

MOVING UP TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

June 2019

Helping Your Child Transition From Elementary To Middle School

Sixth grade recognition ceremonies are now over. Summer is here and your former sixth grader, now an incoming seventh grader, is fast thinking about the great transition which is about to take place. That move from Elementary School to Middle School.

For seven years, from kindergarten through sixth grade, your child has walked through the same halls and lived by the same rules with pretty much the same kids around them. In the final year, they've been the "big kids" of the school. Now it's on to middle school.

You can help ease the transition to middle school by tuning into what worries your child most. No matter how confident your child is at the prospect of starting middle school, chances are there's something about it that has him scared silly. An informal survey of parents, students, and experts who work with adolescents turned up the following:

- **Combination locks.** Many a preteen is terrified that they won't be able to get their locker open. ***What you can do:*** Try buying your preteen a combination lock over the summer to practice on or see if the school will allow them to come try the lockers out before the start of the school year.
- **Being late for class.** The consequence for lateness can be detention. ***What you can do:*** Talk about the fact that they are not alone and what to do if they are not sure where a class is located (for example, the teacher of his previous class, other adult teacher, advisor, etc.)? And remind your child that they'll have to save socializing for lunchtime or after school.
- **Not having friends.** The challenge of not **being a part of the group.** ***What you can do:*** Try to focus on this time of new beginnings and an opportunity to meet and make new friends. Don't feel like you have to supply a steady stream of solutions. Sometimes it helps kids just to voice their fears to a sympathetic listener.

- **Being too different.** Nothing is worse for middle schoolers than standing out in a way they haven't chosen. **What you can do:** First, whatever it is about your preteen's personality or appearance that concerns him or her, don't say, "That's silly," or "It doesn't matter." Emphasize the positive as one way of boosting an insecure preteen's confidence. Again, listening is very helpful.
- **Tough classes.** Some kids worry that they won't be able to keep up academically. A child who is nervous about the increased workload may worry that there will be too much reading, or that he or she got good grades or not so good grades in elementary and are simply scared. **What you can do:** There's certainly nothing wrong with acknowledging that the work will be more difficult (it will be!) but assure your child that it won't be more than he or she can handle and that there will be people to help. Remind them that while being a good student is important, they have other strengths as well – so that the entire sense of self isn't wrapped up in grades. Encourage him or her to let her teacher – and you – know if he or she thinks they need extra help or if they are falling behind. That way you can take steps to address problems early on, perhaps by having him or her meet with a teacher after school or working with a tutor.



Helping Students Transition to Middle School the Summer Before

Parents guide their children through many aspects of life but helping a child transition to middle school can be particularly challenging. A student at the middle school level has to navigate a new world of organizing, socializing, and independence, in addition to all the physical changes he or she is dealing with. Parents can help by easing these challenges both before and during the school year. Let's take a look at three key areas, **Organization, Socializing, and Independence**. In the second part of this document we will leave you with some activities you can do with your child throughout the summer to ease the transition in the fall.

Organization

One of the biggest challenges for a child entering a new school, particularly a middle school, can simply be the logistics of getting around. Where once there was just one classroom, one teacher, and one set of rules and classmates, there is now a multitude of each – all in their own location and all with their own demands. Before school starts, parents can ease their student's anxiety by taking him or her on school tours, signing up for summer programs that might be offered there, and using maps and the student's schedule to help figure out where and when he or she will need to be.

Socializing

Because the transition to middle school can sometimes mean losing friends that aren't going on to the same school or don't have the same schedules, it's important that a child knows how to socialize with new people in a new environment. In addition to talking to him or her about how to be a good listener, a good participator, and a good friend, signing up your child for summer activities can increase his or her confidence in meeting others in new situations. It also gives him or her the chance to make friends outside of school, which can help your child find new perspectives on life.

Independence

Independence can be a slightly trickier challenge, particularly because so many parents, understandably, want to jump in and help their child whenever they can. However, for the long-term benefit of your child, staying connected without taking away the lessons that come with the responsibility is an important balance. Finding out and connecting with your child's teachers before diving into the school year can allow you to inform the teacher about any particular strengths and weaknesses your student might have. It will help to set both student and teacher up for a **successful relationship**, hopefully one that will not require a parent's interference. This is also true for the school counselor, who can be a great firsthand advocate for your child's success.

Transition Activities

June, July, August

Set aside at least 2 times weekly to be purposeful and intentional in *selecting from the following example of conversation starters* for you and your child (feel free to add your own to the list). **Suggestion: Keep a journal to make note of your child's responses. You will find this information useful in August when completing the final activity for the summer.**

- What new fact did you learn today?
- What challenged you today?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your day? Why?
- Who would you like to befriend and why?
- If you could be the teacher for a day, which class would you teach, and what would you do?
- Did anyone frustrate you today?
- What would you change about today?
- Did you learn anything about another country?
- If you could add anything as an elective class this fall, what would you pick?
- What is your favorite game or exercise to do in PE?
- Did you meet any new children today? Did you speak to them?
- What advice would you give elementary school students about the move to middle school?
- Who do you think in the neighborhood needs a new friend?
- What was your favorite class last year and the least favorite?
- What emoji describes your day?
- How would you like to decorate the inside of your locker?
- What's on your mind right now?
- How do you deal with drama at school?
- If someone gave you \$20, at school, what would you do with it?
- If someone were to hurt your feelings at school, how would you deal with it?
- If you could swap places with one of your parents for a day, what would you do for the day?
- Do you prefer to take pictures or be in the picture?
- If you could pick your own team for X sport or club, who would be on it?
- What do you love about school?
- What do you like least about school?
- Who could you be nicer to?
- What is something you wish adults understood about other middle school kids?
- What is something you wish adults understood about you?

June – adapted from *Solving the Relational Puzzle with Learners* – Did You Know Publishing, Inc.



Activity # 11

Multiple Perspectives

This is the way: I See Me/You See Me

Suggested Procedure:

Invite your child to circle the words they feel describe them.
Consult with your child to check perceptions and set personal goals.

Not very smart	Smart [Capable of making good grades]
Sluggish [Not motivated]	Energetic [Ready to Learn]
Tired	Lively
Funny	Loud/Showy
Failure	Success
Punctual	Tardy
Class Clown	Disrespectful
Compassionate	Caring

Suggestion: In your journal make note of your child's responses. You will find this information useful in August when completing the final activity for the summer.

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Activity # 12

Taking A Look In The Mirror *Individual Self-Concept Check*

Suggested Procedure:

Invite your child to complete the checklist. Talk about ways to build personal strengths.

Consult individually with students to check perceptions and set personal goals.

1. I have confidence in myself because _____ .
2. Others have confidence in me because _____ .
3. I believe I am capable in achieving in school because _____ .
4. Others believe I am capable in achieving in school because _____ .
5. My teachers support me because _____ .
6. My parents support me because _____ .
7. My best character trait is _____ .
8. My friends see me as _____ .
9. My greatest challenge is _____ .
10. I will be successful in life because _____ .

Suggestion: In your journal make note of your child's responses. You will find this information useful in August when completing the final activity for the summer.

July — adapted from *Solving the Relational Puzzle with Learners* – Did You Know Publishing, Inc.



Activity # 13

Students Expressing their Dreams, Vision, and Ambition

Suggested Procedure:

Your child is to complete a paragraph for each of the following. Dialogue between the two of you should follow.

Consult individually with students to check perceptions and set personal goals.

1. What does it mean to be SMART?
2. What does it mean to be SUCCESSFUL? Who determines SUCCESS?
3. What does it mean to be DETERMINED? (*What does it look like?*)
4. Who do I ADMIRE and why?
5. What will I need to do to be successful? Do I need support from anyone else? If so, who?

Suggestion: In your journal make note of your child's responses. You will find this information useful in August when completing the final activity for the summer.



June, July, August

Summer Reading Club (reading at your own pace to determine how many books you desire to read during the summer) **Suggestion: Journal your thoughts from the books and your child's thoughts when you meet to discuss your readings.**

Your middle schooler may have traded in crayons and alphabet worksheets for lockers and algebra but finding them age-appropriate and engaging books is still so important. The transition from elementary school to middle school can be tough for many kids, and diving into a relatable read can help.

We've selected books that centered around characters who are also walking the halls of a middle school. The characters in these books are realistic, funny, charming, and empathetic. All of the books are appropriate for 5th – 8th grade student learners.

Space Station Seventh Grade by Jerry Spinelli	Now a seventh grader, Jason finds out the hard way just how different things are where ninth graders are the kings.
Amelia's 7 th -Grade Notebook by Marissa Moss	Amelia is excited to finally be in the 7 th grade but finds that this year is more complicated than 6 th grade. At the first dance of the year, Amelia notices the other girls have started using makeup, including her best friend Carly. Amelia isn't comfortable wearing makeup and worries that she is not growing up as quickly as Carly and the other girls. This begins Amelia's wondering about whether she is pretty, if she should wear makeup, and how others see her. A relatable story on how young girls see themselves and what makes each person unique.
I Funny: A Middle School Story by James Patterson (Series)	Jamie Grimm is a middle schooler on a mission: he wants to become the world's greatest standup comedian – even if he doesn't have a lot to laugh about these days. He's new in town and stuck living with his aunt, uncle, and their evil son Stevie, a bully who doesn't let Jamie's wheelchair stop him from messing with Jamie as much as possible. But Jamie doesn't let his situation get him down. When his Uncle Frankie mentions a contest called The Planet's Funniest Kid Comic, Jamie knows he has to enter. But are the judges only rewarding him out of pity because of his wheelchair, like Stevie suggests? Will Jamie ever share the secret of his troubled past instead of hiding behind his comedy act?

Eighth-Grade Superzero by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich	In this terrific debut, a Brooklyn middle-schooler finds the superhero within himself thanks to old friends, new dreams, and a pair of magical “Dora the Explorer” sneakers.
Drama by Raina Telgemeier	Callie loves theater. And while she would totally try out for her middle school’s production of <i>Moon Over Mississippi</i> , she can’t really sing. Instead she’s the set designer for the drama department stage crew, and this year she’s determined to create a set worthy of Broadway on a middle-school budget. But how can she, when she doesn’t know much about carpentry, ticket sales are down, and the crew members are having trouble working together? Not to mention the onstage AND offstage drama that occurs once the actors are chosen. And when two cute brothers enter the picture, things get even crazier!
Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life by James Patterson (Series)	Rafe Khatchadorian has enough problems at home without throwing his first year of middle school into the mix. Luckily, he’s got an ace plan for the best year ever, if only he can pull it off: With his best friend Leonardo Silently awarding him points, Rafe tries to break every rule in his school’s oppressive Code of Conduct. Chewing gum in class – 5, 000 points! Running in the hallway – 10,000 points! Pulling the fire alarm – 50,000 points! But when Rafe’s game starts to catch up with him, he’ll have to decide if winning is all that matters, or if he’s finally ready to face the rules, bullies, and truths he’s been avoiding.
Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney	Boys don’t keep diaries – or do they? The launch of an exciting and innovatively illustrated new series narrated by an unforgettable kid every family can relate to. It’s a new school year, and Greg Heffley finds himself thrust into middle school, where undersized weaklings share the hallways with kids who are taller, meaner, and already shaving. The hazards of growing up before you’re ready are uniquely revealed through words and drawings as Greg records them in his diary.
Smile by Raina Telgemeier	Raina just wants to be a normal sixth grader. But one night after Girl Scouts she trips and falls, severely injuring her two front teeth, and what follows is a long and frustrating journey with on-again, off-again braces, surgery, embarrassing headgear, and even a retainer with fake teeth attached. And on top of all that, there’s still more to deal with: a major earthquake, boy confusion and friends who turn out to be not so friendly. This coming-of-age true story is sure to resonate with anyone who has ever been in middle school, and especially those who have ever had a bit of their own dental drama.

When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead	Miranda is an ordinary sixth grader, until she starts receiving mysterious messages from somebody who knows all about her, including things that have not happened yet. Each message brings her closer to believing that only she can prevent a tragic death. Until the final note makes her think she's too late.
The Wednesday Wars by Gary D. Schmidt	In this Newbery Honor-winning novel, Gary D. Schmidt offers an unforgettable antihero. <i>The Wednesday Wars</i> is a wonderfully witty and compelling story about a teenage boy's mishaps and adventures over the course of the 1967-68 school year in Long Island, New York.
Rules by Cynthia Lord	Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life. Which is near impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. She's spent years trying to teach David the rules – from “a peach is not a funny-looking apple” to “keep your pants on in public” – in order to stop his embarrassing behaviors. But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a paraplegic boy, and Kristi, the next-door friend she's always wished for, it's her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What is normal?
Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid: Rowley Jefferson's Journal by Jeff Kinney	Get ready for a whole new look into Jeff Kinney's Diary of a Wimpy Kid! Introducing the newest Wimpy Kid author – Rowley Jefferson! Rowley's best friend Greg Heffley has been chronicling his middle-school years in thirteen Diary of a Wimpy Kid journals...and counting. But it's finally time for readers to hear directly from Rowley in a journal of his own. In Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid, Rowley writes about his experiences and agrees to play the role of biographer for Greg along the way. (After all, one day Greg will be rich and famous, and everyone will want to know his life story.) But Rowley is a poor choice for the job, and his “biography” of Greg is a hilarious mess. Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid: Rowley Jefferson's Journal offers readers a new way to look at the Wimpy world – one fans won't want to miss!
Wonder by R.J. Palacio	August Pullman was born with a facial difference that, up until now, has prevented him from getting to a mainstream school. Starting 5 th grade at Beecher Prep, he wants nothing more than to be treated as an ordinary kid – but his new classmates can't get past Auggie's extraordinary face. WONDER, now a #1 New York Times bestseller and included on the Texas Bluebonnet Award master list, begins from Auggie's point of view, but soon switches to include his classmates, his sister, her boyfriend, and others. These perspectives converge in a portrait of one community's struggle with empathy, compassion, and acceptance.

Early August — write a note

“Sharing key information can help educators make a connection with your child”

What can you tell your child’s teachers that will help them do their job better? You might be surprised. However, keep in mind no one knows more about your child than you do. You know the culture (practices, habits, traditions, beliefs, languages, etc.) from which your child comes. Their likes, dislikes, what they value, etc. It’s just as important for parents to tell teachers about what they are observing at home that may affect school performance as it is for teachers to report how children are doing in the classroom.

Students do best when parents and teachers work together as partners. The start of a new school year is a great time to open dialogue with your child’s teacher. Not sure where to start? Here are seven things teachers wish you would tell them. After all it is the teacher’s job to want to make a connection with you and you and your child. No matter how much teachers know about the content area that they teach your child won’t connect with them, unless they know their teachers care about them. Sharing this information with your child’s teachers will help them to better understand your child’s needs and lay the groundwork for a cooperative relationship throughout the school year.

When writing your letter, be sure to refer to the notes in your journal, which you have been keeping this summer in helping your child to transition to Middle School.

1. **Health conditions:** If your child is diabetic, uses an inhaler, is allergic to peanuts, or has a serious health condition, her teacher should know. It’s also helpful to let the teacher know whether your child has been diagnosed with conditions like ADHD, which may affect behavior and concentration.
2. **Family issues:** Fill the teacher in if your family is going through a major change that could affect your child, such as a divorce, a death in the family, or a move. Even if your child seems to have adjusted well, alert teachers so they can watch for behavioral changes.
3. **Personality traits or behavior issues:** Maybe your son is painfully shy and is worried about making friends at a new school. Or perhaps your child has been acting out at home and you’re concerned she’ll do the same at school. It’s best to make teachers aware of these issues before they become a problem at school.
4. **Strengths and weaknesses:** Your daughter is a smart student in math but is embarrassed to read aloud. Your son loves language arts but struggles with science. If you tell teachers these things up front, they’ll have more time to help your children improve in the areas they need it most.

5. **Learning style:** You've spent years teaching your kids, from potty training to tying shoelaces, so you have a good idea of their learning styles. If your child learns better through hands-on activities than listening to explanations, mention that to his teachers. Also share any teaching strategies that you've found work well with your child.
6. **Study habits:** Does your son speed through math homework but labor over reading assignments? Do your daughter's grades suffer because she spends so much time at piano lessons? Tell teachers about your child's study habits and any issues they face in completing work. Teachers often can offer suggestions to make studying time go more smoothly.
7. **Special interests:** Knowing more about your child's hobbies or interests can help the teacher forge connections in the classroom. Let the teacher know that your young son loves a particular comic book superhero and that your middle school daughter is a gifted painter.

Thanks to you and your summer engagement we can start now preparing for an incredible _____ - _____ academic year. We at _____ City Schools are excited about servicing you and your student learner/s!