

# 5

# ways to make schools better

## Start a mentoring program

Research shows that kids who are mentored by peers improve academically and enjoy a boost in self-esteem (as do their mentors). While some mentoring programs focus on specific subjects, such as reading, others attempt to ease the transition from middle to high school. Mentors are screened by teachers or fellow students and may receive training by faculty members. Kids work in pairs or groups.

## Lobby for phones in the classroom

Morale goes up when there's a phone in the classroom, according to the Educational Resources Information Center, in Syracuse, N.Y. Teachers can use it to inform parents of their child's accomplishments. It's also helpful as a disciplinary tool: Teachers can ask a student who's disrupted the class to call his or her parents and tell them what he or she did.

## Keep recess

About 40 percent of elementary schools have either cut back on recess or are considering doing so, according to the American Association for the Child's Right to Play, in Hempstead, N.Y. Yet kids who have physical activity concentrate better and learn cooperation. Raise the issue at PTA meetings, write letters and contact local media.

## Make sure teachers have e-mail

E-mail eases communication among students, parents and teachers. A student can send her teacher a sample of her homework to make sure she's on the right track, and parents can get quick feedback on their child's performance. Parents can also inform teachers about difficulties at home that might affect performance at school. Most schools are connected to the Internet and are equipped for e-mail, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in Washington, D.C. Ask teachers about their preferences; some like to receive their e-mail at home.



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continued

## Push for conflict-resolution programs

At schools where students are taught to mediate their own disputes, playground fighting has been reduced significantly. Conflict-resolution programs teach children how to listen, think critically and solve problems—skills basic to learning and getting along with others. The best programs train the entire school community, including teachers, students and parents. Costs range from about \$100 for do-it-yourself guides to as much as \$5,000 to send school personnel to training centers. For more information, check out the Association for Conflict Resolution's Web site ([www.acresolution.org](http://www.acresolution.org)).



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