

## PARENTING

## Mom and Dad can help kids make grade in school

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Lisa Jackson's oldest son, Justin, 10, wants to be a teacher and has the emotional makeup to prove it, his mother noted.

"All the kids are happy on the last day of school, but he'll come out with a sad face," she said. She added that he helps his brothers, Joey, 9, and Jacob, 6, with their homework.

Along with their 4-year-old sister Ashley, the Jackson boys attend St. John the Evangelist School, Spencerport, a pre-kindergarten-to-eighth-grade institution. Lisa Jackson says she and her husband, Vern, try to encourage their kids to do their best in school through a variety of incentives.

"Little things mean a lot," she said. A good report card can earn her children a new toy. Good schoolwork is displayed on the refrigerator door. And she regularly puts notes in their lunch-bags with messages like: "I'm proud you got an A."

"They look for that," she said.

Educators have long stressed that parents play an essential role in nurturing a love of learning in their children. Angela Fortunato, principal of St. John the Evangelist School in Rochester, likened parents to "coaches or cheerleaders" of their kid's learning. To help their children learn better, Fortunato said parents can do everything from tutor their kids in schoolwork to listen to them prepare for a test or quiz.

"It's very important for children to see their parents reading," she added. "The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, and I think to read anything in front of children, even if it's just sitting down and reading the newspaper, sets a good example."

To help parents who want to better help their kids in school, the Diocese of Rochester's Department of Catholic Schools published these tips in the January edition of *Partners*, the department's monthly newsletter to parents:

1. Read to and with your children as often as possible. Build in a special time together, even if only for 10 minutes before

bedtime.

2. Provide opportunities for children to work on listening skills. Read a paragraph and have them listen. Then read it again and ask them to tell you what they heard, or draw something related to what they heard. Ask questions about the passage. Have children predict what will come next.

3. Have your children read from the cereal box. Let them read labels while grocery shopping with you.

4. Ask children to read street signs and billboards.

5. Expect your children to answer questions in complete sentences. Make it a game. You do it, too.

6. Give your children opportunities to write — journals, drawings, thank you notes, messages, highlights of a family event or trip, questions for a relative coming to visit, cards for special occasions, a gratitude note to another family member, a gratitude log, a prayer request and so on.

In addition to these tips, the Catholic schools department also listed these "Homework Helps" in *Partners*.

- Choose a special spot for homework.
- Be sure the area is well lit.
- Help your child find a comfortable position/setting.
- Give them space. Children are distracted if there's a lot of clutter around.
- Have supplies/tools available for homework — paper, pencil, pen, ruler.
- Give your children quiet time for homework.

• Assist as needed, but never do the homework for them. If they are struggling, help them formulate questions to ask the teacher about the assignment the next day.

In addition to these tips, Sue Maltzan said she and her husband, Eric, have always stressed this philosophy with their son, Christopher, a fourth-grader at Fortunato's school, and with their four other children, now grown:

"We've always taught them that school is their job just like Eric has his job," she said, noting that she's a stay-at-home mom. She added that, just as the *Partners* newsletter suggests, her son has created his own qui-

et homework area by placing two foam boards on the side of his desk in his room.

"He certainly doesn't have a TV on," she added. "There's no distraction. (Homework) comes before anything like playing."

She added that her family doesn't watch much TV, and even when it does, it's more likely to be viewing a rented video than a prime time show. She reads to her son regularly, she said, and also pointed out that her children have been involved in activities like scouting and therefore haven't had much time for television anyway.

Both Maltzan and Jackson volunteer

each week to help out the staff in their respective schools. A lunchroom monitor, Jackson said her kids enjoy seeing her when they come down for midday grub.

"I think that children should know that their parents want to get involved in school," she said.

And when they come home, Maltzan said, children should be encouraged no matter what letters grace their report cards.

"We've always tried to be positive, not negative," she said. "It didn't matter if they got an A or a B or a C. We just encouraged them to try harder."



David Wallace/Photo intern

## Parish 'rallies with Jesus'

(Above) Jessica Riggio, 9, and her mother, Helen, of Spencerport, make boxes out of Popsicle sticks to store gifts from God, as part of the first Rally with Jesus at the St. Plus the Tenth Parish/School campus in Chill Feb. 4. The rally, which ended with a prayer service, drew 96 families including 300 children. (At left) Jeff Cullen, 8, and his father, Dan, of Chill, work on their box to store gifts from God.

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## Family Events

● SAT. FEB. 10 — Storytime: for children ages 3-5: Secret Room, Children's Center, Bausch & Lomb Public Library Bldg., 115 South Ave., Rochester; 10-10:30 a.m.; free; no registration required; 716-428-8150.

● FEB. 19-23 — Birthday Bash: "Arthur's School-Break Birthday Bash," part of "Arthur's World" exhibit, Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; adults \$6, seniors \$5, ages 3-17 \$4, under 3 free; 716/263-2700.

● FEB. 19-23 — Water Blast: cool science experiments around water, find out about animals that live in the sea, fun family activities, Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; free with museum admission; 716/271-4552.

● THU. FEB. 22 — Stories & Songs of Surprise and Wonder, for school-age children, about famous presidents and from black history, Borders, 30 Square Dr., across from Eastview Mall, Vestal; 11 a.m.; free; 716/421-9220.

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