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### **Back to basics: A school life series**

As students prepare for life outside the nest, there are some skills they should master for success.



*Professional tutor Ava White plays a game with Destiny Farmer, 9, that teaches math skills at her Washington Street tutorial School in Gainesville Thursday afternoon. White helps students with all skills, even organization.*

Organization is often the first step to achieve any goal. For many students, it's the toughest step.

"Organizing is a lifelong habit, and when you learn it at a younger age, the benefits are huge," said Terri Stephens, founding consultant for Real Order Professional Organizing in Dawsonville. "One of the basic things for students is to have a planner with all their school and personal activities in one place. Color coding can be helpful and fun, so you highlight tests, scheduled study time and recreational time in different colors for a quick visual."

Stephens has worked with several students while helping to organize families.

"It's important to set realistic goals at the beginning of the school year and break down large goals into bite-size pieces," she said. "Most people also find it helpful to have it written down in a place you see on a regular basis. Life is busy and gets in the way, and it's easy to forget about the small goals."

For study time, students should also determine how many study hours they need each day and put it into their planners.

"If a student has to study three chapters in the history book, break it down into one chapter each day," she said. "You're learning life skills that are basic and carry you through. If you learn them at a young age, it can save a lot of pain later."

Dawn McCloskey of Ultra Organized in Cumming approaches child organization from her perspective as a mother.

"They should write down their assignments before they leave school, as well as the books, notes and supplies they need to take home with them," she said. "There's no excuse not to be prepared to do homework."

Having a daily schedule for homework is vital, and that includes setting aside a spot in the house for concentration, which is a good rule of thumb for students of any age.

"It shouldn't be in front of the TV, and it should be a location where they have all they need right there — paper, rules, pencils and pens," she said. "Then there should be an area for going in and out of the house where they can put their backpack so they're not searching around the house for it in the morning before school."

Organization improves grades and overall responsibility, McCloskey added.

"It helps them later on in life in high school and college with skills that will last a lifetime," she said. "When you're an adult, you have to organize. As adults, we record things that need to be done and phone calls that need to be made and then scratch it off the list. You can instill that in your children at a young age."

At Ava White Tutorials on Washington Street in Gainesville, organizing students can get physical.

"We empty the contents of their locker and do a dump," White said. "We find old gym socks, papers they don't need anymore and sort out the old tests and study guides they need to keep."

White also helps the students create labeled folders and rearrange backpacks.

"They need to keep up with their materials. So many students do the work but then can't find it," she said. "Let them use technology. You can e-mail yourself messages now and use color-coded calendars, and the more technological, the more likely the kids are to buy-in to the tools."