

# Why Johnny can't plan

## Organization can lead to scholastic success

By Andrea Downing Peck

WHILE AN OCCASIONAL bout with disorganization won't doom a student, a pattern of forgotten homework assignments, lost study guides and misplaced class notes may set students up for failure.

"Missing an assignment and getting a zero can have a huge negative impact on a student's grade," says Ana Homayoun, founder of Green Ivy Educational Consulting in San Francisco and Los Altos, California. "Getting poor grades because of missed assignments can [also] really affect a student's academic confidence and self-esteem."

Today's students are more time crunched than ever, with 57 percent of all middle and high schoolers participating in an after-school activity almost every day of the week, according to a 2004 study by Public Agenda, a nonpartisan opinion research organization reporting on public policy issues.

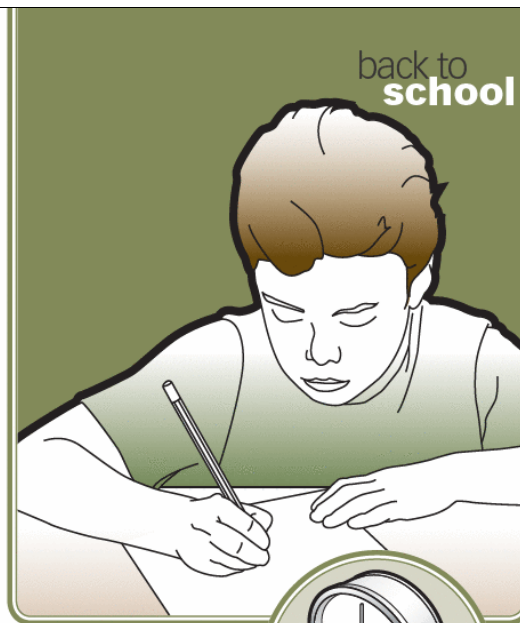
Donna Goldberg, co-author of *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond*, says strong organizational and time-management skills remain building blocks to academic success, even in classrooms filled with laptops, interactive whiteboards and other high-tech educational aids.

"The need to be organized has grown year after year," says Goldberg, a Costco member who founded The Organized Student ([www.organizedstudent.com](http://www.organizedstudent.com)), a New York-based consulting firm, in 1990. "We have far too much information rushing in. In order to be successful, you have to have a system of dealing with it."

### Time is of the essence

Goldberg advises, as an overview, to look at time management. She says that may require parents to closely monitor what their children are doing when on the computer. Most of her students admit to receiving at least 20 instant messages a night, which she calculates results in two minutes of lost time per message as children transition between what they were doing, reading and answering each message, and returning to their work.

"They are losing hours a night that they don't even realize," she notes. "That's a problem."



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### Developing a system

Goldberg says the next step in becoming an organized student is creating a system to manage the flow of worksheets, packets and handouts to and from school. She recommends students use an accordion file with a section devoted to each subject to carry all their current work.

"How papers flow back and forth to school, what system a child decides to use, isn't as important as having them practice it over and over again," says Goldberg. "Getting organized isn't a one-day event."

For organization at home, Goldberg suggests students place completed work in an open file box. All handouts, notes, quizzes and tests pertaining to that subject would be organized and placed in a labeled file folder once the unit was completed.

When creating organizational systems, Goldberg says, parents need to "think like a student," which means keeping the process quick and



## Organizational and time management tips

**Space.** Parents should work with their children to create a study place in the home that is consistent, organized and inviting. A common mistake is to encourage children to do homework in their room. Instead, have them do homework at the dining room table or, even better, a clean desk space outside their room.

**Time.** Set aside a consistent block of time for homework without distractions, after school or after dinner. If your child is hard-pressed to finish homework each night, monitor how much time is spent instant messaging, texting and on Facebook or MySpace.

**Plan.** Encourage use of a daily planner. Have your student set a plan of action before tackling homework each night.

**Organize.** Create a system to track paper flow to and from school. Binders should contain see-through pocket folders and dividers so assignments do not become out of sight, out of mind.

**Get help.** Know when to turn to a professional. If your child's disorganization is becoming a source of family tension and bickering or is affecting his or her grades, consider seeking help from an expert.—ADP