

7th Grade Academics: What To Expect

Academic concepts continue to get more advanced, and students will really need to use their study skills this year.

by Patti Ghezzi



Did someone say “algebra”? The math curriculum varies by state, but most 7th graders will be introduced to pre-algebra. They’ll also be expected to read more complicated texts, write papers, and give oral presentations. They may complete a project for a science fair or social studies fair.

Seventh grade is also a huge year for reinforcing study skills. In science and social studies, your child will be expected to study for a test at home using methods that work best for his learning style.

Parents can help their child succeed in 7th grade by letting her be in control of her education but remaining on standby to step in if needed to help her get organized and stay on task.

A 7th grade parent’s best friends are progress reports and teacher conferences. This is not the year to expect your child to tell you what’s going on at school. You’ll need to find out from the source: your child’s teachers.

Language Arts

The 7th grade curriculum builds on the previous year, with higher expectations in reading comprehension and vocabulary. Passages will be longer, and students will be expected to do more than just answer a few questions directly based on the material. They’ll be expected to infer from the passage, interpret the author’s ideas, and draw from additional sources to reach conclusions.

To teach writing, many schools use the workshop approach. Seventh-graders work through the writing process, using peer review to improve their work. At this age, kids sometimes struggle with the difference between fact and opinion and may need prodding to back up their opinions with well-researched facts.

One thing conspicuously absent from some 7th graders’ lives is reading for pleasure. “As kids get older, they’re reading fewer and fewer books,” says P. David Pearson, dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley.

Students may be required to read a classic or two as part of the language arts curriculum. But to develop the reading prowess necessary to succeed in high school and beyond, they need to make independent reading a habit. Parents can help their kids find books that match their interests and reading level and help them carve out time for reading.

Another aspect of modern middle school life that parents and teachers find frustrating: the shorthand, slang-heavy language kids use when communicating with each other. Pearson addresses this by encouraging students to recognize the difference between personal, interpersonal, and public writing. “With personal writing [that] you do for yourself, spell any way you want,” he explains. “With interpersonal writing, where you’re acquainted with the audience, if you’ve communicated clearly then you’ve succeeded. With public writing, it must be conventional.”

Mathematics

Math looms large in middle school. Many parents and kids perceive success in 7th grade math as a ticket to honors courses in high school, followed by admission to a competitive college. In reality, your child’s placement in middle school math should not determine the course of her future. Kids are grouped by ability so they can learn what they need to move to the next stage.

If your child struggles in middle school but wants to pursue honors courses in high school, online and summer courses can help him catch up, says Susan Rakow, an assistant professor of curriculum at Cleveland State University and the author of *Educating Gifted Students in Middle School: A Practical Guide*.

Many 7th grade students will develop a deeper understanding of measurement and geometry while also being introduced to some algebra concepts. Some schools will focus more exclusively on algebra, a subject once taught in 9th grade but now increasingly taught to most students in 8th grade.

Such curriculum shifts should not be cause for alarm. Most kids can do the work; for those who struggle, support services are available at school or in the community.

Parents should be careful not to project their negative attitudes toward math onto their child. They should also avoid pushing children into advanced classes if they aren't ready for advanced work, says Rakow, a former 7th grade classroom teacher. "Many times, parents want their kids in honors classes because of the perception that the kids are well-behaved," she says. "But if your child is struggling in a class of people who soar, that will be a blow to their self-esteem."

Science

Like math, science can be intimidating in 7th grade as students are introduced to lab reports and expected to study independently for tests. But science should be a fun subject for 7th graders; it's hands-on and connected to their immediate world.

The curriculum will vary, but many 7th graders will study the natural world and the human body, with an emphasis on collecting data, forming hypotheses, and using the scientific method to test the hypotheses.

Students at this grade level most likely will participate in a science fair, giving them a chance to explore a topic of interest in depth. Parents should resist the temptation to get overly involved in their child's science project, though they may be needed to assist in selecting a manageable topic, breaking the large project into smaller pieces, and gathering supplies.

Social Studies

Social studies and history may get overlooked in a curriculum so heavily weighted in math, science, reading, and writing. But 7th grade is an important year for learning how to study, and social studies is an ideal place to help your child figure out how to use the textbook, class notes, and other sources to prepare for a test.

Often, bright students stumble in 7th grade because they have never had to study, Rakow notes. "They have never made flash cards," she says. "They never had to."

Many 7th graders will study American history, a subject they will revisit in high school and college, making it worthwhile to learn as much as they can now.

Grade 7 is a time when students discover which subjects they're good at and which ones don't come so easily. It's a time to develop solid study skills and to learn to balance schoolwork with their social and family lives. It's also a time when some students will struggle academically for the first time. Instead of panicking, parents should recognize this as an important stage of self-discovery.

"What it takes to get an A in 7th grade is not the same as what it takes to get an A in 3rd grade," Rakow says. "Nobody should be getting straight A's in 7th grade. If they do, they probably aren't being challenged enough."

For more information, read ["7th Grade Social Changes: What To Expect"](#)

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