Welcome to Adams 12 Five Star Schools!

The start of middle school can be an anxious time for students and their parents. There is excitement at a new beginning, the chance to meet new friends, have more class options and become more independent right alongside the stress of the unknown and the often negative reputation of “middle school.” As parents, we often wonder how we can best prepare our children to make the transition from elementary to middle school and how to support them during their first year in a new environment.

We asked principals and staff from the Five Star District’s middle schools to let us know what advice they would give to the parents of incoming 6th grade students. You will see their advice, recommendations from sources in the literature, advice from parents who have already had a child in middle school and some additional resource ideas. We hope you find the information useful!

Special thanks

Thanks to all the parent and teacher volunteers who contributed to the creation of this document. Parents serving on the District School Improvement Team (DSIT), principals and staff at all the middle schools and teacher representatives of the DTEA graciously contributed their time and expertise to create this document. The DSIT subcommittee met over a year to compile, research and answer commonly asked questions from parents sending their children to 6th grade for the first time. We hope you find this guide to be practical, useful and a good introduction to what’s ahead for the coming year!

Learn how you can get involved at www.adams12.org/dsit.
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The Big 3
Middle School Student Concerns

**Lockers:** Middle school staff know this is a big concern for kids and allow time for students to practice opening their lockers during their orientation day and for the first few months of school. Students are not expected to be experts right away! Consider buying a lock for your child to practice on at home. It won’t be an exact match to the school locks but it is still valuable practice and may help them feel more prepared. And—no one gets shoved in a locker.

**Late:** The first few weeks, teachers are very understanding about students being late to class. After a while, your student will work out a system of when to go to his/her locker and what to take to each class. If he/she has trouble, he/she can always ask a teacher/counselor to help!

**Lost:** At the beginning of the year, the school will seem very big. At the student orientation day, students will have time to navigate the halls without the older kids. 6th grade classes are also typically grouped together so they don’t have to find their way around the whole school, just certain areas.
Familiarize Yourself with the School

Before The School Year Begins

• Attend the school’s orientation with your child. Each middle school offers an orientation that gives you the opportunity to see the building, meet teachers, check out the lunchroom and ask questions. The more you and your child know about the workings of the school, the less anxious you both will be.

• Check out the school’s website. Read the previous year’s postings to get an idea of what happens during the year. Some websites have links and specific information just for parents.

• Talk to students and parents of children who attend the middle school. Ask questions about the lunch room, lockers, teachers, electives, anything your child would like to know more about.

During The School Year

• Be involved with and communicate with the school. Don’t assume that middle schools don’t like or want parents involved. They want parents! Teachers’ phone numbers and emails are posted on the schools’ websites.

• Visit the school’s website regularly for updates about school events, to connect to homework pages and Infinite Campus and to find ways to get involved.

• Attend as many events at school as you can. This will allow you to meet and interact with staff and get a sense for the school’s activities and culture.

Visit Your Child’s School Online Today
Organization

Before The School Year Begins

• Work on organization at home – good habits at home will translate to good organization when school starts!

  › Discuss and try out different organizational systems (calendar, white board, bulletin board, folders, sticky reminders, setting a schedule). Let your child choose a system he/she feels most comfortable with and practice using it with their summer activities.

  › Put your child in charge of manageable tasks to help him/her develop organizational skills and a sense of responsibility.

  › Time management: Give your child the chance to plan and execute his/her own time and responsibilities

During The School Year

• You won’t be asked to regularly sign anything regarding homework but take a look at planners, backpacks and binders regularly. Check to see how things are organized and get a sense of what your student is bringing home. If Infinite Campus shows missing homework assignments you can know if organization may be the culprit.

• Middle school teachers expect the student to take on much more responsibility than parents, so the best thing you can do is let them do as much on their own as possible, even if that means they fail sometimes.

• Help your child make a plan for handling his/her locker. If they are overwhelmed and express frustration about having the wrong materials for class or forgetting to bring things home, have them work with you or someone at school to help them plan:

  › what to take to class

  › when to go to their locker during the day and what to get

  › what to take home and bring back

  › ways to help them organize their locker: e.g. shelves, magnets and message boards to write reminders.
Academics

Before The School Year Begins

• If they have not already, help your child master his/her math facts. They should know to add, subtract, multiply and divide digits 0-10 without hesitation.

• Look at your child’s writing. Make sure he/she knows the grammar basics—starting a sentence with a capital letter and ending with a period. Practice writing over the summer in easy ways (e.g. letters, journals) if they need to practice the basics.

• Have your child read over the summer for pleasure (comic books, newspapers, fun fiction—anything that keeps a book in his/her hand).

During The School Year

• Plan for about 60 minutes of homework a night and additional time if your child is playing an instrument. Try as much as possible to establish a routine and stick to it.

• Check Infinite Campus often (both students and parents!) Use it to check the homework pages and to keep track of grades and assignments.

• If your child’s grades go down, don’t panic. Work with your child and your child’s teacher on a strategy. Infinite Campus lets you track whether or not homework is getting turned in and know when tests have been graded. Students have the opportunity in many classes to re-take tests so they can master the material.

• Your child will have several teachers, which means different teaching styles. Help your child learn to deal with the diversity they will experience in communication, teaching strategies and feedback procedures.

What Will My Child Be Learning in Middle School?

There are standards set by the state and adopted by the district that detail what your child will be working to accomplish at each grade level.

You can find these standards here: http://www.cde.state.co.us/StandardsAndInstruction/ColoradoStandards.asp
Peer Issues

- Help your child learn to navigate changes they can expect to see in middle school. Friend changes, strong emotions, and development of new interests are all part of the experience. Empower your child to take charge of his/her growth and not to feel like (or be) the victim when they experience challenges.

- There will be lots of different types of kids in middle school. Your child has an opportunity to meet kids with same interests and make new friends. This can be helpful to point out if your child is worried about going to a bigger school.

- Peer pressure/problem solving skills:
  - Parents can help by role playing or coaching their kids through tough times. (e.g. what can you say or do if one of your friends wants to sit with someone else at lunch). It is tempting to want to step in but this ultimately won’t be as useful as helping your child learn how to handle the situation on his/her own.
  - Be careful to separate your own experiences in middle school from what your child is experiencing. Many of us do not have fond memories of middle school. It’s important not to project our own perhaps negative experiences on our child and add to their anxieties.
  - A big parent and student concern in middle school is bullying. Bullying is taken very seriously by all middle school staff. They have received training and do their best to deal with incidents as they made aware of them. Since school staff don’t witness or hear about everything, it’s helpful to talk with your child at home about what he/she is experiencing and help problem-solve with them. Let the school know what is happening to come up with a plan. For concrete tips and links to other information go to: http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/bullyingprevention.html
General Support for your 6th Grader

• Check in with your child often - ask about how the day went. You may only get a one-word answer, but the fact you asked is still important to them.

• Support your child in his/her efforts to become independent.

• Encourage your child to try new things and to regard failure and mistakes as important parts of learning and growing. Assure your child that one mistake won’t negatively label them in the eyes of the teachers and administration at middle school. It’s how they respond and grow that is important.

• Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition. Check out some of the references mentioned in our resources section. It can help you feel less anxious to get advice and know you are not the first to be dealing with challenges.

• Show your child that you are in touch with the school and that you know who is who and what is going on there. Let them know even though you may not be at school like you were in elementary school, you are still connected.

• Remember, middle school staff has lots of experience dealing with kids this age. They are sensitive to their issues.

• Maintain strong family connections with your 6th grader. They may push you away on the surface, but they do want you to be there… really.

• Be alert to signs of depression or anxiety in your child and seek help. If you see signs, talk with the counselors at school and let them know what is going on. They can alert teachers and provide you with resources on where to go for assistance.
SOURCES

MS staff interviews and


RESOURCES

Parenting with a Purpose: Great site with blog posts on a variety of topics, resource recommendations and frequent updates. This site is sponsored by Silver Hills Middle School. http://shmsparent.wordpress.com/

Rocky Top Middle School counseling department: site has several helpful links on topics such as bullying and motivating your student among others. http://rockytop.adams12.org/counseling

Quick Find On-line Clearinghouse: This site is a clearinghouse for articles on transitions at all levels. There are several links to articles about transitioning to middle school. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

Middleweb: This site is currently undergoing a big upgrade. There are lots of resources for middle school teachers on this site but also some great resources and blogs for parents. http://tln.typepad.com/middleweb/about_middleweb/

Adolescent Brain: This is one helpful article on the teen brain. More is learned every day about how basic brain development affects teenagers and can explain some of what is seen in adolescence. http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/09/the-teen-brain.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: For information on adolescent health issues and development. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/

Helpful Books

“How to talk so Teens will Listen and Listen so Teens will Talk” Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish, HarperCollins (2006).

“Staying Connected To Your Teenager: How To Keep Them Talking To You And How To Hear What They’re Really Saying,” Michael Riera , Da Capo Press (2007)


* Note: American girl publishes a number of helpful books for young adolescents on friends, body changes, self esteem, and other topics.
For More Information On Your Child’s School, Visit Their Website:

Century Middle School  
Crossroads Alternative School  
Hulstrom Options K-8 School

Northglenn Middle School  
Rocky Top Middle School  
Shadow Ridge Middle School

Silver Hills Middle School  
STEM Launch  
STEM Magnet Lab School

The International School at Thornton Middle  
Westlake Middle School

Adams12  
Five Star Schools