With Homework?

Homework is an assignment that teachers give students to do at home.

There are different kinds of homework assignments. Children may:

- Finish assignments started in school
- Do assignments that practice or review something they learned in school (such as reading or math)
- Do special projects, such as book reports, science experiments or drawing a map
- Study for a quiz or test

Teachers decide how much homework to give each night. Not all teachers give the same amount of homework. Older children usually have more homework than younger children. Here are some things you can do to help your children with their homework:

**Homework Time:** Children have many daily activities such as chores, appointments, playtime, after school programs, and homework. You can help your children schedule a special time for homework. It is best if homework is done at the same time every afternoon or evening, but not late in the evening. During homework time, you should turn off the television and video/computer games. Children need a quiet place to do their homework.

**Looking at Homework:** You should look at homework to see if it is neat. Your children can explain their homework to you. You should also ask your child questions about homework.

**Problems with Homework:** Sometimes children cannot finish their homework because they don't understand it. If parents understand the homework, they can help their children. But parents should never do homework for their children.

Many parents feel that they cannot help their children with homework. Sometimes parents don't understand much English or don't understand the subject. If parents cannot help their child with a homework problem, they should write a note or call the child's teacher or call a classmate for help. Parents can tell the teacher their child had a problem finishing the assignment. Sometimes children can get extra help with their homework assignments at school before school, after school, or during recess.

Sometimes children do not want to do their homework. They may prefer to watch TV or play instead of doing their homework. Often teachers will call or write a note to parents if a child is not doing homework. Teachers and parents

must decide what will happen to children who don't do their homework. Teachers will usually give a child who does not do their homework a lower grade. You should always encourage your child to complete all of their homework, even if they do not want to.

You can encourage your child to do homework by talking with them about it. Even if you do not understand the work you can ask questions such as;

1. **Do you understand what you are supposed to do?** After you or your child reads the directions, ask the child if they understand what they need to do. If your child does not understand, help explain it to them. If you do not understand, contact one of your child's classmates or the teacher for help.
2. **Do you have everything you need to do this assignment?** Sometimes your child will need supplies for homework like colored pencils, protractors, calculators or reference books. You can often find these supplies at the library or you may have to purchase them. If you cannot afford to buy them, contact your child's teacher, guidance counselor or principal for assistance.
3. **Does your answer make sense to you? Explain it to me.** Sometimes it helps children find mistakes when they explain their work to someone else. By explaining their work you can also see if your child did all of their homework thoroughly.

**The Library:** For some homework assignments children may need materials from the public library. All library materials can be used in the library. If your child wants to take materials home or use the library computers, you must have a library card. You can get a library card at the library.

**Reading and Talking Together:** Children who read at home do better in school. It is a good idea to have family reading time in your home. During reading time you can read to your children, your children can read to you or everyone can read by themselves. It is important for your children to see you read in English or in your native language.

If reading is difficult for you, then tell stories to your children. You can tell stories about your family when you were young and about when your children were babies. Your children can also tell stories. You can tell stories in English or your native language.

**Family Learning Activities and Family Resource Centers:** Many schools and community organizations offer family learning programs in the evening and on weekends. Parents and children attend these family activities together. Your family can learn about subjects such as math, science, reading, and computers. You will usually receive materials to take home for more learning.

Some schools have family resource centers. These centers have materials that parents can borrow and take home. Some materials are about child

development, nutrition, safety, health, the school and learning activities. There are usually books, games, videos, tape recorders and audio tapes.

 **HELPFUL HINT** 

Contact your children’s school to find out if they have a family resource center or family learning activities. You can also go to these websites:

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html>

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/>

**8. What can I do to help my children plan for their lives after high school?**

Parents should find out about the school staff that can help with their children’s future plans. The high school guidance counselor can help families make decisions about what students do after high school. When your child starts high school, begin to talk about future plans. It is best to make decisions before the last year of high school. If children decide too late to go to college, they may not have all the courses they need. Students have to take certain courses in high school to prepare for college. Students also have to take tests in high school to apply for college. You can also get information from the United States Department of Education about how to prepare your child for college.

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/prepare-for-college>

This webpage can give you information about why it is valuable for your child to go to college, how they can pay for it and what you can do to help them.

**9. What are the standardized tests that my child takes?**

Each year different grade levels of students take what are known as standardized tests. These tests are designed to help see if students are learning the information that they need and compare their performance to other schools. You can find out information about the test that your child may take each year from the New Jersey Department of Education:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/>

The state assessments are different for each grade level. Not every grade level will take a state assessment each year. Some assessments are used to see how much progress a student has made in learning English or as a requirement for high school graduation.

**The PARCC assessments** are annual assessments aligned to state standards that were created to measure students' content knowledge in grades 3-11. The tests include mathematics and English language arts (ELA) sections. The assessments will provide teachers information on student progress to inform instruction and provide targeted student support. English language learners (ELLs) are allowed certain accommodations on PARCC assessments. ELLs can also take the mathematics portion of the PARCC in Spanish if they meet certain eligibility requirements. Graduation from high school is based on PARCC scores, substitute competency tests, and/or a portfolio appeal review.

You can help your child prepare for standardized test in a few ways. Usually your child does what is called “test prep” in their class. Their teacher may talk to them about the rules for taking the test, what the questions would look like, and how to answer multiple choice questions. You can assist your child by:

- Making sure they eat well and get plenty of sleep.
- Making sure they arrive to school on time for the day of the exams.
- Making sure that they have been keeping up with their homework.

It is important that you understand your child's scores and results from these test. When the results come out your child's school will send you a copy of the results. The results may be confusing; you can always go to your child's teacher with questions. You can also contact the Office of State Assessments.

The Office of State Assessments: <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/parents/>

## **10. Is there more information on how to help my child?**

The United States Department of Education created the “Helping Your Child Series” for parents to help their children through various stages of development. The series is free and it can be found in both English and in Spanish. It can help you find information about helping your child in different school subjects like math, science and reading. It can also help you guide your child through adolescence and help them prepare for college. You can get the “Helping Your Child Series” online or you can order it.

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html>

## IX. ADULT EDUCATION



### 1. Where can I go to learn English or take other classes?

There are many learning opportunities for adults. Many classes are free, but some charge tuition. Classes are offered in the daytime and the evening. Classes for adults are often held at community colleges, schools, libraries, and community centers.

Some adult education classes are:

**English as a Second Language (ESL)** - for basic English language skills.

**High School Equivalency and Basic Skills** - for basic reading and math skills and to prepare for high school equivalency tests.

There are also academic programs at colleges and universities. Academic programs prepare adults for college study and charge tuition.

 **HELPFUL HINT** 

You can get information about adult education classes from:

- Your child's school
- Community organizations in your neighborhood
  - Your public library
- A community college near your home
  - Religious or ethnic organizations
- The New Jersey Department of Education

[http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/esl/resource\\_guide\\_adult\\_english.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/esl/resource_guide_adult_english.pdf)  
<http://lwd.state.nj.us/WorkForceDirectory/index.jsp?displayID=12&printacrossID=1>