

## Surviving the School Days Craze!

I am going to register and enroll my three elementary boys, Mark, Joey, and Zach for school this week. I poured over the paperwork, printed off the supply lists, and calculated the total costs to get all three started in their respective grades of 4th grade, 3rd grade, and 2nd grade. YIKES! It seems a bit daunting to begin reorganizing our lives and our finances in order to help our kids get off to a good start each year, but I would like to offer some tips and tricks I have learned and used for helping the transition and financial burden become a bit more manageable. The key is planning!

First, do your homework and find identify the various back to school expenses you will have and consider what resources you have to cover these expenses. Begin with the school's website (for Geary County Schools follow this link: <http://www.usd475.org/enrollment/SitePages/Home.aspx>) to find a list of the supplies needed for each grade, the cost of enrollment, and additional information about the enrollment process. Families also need to consider the costs associated with required immunizations, extra-curricular expenses (such as band instruments, sports equipment or uniform expenses.) I encourage families to check the cost for school breakfasts and lunches, and eligibility to apply for reduced prices, as well.

Next, families need to consider the cost of transportation and the potential need for child-care or after-school program services and related expenses. Once these first two steps have been accomplished, some additional suggestions for easing into the school year include:

- Encourage children to help inventory the school supplies still on hand from the previous year. Assist them in creating a shopping list of the supplies they still need, based on this year's school supply list.
- Prioritize your spending based on the expenses you have identified. Set money aside for the "must haves" first. Watch the sale adds for school supplies that are on sale or find alternative sources for helping acquire the supplies needed. The United Way collects

school supplies in their Stuff the School Bus campaign and distributes them to the various schools in our district. Check with your child's school to find out how you can access this resource and ease the financial burden of purchasing all the supplies for your children.

- If possible, families may want to put off buying new school clothes until the “end of season” sales begin after school starts. However, it is important to check the condition and fit of the clothes your children currently have to ensure they are comfortable and appropriate for school attire. It is important to take an inventory of what your children have available for school clothes before school starts. Based on this inventory, you can plan for how you will adjust your budget to purchase the needed clothing, either at retail stores, resell stores, or garage sales.
- Begin to ease in to your school schedule starting today. Children need time to adjust to new sleeping patterns and with school starting in only a couple of weeks, it's not too early to start following the school sleeping routine. The Centers for Disease Control identify the following recommendations for the number of hours of sleep children need: age 3 - 5 need 10-11 hours; age 5 – 10 need 10 – 11 hours; and age 10 – 17 need 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep. They will likely groan about going to bed before the sun goes down, but the pay-off is worth it. Regular sleep patterns have a positive impact on a child's health, his/her ability to concentrate in school, and self-regulate behavior in the classroom. Simply stated, well-rested children are easier to parent and easier to teach.
- Plan out your breakfast routine. Whether you decide to enjoy breakfast with your children or have your children participate in the school breakfast program, it is essential that they have a breakfast marked with variety and nutritional value. In addition to the traditional standby options, cold cereal and peanut butter sandwiches,

try making a quick breakfast burrito with a scrambled egg, a tablespoon of shredded sharp cheese and a thin slice of lean ham wrapped in a warmed multi-grain tortilla. Add a fresh apple or banana for an even better start to the day. If you're in a hurry, yogurt with a piece of fruit and a slice of toast is another alternative. The key is variety and consistency. Try to avoid having the same breakfast menu two days in a row and make sure your children have time for breakfast consistently each day. According to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, research shows that children who have a healthy breakfast every day are more likely to behave better in school, are less likely to miss school, and are more likely to have improved reading, math, and standardized test scores. Eating breakfast daily as a child promotes healthy eating patterns later in life.

The first day of school will soon be here. Planning for the transition by identifying and adjusting for the expenses as well as establishing new routines now can change a potentially stressful time to a time when families can work together to help everyone get ready for a new school year.