

Getting Out of the Education Rut

by Diane Trautman

Sometimes people get into ruts. I know I do. My days may be steady or just plain hectic, but I frequently find myself repeating the same actions toward the same goals. It can get a little stale — until, that is, I find something new, something that piques my interest. Then I'm hooked and once I've made the commitment to that new idea or project, I get a great boost of energy. Succeed or fail, I've learned something about the subject and about myself along the way.

Students also get bored when they go through the same routine day after day. Even if they enjoy some or all of their classes, they may be less inclined to push themselves unless something about the subject (or the way it's taught) really grabs them. If they don't enjoy the subject or they get negative feedback despite their hard work, getting them to do the work can be torturous.

A skilled tutor who is committed to the development of the whole student, as opposed to simply conveying information, can make lessons relevant and exciting. The private tutor can help the student discover or expand upon their unique skills and create strategies for studying. Just as importantly, a good tutor can provide a comfortable atmosphere in which the student can challenge himself, free from parental expectations and judgment. (Despite their best efforts, even the most patient of parents — including those who are teachers by trade, can reach a point at which their familiarity with their child becomes an impediment to learning.) Breaking routine patterns is a big benefit gained from personalized one-to-one tutoring.

As we enter the season of caring and sharing, I'd like to suggest another rut-busting possibility for your child: volunteer work. Working on projects that benefit their fellow citizens expands a child's world and gives them a sense of pride in themselves. Along the way, kids learn new things and build their leadership skills. The sense of accomplishment and purpose, the ability to work as a team and to move others to action will be among the criteria that admissions officers consider as they review your child's college application. They know that good students are more than their GPAs and S.A.T. scores. They're inquisitive people and engaged citizens. We can get them there with love, patience, and attention to their full development.