

John King - Back to School Message for Students and Parents

Transcript

Welcome back to school. My name is John King. I am the Commissioner of education for the State of New York and I wanted to take some time today to reflect on the significance of the first day of school. The first day of school marks the beginning of the journey, a journey I that will take us through the school year, an opportunity to learn and an opportunity to have new experiences. For students I have a simple message, work hard, get smart. What do I mean by that? Well, sometimes people say that some people are good at math and other people are not good at math as though that were determined by something outside of their own effort. That's actually not true. The difference between being good at something and not good at something is really all about hard work, about training, about preparation. So, how do you get good at math? Well, you work hard, you study, you learn from your teacher. How do you get better at reading? You read lots of books. You read books that are enjoyable to you, that feed your curiosity, that give you an opportunity to explore new worlds, new topics and new areas of interest. That's how you get better as a student and that's all we ask really of students each day - to come in to school each day eager to learn and get smart.

We've adopted as New York State, a new set of standards, a new set of curriculum standards that are designed to ensure that every student leaves their high school education college and career ready. We have an opportunity this year to start that work. So think about the books you'll read this year. What's one book that you could read this year that would challenge you? A book that is maybe a little bit harder than you might think you're ready for but that might give you an opportunity to push yourself, to learn new vocabulary words, to engage with a new author whose books you haven't read before. Think about writing. Think about where there is an opportunity to make an argument you really believe in - in writing - an opportunity not just to tell about an idea but to prove something through the use of evidence.

For parents I have a somewhat different message, which is, take this year as an opportunity to dive into your students' school experience. What are they working on at school? Ask everyday, what did you learn today? And ask not just as a cursory start of the conversation but really listen to the answer. Probe deeply. How do you know? What does that mean? How does that connect to other things that you've learned? Take the opportunity to go to a museum on a Saturday instead of the movies. Take an opportunity to read a new book together. Figure out an opportunity with your child what you can learn together through text which is exactly what we are trying to emphasize in the English Language Arts classroom and in the Science and Social Studies classroom. Go to a baseball game and talk about what a batting average really means. What is it telling us? What do we know from a batter's batting average about their performance? See, those academic conversations really matter. Those are a way that you as a parent can engage in your child's education and work alongside their teachers to help support their academic achievement. We have a huge opportunity to make a difference for our children as parents or as students to roll up our sleeves and take every advantage of the learning opportunity in the year ahead. This is an important moment to acknowledge, to celebrate.

Welcome back to school. Thank you for your time.