



Golden Apple

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State's top teachers share advice on easing into the new school year

Golden Apple Award winners offer "Top 10 Ways to Make Back-to-School a Breeze"

CHICAGO (August 12, 2008) – The start of a new school year can be overwhelming for both kids and parents. But it doesn't have to be, according to Illinois' top teachers. Tapping into their collective 2,000 years of teaching experience, the members of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators have compiled a list of the "Top 10 Ways to Make Back-to-School a Breeze," to aid Illinois parents as they prepare their children for the first day of school.

"The Number 1 thing parents can do to help their kids succeed in school on the first day, and every day, is to demonstrate that school is important — in what they say and what they do," said Dom Belmonte, president and CEO of Golden Apple and a former high school English teacher.

Golden Apple is a community of expert educators who work to ensure that all Illinois children have the excellent teachers they deserve. Members of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, including Belmonte himself, are winners of the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching, a program that honors those who exemplify the highest standards and practices of the teaching profession.

A recent survey of Academy members revealed a general consensus on the most important steps parents can take — at home and at school — to help their children succeed. Golden Apple shares the list as part of its ongoing efforts to improve the quality of the education experience for Illinois students.

Golden Apple's Top 10 Ways for Parents to Make Back-to-School a Breeze

1. Establish a daily routine – and stick to it!

Make sure there is enough time in the morning for your kids to eat a healthy breakfast and get themselves ready without being rushed. And after school, designate a physical place in your home for homework and agree on a time and schedule for completing homework every night. No exceptions.

2. Make your home a year-round haven for learning.

Demonstrate the importance of education and learning by making it part of your home life. Visit a library or museum or attend concerts and plays. But be sure to limit extracurricular activities, so your children aren't over-scheduled and over-stressed. And most importantly, read to or with your children. "I know this is the Internet/text-messaging generation," said a Golden Apple Award-winning retired high school science teacher, "But OMG! They should read books!"

3. Your positive attitude will rub off on your kids!

Make sure your attitude about school is positive and supportive. Share your favorite memories about starting a new school year and emphasize that a new year means a fresh start.

4. Build a "learning team" with your child's teacher(s).

Meet the teacher early in the school year and check in more frequently than parent-teacher conferences. Find out about special projects and activities and offer to help when you can. Find out what online services your school provides and utilize them to stay abreast of grades, lesson plans and school activities, and to communicate with the teacher and staff. At the same time, said Louis Broccolo, retired Central Middle School of Tinley Park social studies teacher and 1998 Golden Apple Award, "Be involved but don't be a helicopter parent," hovering over your child and taking too much of the teachers' attention away from the first priority of running the classroom.

- 5. Keep tabs on what your child is doing in and out of the classroom.**
Know who their friends are and talk to them about what they're learning and who they're meeting and spending time with. Make sure you see all returned tests and papers and that you get notes and materials sent home from school. Older students, in particular, don't always remember or want to share information sent home from the teacher. Communicate with other parents to keep each other abreast of new developments and information from the school, and be aware of issues facing your school.
- 6. Start the transition from summer vacation to school-day schedules early.**
Establish earlier bed times and wake-up times a few weeks prior to the first day of school to get your kids used to the new schedule. Connect with classmates they didn't see over the summer and talk or write about your summer experiences so they have them fresh in their minds.
- 7. Remember, grades aren't the only measure of success!**
Success is defined differently for everyone. Discuss expectations for the school year and ask your child to set his or her own goals, along with yours. Encourage them to be themselves and do the best they can – not follow someone else's definition of success.
- 8. Support your student in big ways and small, through the low spots and highs.**
Ask your child every day how school went. Make your questions specific and engage them in conversation about what they learned and what they did. Make sure your child has everything necessary to start the school year and follow through on what is needed to be prepared and participate throughout the year. In addition, recognize that things won't always go perfectly and help your child through the rough spots, all the while congratulating them when they meet or exceed your expectations.
- 9. Recognize and help ease that back-to-school anxiety and uncertainty.**
Build confidence and self-esteem, not dread, about the start of school. Talk about school everyday with an upbeat attitude. Discuss ways they can help themselves get ready for the new school year. Writing a letter to or drawing a picture for their teacher or picking up a book to donate to the class library can give them something tangible and positive to focus on leading up to the first day.
- 10. The little things really do matter!**
For younger students, accompany them to school and to their classroom on the first day. For middle school and high school students, know their schedules and their locker combination. Make sure that all forms are filled out and physicals are completed on time and have their school supplies purchased, out of the package, and labeled before the start of class that first day. Above all, hug them. Encourage them to do their best and support them along the way.

"Back to school can be stressful for everyone, with new schedules, new schools, new supplies and clothes to buy, but it's our jobs as parents to ease the transition from the lazy days of summer to the more regimented school-year schedule," Belmonte explained. "And the place to start is by paying attention, following through, and keeping a positive attitude to get you and your child off on the right foot this year."

About Golden Apple

Golden Apple began in 1985 with founders Mike and Pat Koldyke and a shared inspiration — to offer outstanding school teachers the level of recognition enjoyed by actors at the Academy Awards. Golden Apple's successful track record now spans more than 20 years. Integrated, innovative Golden Apple programs and resources enhance the quality, resiliency, and creativity of classroom teachers and improve teaching and learning throughout Illinois. Qualified, passionate educators — including Golden Apple Award-winners and finalists — lead a small staff of dedicated employees with functional and program expertise. A connected and committed board of directors oversees Golden Apple's strategic direction. Together with a larger community of expert educators, the not-for-profit organization works to ensure that all Illinois children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

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