

# Brain Rules

By: Bob Schaffer, Principal

In addition to the honor of being your students' principal, I also have the honor of representing Colorado's Fourth Congressional District on the Colorado State Board of Education. I'm in my sixth year on the Board and my third year as the Board's Chairman.

A Board colleague of mine recently gave me a copy of John Medina's 2008 best-selling book *Brain Rules*. She even had it inscribed by the author himself. The colleague, Dr. Angelika Schroeder of Boulder, says the book should be read by everyone in the education business.

It's just as useful to all parents of schoolchildren. After all, we're in the education business, too.

The book explains in layman's terms (in twelve rules) how the brain works. It gives lots of tips on how to improve the brain's performance and insights on how learning can be improved.

Though the book is indeed aimed at teachers in the classroom, it offers practical advice that parents can follow in an effort to help teachers and students alike. For example, oxygen is a superpower fuel for the brain.

More oxygen equals better brain performance – for everyone, all the time. Exercise, adequate sleep and good nutrition make every brain smarter. If your kid is struggling in school, start there.

"Multitasking" is something like a suntan. It seems pretty fascinating at the time, but it's really overrated.

The brain can truly focus on only one thing at a time. Distractions impede learning. This makes a strong case for eliminating distractions.

It explains why we're sticklers for the Dress Code, being tardy, chewing gum, using cell phones, wandering off campus and other disturbances. If your scholar is not achieving his full potential, consider how you can remove distractions at home, too.

Most memory vanishes immediately. Enduring memory is fixed in the brain's cortex. Lodging it there and retrieving it entails gradual acquisition of information and reinforcement through repetition.

This helps explain why the Core Knowledge Sequence is so powerful and why the concept of "background knowledge" helps the learning process to surge through high school, college and beyond. If your student's performance is not at its peak, find strategies at home to reinforce what they're expected to know at school – even after the unit is over.

Chronic stress at home hurts brains at school. Stress stimulates the body's production of adrenaline and cortisol. Too much of these chemicals damages the heart and hippocampus.

High stress can literally cause a brain to snap. This explains why we work so purposefully at Liberty to create a safe, calm, stable, routine and predictable environment for our students.

The process of education is a good kind of stress. Adding traumatic stress on top of it is counterproductive. If your household is unstable, do your best to insulate your kids from the mayhem.

To see a 45-minute video introduction to Medina's book, check online. To help make your students' brains stronger, keep supporting Liberty. Your kids will have it made in the shade.