

# Student Accountability: 5 Fast Ways to Keep Kids on Track

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School may not be a paid position for students, but the positive habits formed by students today are a good investment in their future.

Holding students accountable for their school work isn't about being a "mean teacher." It is about teaching students life lessons and helping them understand responsibility. The classroom is the perfect place to learn responsible work habits as well as content.

Here are a few simple ways to lead students toward increased accountability:

## Create a Paper Trail

I begin the year with two documents: a course outline and an ethics policy. The course outline provides an up front look at expectations, consequences and the general curriculum of my class. The ethics policy makes a frank statement about cheating of any sort and outlines consequences for such actions. Both are signed by the student and a parent. Both provide upfront expectations about actions and consequences and provide valuable evidence during parent-teacher conferences. There are no surprises when, for example, a student loses points for a late assignment or copied homework. During the school year, students are expected to hand in something every time work is due. If they do not have the assigned homework, they must fill out an excuse slip and hand that in. This half sheet requires students to put their excuse in writing, creating documentation for their missing work.

## Communicate with Kids

Try to always speak to students first and document it. One of the small steps in keeping students at the forefront of responsibility is to make them the targeted audience for concerns. Follow up your conversation with documented communication to the parent. Students often become more responsible when they know they cannot play parents and teachers against one another.

## Take Advantage of Technology

Technology has become my greatest ally in making students more responsible. I encourage students to email me with questions or concerns. I use Google Docs which allows the sharing of files for handing out and handing in assignments. I maintain a class website where I post homework, important information and link printable handouts. My students learn early on that I make exactly enough copies. If a student loses a paper, and it is available on my website, they are responsible for obtaining a new one. Many schools now offer the option for

students and parents to view assignments and grades online. Each student is assigned a log on and password which enables parents and students to see a students' latest marks. When a student wants to know "*What am I missing?*", I steer him or her to the "Portal", as it is called at my school. I send the same message to parents, "*Tell Johnny to check his Portal.*" The program my school uses allows me to tag assignments with such attributes as "late" or "incomplete" further explaining a low or missing mark..

### **Turn Up the Volume on Student Voice**

A colleague of mine insists that students call their parents as consequence for incidents of cheating, repeated disruption, or other behavior that interrupts instruction. She stands by as students make the call and speaks to the parent after the confession has been made. This idea puts the focus on the student as the cause for the behavior and helps him / her take ownership of the behavior. When parents email or call about missing work, I ask them to direct their student my way for a conversation. It's not the parents' education and I want students to come to me about their work. I want to teach my students to communicate with me, even if by email, regarding questions or concerns.

### **Give Points for Participation**

Involved students are invested students. Students who are invested are usually more tuned into their educational responsibilities. Give kids points toward their averages for participation and effort - coming to class on time, being prepared, productive group work and speaking up in class. Awarding points for positive actions helps students to be responsible for their own success. In order to document points, I cover a class seating chart in a plastic page protector and use an overhead marker to keep track of participation during a class period - an idea I gained from a Kelly Gallagher workshop. As most of us approach the half way mark of the school year, we should think about incorporating ways to empower our students; ideas that help them learn to be more responsible. Responsibility is one of the most valuable lessons students can learn in school.