

Action Guide for Caregivers

As we learned in [The Opportunity Makers](#), trajectory-changing schools invest in belonging, consistency, and coherence to create a powerful baseline experience for all young people. This guide helps caregivers work with their child and their child's school to support these three focus areas.

The Case for Caregiver Support

Young people's lives are shaped by more than what happens at school. Research shows that when schools engage families and families are engaged in schools, students learn more. In a perfect world, schools would provide trajectory-changing experiences for all students, keep caregivers informed on student progress, and engage caregivers to support the three trajectory-changing focus areas at home:

- **Belonging:** Schools create an emotional climate for learning, activating students' ability to excel.
- **Consistency:** Schools deliver consistently good teaching and grade-level content for all students.
- **Coherence:** Schools build a unified instructional program and set priorities that are clear to all.

But in the real world, it's not always easy for caregivers to know how or where best to engage. Just asking the right questions can be an essential first step to help caregivers stay informed about what students are learning and to advocate for their children. Below, we suggest simple questions to ask and ways to engage, drawn from [resources](#) from Learning Heroes and [The Busy Family's Guide to School](#) from EdNavigator.

Belonging: Does my child's school and teacher understand my child's gifts and needs?

Think about what's most important for the teacher to know about your child. Being in regular contact with your child's teacher can help them get to know your child as both a learner and as an individual.

At the start of each school year, you can introduce your child with a ["Dear Teacher" letter](#), or share information on your child during back-to-school nights or the first teacher conference. This helps the teacher support your child right from the beginning. Here are some questions to consider:

- What does my child most enjoy, in and out of school? What motivates them?
- Where does my child need support (academically, socially, and emotionally)?
- Does my child have any unique learning needs? Here's a [guide](#) to learning and thinking differences, which affect one in five U.S children.

Consistency: Is my child doing work that's on grade level?

Find out what's expected of your child and how the school will track your child's learning. This [guide](#) gives families quick tips on how to make the most of family-teacher conferences, which tend to be short. You don't need to be a math or reading expert to understand your student's performance. Here are some questions to ask the teacher.

- Is my child at grade level in reading and math? If yes, how can I support their continued growth? If not, how can we work together to get them on grade level?
- What are the key skills my child is expected to learn this year? How can I track progress and make sure they are on track to learn these?
- Can you show me an example of what those skills look like?

Coherence: Where does my child stand academically and how can I help at home?

Find out how to support your child's learning goals at home and in activities outside of school. This [guide](#) helps caregivers support math and reading at home in grades K–8, and this [guide](#) helps caregivers and teachers identify skills to focus on outside of school. Here are some questions to ask the teacher:

- How does homework support what is being done in class? What should I be looking for as my child does homework?
- What kind of books should I read with my child or encourage them to read independently? What topics have been covered in class and how can I build on that knowledge?
- How can I support key grade-level math and reading skills at home?
- What is most important for me to share with anyone working with my child outside of school (e.g., afterschool programs, tutoring, or summer learning)?

About TNTP

As a leading education nonprofit, TNTP works side by side with educators, system leaders, and communities across 39 states and more than 6,000 districts nationwide to reach ambitious goals for student success. Our vision pushes beyond school walls, catalyzing cross-sector collaboration to create pathways for young people to achieve academic, economic, and social mobility. Read more at tntp.org/makers-connect

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