

Middle School Matters!

A Guide for **STUDENTS**
on Middle School Transition



Moving Up to Middle School is an exciting time because you have finally completed elementary school. On the other hand, you will no longer be one of the oldest kids at school but one of the youngest. In fourth or fifth grade, you will begin to participate in school activities offered by administrators, counselors, teachers, media specialists, or local business people that will help answer questions you have regarding middle school. These activities will help you develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be successful as you transition from elementary school to middle school. Some questions you may have are: “How much homework will I get and how do I get help if I need it?”; “What do I do if I see bullying or am bullied?”; “How do I make new friends?”; and, “How are the school rules different?”



This booklet will help answer these questions by spotlighting five important topics:

- **Making New Friends**
- **Having Time for Everything**
- **Classes and Grades**
- **Growing and Changing**
- **What Do I Want to Be When I Grow Up?**

Upon entry into middle school, it is common to be bombarded with changes that may overwhelm you. You are in a new building, meeting new people, and your body is growing. If you don't learn how to cope with these changes, then they could affect your ability to adjust, therefore influencing your relationships with others or your academic achievement. Continue reading to learn more about what you can do to make sure you have a successful transition into middle school.



Making New Friends is one of the many experiences you will have in middle school. Due to the variety of courses and activities in middle school, differences between you and your peers become more obvious. You will probably notice kids who are great in academics, some who excel on the playing field, and others who are into the arts. Sometimes people form “cliques” or groups based on what they have in common. Make sure your group doesn’t exclude other kids for unimportant reasons. Another part of middle school is learning how to manage your emotions in a positive way without taking everything personally. Sometimes this means asking for help in adjusting to relationships or working on a solution yourself. For example, you may experience a group project that is not completed on time because of group members not doing their part. Even though you may ask a family member, teacher, or counselor for help, they might decide to give you time to think about it first and make a decision about how to handle the situation and work out a solution on your own.

Trying New Things

- Introduce yourself to the other students in your class
- Become involved in clubs, sports, band/chorus/drama
- Volunteer your time in something that interests you
- Try doing more on your own

Understanding New Attitudes

- Share and appreciate your differences with other students
- Watch out for intense emotions
- Ask for privacy
- Manage anger/stress by talking to a family member, getting active or meditating

Having time for everything you want to do throughout the day, week, or month without feeling overwhelmed will require that you develop time management skills. Now is the time to begin keeping a good homework and activities calendar so you don't feel constantly behind. You will have to find a balance between what you have to do and what you want to do. Consider what the consequences will be if you decide not to study for a math test and watch a movie instead. Try creating a "Possible Consequences" list to help you make these decisions. Expect to work daily on homework and long-term projects. Remember your family's rules about when to be home and how much time you can watch TV or use the computer. During the summer before you begin middle school, try to attend a middle school transition camp or another offered activity to become familiar with your new building and your class schedule. Make it a goal to meet other new students while you are there.

How To Organize Your Day

- Get to school/class on time
- Find your locker and learn your way around school
- Discover if your schedule will change daily/weekly
- Use a homework and activities calendar
- Work on the difficult assignments first
- Take a break and have fun



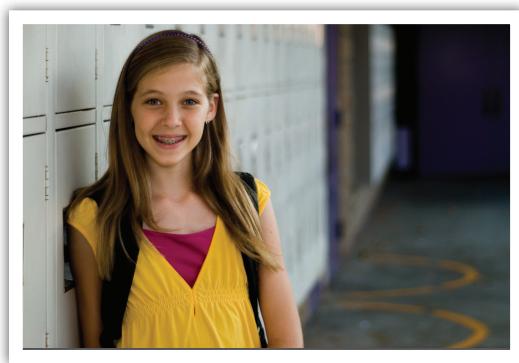


Classes and Grades will determine what you are supposed to learn in middle school and how well you succeed in learning the material. Students are required to take the following classes: *English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies*. You may also have the opportunity to take *Physical Education, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education* or *World Languages*. Make it a goal to meet all of your teachers during middle school transition opportunities. Review all homework and grading requirements and, if necessary, ask your teacher for additional help before/after school. Stay informed about any elective courses that might be available for you to choose based on your personal interests and career goals.

Making the Grade

- Understand the grade requirements
- Raise your hand, ask questions, and seek help when needed
- Expect more homework
- Know that incomplete homework will affect your grade
- Attend class every day
- Be prepared for every class
- Stay well rested and fueled for each day





Growing and Changing will occur during the next few years. Girls start changing physically between the ages of 8 to 13. Physical changes in boys begin, on average, two years later. Your brain develops even faster during this time as well. You will find that one day you and your parents get along just fine and the next day it may be completely opposite. Another day your pants fit just fine and the next day they will be too short. You may begin sleeping later on the weekends. Do not worry, this is all part of normal development. It is a natural process, embrace it and plan accordingly. Take time to find out who you are. Don't hesitate to ask a family member to listen when you need help solving problems or have a new idea to share.

Brain and Body Changes

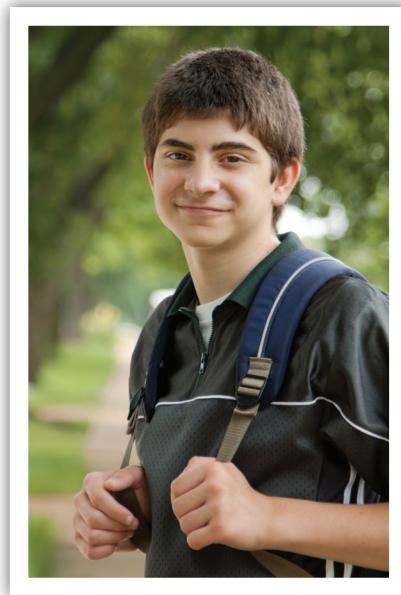
- Think before you act
- Use what you know to solve a problem
- Realize that body changes are natural
- Ask questions about changes you do not understand
- Address the new physical and mental responsibilities that come with puberty



What I Want to Be When I Grow Up is a question parents and teachers have asked you to think about since you were a small child. There are several things you may do in school to prepare you for a future job. They are: attending a school career day; researching different types of jobs; making good grades; or working in groups. During this time, you are able to gain knowledge about the nature of work and begin to form ideas about future career goals. School counselors or advisors will help you discover what your interests are by giving you a survey to complete during class. Ask your family to help you create an individual graduation plan based on your career goals.

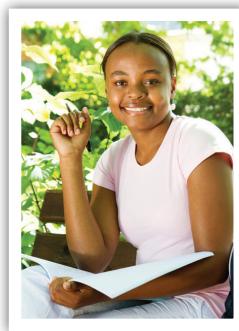
Thinking Past Middle School – What I Want to Be

- Discover who you are
- Determine where you want to go
- Make a plan to get there
- Visit a family member's or friend's workplace
- Take classes that can prepare you for your career interests
- Use computer Websites like www.GACollege411.org to help



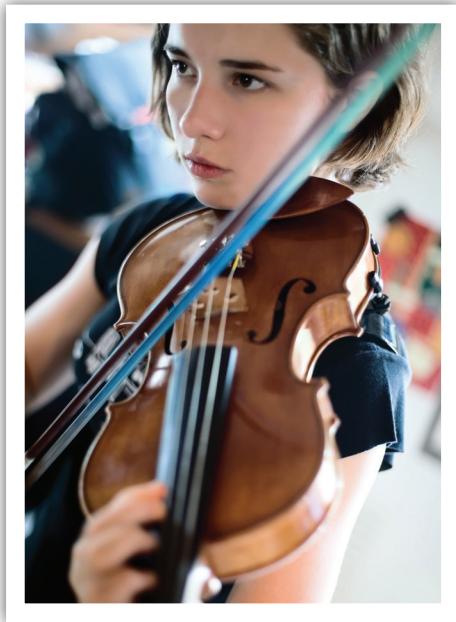
How Do I Become Involved In My School?

It is important to make the most of your middle school years by taking advantage of all the new opportunities for self-discovery and growth. Check out the ideas below for some ways to help get you started on the right path.



- **Find your spark and let it be known.** Discover what interests you by taking advantage of all the learning opportunities available in middle school. Try new things to discover what motivates you. Share your passion with your parents, school staff, and friends so they can support your goals.
- **Explore student clubs and activities.** Join the football or soccer team, become a member of the Spanish or chess club, attend a dance, play an instrument in the band, sing in the choir, or explore an afterschool program. Ask your school counselor or teacher about how to find out what is offered at your school and ways you can get involved.
- **Put school activities on your family calendar.** Look in your student handbook for a copy of the school calendar and put important dates on your family's calendar. Add test dates and project deadlines, as well as other events that come up throughout the year such as sporting events, club meetings, or dances that you want to attend.
- **Participate in student leadership opportunities.** Decide to run for a seat on the student council or as an officer in one of the school clubs. Student leaders have unique opportunities to bring problems, concerns, and ideas to the faculty or administration of your school. If you do not want to run, consider what other leadership roles you can take within organizations outside of your school, such as your place of worship or afterschool program.

- **Ask questions regularly.** Learn as much as you can in middle school by taking the opportunity to ask questions about anything and everything. This will ensure you are knowledgeable and well prepared for important decisions that will be made later in life.
- **Meet new people.** Introduce yourself to other students who are in your classes, try to sit with different people at lunch, or make it a goal to meet someone new each week. You do not have to be best friends with everyone, but it will sharpen your social skills and help you build a positive reputation.
- **Join a mentoring program.** Talking with a trusted adult other than your parents, or an older student, can be a great way to learn about maintaining positive relationships, discovering college and career opportunities, enhancing problem-solving skills, increasing self-esteem, and developing strategies for conflict resolution.





Visit Our Partners for More Information about Middle School Transition

Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network
www.afterschoolga.org

Georgia Department of Education
www.gadoe.org and parents.gadoe.org

Georgia Family Connection Partnership
www.gafcp.org

GA College 411
gacollege411.org

Georgia Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
www.georgiapta.org

United Way of Greater Atlanta
www.smartstartga.org and www.unitedwayatlanta.org

Middle School Matters!

A Guide for **FAMILIES**
on Middle School Transition

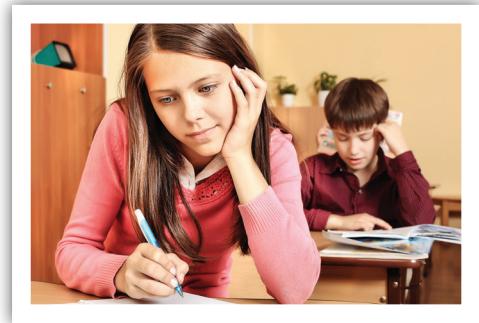


School Transition is a process that prepares students, families, schools, and communities to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and relationships to assist students in successfully moving from one setting to another. In this instance, students are transitioning or “changing” from elementary school to middle school. It is important for students and families to begin this transition prior to entering middle school to allow time for the student to get acclimated to the rigor of the curriculum in addition to a new school climate. A smooth transition into middle school will help your child form a positive first impression and realistic expectation of what middle school is really like, increasing their ability to succeed in school.

For the purpose of this brochure, five areas of focus have been identified as particularly important to the life of a middle school student as they transition. They include:

- **Social and Emotional Changes**
- **Organizational and Environmental Factors**
- **Academics**
- **Developmental Growth**
- **College and Career Readiness**

Upon entry into middle school, students are bombarded with environmental, social, emotional, and physical changes that may overwhelm some. Lack of specific skills needed to cope with these changes can have significant effects on an individual student’s ability to adjust, as well as his or her academic achievement, future aspirations, and overall feelings of self-worth. Continue reading to learn more about what you can do to make sure your child has a successful transition into middle school.



Social and Emotional Changes will begin to occur during the middle school years as a part of normal development. During this time, children develop many of the social skills they will use throughout adulthood. They form self-concepts and self-esteem, build new relationships, and begin to regulate their own behavior. Talk to your child about school and their peers. Listen for comments that reflect what they are feeling and thinking. Expect your child to make mistakes and have personal struggles. Give them time to think and make decisions about how to manage their problems as well as time to deal with the consequences. Understanding these changes will help you interact with your child in positive ways.

What to Expect Socially

- Spending time with parents becomes secondary to their peers
- Desire for privacy and secrecy develops
- Belonging to a group becomes important
- Showing allegiance to peers is key
- Exposure to peer pressure and negative influences increase

What to Expect Emotionally

- Desiring freedom from parental supervision
- Experiencing mood fluctuations
- Rejecting adult advice and “talking back” become common
- Becoming highly critical of themselves
- Experiencing stress related to ability levels and competition



Organizational and Environmental Factors

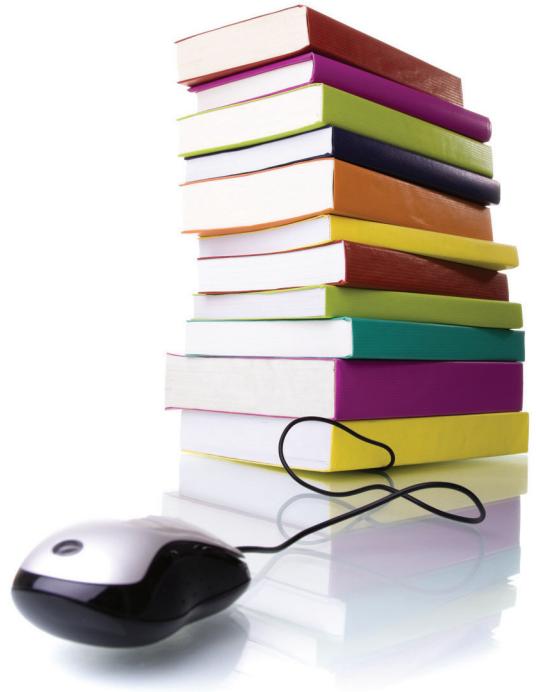
can influence your child's first priority in middle school, which is to learn. The middle school day changes, with students possibly experiencing as many as six classes with six different teachers, six different expectations, and in many cases six different homework assignments. Organization and time management skills must be developed so students will feel less overwhelmed. Be sure to balance after-school recreational activities, as well as provide a quiet study area. Expect to see your child working regularly on homework and long-term projects. Set limitations on TV and electronic device use. Make it a goal during the summer before entering middle school to attend a middle school transition camp or other school transition activities offered throughout the year to become acquainted with your child's new building and schedule. Teaching your child to plan each day, keep up with homework assignments, and learn self-regulating strategies are important to motivate your child to become more accountable and self-reliant.

What to Expect Organizationally

- Learning to manage time
- Getting to each class and other activities on time
- Keeping up with materials and assignments
- Taking time to relax

What to Expect Environmentally

- Adjusting to using lockers instead of desks
- Learning their way around school (lunchroom, bathrooms, classes)
- Getting to know who's who
- Becoming familiar with the dress code





Academics relate to what your child is learning and is expected to learn in middle school. Students are required to take the following classes: *English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies*. They may also have the opportunity to take *Physical Education, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education, or World Languages*. These classes are based on Georgia's adopted state standards which provide clear expectations for instruction, assessment, and student work. Please visit the Website, GeorgiaStandards.org, or call 1(800) 311-3627 to learn information about the state's curriculum standards. Make it a goal to meet all of your child's teachers. Review all homework and grading requirements for each class, and, if necessary, locate resources to help with your child's success. Learning effective "study skills" can also help raise your child's achievement. Establish ground rules and expectations for phone, texting, and TV/electronic device usage while studying. Academic problems should be addressed through frequent contact with the teacher or school counselors. Gaining an understanding of your child's classes and coursework will allow you to support your child in their long term course decisions and career path.

What to Expect Academically

- Increased homework loads
- Reduced parental help in completing homework
- Understanding new grading factors
- Accepting more responsibility
- Presenting more class projects





Developmental Growth will take place in your child during the adolescent years, both physically and mentally. Girls start changing physically between the ages of 8 to 13. Physical changes in boys begin, on average, two years later. Your child may be frustrated at times, but you can look forward to them also being funny, curious, imaginative, and eager to learn. Encourage your child to come up with ideas and think about things abstractly and creatively. Help your child as they begin to think through problems and recognize the consequences of certain behaviors or actions. Make it a point to talk with your child about developmental changes before they happen. Do not become less involved in your child's life at this stage. A good relationship with you, as well as with other trusted adults, is the best safeguard your child can have.

What to Expect Developmentally

- Start of puberty
- Anticipate growth spurts and weight fluctuation
- Increased levels of activity along with frequent fatigue due to rapid growth
- Experiences voice changes
- Develops body odor
- Increase in logical reasoning using concrete examples
- Enjoys using skills to solve real life problems

College and Career Readiness is part of your child's curricular activities. With each class they take, and with each life experience, they gain a greater awareness about the nature of work and begin to form ideas about their future career goals. These curricular activities maximize opportunities for students to be better prepared for their next step in their education and career planning process—the workforce or postsecondary education. Support your child's efforts to create an individual graduation plan and participate in the process when invited by their school. Ask your child about their interests and what they enjoy doing in and outside of school. Encourage your child to learn more about their expressed interests and help them explore further opportunities. Parent involvement in every aspect of the educational journey can result in higher achievement for all students.



What to Expect for College and Career Readiness

- Acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to make informed career decisions
- Understand the relationship between educational achievement and career development
- Participate in career exploration
- Take career-related assessments
- Develop an individual graduation plan (IGP)



How Do I Become Involved In My Child's School and Education?

While opportunities for parent engagement change at the middle school level, your involvement in your child's education is still very important to his or her achievement and success. Check out the ideas below for some ways to help you stay an integral part of your child's educational journey.



- **Visit your school's parent/student organization such as the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA).** Go to a PTSA or other parent organization meeting in the spring before your child starts school. Find out how you can join and get involved. Contact your child's school to learn of meeting dates and times.
- **Keep a family calendar.** Ask for a copy of the upcoming year's school calendar and put important dates, such as open houses, parent conferences, and holidays, on your family's calendar. Encourage your child to add items, such as tests, project due dates, and extracurricular activities as well. Make it a point to check it daily.
- **Attend school activities.** Go to school functions, such as a curriculum and career night, a sporting event, or student performance. While there, learn about school expectations and get to know other parents and school staff. Call the school and ask to speak with the parent involvement coordinator or school counselor to discover when these activities are held.
- **Volunteer at home or at school.** Participate by mentoring students, helping out in the media center or computer lab, or serving as an advisor for an extracurricular activity or club. If you cannot get to the school during the day, let the school know what special talents you have and what you are willing to do from home. It could be collecting recyclables for class projects or reaching out to community and business organizations for school support. Volunteering is a way to meet your child's classmates, network, and understand your school community.

- **Share your ideas.** Find out which school committees seek to include parent representation, such as Title I, School Council, and Family Engagement. Talk to the principal and other parents about getting involved in decision-making processes.
- **Be an informed parent.** Carefully read information sent home from the school on school policies, procedures, curriculum, and meetings. Check out newsletters, websites, and other resources. Utilize the school's parent portal so you can monitor your child's progress daily. Consider visiting the Khan Academy website (www.khanacademy.org) to find resources to help your child learn.
- **Show your child that you care.** Ask your child about his or her school day. Monitor your child's academic, social, and developmental performance. Get to know their interests and what truly motivates them to do better. Support them in those endeavors.



