

# ALGEBRA II

## Strategies for Survival

by Theresa Warner, MEd, NBCT

**O**VER THE PAST DECADE, many states have changed high school diploma requirements to include math beyond geometry. In most cases, that means Algebra II. For many students with ADHD (and their parents), Algebra II is one of the biggest challenges of high school. But it doesn't have to be a barrier. With some planning and strategizing, students with ADHD can survive, and maybe even thrive, in Algebra II.

### Just say “not yet”

In secondary math, instruction is somewhat like a pyramid. We lay the foundation in Algebra I, and all subsequent math learning builds from there. There's a nationwide push to enroll middle school students in Algebra I, but this can be a problem for students with ADHD. When we place eighth graders with ADHD in Algebra I, we're expecting them to be ready—good academic skills, competent note taking, and the eternal albatross, homework completion.

Attention parents: You do have the right to say “not yet.” Be prepared to explain the rationale for the request. Good “evidence” might include current year's math grades, recent math scores on standardized testing, and the gold standard—homework completion. A student who isn't completing homework in seventh grade won't magically change habits in Algebra I. It's just fine to have another year of middle school math, and it lets students mature and develop skills before the workload of high school.

### Lay the foundation—Algebra I

Think of Algebra I as pre-Algebra II. If Algebra I skills are iffy, there's probably a rocky math year in your future. If your child squeaked by in Algebra I, you should

look into options for review and remediation before Algebra II. Many schools districts offer summer Algebra Review courses. If the Algebra I grade wasn't at least a high C, consider some “tune up” before tackling Algebra II.

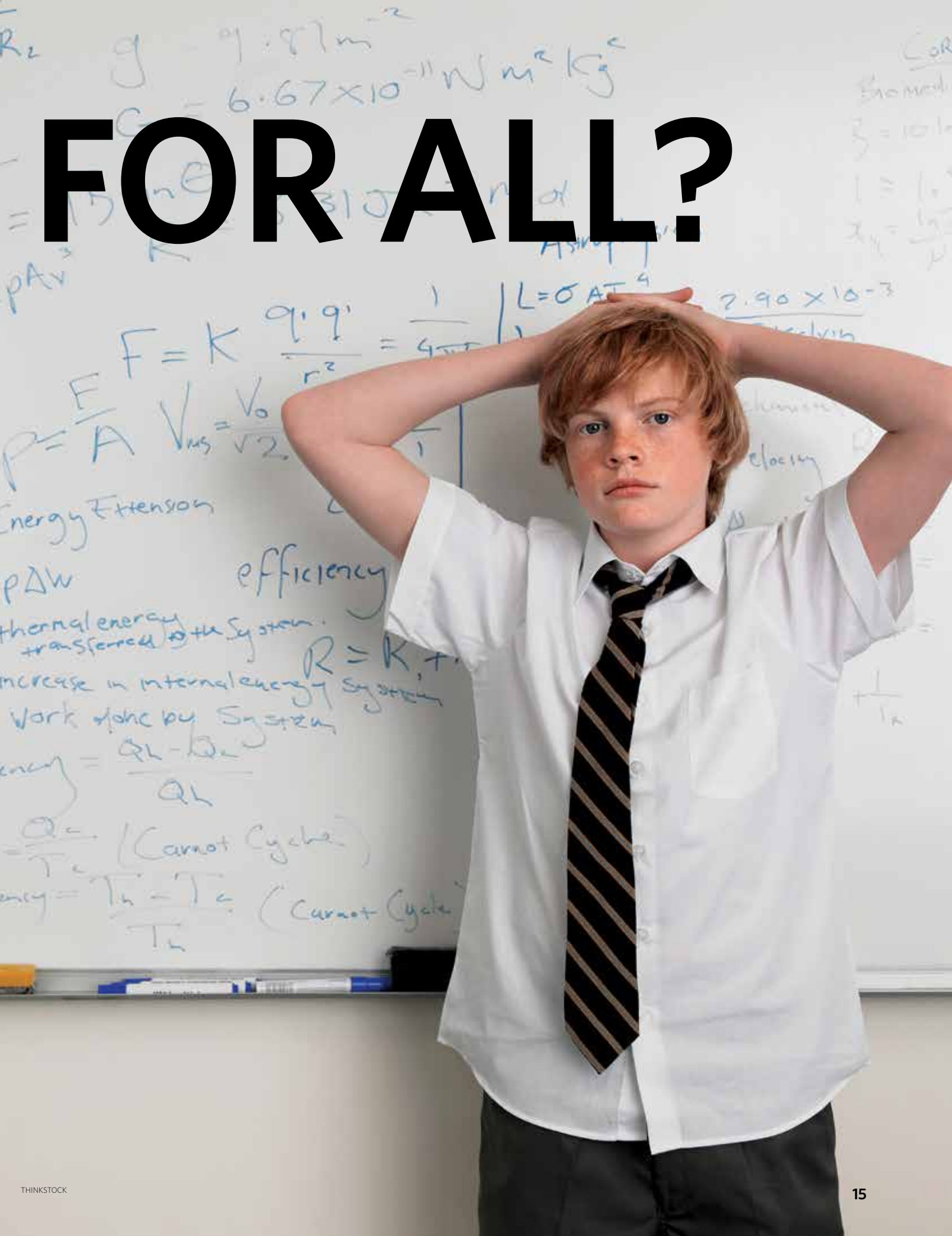
### Create a learning climate

Ideally, the right accommodations should begin in Algebra I. There is value in clear, consistent expectations. When students know they can use these accommodations, they can relax and make themselves more available to learn. And remember—think beyond traditional “accommodations.”

#### ● *Timing and Scheduling*

Timing is critical. Scheduling can make a huge difference in a student's ability to function well in Algebra II. Medication factors in, so figure out the “optimum” window for learning; talk to your doctor about peak performance time. Be aware that scheduling can be difficult, particularly if your student has special electives that constrict the schedule. Even in big high schools where there might be ten sections of Algebra II, there may be only one section that works with your student's schedule.

# FOR ALL?



## Help is Only a Click Away

For online help, start with the course textbook. Most publishers offer web support, ranging from extra problem sets, to games and practice tests and quizzes. Then check out these sites for even more help.

- <http://math.kendallhunt.com/x24054.html>—a very detailed section with step-by-step directions for using a graphing calculator in Algebra II.
- <http://www.purplemath.com/modules>—good visuals with clear, concise explanations and examples covering more than 30 Algebra II topics. Worksheet and quiz section for review and self-check.
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/math/algebra2>—covers all of learning styles through colorful, creative videos explaining the concepts with worked-out examples. Clear audio with a human voice. Great for reteaching.
- <http://coolmath.com/algebra/Algebra2/index.html>—worked-out solutions and practice problems for quick tune-ups on specific questions. Organized by topic.

ISTOCK/ THINKSTOCK

### ● **Finding the Right Teacher**

It's a controversial concept, but you can discretely “shop” for the right teacher. Unless your student attends a tiny school, there will be several Algebra II teachers. Talk to your student's special education case manager or school counselor about which Algebra II teachers would work best. Ask specific questions:

1. How quickly does the teacher grade and return tests?
2. Does the teacher routinely post homework online?
3. Does the teacher provide guided notes?
4. Has this teacher previously worked with students who learn differently?

Trust what you hear from counselors and special education teachers. They know the teachers and they know your student. Other parents may share their experiences with you, but their accounts relate to their son or daughter, not yours.

### ● **Accommodations for Assessments**

Talk with your student's academic team about typical accommodations: extended time for quizzes and tests (up to fifty percent usually), small group testing when available, and no Scantron forms. Ask that your student be allowed to use the formula sheet that accompanies the state end-of-course test to reduce the anxiety that comes with memorization and relies on problem solving.

For all assignments and assessments, the graphing calculator

is a must. Remember—an accommodation for a graphing calculator means your student may use the technology; it doesn't mean the school will provide it unless specifically stated in the IEP or 504 Plan.

### **Tame the tiger we call homework**

Homework in general is a major hardship for students with ADHD. But for Algebra II daily homework is critical for success—perhaps more than any other high school course. Homework is the mini-assessment of that day's learning, and it's the bridge to the next day's instruction. Therefore, it must be done the day it is assigned, so there can be no extended time accommodation.

If your student truly can't handle the homework load, ask for a “reduction with staggered increases.” As the student gains competence through the year, more homework can be added. Practice does make perfect in math, so this approach can be a double-edged sword. It's something to pursue only if absolutely necessary.

### **Turn it in!**

The homework must be done. Typical Algebra II classes cover one textbook section per day. Missing just one homework assignment can undermine the whole chapter. If the daily schedule offers a study hall or “instructional studies” period, that slot should be dedicated to Algebra II homework every day. This should be a plan everyone agrees to, and sticks to. Homework is finished (or at least started) at

school, and often with the help of a teacher or another student. Most schools also offer homework help after school, especially for math. Have your student check into this, and be sure to follow up.

Find a way to monitor homework completion. Most teachers don't have time to post homework status, but it's perfectly acceptable to ask for a quick note whenever a homework assignment is missing. Be sure that assignment is completed, even if the late work won't be credited. It's still important to stay current with the lessons.

### Contingencies and communication

Expect the best, but have contingencies close at hand. Algebra II starts quickly and keeps rolling to the end. The very best resource is your student's classroom and/or team teachers. Get in touch early and stay in touch. Email is great, but use it appropriately. When you have a question, keep communication simple and meaningful. Be patient, too—allow up to twenty-four hours for a response to most concerns.

The first few weeks of school are terribly hectic for teachers, so resist the temptation to "inform" the teacher about your student's math history. Skillful teachers quickly recognize student strengths and weaknesses, and they already have IEP and 504 plan information.

Consider copying the special education monitor and counselor on any emails. With their background, they can help support you, your student, and the teacher. The best teachers will strive to help your student succeed, but remember they can't make your student do homework.

### Presume good will

Math teachers have been stereotyped as rigid, but it's really just a need for order and systems. So if you establish a communication system, it's likely to be followed. If you need to know every Friday whether homework has been finished that week, send a routine email every Thursday.

Most teachers also post online information, so be sure to check there first before

contacting the teacher. Try to presume good will when communicating with teachers—most of them do want the best for students.

### What about a tutor?

That's a tough question. Many schools don't let teachers make recommendations about the need for tutoring. Before you resort to outside help, remember that the teacher is your best resource. Does he or she have scheduled extra help times? Actually, few students take advantage of this free resource.

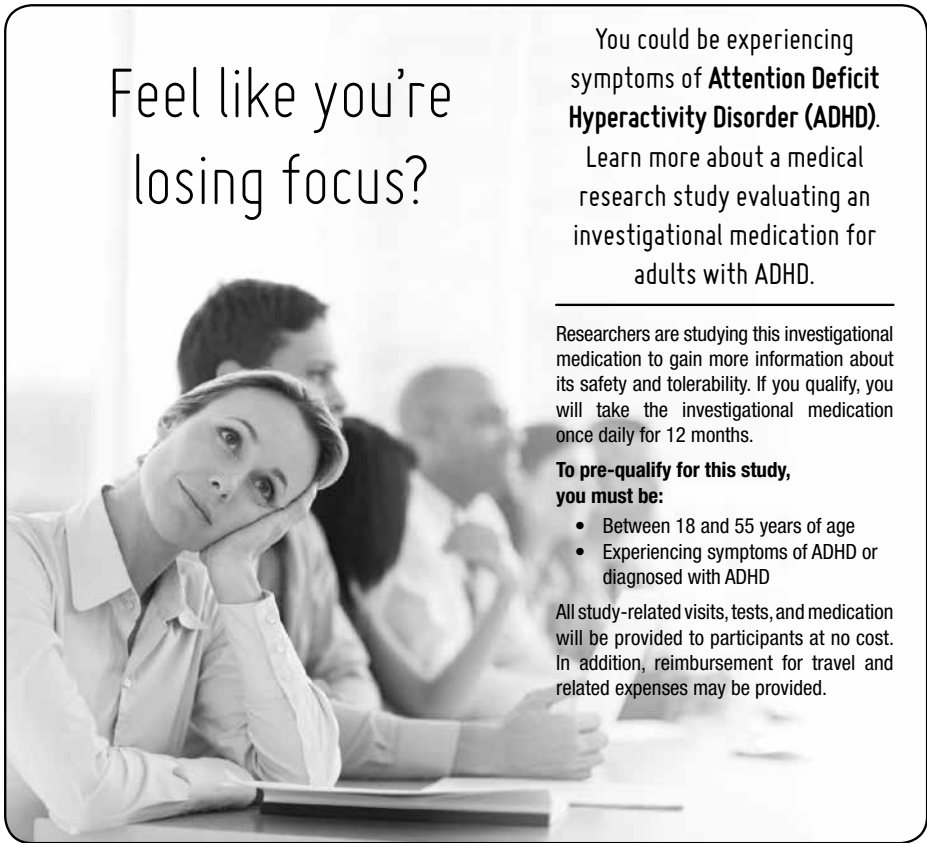
If you do need help, ask "What do we expect the tutor to accomplish?" If your student just isn't doing the homework, a tutor isn't the answer. If your student isn't grasping the concepts, a tutor may be appropriate. Find an expert who has experience helping students with ADHD. The best tutors have more than just a math background. They have many ways to teach and reteach the concepts and have strategies for streamlining the materials.

### Get comfortable with good enough

Overachievement may be as American as apple pie, but it's unrealistic for struggling math students. Instead of getting caught in a vortex of worry and disappointment, sit down and figure out what's "good enough" for the Algebra II experience. What is the real goal? To pass the course for graduation? To pass the course and the end-of-course state exam for a certain diploma? To get at least the C required for a college or postgraduate course?

An agreed-upon goal puts some parameters around the effort and defines both success and trouble. When everything is on track toward the goal, no need for panic. Whatever the goal, own it and embrace it. Don't be embarrassed by it. But don't expect teachers to instantly embrace it. This is just your way to keep things real on the home front. 🍌

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Feel like you're losing focus?

You could be experiencing symptoms of **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**.

Learn more about a medical research study evaluating an investigational medication for adults with ADHD.

Researchers are studying this investigational medication to gain more information about its safety and tolerability. If you qualify, you will take the investigational medication once daily for 12 months.

**To pre-qualify for this study, you must be:**

- Between 18 and 55 years of age
- Experiencing symptoms of ADHD or diagnosed with ADHD

All study-related visits, tests, and medication will be provided to participants at no cost. In addition, reimbursement for travel and related expenses may be provided.