

Thinking About School Yet?

It's not too early to prepare for fall

With the warm sun shinning, and sand still sifting through our toes, it's almost impossible to fathom thoughts of homework, essays, tests, quizzes, teachers and bus rides. But soon enough Labor Day will be here, heralding the first days of the new school year.

Whether the student in question is a first grader or college freshman, for parents who want their children to be really ready for school—now's the time to start gearing up.

"Line up tutors and check on how much summer reading is left," advises a mother of five. "And check test registration dates and register for SAT's."

Many parents agree that it's not too early to start shopping for pens, pencils, paper and various other supplies by the beginning of August.

"I like to do a few things each week so the whole back-to-school thing doesn't kill me, financially or time-wise, when school starts," remarks one mother. "This way, when school starts in the fall, and costs hit, you're ready."

"Shopping for school supplies with every other parent is a hassle," remarks another. At the end of August some stores, like Venture Stationary on Madison Avenue or Staples, tend to feel a lot like Macy's at Christmastime. Moreover, colleges and boarding schools also have deadlines for orders right around now, having mailed forms in spring for linen, laundry and other must-have items.

But parents of teens should shop lightly where wardrobes are concerned: Do not buy too many clothes before school starts. They need to see what the other kids are wearing first.

As far as academics go, summer can be the perfect time for enrichment. The pressure for grades is off, and many kids are more relaxed and enjoy what they're learning. For older kids, "SAT prep programs are in full swing," confirms a parent who signed her daughter up for a two-week mid-summer program.

At most summertime SAT test prep programs, high school students don't sweat too

much while taking tests for practice only. They memorize vocabulary lists, grammar rules, practice writing skills, and work on countless math problems while summer slips away.

For younger kids, especially those with learning issues, brushing up on their basic skills can give them a boost come fall (a distinct advantage for kids enrolled in very competitive private or public schools).

Spending time in small reading, writing or math groups with a private tutor helps insure success. One-on-one tutoring can help, too.

Another good mid-summer plan is to map out the best routes to and from school or bus stops to be sure that they're the best, safest and most expeditious routes. Or, if school's too far from home to hoof it, and the bus isn't your kid's bag, arrange a car pool or set up an account with a car service ASAP.

This is also a good time of year to consider joining the PTA.

"If you haven't joined yet, find out more about when you can sign up," urges a die-hard member. "Becoming a member of the PTA is most important, parents have a lot to learn too," she attests.

If the kids are in town, mid-summer can also be an optimum time to schedule routine appointments and get elective procedures over with. There's plenty of time to recover from the ordeal of having wisdom teeth removed — or a nose job.

For others whose children are away, summer can be the time to clean out kid's rooms — desks, closets and drawers. "I go into her room like a tornado," says the summer SAT student's mother. "Then, I'm cleaning out her drawers, desk and closets, and this year I'm changing the wallpaper and drapes too!" Warning: some found items can be most disturbing to parents who must be extra careful not to disclose that they've been snooping while cleaning and organizing bedrooms.

In the end, parents agree that summer should hardly be all work and no play. Family time should be blended with getting ready for the new school year. "Before you blink, summer's going to be over," she says wistfully. "So sleep late and relax." ■

