

Elementary



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WHAT'S ONLINE

Find these features at [www.PartnershipForLearning](http://www.PartnershipForLearning.org)

- Clubs and Computer Games That Teach
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- What Can Go Wrong: Dealing with Bad Grades and Worse
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The Partnership for Learning is a nonprofit, national award-winning organization dedicated to student success through publications and presentations. Publisher: Bryan Taylor; Editor: Sheryl James; Advertising Director: Linda Dintenfass; Distribution Director: Jan Mason. Contributing authors: Gina Carrier; Jessica Schrader, Alice Rhein, Rebecca Kavanagh.

Special thanks to the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth, Bureau of Career Education, Office of Postsecondary Services for distribution of this publication. GEAR UP grant from the United States Department of Education PR award p3334s010013.

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SEVEN STEPS TO STAY AHEAD

By Bryan Taylor

What makes the biggest difference in why some kids do better in school than others? I asked dozens of parents and teachers when my own son started kindergarten. Here's what I found:

1. **Focus on home first.** Volunteering at your child's school is fine, but experts agree your top priority should be as your child's first teacher at home. Help your child with learning activities and good social habits.
2. **Back up your child's teacher.** Teachers want to treat all students the same but often admit they're more likely to take extra time with children whose parents have been supportive. Make sure they know from the start that you're on their team. Say:
 - "I'll back you up on discipline."
 - "How can I support classroom learning at home?"
 - "Thanks for all that you do."
3. **Connect with someone at school.** Before your child faces problems, build a relationship with a principal, counselor, another teacher or even an involved parent. They can help you resolve the issue — and avoid making enemies in the process.
4. **Get help right away if your child falters in math or reading.** Children who still struggle with reading by third grade are more likely to drop out of school later. Math problems at this level will limit their choices of career and college pathways that begin in middle school. Ask the teacher about tutors or other services at school before your child slips too far behind.
5. **Plug in.** Kids spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school. You can double their learning time by plugging them into after-school, summer and cultural activities. Check churches, libraries and clubs for free or low-cost classes. Unplug the TV and computer games. The doctor-recommended screen time limit is 1-2 hours daily.
6. **Plant the seeds for college.** Tell your children early and often that you expect them to attend college. Don't worry about specifics, just instill the dream. Research shows that most students who go to college never thought they had a choice. Visit campuses, or professionals in their habitat — artists, architects, engineers. Then review with your child what they had to do to get there.
7. **Monitor motivation.** Ask your children often what they liked or disliked about school. It will help you pick up early signs of trouble, such as bullies and bad grades. Don't let them off with one word answers. Ask for details. Kids who stop liking school stop learning. 🍎



Bryan Taylor, president of Partnership for Learning and father of two, is a national speaker for parents and educators.

READING, CHAPTER 2: Comprehension

By Gina Carrier

In the last few years, an alarm has sounded throughout the nation's middle and high schools: too many students cannot read well. It isn't that they don't know their ABCs or how to read words. It's that they cannot understand or explain what they're reading. Johnny can read, but he doesn't understand.

Teaching children to understand what they read — called reading comprehension — was until recently undervalued in all grades. This is one reason why so many middle and high schoolers are struggling.

Up until a decade ago, most classrooms waited until 3rd or 4th grade to teach students reading comprehension strategies and tools. But not anymore. Reading comprehension is now being taught in the early elementary grades. One trigger for this change was the 1997 landmark National Reading Report, a comprehensive examination of research on reading. The study identified five essential reading components:

- **Phonics:** Associating the letters with the speech sounds they represent.
- **Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words.
- **Vocabulary:** The knowledge of words.
- **Fluency:** The ability to speak or express a language effortlessly and correctly.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Understanding of text.



“When you go into our schools, you have a variety of different kids, and what I have argued vehemently for is that we need to look at what the child needs. We don’t teach a method, we teach what the child needs,” says Edwards.

Dr. Patricia Edwards, Michigan State University

These findings encouraged a research-based makeover of the teaching of reading. “In the past five or 10 years, the research has indicated that educators need to make reading comprehension more of a focus, right from the get-go. So in our district there is a definite focus on reading comprehension beginning in kindergarten,” says Carolyn Evans, Director of Elementary Literacy, Grand Rapids Public Schools.

So what is the best way for students to learn reading comprehension? That depends on the child. According to The International Reading Association, there is no single method that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must know several methods for teaching reading. They must also know their students so they can balance the methods needed for each child.

Dr. Patricia Edwards, a literacy expert with Michigan State University, says that all teaching methods work for some children — but not all children respond to every program.

“When you go into our schools, you have a variety of different kids, and what I have argued vehemently for is that we need to look at what the child needs. We don’t teach a method, we teach what the child needs,” says Edwards. “It’s like when you go to the doctor, he doesn’t give you ‘global’ medicine. He would take your family history and examine you and give you what you need for your condition.”

No one method is better than all the others. But there are many proven strategies that help children improve their reading comprehension. These include:

- Identifying key elements in a story and summarizing
- Predicting
- Questioning
- Making connections while reading
- Using pictures to help figure out the text
- Reading at the right level
- Writing or journaling

The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires states to develop grade-specific content expectations for all core subjects, including reading. These guidelines provide teachers, parents

and students with a detailed, focused list of skills students should know at the end of each grade. (See pages 11-12 for a list of reading and math expectations for kindergarteners.) They were designed to establish similar lessons across the state. A recent, independent review described Michigan’s standards as among the best in the country.

“Our content guidelines are very thorough, they are very well-thought-out, they’re very encompassing. They are a good resource and tool for educators and teachers to help all children become successful readers,” says Mark Coscarella, a Reading First Coordinator with the Michigan Department of Education’s Office of School Improvement.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Warning Signs of Struggling Readers

The Learning Disabilities Association of America, the largest nonprofit organization advocating for people with learning disabilities, says parents should watch for the following warning signs in children between ages 4 and 7. Of course, any child may exhibit some of these from time to time. The key is to see how your child compares to peers on a regular basis.

- Short attention span
- Poor memory
- Difficulty following directions
- Inability to distinguish between letters, numbers or sounds
- Difficulty sounding out words
- Inability to re-tell a story
- Avoidance of reading aloud
- Problem with spelling
- Reversal of letters and numbers (typical in a young child, but not typical by age 6)



The latest MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) scores also indicate that Michigan is on the right track with reading instruction. In the test, reading and writing portions are combined to create an overall English Language Arts (ELA) score. Students who met or exceeded the expectations on the ELA portion of the MEAP ranged from 69% of 8th graders, to 77% of 3rd graders. Coscarella adds that Michigan students are making considerable progress and that scores have nearly doubled in the last decade.

THE PARENT FACTOR

Exposing children to the written word and books early on is crucial to their

reading success. Teachers say these activities need to occur well before a child steps foot in a classroom.

“When parents and day care providers start at a very early age to teach those concepts of print — what the front of the book is, what the back of the book is, how you hold a book, that the print carries message, that a picture can help you with the understanding and the comprehension of a story — a kindergartener’s job is much easier because they have the basic understanding of print and that print carries message,” explains Coscarella.

“Parents need to take some responsibility early on for nurturing early literacy,” says MSU’s Edwards. “Kids who come to school marinated — soaking and dripping in print — are the kids who have a sense of what’s going on and will do well in school. Parents have to give their kids the basic skills and work on those building blocks.” 🍎

Gina Carrier is a freelance writer and mother of two children from Grosse Pointe.

9 Steps to Comprehension

1. When you read with your child, ask them questions as they move through the book: Why did Mr. Smith do that? How do you think Suzy feels?
2. Help your child make text-to-self connections. Ask them how they feel about a situation in the book or what they would do if they were the character in the book.
3. Help them make text-to-text connections. Ask them: What other stories have you read that talk about going on a trip?
4. Make sure they are reading at their level. A book that is too hard frustrates a child. A book that’s too easy doesn’t challenge him.
5. Set aside at least 20 minutes to read every day.
6. Help your child find books that they enjoy. This keeps them motivated.
7. Make reading more important than TV.
8. Model reading yourself. Children need to see parents read for fun.
9. Encourage writing. Have children write about what they have read or keep a daily journal.

— Source: Carolyn Evans, Grand Rapids Public Schools



KEEP A POSITIVE PARENT PROFILE

Your little girl got a D on a science report and came home in tears, so you called the teacher, steamed. You signed up to help with the class Christmas party, but then you got that call from the boss and didn't show. Your 10-year-old son messed up, but, listen, it wasn't really his fault, you tell the teacher.

Sometimes — usually because you are worried, excited, busy or just plain passionate — you can present yourself to teachers as, well, difficult. They can't really tell you that, and often, the situation reflects conditions no one can change. Still, there are some behaviors that you can recognize and try to avoid so you can better communicate with teachers and administrators — which ends up helping your children. Here are some undesirable behaviors and some advice about changing those behaviors:



Put-it-off Paul: You're a nice guy and you mean well when you promise to help out at the school carnival, check your son's homework more regularly and get the forms in on time. But somehow, it gets to be Friday, and you've forgotten to show up, help out and turn in those forms.

Advice: Stop promising so much. Write down the dates and times of what you do volunteer for. Ask your child's teacher for advice on how to be more consistent on the homework front.



Visiting Veronica: You're at school so much, people assume you're on the payroll. That's great...isn't it?

Advice: Most teachers appreciate help but they don't want parents in their classrooms 24/7. That forces them to spend valuable time finding things for you to do. Elementary school is not like daycare or even preschool; there is a schedule and an awful lot of teaching to be done. Ask the teacher what day, what time is best to come in. Is there something that can be done from home? Always schedule visits so you are not interrupting a lesson.



Courtroom Connie: You get some bad news about your son's behavior. You march right over to the school and argue your son's case like a lawyer. It wasn't his fault, you maintain. Meanwhile, at home, you threaten a lot, but you often don't enforce the limits you have given your son.

Advice: It isn't easy for a teacher to give parents negative news. Thank them for doing so, and try to listen objectively; it could help you in the long run as you raise your child. Ask for possible solutions for the problem. Try to avoid using the words "always" or "never." Replace them with the word "and." For instance: "I know that Tommy is sometimes a sweetheart and sometimes he hurts others. What can we do about that?" Ask parents you admire how they establish and maintain limits with their children.



What's-wrong Wayne: You often focus on what needs to be changed and what goes wrong at your child's school rather than what works well and what goes right. You are quick to offer criticism, less so to give educators praise.

Advice: Don't tell, ask. You will get more from people when you talk to them as if you are on the same team. Try starting conversations with, "I need your help." Then explain your concern without blaming anyone. If you feel yourself slipping, say, "I'm sorry if I sound demanding; I just really want to do the right thing for my child."



Too-busy Brenda: Life lately has been so busy, you don't even know what day of the week it is anymore. You can't begin to think about a parent-teacher conference, and, worse, your child has been showing up to school tired and hungry.

Advice: Being busy doesn't make you a bad parent. And sometimes, life can really get in the way due to forces you cannot control. Let the teacher know some of this, and that you may be hard to reach. Offer to communicate via email or after hours. As for your child, keep a stash of fruit and nutritious breakfast bars that he can grab when you cannot provide a better breakfast.

COLLEGE BEGINS IN Kindergarten

Your child will not be college age for years. But the earlier you begin a college savings plan, the better. Here are five different, inexpensive ways to start a tax-free college savings account.

529 SAVINGS PLANS

Pick which state has the best plan for you, but most offer tax and other benefits for using your home state's plan. You can begin with as little as \$25 with the Michigan Education Savings Program (MESP).

Pro: Contributions are eligible for a \$10,000 Michigan tax deduction (\$5,000 for single tax filers). Use the funds at any accredited postsecondary college in the U.S.

Con: The plan's tax free status is up for renewal by Congress in 2010. Account value may fluctuate depending on investment options.

529 PREPAID PLANS

Pay tuition now; lock in today's rates. Example: With the Michigan Education Trust (MET), buy a 5-year-old one semester at a community college for as little as \$13/month for 120 months. Cash up front for four years of tuition and mandatory fees at a public university is \$35,436. Program does not cover room and board.

Pro: Guarantees against rising tuition costs. Monthly payment contract will motivate you to save. Can be used to pay for part of tuition out-of-state and private colleges. Total contract price is eligible for Michigan tax deduction.

Con: Child must be a Michigan resident. You cannot transfer to another child or cash out until the child turns 18.

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Open an account with any bank, broker or mutual fund, like retirement savings.

Pro: Can be used for college or any educational expenses K-12 – including books, private school tuition, computers, tutors. Lets you pick your own investments.

Con: Limited to \$2,000/year per child. Tax benefits phase out for some families making more than \$95,000. May tempt you to spend before child's college years.

CASH BACK

Buy selected goods with a registered credit card and get 1 to 10% cash back for college savings account. Upromise, EdExpress.com, Babymint.com and MBNA Fidelity credit cards offer such programs.

Pro: Save while you spend: Average annual savings range from \$50 to \$500. Registered friends can direct their earnings to your account.

Con: Limited dollar value. Fewer investment options. May tempt you to chase rebates and eat up savings you could put into your child's account.



ROTH AND TRADITIONAL IRAS

Tax laws now let you take money from these retirement accounts to pay for college without penalty. You can open IRA accounts at any bank or investment agency.

Pro: Some experts recommend saving for retirement or a home before saving for college; this allows you to save for both and choose how to spend it later. Lets you pick your own investments.

Con: Limited to \$4,000/year per person in 2006. Some restrictions apply. May confuse your retirement planning; your retirement fund may not attract contributions from Grandpa.

3 Rules for College Savings:

- 1. Start early.** When your child is 5, start saving \$100/month for 13 years. With 8% annual return, that's \$27,000. Waiting until the child is 12 requires investing \$240/month over seven years to get the same amount.
- 2. Invest often.** Commit now to set aside \$5, \$50 or \$250/month. Or have it withdrawn from your paycheck. Send refunds, rebates, loose change to the fund. Ask relatives to contribute to the college fund instead of buying toys.
- 3. Don't wait.** Earmarking even \$25 makes a difference. Telling your kids will inspire them. Ask them to help and drop a dime in their college jar for every dollar they get. It will teach them to work towards a goal.

Will saving now cut my child's financial aid later? A little for some, but you're still better off having money than not, just as you're better off earning wages than not, despite income taxes. Using today's aid formulas, a low- or medium-income family could lose up to \$5 in aid for every \$100 extra they saved in any of these tools. But higher-income families probably won't qualify for need-based aid anyway.



The ABCs on the MEAP

As a new elementary school parent, third grade may seem like a long way off to you. However, these first few elementary school years will likely fly by for both you and your child. During this time, your child will be growing and learning by leaps and bounds. To assure your child is mastering important reading and math skills needed to be a successful student, teachers will begin asking your child to explain what your child knows and is able to do informally and later more formally in the form of tests. By third grade, your child will begin to take an annual statewide test called the Michigan Educational Assessment Plan (MEAP). Here is some information that will help explain why this test is given and its importance both academically and financially to your child's school success.

Why is the MEAP given?

The MEAP test is the only test given to all Michigan students. It provides the only common denominator in the state to measure in the same way, at the same time, how all Michigan students are doing on the same skills and knowledge. The test provides valuable information to parents on their student's academic progress. It also allows teachers and schools to determine whether improvement programs and policies are having the desired effect and to target academic help where it is needed.

What is the MEAP test based on?

Michigan's MEAP tests are based on the Michigan Standards and Grade Level Content Expectations that outline what a student should know and be able to do by subject, at the end of each grade. We have provided a pull out of the kindergarten grade level content expectations for your information and use on page 11.

What is on a MEAP test?

The 2005-2006 school year was the first year that all students in grades 3-8 were assessed in mathematics and English language arts, in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. This doubled the number of Michigan students tested to nearly one million. Science and social studies are only administered once at the end of elementary and middle schools. Prior to this school year, students were assessed in different subjects in different grades.

Understanding MEAP Scores

A basic understanding of your child's MEAP scores is not difficult. All MEAP tests have four performance levels:

- Level 1 indicates a student has "Exceeded Michigan Standards."
- Level 2 indicates that a student has "Met Michigan Standards."
- Level 3 indicates that a student has demonstrated "Basic" knowledge and skills.
- Level 4 indicates that a student showed minimal success in meeting Michigan Standards.

The good news is that Michigan students did well in the first year of these new annual tests.

How can I prepare my child for the MEAP?

Remember, the MEAP is based on the grade level content that a student learns every day in the classroom. Helping children do well in school also helps prepare them for the MEAP. The best way to help is to make sure children get to school ready to learn.

This includes:

- Getting your child to school on time each day.
- Providing a place and time at home for your child to read and do homework.
- Making sure your child gets enough sleep and a nutritious breakfast.

If your child performs at Level 3 or Level 4, don't panic! Instead, you can:

- Check for areas of strength and weakness on the MEAP report for parents. Compare the results to other assessments of your child's learning.
- Take care to understand the results of these assessments. Your student's scores reflect performance of a given day under standardized administration procedures.
- Discuss the MEAP results with your student's teacher and other school professionals who know your student personally. Teachers can use MEAP results with other assessment and classroom performance information to provide a more complete plan for your student's learning.

What if my child has special needs?

While a majority of students with disabilities take the MEAP along with non-disabled students, it is not appropriate for some students. For that reason, the state developed MI-Access, the state's alternate assessment program. There are three MI-Access assessments in which students with disabilities can take part in: Participation; Supported Independence; and Functional Independence. Which of the three assessments a student takes is determined by that student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), based upon their cognitive functioning level, curriculum, and instruction. For more information on MI-Access, please visit the Michigan Department of Education's web site at www.michigan.gov/mi-access. Click on "State Assessment Results for Students with Disabilities."

Additional information on the MEAP may be found at www.michigan.gov/meap. Click on MEAP Test Results. You also can call the MEAP help line at 1-877-560-TEST or email MEAP@michigan.gov.



Reading Success = Student Success

When children first enter their kindergarten classrooms, they are continuing a journey of learning that began at birth. During their first few years of life, they had to learn one skill, such as walking, in order to learn the next — running. The same process happens during kindergarten. Young students will need to learn to read, for instance, in order to learn just about everything else. You are your child's first reading teacher. For example, did you know that if you read to your child or encourage your child to read to you every day, you will help him to become a stronger reader? You also can help ensure your child's success by monitoring his or her progress in school and working with your child's teacher to support learning activities at home.

But, in order to monitor a child's progress, parents need to know what the child should have learned in core subjects, such as English and math, by the end of each grade.

How do parents do this? It's easier than you think. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has developed for each grade a tool called *A Parent's Guide to Grade Level Content Expectations*. These guides provide important information on what your child should know and be able to do by the end of each grade, and are based on Michigan's state education standards. These nationally recognized expectations are used by educators in districts and schools to develop curriculum and guide classroom teaching. They also are used by MDE to develop grade level tests given to students in 3rd through 8th grades. These tests are called the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, commonly referred to as the MEAP.

Parents can use the grade level content guides with teachers to:

- Learn what their child should know and be able to do after each school year.
- Ask how this information will be taught in school.
- Discuss their child's progress, especially during parent-teacher conferences.
- Explore ways they can support learning in the classroom.
- Ask for activities children can perform at home that will support classroom instruction.
- Review and understand the MEAP test results.

For more information contact:

The Michigan Department of Education
Student Issue Unit
517-373-6534
Toll-free: 1-888-323-4231
Email: K-12studentissues@michigan.gov

The Michigan Department of Education Parent Guide to Grade Level Expectations support the State Board of Education's goal to: "Attain substantial and meaningful improvement in academic achievement for all students/children, with primary emphasis on high-priority schools and students."

On April 20, 2006, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm signed into law new high school graduation requirements called the "Michigan Merit Curriculum." It requires students in the class of 2011 to earn a total of 16 credits, including: four credits in both English and math; three credits in science and social studies; one credit in visual, performing and applied arts; one credit in health/physical education; and an online learning experience.



While your young child is years away from entering high school, this new law emphasizes the importance of children learning another language. Beginning with the Class of 2016 (Third graders in Fall 2006), students will also need to complete 2 Credits of a World Language. Students may earn credit anytime between kindergarten and 12th grade by taking classes in high school or by successfully completing course work or other learning experiences that are substantially equivalent to the requirement. To learn how your school district will implement this language requirement, please contact your child's school.

For information on a child's innate capacity to learning language, read *Born To Speak: Cornell Studies Babies' Innate Capability To Learn Language*, available online at <http://www.news.cornell.edu/chronicle/98/2.19.98/language.html>.



Detach the next two pages for your own copy of *A Parent's Guide to Grade Level Content Expectations*.

Use it with your child's teachers and at home. For more details on these and other grade level expectations, go to www.michigan.gov/mde and click on "K-12 Curriculum."

English Language Arts

✓ CHECK WHAT YOUR CHILD CAN DO NOW. THEN HELP THEM ADD NEW SKILLS.

READING

- Change the sounds of words by changing letters that can make new words. Example: “hat” becomes “at,” or “sat,” or “mat.”
- Recognize that words are made of sounds blended together and that words have meaning.
- Understand that sounds in words are represented by letters of the alphabet.
- Use letter-sound clues to recognize a few one syllable words.
- Begin to match letters and sounds, including first and last consonants of words.
- Easily recognize about 18 familiar words s/he sees in and around the home, such as his/her name, brand names and logos.
- Recognize with ease a few basic sight vocabulary words, such as “go,” “the,” “is.” Obtain a list from your child’s teacher.
- Follow the written text of familiar stories by pointing to known words.
- Be able to predict unknown words.
- Know the meaning of words s/he hears and sees often. (Ask the teacher for a grade-level vocabulary list.)
- Try to figure out the meaning of new words and phrases.
- Automatically name letters and match letters to their sounds.
- Recognize a few words.
- Understand that words and sentences are arranged from left to right, top to bottom.
- Respond to high-quality literature.
- Begin to know the difference between stories, nursery rhymes, poetry, songs.
- Discuss simple story elements: setting, characters, events.
- Tell how authors use pictures to give readers clues about the setting and characters.
- Show how two or more stories can be connected.
- Know the difference between different types of informational text, including brand names, street signs, picture books and books that teach lessons.
- With the help of the teacher, discuss the way information is organized in texts.
- Explain how authors and illustrators use pictures to give clues about the text.
- Show through drawing, writing or talking how two or more informational texts are connected.

COMPREHENSION

- Use their own experiences to understand new ideas and connect to ideas in texts.
- Retell up to three events from a familiar story in their own words.
- Begin to connect and compare a story to their lives.
- Predict what will happen next in a story, based on pictures or portions of the story.
- Remember and use what has been read to them from other subject areas.
- Know when s/he does or does not understand the texts.
- Use simple strategies to increase understanding of texts at child’s reading level.
- Begin to identify the author’s purpose.
- Begin to sort and put information in order with the help of the teacher.
- With teacher’s help, learn how to measure the quality of child’s and others’ work.
- Become excited about reading and learning to read.
- Choose books, book activities, and word play during free time in school and at home.

WRITING

- Write a brief personal story using pictures, words, and/or sentences.
- Read and try to copy different styles of poetry matched to their grade level.
- Write a short informational piece using drawings, words, and/or sentences.
- Help with class projects by adding information gathered from teacher-supplied materials.
- As s/he plans to write, with teachers’ help, consider reactions from readers.
- Brainstorm ideas for stories and informational texts.
- Spell words based on how they sound, and add pictures and drawings that fit the story.
- Make changes to writing by asking friends for ideas to improve it.
- Express feelings, use his/her natural language and create new ideas to show originality.
- Correctly spell common words, such as his/her name and some basic vocabulary words.
- Use beginning and simple ending sounds or word lists to figure out how to spell more words.
- Be eager to write and learn to write.
- Choose to write during free time in school and at home.

English Language Arts continued on other side →

English Language Arts (continued)

Math

✓ CHECK WHAT YOUR CHILD CAN DO NOW. THEN HELP THEM ADD NEW SKILLS.

SPEAKING, LISTENING, VIEWING

- Use language to communicate with all kinds of people for all kinds of reasons.
- Be able to speak or read out loud in complete sentences that make sense.
- Make presentations to the class in Standard English or a version of Standard English if the child is learning the language.
- Use language suitable for different cultural settings, like the home, playground or school.
- Speak loudly and clearly in complete sentences.
- Stay on the subject as s/he discusses books or other topics during conversations.
- Briefly retell about experiences or things s/he cares about.
- Be able to talk about the meanings of and the connections between different stories.
- Plan and deliver simple but organized presentations that include details, such as “Show and Tell.”
- Understand and follow one-and two-step directions.
- Ask good questions during a report or presentation.
- Pay attention as they listen to one another.
- Be able to tell who is sending and who is receiving a message.
- Listen to or view and respond thoughtfully to good books.
- Make connections between different stories by discussing, drawing pictures or writing.

NUMBERS AND OPERATIONS

- Count, using whole numbers.
- Recognize how many objects are in sets up to 30.
- Count objects using one number for each item.
- Put in order sets of up to 30 objects and compare using words like “same number,” “more than” or “less than.”
- Read and write numerals up to 30 and match to same number of objects.
- Count out loud to 100 by ones. Count to 30 by 2s, 5s and 10s.
- Understand that numbers to 30 can contain groups of 10 plus some 1s.
- Use objects to count by 10s to 100.
- Put together and take apart numbers that total up to 10, such as: $5 = 4 + 1$.
- Learn number sense, such as: 6 is 1 more than 5, 7 is 1 more than 6.
- Count objects using fingers and/or objects.
- Record mathematical things by writing simple addition and subtraction sentences, such as: $7 + 2 = 9$ and $8 - 5 = 3$.
- Create, describe and extend simple number patterns, such as: 1, 2, __, 4, 5, __.

MEASUREMENT

- Know and use the words “morning,” “afternoon,” “evening,” “night.”
- Know and use the words “yesterday,” “today,” “tomorrow,” “last week,” “next year.”
- Know that clocks measure minutes/hours; calendars mark days/weeks/months.
- Name times when daily activities occur to the nearest hour: lunch is at 12 o’clock.
- Compare two or more objects by length, weight and capacity.
- Can identify which object is shorter, longer, heavier, lighter.
- Can identify which container holds more or less water.

GEOMETRY

- Relate correct geometric name to familiar objects: ball to sphere; dice to cubes.
- Name and group objects by attributes, such as the square doesn’t belong with the circles.

For more details about these expectations, or to see content expectations for first through eighth grades, go to www.michigan.gov/mde and click on “K-12 Curriculum.”

A menu for success

One school district's path to wellness

Annette Fuhrman always used the word “tragic” when she spoke to friends and neighbors about overweight children. She thought the damage to an overweight child’s health and self esteem was tragic. But most tragic, perhaps, was the apparent lack of concern about this epidemic from the general public.

Then one day in 2005, Fuhrman, of Rochester Hills, was excited to learn that a new federal law had been passed. It required school districts, with input from parents, to develop a local health-related student wellness policy by July 1, 2006.

Before she knew it, Fuhrman had joined five other dedicated moms just as passionate about the topic of promoting healthy weight. They rolled up their sleeves and got to work on a policy for Rochester Community Schools. Others got word and got involved. Pretty soon, everyone from the superintendent’s office to the food service staff joined the cause.

Rochester’s Wellness Committee was formed and began writing the school’s policy. Soon, candy disappeared from school halls and cafeterias. Soda pop machines were shut down during school hours. More milk machines showed up. Students joined “Milk Madness” contests and opted for “super sized” fruits and veggies at lunch. Parents noticed that students spent their money on too many high calorie ala carte foods instead of purchasing the healthier and less expensive national school lunch meals. Before long, all incoming 6th graders were attending an orientation entitled, *“Make the most of your lunch program! Choose well and save.”*

The School Board of Rochester Community Schools unanimously approved the wellness policy by the summer 2006 deadline. The entire experience reinforced the powerful message that good nutrition and physical fitness promote students’ health and academic success — and that by working together, school communities can accomplish almost anything.

The publishing of this article is funded in part with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

What must school district wellness policies include?

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities.
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods on the school campus.
- Assurance that reimbursable school meals meet the National School Lunch Program requirements.
- Participation by entire school community and the community at large.
- A school wellness policy evaluation plan.

How can parents promote school wellness?

- Check out what is being served for classroom snacks, rewards, parties, ala carte, and vending machines.
- Check out what daily physical activity and education opportunities are being offered.
- Review your district’s local wellness policy.
- Become a champion for change.

How can parents become champions for change?

- Learn more. Sign up for a free and fun workshop for parents by visiting Parent Action for Healthy Kids at www.parentactionforhealthykids.org and click on “School Wellness” or contact Barb Flis at 248-538-7786.
- Build a network of parents who care about student wellness and spread the word.
- Join the school wellness committee.
- Join Michigan Action for Healthy Kids at: <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>.
- Enroll your school in Team Nutrition at: <http://www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu>.
- Share your healthy schools parent success story at <http://www.mihealthtools.org/schoolsuccess>.

For more information about the local wellness policy, visit: www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/policies.html.



Kindergarten Questions Parents Ask

The Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) answers many questions from parents about kindergarten. That's not surprising, since sending a child off to the "big school" is a huge step in the life of a family. Here are some of the most common:

Q What can I do to make sure my child has a great kindergarten experience?

A Children whose parents are interested in their schooling and who learn with them and provide extra learning opportunities beyond school are the most successful. Develop a relationship with your child's teacher and keep in touch. Be sure your child is well rested, well fed, and emotionally ready for each school day. Make sure supplies are laid out the night before, and try to make the "getting ready" time in the morning as pleasant as possible.

Q What are children supposed to learn before they go to kindergarten?

A The State Board of Education has approved Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten, available on the MDE website at www.michigan.gov/mde. Click on "Programs and Offices," and then click on "Early Childhood and Family Services." The document includes a section on Early Learning Expectations for Three- and Four-Year-Old Children, which helps explain the expectations that kindergarten teachers have of children entering their classes and where the kindergarten curriculum begins.

Q What will my child do in kindergarten?

A Today's kindergarten classes are filled with learning and exploration activities to engage young learners. Ask your child's teacher to share the daily kindergarten routine with you so that you can ask your child more specific questions about the school day. There likely will be both whole class and smaller group times. There usually will be set times for vigorous activity outdoors or in the gym, and for meals and snacks. In a full-day program, children may even have a rest time. Children may be scheduled to visit the library, computer center, music or art room. Activities in typical academic subject areas are often arranged to encourage children to interact and develop their social and physical skills at the same time. No matter what the schedule of activities and routines, the most important thing is the quality, variety, and appropriateness of the learning experience.

For more, see "The Top Ten Signs of a Good Kindergarten Classroom" www.naeyc.org/ece/1996/12.asp published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Q What about homework?

A A rule of thumb is about 10 minutes a night of homework per grade; often, kindergartners don't have much, if any, homework.

Q Are there books for us to read at home about kindergarten?

A Here are some great books, available at your local or school library, that are a fun way for you to help your child understand the routines of kindergarten:



Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Kindergarten-But Didn't Know Who to Ask
by Ellen Booth Church

Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten
by Joseph Slate



The Night Before Kindergarten
by Natasha Wing

Tiptoe Into Kindergarten
by Jacqueline Rogers



Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!
by Nancy L. Carlson

Welcome to Kindergarten
by Anne Rockwell



Q How else can I support my child's learning, besides checking her homework and reading daily?

A Young children are interested in just about everything that goes on in the world and learn a lot from experience. Taking walks and learning about the seasons and the natural world are exciting to young children. Trips to parks, museums and special events are a "big deal" to little kids. They'll remember special outings and process the new information for a long time. There are many learning opportunities in your house as well — chores such as setting the table or sorting laundry can help young children learn about numbers and sorting, as well as responsibility and being part of a team. Vigorous activity and play with other children are important too. Limit your child's television and video games — research shows too much of these activities interferes with school success.

Q How can I talk with my child's teacher?

A Find out the teacher's preferences. Teachers rarely leave the children during the day. Your child's teacher may have a regular planning period during the week when she can return phone calls. The old-fashioned "note to school" still works, although many teachers and schools have set up an e-mail system for more regular — and easier — communication. Ask to see the school's website, if they have one, where notes, assignments, and activities are posted. Tell the teacher the best way and time to contact you.

Q How will I know if my child is having trouble at school?

A School staff may be in contact with you, or your child may talk to you or complain of being sick or not wanting to go to school. Listen to your child and explore possible reasons with the teacher or school staff. Many times a small problem can be identified and extra support given before a problem grows and needs more attention.

Q My child has some special needs, and attended an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) class last year. He is now included in a regular kindergarten class. How can I make sure he has a good year?

A If your child is 5, he can continue to attend the ECSE class, or be placed full- or part-time in a regular kindergarten classroom. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed for your child, with your participation, can spell out the particulars in a way that will best help your child learn. Make sure you connect often with your child's teacher so that you know how he's doing. Help him practice skills and activities at home. You will always be your child's best advocate.

Q It seems that there is a wide range of ages of children in my child's class. How does this happen?

A Children who are 5 on or before December 1 are legally entitled to enter kindergarten. That means that your local school district must allow any child to enter a regular kindergarten class if he or she is old enough. Children with fall birthdates may still be 4 when school starts. Parents may also choose to keep their child out of kindergarten, because children are not required to be in school until they are 6 years old.

Q Do children have to go to kindergarten?

A State law indicates that any child who is 6 on or before December 1 must be enrolled in a public or private school or be home-schooled. A child who does not go to kindergarten at age 5 may be placed into kindergarten or first grade the next year.

Q What's this developmental kindergarten/beginning kindergarten class my district offers?

A Some districts offer a two-year kindergarten for children who seem less prepared to succeed in kindergarten. Before enrolling a child in an extra-year program, it is a good idea to be absolutely sure that the child's "youngness" is not really a learning difference or disability. Children with learning problems benefit most from direct attention related to the difficulty. Attending a two-year kindergarten also means that child will be older than his/her classmates all through school, and this may become a social problem in middle and high school.

Q Why is my district's kindergarten only half-day? My child has been in a full-day preschool program and I work!

A State law requires that kindergarten children attend for half the number of hours required for older children in grades 1-12. Districts choose varying schedules, including AM only, PM only, alternate days and full day. Many districts in Michigan offer a full-day, every day program for kindergartners, feeling that there is so much for them to learn that it is not possible to teach it all in a half-day program. Other districts offer before- or after-school programs to accommodate working parents.

Q My district offers a full-day program, but I have to pay for the afternoons. I thought districts couldn't charge for school.

A Districts cannot charge for kindergarten, but they can charge if they arrange for part of the day to be considered a before- or after-school program, and get it approved as such by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Parents should be clearly told that the part of the day they are paying for is approved as childcare, and the approval/license should be displayed in the classroom or office. The second part of the day is then considered childcare, not school, and parents can pay tuition. If they qualify, parents may receive a subsidy from the DHS to assist with fees.

Q My child attended a kindergarten program in a childcare center, and now the school district isn't sure that she will be successful in first grade. They might place her back in kindergarten!

A The placement of your child as a 6 year old is up to the school district. It might be helpful to find out just what your child is missing in terms of knowledge or skills; some short-term tutoring might help him

MAKING IT **all** Add Up

By Rebecca Kavanagh

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD MASTER MATH



When Don Jozwiak's daughter Sophia was in first grade, she brought home a new book to read aloud each night. She also brought home spelling lists each week. But math homework never found its way into her backpack. Jozwiak's first reaction was relief. Math was never his strong suit, and he dreaded the day Sophia would sit at the kitchen table puzzling over long division. His second reaction, however, was concern. Maybe if Sophia were assigned math homework in first grade, long division wouldn't be so hard a few years down the road.

"Kids struggle later on if they don't have those rudimentary math skills mastered," says Farmington Hills seventh grade science teacher Leslie Baron. "Not having memorized the times tables, for example, comes back to haunt them time and time again. It breaks my heart when I see my students using their fingers to do math; those kids lack confidence in other areas too."

Baron had similar concerns for her own son's math education when he was in second grade. So she encouraged him to join his Farmington Hills elementary school's Mathematics Pentathlon team.

Math Pentathlon is a program of interactive problem-solving games through which students develop and practice important math concepts (for details, go to www.mathpentath.org). After learning and mastering the 20 games through after-school practice sessions, teams go on to compete with students from other schools at local, state and national tournaments.

"I like Math Pentathlon because the games teach different thinking skills and show that there's more than one way to solve a problem," says Baron. Her son, Jake, now in sixth grade, likes Math Pentathlon because, he says, "it's fun!"

Baron helped out with a Math Pentathlon program last year in her daughter Emily's first grade class, taught by Nancy Keegan. "Expectations for what first graders should know have changed since I began teaching 10 years

ago,” Keegan says. “The bar has been raised tremendously.”

Keegan says a major difference is that educators don’t just want students to do math operations but to really understand the process. “Our current approach to teaching math creates more (curious) kids,” she says. “It makes math fun and more practical in day-to-day life.”

Keegan says parents can easily find at-home math exercises as well: “If you’re making cookies, count the eggs. Measure the flour. How many tablespoons equal a quarter-cup? Math is so broad. It doesn’t come simply from a book. It’s all around us.”

Christine Ferguson, a Waterford fifth grade teacher, suggests parents play the “silly question game” with their kids. “If your child asks you, ‘What time are we going to the park,’ you might say, ‘What time is it now?’ And then, ‘We’re leaving in 20 minutes. What time will it be then?’”

Ferguson says the game can occur outside the home in places such as the grocery store: “We have \$5 to spend on treats. How much are those cookies? Can we afford cookies and ice cream?” She adds, “Make it part of your regular

day, every day. Doing that makes it seem less like teaching and more like problem-solving.”

When it comes to parents helping with actual math homework, however, Ferguson offers a different approach: “Sit with your child one-on-one and ask him to work out the problem. If he says, ‘I don’t get it,’ tell him to take it as far as he can go. Once you see where he’s getting stuck, explain that step, work through the next problem together, and keep sitting there and watching until he can do it on his own.”

Ferguson says there’s no shame in parents asking their child’s teacher for a quick refresher course in, say, decimal division, if their memories are a little hazy.

Keegan adds that parents should be on the lookout for signs that a new math concept isn’t clicking for their kids. “If they’ve been shown two or three times how to do something and they still don’t get it, or if they seem to have it one day and it’s gone the next, you need to be aware that they might need some extra help,” she says. “Helping them grasp math now sets the foundation for later success.” 🍎

Rebecca Kavanagh is a freelance writer and mother of two from Farmington Hills.

Web Connections

Check out these websites for interactive math activities

www.funbrain.com/brain/mathbrain/mathbrain.html

A trip to this site’s Math Arcade begins with choosing a skill level from first through eighth grade. Players must then beat the games in a certain order to advance and win.

www.multiplication.com/interactive_games.htm

Titles such as Timez Attack and Space Shuttle put an element of adventure into learning math facts.

www.primarygames.com/math.htm

In Math Search, kids must first solve the equation and then find it in a grid of numbers, Word Search style. Also on tap is Sudoku, the hot logic game that even grown-ups can’t get enough of. All games are timed for added excitement.

www.mathfactcafe.com/

Parents can print pre-made fact sheets or create their own. There’s also a spot where kids can work with online flash cards targeted to their skill level.

www.aplusmath.com/

The game room includes a combination bingo-math game, a math version of hidden picture and the ever popular Planet Blaster. The site also offers a Homework Helper, where students can input a problem and their answer, and the Helper will tell them whether they’re right.

www.mathcats.com/contents.html

In addition to unique games and cool math art projects, Math Cats offers a tool that allows students to figure out exactly how old they are down to the second.

1+1=FUN *A playful approach to math*

- **Shuffle up.** Whether you’re playing Concentration, Crazy Eights or Solitaire, a simple deck of cards can lead to numerous math lessons. One good alternative is Addition War: The dealer passes out all the cards, which are kept face down in piles. Each player turns up two cards. The person with the highest sum wins the hand and collects all four cards. This can be done with multiplication as well.
- **Play board games.** Even the simplest children’s games such as Chutes and Ladders or Candyland require counting. Kick it up a notch with Monopoly to give older children practice adding large sums. Kids 5 to 8 will appreciate Monopoly Junior, which takes place at an amusement park.
- **Dump out the coin jar.** Even kindergartners can count and sort. Older children should name the coins and use them to count by 1s, 5s, 10s and 25s. Award a quarter to star performers.
- **Watch the clock.** Be sure you have at least one analog (non-digital) clock in the house that includes all the numbers (not just 3, 6, 9 and 12). Then as often as you think of it, ask your child to tell you the time.
- **Give an allowance.** Set up a system for younger children through which they earn, say, a nickel each time they complete a chore. Then help them chart their earnings and count out their pay at the end of the week. For older children, include lunch money into their allowance and help them create and keep a budget.
- **Estimate and count everything.** How many steps do you think there are in the staircase? Have everyone place a guess, and then count them together. This game can take place spontaneously throughout the day, no matter where you are. How much money do you think this cart full of groceries will cost? How many items are there in the grocery cart? How much will that bunch of bananas weigh? All of the answers can be found on the sales receipt. The children can find and repeat these answers on the way home.
- **Go outside.** Set up a rain gauge, measure your shadows, estimate how many blades of grass are poking through that crack in the sidewalk — Mother Nature is a great math tutor.
- **Bowl them over.** Head to your local bowling alley and ask for an old-fashioned scorecard rather than using the electronic scorekeeper. Hand a pencil to your child and let her keep tally.
- **Get cooking.** Counting chocolate chips, measuring ingredients and watching the timer are all math lessons. Math and cooking go hand-in-hand. And the end result is always delicious.



HELPING THE shy child

By Alice Rhein

Social Interaction

Signs and Solutions

Here are signs that may indicate your child has problems with social interaction:

- Little eye contact when listening or talking
- Has trouble understanding non-verbal messages
- Gets very anxious
- Withdrawn
- Gets picked on at school
- Doesn't want to go to school
- Blames others for things that happen
- Says things like "Nobody likes me"
- Not doing well in class
- Not having interaction outside school

Here are ways to help improve your child's social skills at home and school:

1. Schedule one-on-one play dates outside school.
2. When approaching a group, don't have your child ask "Can I play, too?" Instead, teach your child to mimic the play of others. If everyone is digging in the sand, just dig, too. Conversation will build from there.
3. Talk to the teacher about your child's shyness. Often pairing a socially inhibited child with a more talkative one can help foster cooperation.
4. Help your child highlight something he or she is interested in or good at during sharing time at school. This can increase his or her status with fellow students.
5. Help set up the rule "You can't say you can't play" at your child's school. If kids know that negative talk will not be allowed, it establishes a place for acceptance and learning.

During a visit to your child's school, you notice that your child seems isolated on the playground. In the classroom, he often sits off by himself. At home, he says he has no friends, or that he doesn't like school. At the same time, when he's with family or the boy next door he knows well, he's fine. And you've already ruled out any serious disorders, such as autism.

What you have is a socially inhibited child. Such shy children seem to have trouble fitting in or even talking to others. Making excuses like, "He's just shy," doesn't solve anything. And in school, excessive shyness can lead to isolation, intimidation and trouble with learning. Yet, because shy children are not learning disabled or require formal mental health services, they often can be overlooked. Parents end up trying to figure out what to do, often with limited success.

Kelly Mix, an associate professor of Educational Psychology at Michigan State University, says certain signs indicate possible social shyness. In early childhood, it is normal for a child to play alone next to another child playing alone — called "parallel play." But by kindergarten children should be interacting with playmates fairly easily. "If you're not seeing social play, you might worry about that. You want to see children noticing each other," Mix says.

Early socialization with friends and family can help children feel more outgoing. And a cold, rejecting environment, at home or elsewhere, will have the opposite effect. Unchecked, socially isolated children can spiral into a cycle of rejection through elementary school and into the teen years, when there is a higher chance that they'll identify with other anti-social kids. "Rejected kids begin to identify with each other. They don't care that they are flunking, they don't care because that is what their social group is doing," says Mix.

Shyness, in itself, is not a problem. Not every kid is going to be popular, and lots of children identify with one friend, and that's just fine. But many students who have reduced social skills find themselves in the rejected or isolated subgroups of the school's social hierarchy. And even if a child succeeds academically, trouble being accepted will shape his or her attitude about school.

Eileen Bond, a social worker and supervising faculty at the University of Michigan Center for Child and Family, says teaching children a curriculum of social competencies should be as important as academics. "Social success is a key indicator of how well people do in the world," she says.

In the group sessions she oversees with graduate students working with young students, Bond says children are given opportunities to practice different ways to interact positively with others. Then they are given homework to try to try the behavior with others. She says if children can learn the dos and don'ts of making connections, learn how to start conversation, actively listen and deal

COPE

Shyness, in itself, is not a problem. Not every kid is going to be popular, and lots of children identify with one friend, and that's just fine.

with bullies and teasing, they will feel much more comfortable socially.

Some researchers believe that children are born with social abilities, just as they are born with good language or physical skills. Bond believes that qualities children are born with and their environment combine to shape their personalities. Some children naturally feel comfortable approaching others, and some don't — and so they withdraw from social interaction, she says.

Third grade teacher Lisa Momblanco says giving consistent and constructive feedback to parents is one way to help them help shy children. In her classroom she keeps a notebook on her desk for specific students who are working on social skills. When a child does something like volunteer to

answer a question, Momblanco jots it down in the book. On a weekly basis, examples from the notebook go home with the child, so parents can reinforce some of the positive things their child is doing in class.

Setting up a more encouraging classroom is another way teachers can nurture socially inhibited children. Instead of drawing attention to these children by calling on them, Momblanco learned which activities these children enjoyed and would likely want to join.

“Usually the child is insecure and doesn't feel confident about school,” says Momblanco. Children may also be embarrassed about a family situation, or may be socially withdrawn because of underlying learning problems with

reading or math. These children should be evaluated for possible learning difficulties. Beyond that, providing classroom support, encouragement and positive ways for them to contribute in class help children open up more.

Bond says that if a parent or teacher suspects that a student is having trouble with social interaction, the time to seek help is now. “How they feel about being at school is a huge part of their identity. If they are getting rejected, it is important to get help,” she says. “It's a process of learning — and learning how to deal with difficulty.” 🍎

Alice Rhein is a freelance writer and mother of two from Huntington Woods.



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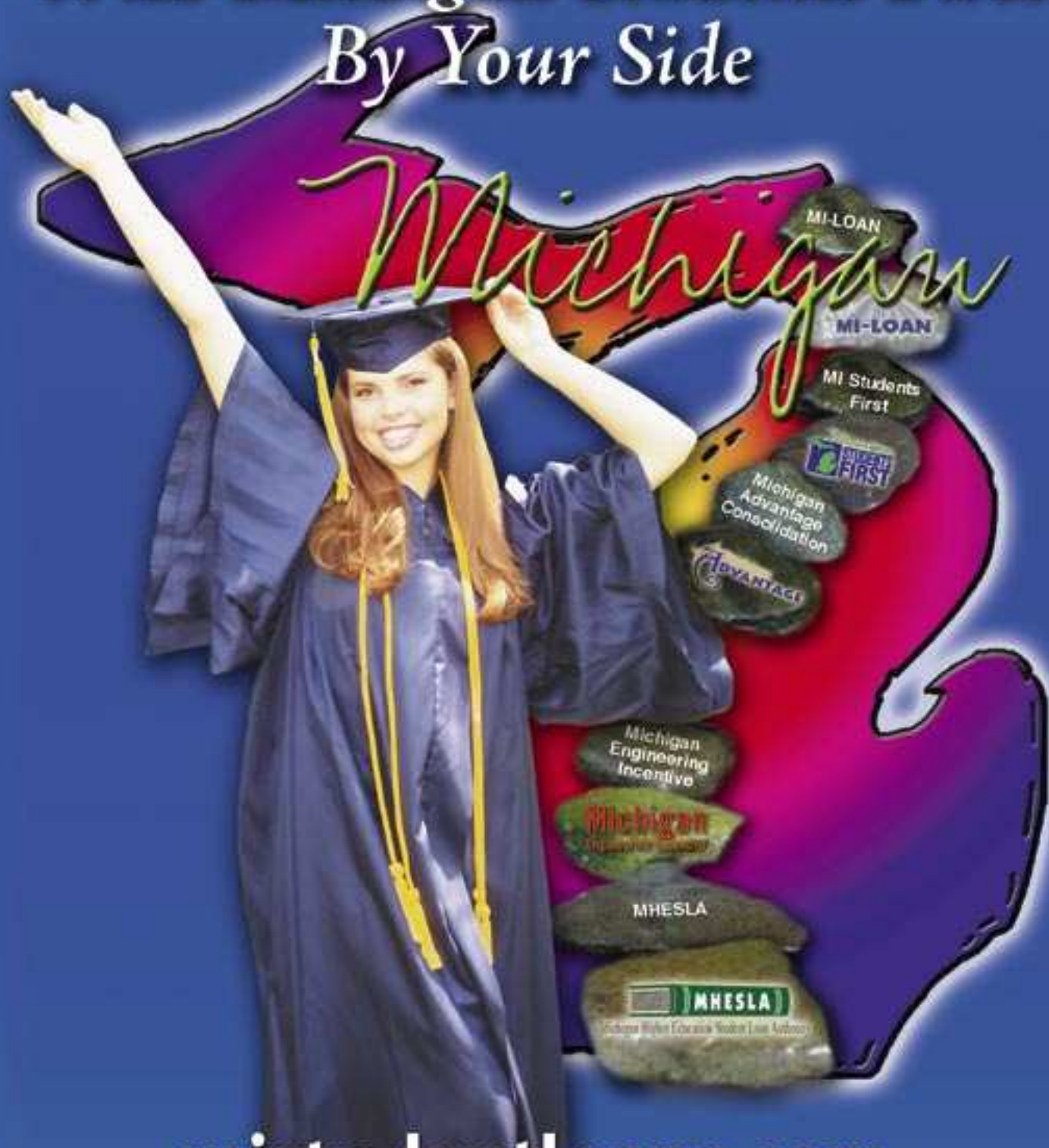
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