

School's back in style

Get the kids organized with a homework area that will keep them motivated

BY SHARON J. GINTZLER
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

The mercury hasn't dropped much, and their tans haven't quite faded, but it's time for kids to trade in their bathing suits and boogie boards for backpacks, textbooks and No. 2 pencils.

The approaching school year needn't be a stressful experience for students — or their parents. Whether your child is starting or returning to elementary school, middle school or high school, you can help turn back-to-school blues into an adventure.

According to the experts, getting your child into a studying state of mind can be (almost) as easy as ABC, and outfitting the study space may be the first step.

"Everyone needs their own workspace, even if it's at the kitchen table," says Kathy Bottone, a fifth-grade teacher entering her 33rd year at Drum Point Road Elementary School in Brick.

The right workspace for homework can be in your child's bedroom, or another area of the house. The key is for the homework area to be organized and free of distractions, experts say. That includes televisions, cell phones or noisy siblings.

Organizing your kids' stuff is part of the distraction-free approach, says Bottone. When

it's time to do homework, all the supplies are at their fingertips, "so no one wastes time hunting for stuff," she says.

Here's where the adventure comes in: Get kids involved in selecting their get-organized gear. "Find some cool baskets or containers," Bottone suggests. "Buy a different color for each child and let them arrange the bin the way they like it. It's a great way to teach kids how to be more organized."

To further eliminate distractions, Minoo Hersini, a Westchester County, New York, interior designer, suggests creating a dedicated study nook.

"Most kids have their own rooms, so try inserting a partition in a small corner of the space to create a study area,"

she says. "It's a creative and practical way of separating work from leisure." If your children share a room, use the partition to create two distinctive study areas. "Mount a notice board so you and your children can pin up reminders, invitations, social events, practices and the like," she adds.

A study area can be any place in the house, and the ideal study area for Morganville resident Allison Wertheim is in her father's office. "I have my computer and all my supplies there," says the 17-year-old senior at Howell High School in Farmingdale. An extra bonus,

she says, is access to her dad. "He's a big help when I'm doing work in the office," she says. "If I have a question, I can just ask

him and he'll help me. It's very convenient and helps keep me focused."

Dad Steven Wertheim, who works in information technology sales, has a formula for student success: "A student needs a desk or dedicated workspace where she knows she can always go to do her school work. The area needs to be well-lit, comfortable and have full computer and printer access."

Keeping kids focused and interested is crucial, and

retailers have a variety of products to help create the kind of exciting homework area where kids will want to spend more time.

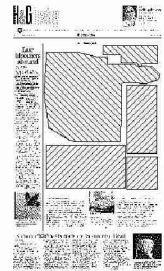
"Make your child's workplace a fun place to be," suggests Christina Hansen, product specialist at CableOrganizer.com.

"Let them choose decorative items that create a work space that is personalized and encourages their interests," says Lani Murakami, of Overstock.com.

But in the end, the primary goal of the proper study space is to motivate your child to get

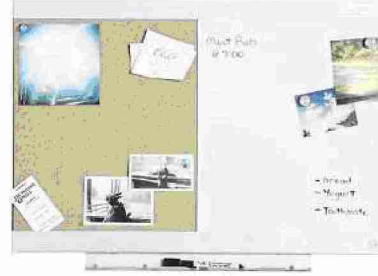
into the back-to-school groove and keep them motivated throughout the year.

"Once they get into the habit of working in the appropriate area, their attitude toward homework will change," write Lee Canter and Lee Hausner, Ph.D. in their book "Homework Without Tears: A Parents Guide for Motivating Children to Do Homework and to Succeed in School" (Collins, \$13.95). "They may not notice it at first, but their efficiency and attention span will increase almost at once. Homework will seem easier for them. And it will certainly seem easier for you."



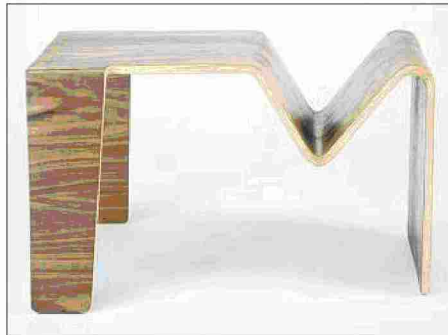


An inexpensive desk can make an easy homework hub. The Cosmopolitan Compact Desk Workstation is \$137.99 at Overstock.com. If the bed is your student's workplace of choice, a lap desk, above right, offers a stable writing surface. These colorful pillow-cushioned models are \$24.99 each at containerstore.com.



Above, every work area needs a memo board, and here's one that works with push pins, magnets and dry erase markers. It's made of cork and metal and sells for \$19.95 at cb2.com.

Left, a corner of the basement playroom can be study central with a small desk such as CB2's "Swoop," shelving, storage bins and memo boards. Desk is \$299 at cb2.com; book towers, \$189 each.



The TreTable is two desks in one. It's perfect for floor work. Standing, the flat side becomes a work surface to use with a chair. \$99.99 at csnstores.com.