

## *Moving from Elementary to Middle School Can be a Smooth Experience for Students and Parents*

Moving from an elementary to middle school level can be an especially trying time for parents and students alike. While the elementary setting is comparatively secure with a single teacher, basically the same classmates all day, and only one classroom, middle school brings changes. These changes are likely to result in greater learning opportunities-both academically and developmentally-but they are changes, and that can confuse 10 year olds.

Among the changes students and parents will find are:

Different teachers for different subjects, meaning that mathematics will be taught by a teacher who is particularly trained and experienced in math, science by a science specialist, etc. Students are likely to receive more activity-orientated instruction in the core subjects.

Most middle schools have adapted some form of team approach in which a group of students stays together for their core subjects-English, math, science, social studies and physical education under the direction of two to five teachers. These teachers have their planning time together during which they discuss the best ways to meet the learning and development needs of the pre-adolescents on their team.

Expanded opportunities exist in the middle school for students to participate in student activities and a rich and diverse program. While the major goal of middle schools is to provide high quality academic programs, they offer many more learning opportunities appropriate for students this age who now have increased interest and curiosity. Students have the chance to learn to work together by participating in band, student council, art, after-school activities and sports programs. Developing the skills necessary to be a part of a team will help prepare them for tomorrow's workplace. Exploratory options allow students to find areas such as music that interest them and can become lifelong avocations.

While there is much excitement attached to ways middle schools can expand a student's learning opportunities, there are also questions that come into a young adolescent's mind. Here is where parents can play a big role. Questions that students frequently ask as they approach this transition period include:

- What will it be like going to school with older kids?
- Will I be able to find my locker and remember by locker combination?
- Will I have enough time to get to my next class between periods?
- Will I remember what my schedule is?

- Will I get lost in this much larger school?
- Can I handle all the increased homework and projects?

Here are some tips parents can consider now and during the summer to help make the transition smoother for their young adolescent.

- ✓ Share with students your own experiences when you went to middle school or junior high school. Talk about the things you enjoyed that made school more interesting, including your fears and how you overcame them.
- ✓ Find a parent who has a child at your middle school. Talk to that person and discuss concerns you may have as a parent. If you are uncomfortable with the transition, your child will sense that concern. Make sure you understand everything you can about the new school and project a positive attitude.
- ✓ Spend time during the summer giving your child manageable tasks that will help him or her develop the organizational skills to complete homework and other assignments in an orderly manner.
- ✓ Toward the end of summer, discuss with your child how his or her time will need to be organized to complete work. Develop a homework and project log or poster so you and your child can keep track of when assignments are due and when they are completed. The school will require every student to maintain their school planner in which assignments and related notes are recorded. Parents are asked to check the planner on a regular basis during the first quarter.
- ✓ Encourage your pre-adolescent to try new things and to regard failure as a necessary part of learning and growing. Point out mistakes that you have made and how you grew from them.

Understanding of the "whys" and "whats" of middle school helps you support your child's transition into middle school. The middle school helps meet young adolescents' need to develop social skills, to strengthen communication skills, and to gain advanced knowledge in the basic subjects.