

Grade 7
Valley View Middle School

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Dear Parents,

Welcome to the 7th grade Parent Survival Guide. This year will be an exciting one for you and your child, filled with new opportunities and challenges. Developmentally, it is appropriate for children to push for more independence (i.e. not wanting you to check their homework, asking for a later curfew, etc.) But we also know that it is still important to provide structure and limits. Therefore, our team focus is building your child's academic, study and life skills. We understand that parents sometimes need support navigating these changing times and providing the structure students need to become competent, caring, responsible adults. The 7th grade team is committed to working with you and your child toward this goal.

To that end, we have compiled a treasure trove of tips based on our many years of experience. We sat down as a team and listed questions that we seem to be answering year after year. This document is our attempt to provide answers to these common issues as a starting point for our work together. We would appreciate knowing what parts you find most valuable.

Please keep this information handy as the year progresses. We hope this is a helpful beginning to another great year at Valley View.

Sincerely,

The 7th Grade Team

Schedule

2010-2011 Daily Schedule

Period	Time
Advisory	7:45-8:07
1 2	8:11-9:37
3 4	9:42-11:09
5	11:14-11:55
Lunch	11:55-12:28
6	12:28-1:08
7 8	1:13-2:40

Keep track of your child's schedule here. If you need to contact your child during the school day, please call the office at 952-848-3500. It saves a bit of time if you can tell them what class your child is in without them having to look it up.



Please do not call your children on their cell phones during the school day. According to school policy, all phones and pagers should be off from 7:45-2:40. We're busy learning!

Semester One Schedule

Period	Class	Teacher	Period	Class	Teacher
	Advisory			Advisory	
1/2 A			1/2 B		
3/4 A			3/4 B		
5 A			5 B		
6 A			6 B		
7/8 A			7/8 B		

Semester Two Schedule

Period	Class	Teacher	Period	Class	Teacher
	Advisory			Advisory	
1/2 A			1/2 B		
3/4 A			3/4 B		
5 A			5 B		
6 A			6 B		
7/8 A			7/8 B		

Skills for Success—in School and in Life

Over the years, the 7th grade team has worked with thousands of students and their families. We've see all kinds of learners pass through our rooms, but the successful ones all had certain skills in common. We've narrowed the list down to the 10 most essential skills, which we emphasize in our classrooms.

Throughout the year, it is helpful if you talk with your student about how s/he is progressing in each of the areas. This guide also contains many specific suggestions to help your student build these competencies.



1. HOMEWORK COMPLETION

- On time
- Quality- Is it your best or a “worthy practice”
- Comprehension- Do you understand it?

2. ORGANIZATION is **PLANNING** where you are going to **PUT** something! **PLANNING** to be successful.

- Keeping binder neat (No piles!)
- Keeping locker neat (No cramming, kicking or slamming!)
- Using Daily Planner
- Establishing routines



3. TIME MANAGEMENT

- Planning ahead
- Using your daily planner/calendar
- Getting into routines

4. USE OF TIME

- Doing what you are supposed to be doing **WHEN** you are supposed to be doing it, both in class and at home

5. READING AND FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

- **BEFORE** you start doing an assignment
- Rereading directions and putting them in your own words- out loud
- Going back to them when you don't know what to do

6. ENGAGEMENT

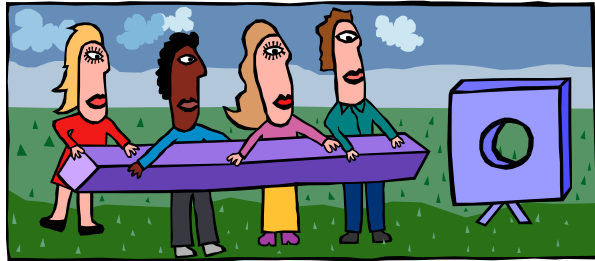
- In class **AND** on homework
- Activating your brain
- Getting your brain involved

7. TRACKING/ATTENTION

- Looking at the teacher/board
- Doing what the rest of the class is doing
- Following directions

8. WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Sharing the work
- Being respectful
- Listening
- Participating



9. KNOWING HOW TO WORK HARD

- Understanding what it means to work hard
- Knowing what to do when you need help

10. STUDYING/TEST TAKING

- Reviewing= Looking over the material
- Studying= *Doing* something with the material
- Learning begins when you start the unit

Using these skills takes (Self-) MOTIVATION and (Self-) DISCIPLINE.

Team Expectations

Preparedness



While each course has its own supply needs, there are general items all students need in order to be ready to learn. We expect all students to come to class with a pencil and eraser, pen, paper, planner, and homework (if applicable). In many cases, students are not allowed to return to their lockers for these items once class has begun. *Tip:* It's a great idea to check your child's supplies every month or so to keep them replenished.

School View, Moodle, Google

We expect students and parents to check these online sites once a week for grade and assignment information. Teachers post handouts, worksheets, test and project dates, website links and more. We are required to post current grades at mid-quarter and end of quarter. *Tip:* One idea is to set up a weekly routine where you sit down with your child and have him explain what's going on in each class, using these sites as a guide.

Homework

We expect 7th grade students to spend 1 to 2 hours in practice and preparation a night. This may vary depending on your child's course load, their rate of work, and their time management ability. If your child seems to be spending excessive amounts of time on daily work, check to be sure his attention is actually focused on work the whole time, then contact the teacher to see what steps can be taken to support your child's homework efforts. We have found that it is best if students do their A-day homework that same night. The material will be fresh, and they have the B day in between classes to get clarification from the teacher if needed.

Tip: Encourage your child to find a "study buddy" in each class. These partners will serve as a resource for clarifying assignments, getting missing work, or asking questions.

Although teachers allow several weeks for projects to be completed and help students break them down into small chunks, it is common for students to leave big portions until the last minute. You can work to prevent this by checking Google/Moodle regularly and talking regularly with your child about upcoming projects.

If your child is working steadily and realizes that he may need an extension, it doesn't hurt to ask the teacher **ahead of time** for an extra day or two. This is a great chance for you to coach your child in how to approach teachers. *Tip:* Try to role play the situation until your child is confident about what to say. While the teacher may take another

avenue of support rather than extending the due date, your child will have learned a valuable advocacy skill.

Of course, there's always the opposite situation, when it's 1 a.m. the night before the project's due, your child is in tears, and you've maxed out your frustration level. You might want to say, "Go to bed! I'll just finish this for you." We understand the guilt that often catalyzes this temptation. It's a touchy subject. No parent wants his child to fail. Neither do we, but often the failure is the result of the student making poor choices. He needs to see the natural consequences of his behavior, even if it is a poor grade or the work is late. This is the only way he will learn to change the behavior and make better choices, and it provides an effective discussion tool once emotions have cooled down. Think of it as an opportunity to make plans for future similar situations.



Late Work

We are working to teach students time management and organization skills. Most teachers will accept late work until the end of the current unit and want the work turned in eventually, regardless of the point value. Some teachers even base the opportunity to earn extra credit on the completion of assigned work. Don't be surprised if your child calls home from our classroom to leave herself a message as a reminder to do a missing assignment! And, while we again understand the temptation to rush a piece of forgotten homework or gym clothes or instrument to school, please consider what message you want to send to your child. This is another valuable learning situation where your child can develop life-long coping skills. Be sure to check each teacher's individual classroom policies for further details.

Attendance and Make-Up Work

Because we operate on an every-other-day class schedule, it is imperative that students attend class each day. Missing one day of a blocked class is the rough equivalent of half a week of content. In the event that the absence is planned (doctor's appointment), we ask that you encourage your child to take responsibility for the work that she will miss by approaching the teacher a day or two ahead of time and asking for the assignments. Sometimes appointments are scheduled last minute. If that is the case, then have your child stop by the missed classes upon her return to school that day or sometime on the following day, which would still leave time to catch up before the next scheduled class meeting. Ah, the good thing about the every-other-day schedule!

If the absence is unplanned, school policy allows two days to make up the work for each day missed. We would encourage students to do the work as quickly as possible so they can participate in classes. *Tip:* If your child is sick at home but able to use email, you can encourage her to contact teachers from home and ask for



the assignments. This is another great way to promote responsibility. Sometimes teachers can even send the actual worksheets or handouts that way so when the student returns, she hits the ground running.

We also expect students to arrive on time for class. Students who are chronically tardy to a class (3 or more in a semester) may be awarded an after school detention.

Folder Clean Out

Parents and students often wonder how long to hold on to materials for each class, especially when the folders are near-to-bursting. An obvious rule of thumb is to keep materials for the current unit in the folder. If it's difficult to discern what is current, at least keep materials in the folder until they appear on the School View grade report. Some teachers take class time to perform folder clean outs each quarter. *Tip:* Keep all materials removed from a folder in a home file in case they are needed later in the year.

Detention

Sometimes the logical consequence for undesirable behavior is taking away a student's free time. 7th grade detentions are held on Thursday afternoons from 2:45 to 3:45. The 7th grade staff takes turns hosting, so the location changes weekly. The detention time may include some sort of service to the school, teacher conference, or quiet reflection. Students should make transportation arrangements ahead of time. The Activity Bus leaves Valley View at 4:15.

Planner Use

We encourage students to find time-management systems of their own, yet we want to make sure that all students have basic coaching in this important life skill. These are the instructions all 7th graders have received in using their planners:

Time management is an essential strategy in becoming a successful scholar. Planners are an extremely important tool to help you prioritize your commitments. The most obvious way to use your planner is to keep track of your schoolwork. It's also great to mark practices or rehearsals, sporting events, friends' birthdays and family gatherings.

However, PLANNERS ARE NOT FOR DOODLING. Don't write notes to friends. Don't color all over the days. Don't rip out the page of passes in the back. And don't EVER write in (or take) someone else's planner.

Because your schedule this year is so different from last year and your course load is heavier, we've developed a planning method that helps most students make the transition successfully.

Part 1: Setting up the planner for efficient use

1. Put your name on the cover and somewhere on the inside as well, in case the cover gets ripped off.
2. Mark the dates of no school.
3. Label A-B days for about a month at the top of each date column.
4. Color-code A or B days—outline days in alternating colors or put different shapes at the top so you can easily see the difference. Some students write the A's and B's in alternating colors.
5. **First**, write down all A day classes on each A day, leaving blank lines in between each title. Be sure to abbreviate the names of your classes; there's not much room to write. If you know you'll rarely have HW for a class or it will be minimal, leave less space than for LA or math. You'll soon learn which classes will need an extra line or two for homework. **Then** go back and list all the B day classes. Since it's the start of a new year, only label classes for a week or two in case they change.
6. Get a paper clip of some kind and clip together the pages so you can easily flip from the current weekly view to the full month view.

Part 2: Using the planner

1. Write your daily homework down **on the day it is assigned**, not on the due date. For long-term projects, still write it down on the day it is assigned, but also flip forward in your planner and make a note the day before the project is due. It is also a good time-management tool to put larger, longer items on the monthly calendars at the front of the planner.
2. Even if you have no homework in a class, write down "none" so you know you didn't just forget to copy the assignment off the board.
3. When you finish an assignment, cross or check it off. If you don't finish an assignment on time, be sure to carry that information forward to the next day so you complete the learning before you forget about it.
4. Use abbreviations when recording your assignments, but make sure to enter complete enough information that you understand what to do when you get home.
5. Near the end of each day, take a minute to read through your assignments and make mental note of what materials you need to take home to complete them. Sometimes you can put materials in your bag throughout the day as you visit your locker between classes. Some students also stand at their locker with their planner in hand and fill up their bags just before they go to their busses.
6. Be sure to take some time in CT or at home to keep up the format—A/B days, color coding, classes listed.

Homework Help

Teachers are always willing to provide extra help to students, and many even have specific lunch bunch times and after-school help nights. In addition, the school has a general homework lab every Tuesday afternoon that is under staff supervision. Watch for information about when that is starting up again for the year.

Helping with work at home is a different story. Many middle-schoolers won't let their parents near their homework, and still others may ask for help that parents sometimes aren't sure how to give. We know it's been a long time since most parents have had to think about what an adverb does or how to use the quadratic equation. *Tip:* One way to work through homework issues is to make sure your child consistently does the homework on the day it is assigned. That leaves a non-class day in between for him to go see the teacher for further explanation. Many teachers post helpful resources on their Google/Moodle pages.



The U. S. Department of Education also has general homework help guidelines at <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html>.

Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are held the Thursday evening prior to Thanksgiving and the Monday of Thanksgiving week. For grades 7-9, they are arena-style conferences, which offer a lot of flexibility. There is no signing up for a specific time. Instead, all the 7th grade teachers are seated around the edges of the gym or cafeteria. Parents wait in the center for the teachers they wish to see to be open, and then move to their tables.

To make the five-minute conferences as productive as possible, it's helpful if you can prepare ahead of time. It's always a nice idea to bring in a recent photo of your child to help us connect names and faces. You will also want to talk to your child about how each class is going. Finally, plan to come in with a specific question or two and an Edline grade report for the teachers you wish to visit.

For more tips on preparing for conferences, try this article from Time magazine: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1027505,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-sidebar>

Academic Problems

It's the \$64,000 question: Why is my child getting such-and-such grade? Of course we teachers want to dialogue with you about this, but our conversation will be much more productive if you can do the following research first.

1. Talk with your child. Ask what happened to lead to the poor performance. It may be lack of understanding the concepts, lack of preparation, or just having a bad day. Each of these reasons has different fixes.
2. Check your child's planner use. 90% of the time, the reason a child is not doing work is because he didn't write it down.
3. Check School View for instances of late or missing work. Several late or missing homework assignments can really impact a grade.
4. Check School View for performance on tests. If scores are low, talk with your child about how he prepares for tests. Every teacher reviews in class prior to an assessment and coaches students on how to prepare at home. If your child is not putting in the study time, it will obviously affect his grades.
5. Monitor your child's homework habits. Seventh graders can expect 1-2 hours of homework a night, depending on their course load. Also check that your child is doing his A-day homework on the A day, and the B-day homework on the B day.



Once you've completed these preliminaries, contact the teacher if you need support developing specific strategies to counteract these problems. If the problems are not isolated to one or two classes or your efforts aren't making a difference and you'd like to meet with the team to plan further, contact Gretchen Brandt in the counseling office at grebrandt@edina.k12.mn.us or 952-848-3391.

Underachievement


In some cases, a child might be struggling with chronic underachievement. We know this is extremely frustrating for parents to watch, but rest assured, there are specific action steps we can take

together to stabilize a student's effort and get him re-engaged in schoolwork. The elements of a plan are a study routine, a communication routine between school and home, ways to motivate a student, problem-solving options, and a timetable to evaluate progress. Several team members have training in and passion for combating underachievement, so contact Gretchen Brandt if you'd like to pursue this avenue. If your child works with Kit Olson, she is another great resource in this area.

Plan for Success

Name: _____

We know you can do better in school and we want to help you get there. So we have developed the following plan to support you. The plan has four parts: a study routine, communication between school and home, ways to motivate you, and a method to solve problems should they arise.



Resources

We've done a lot of reading and research when it comes to working with adolescents. Below is a compilation of resources we've found useful. While some may appeal more to your parenting philosophy than others, they are all thought-provoking.



Dr. Sylvia Rimm's Family Achievement Clinic

<http://www.sylviarimm.com>

Author John Scieszka's Guys Read

<http://www.guysread.com>

Minnesota's "Say Yes to No" Campaign

<http://www.sayyestono.org/>

How Much Is Enough?

<http://www.overindulgence.info/>



Clarke, Jean Illsley, et al. *How Much Is Enough?* New York: Marlowe & Company, 2004.

Costa, Arthur L. and Kallick, Bena. *Discovering & Exploring the Habits of Mind.* ASCD, 2000.

Fay, Jim and Funk, David. *Teaching With Love & Logic: Taking Control of the Classroom.* Golden, CO: The Love and Logic Press, 1995.

Glasser, William. *For Parents and Teenagers: Dissolving the Barrier Between You and Your Teen.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.

Gossen, Diane. *It's All About We: Rethinking Discipline Using Restitution.* Saskatoon, SK: Chelsom Consultants Limited, 2006.

Gurian, Michael, et al. *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Rimm, Sylvia. *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades: And What You Can Do About It*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1995.

Walsh, David. *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*. New York: Free Press, 2007.

---. *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*. New York: Free Press, 2004.