

There is still time to prepare for school success

written by: Marta Montleon, Superintendent of Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School

In the next few short weeks, children will be beginning the new school year. I was once asked how schools get ready for the first day, and I replied, "It's magic!" But it really isn't magic. Schools are ready to receive students on the first day through the efforts and dedication of the people who work in them all summer. All across the region, school maintenance workers and custodians are busy repairing and cleaning the buildings. School business offices are processing the requests and payments for books, materials, and supplies for the opening of school. School administrators are filing reports and reviewing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's summer "to do" checklist. (Yes, the DESE does issue an annual 120+ item checklist, and woe to the superintendent or principal who misses something.)

There are steps children and parents can take to get ready for the school year, too.

Remember that reading list your child got at the end of June? Have they read those books, kept their writing journals, and completed all their summer assignments? We can all remember when summer was a time for swimming, playing with friends, and the recreational reading we didn't have time for during the school year. That was before MCAS, Common Core, and high-stakes testing. While schools should be held accountable for providing students with the knowledge and skills they will need to become successful adults in a very competitive world, they can't do it alone. Although the requirements, expectations, and accountability for public education has increased, the school year and time spent on learning has remained the same. The summer reading and assignments that your child received in June are meant to keep their skills current so they are ready to learn new skills in September.

Now is also a good time to look at your house or apartment with homework in mind. The best place for many children is the kitchen table where there are family members around so they can easily ask for help when needed. For others it's sitting on the floor and using the coffee table in the living room as a "desk." This tends to work best if the TV is off, which may not play well with the rest of the family. Some children have difficulty concentrating with distractions and will need a more secluded area. Wherever your child is going to complete homework, the location should be planned in advance so that the routine can be established at the beginning of school. Waiting until you get a call or email that assignments are not being turned in can place unnecessary stress on both your child and you.

Another thing that you will want to plan ahead is your child's back-to-school wardrobe. Most schools have a dress code and/or uniform policy and parents are advised to check them before you finish your shopping. Please consult your child's school or school website for its specific policy. Most schools have restrictions on how short the bottoms are, how low the tops are, and how much can be showing in the middle. And please consider, just because a garment was "long enough" last year doesn't mean it is this year – kids grow. Others restrictions may include spaghetti straps, leggings as pants, and muscle shirts. I for one have always felt that, other than the store clerk, the only people who should see a teenager's underwear is the teenager and the person who does the laundry. Checking the dress code policy may reduce the chances of receiving a "wardrobe malfunction" call from your child's school, as well as the financial stress of adding to a school wardrobe.

You may also be able to check with your child's school or school website for a list of recommended school supplies for each grade level so these can be purchased early on. Many schools and teachers now ask that, in addition to the child's individual school supplies, parents contribute to the stock of classroom supplies. This often includes a box of tissues, arts and craft supplies, pens, pencils, notebooks, and folders. If you recall the budget debates of May and June, many of our communities are funding their public schools at the foundation level and making only the minimum contribution required by law. When funding is tight, classroom supplies are often one of the first line-items cut. Some budgets are unable to include the cost of new text books aligned with the Common Core or the technology for the proposed PARCC. The classroom supplies that parents are asked to contribute don't change the state funding formula or the spending priorities of communities, but they do help the individual classrooms function more smoothly throughout the school year.

Your community's schools will be ready for your child on opening day. Please do your "homework" now so that your child is ready, too.