

Packin' Up...
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A Guide to Middle School Transition

A Resource Guide

WCPSS

Office of Counseling and Student Services

www.wcpss.net

Dear Counselors and Parents,

The transition from elementary to middle school is often an exciting, yet nerve-racking time for students. Best case scenario would be that each rising 6th grader feels prepared to enter middle school. As educators or parents, we can greatly enhance students' comfort level with this change by exposing them to common concerns that arise in middle school and equipping them with skills necessary to be successful. Packin' Up ...A Guide to Middle School Transition is created in an effort to support 5th grade counselors, 6th grade counselors and parents in this endeavor. The information within this guide can be used by counselors and parents at the elementary and middle school levels; therefore, it can be tailored to the school's goals and students' needs.

Sincerely,

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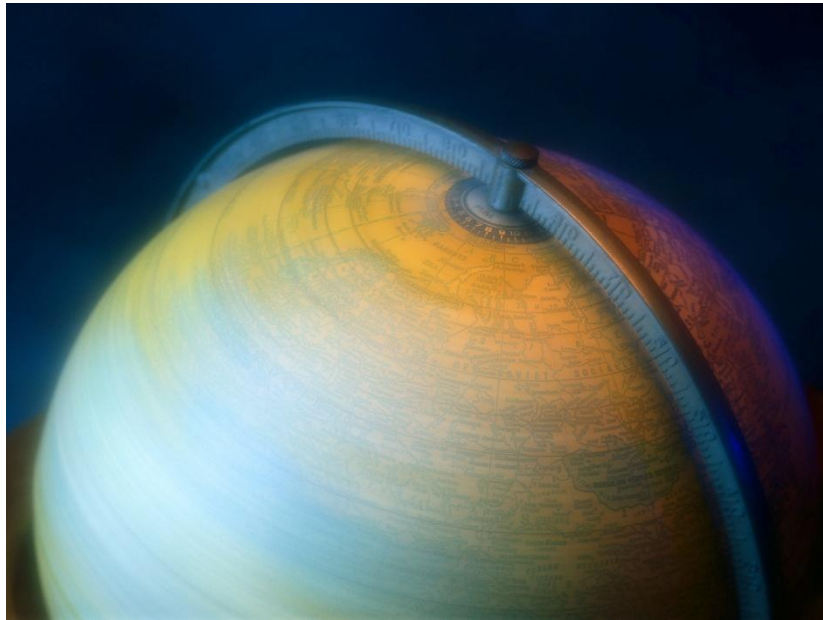
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I. General Information



General Information

The transition to middle school can be challenging for students due to differences in middle and elementary school settings. It is important that parents transition, as well as their child. Parents and students have to adjust and know that in most cases, students no longer have one core teacher, but six or seven. This section will provide general information about the functioning of the middle school.

1. Who's Who in the Middle School?

Students may notice when they get to the middle school that there are several adults around, but they are not always sure what those adults do and who to ask for help.

Case Manager-It is important to know that students with special needs have been assigned a case manager to help ensure that their needs are being met. Special education teachers serve as the case manager for an identified group of students who have an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). These teachers are responsible for ensuring that the IEP is implemented, scheduling meetings to discuss an IEP, and/or to answer questions regarding the IEP. The 504 Contact is the case manager for students who have a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. In most middle schools, this person is typically a counselor. The AIG Coordinator is the case manager for students who have a Differentiation Educational Plan (DEP). Finally, the ESL Resource Teacher is the case manager for students who have a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan.

Grade Level Counselor-One very important thing for students to understand is that their middle school counselor is there to help them, just like their elementary counselor. For most middle schools within Wake County, there is one counselor for every grade level in the middle school. For many schools that counselor rotates with their students for all three years, but for some the counselors remain in the same grade level from year to year. The counselor in the middle school will typically not be in the classroom as much as the elementary counselors, but are available for individual and group sessions. The counselor is not an administrator and is not responsible for disciplinary actions.

Grade Level Administrator-The administrative layout of a middle school can be very confusing to some students. They have a principal of the whole school, but they will most likely have a grade level administrator (or Assistant Principal). The students' grade level administrator will more often than not be the one to handle safety, disciplinary, and/or facility situations within that grade level.

Guidance Technician-There is typically a guidance technician in each of the middle schools. This individual is usually the first person a new student meets at the school because they often handle the initial registration process. The technician also coordinates the withdrawal process for students leaving the school.

School Resource Officer (SRO)-The school resource officer is not a security guard, but a Wake County sheriff's deputy. His/her presence on campus can be intimidating if students are unaware of the role the resource officer plays within the school. These individuals are on campus to maintain student safety. Almost all middle schools in the county have one, so it does not mean a school is a tough school for having a full time resource officer. The school resource officers are very approachable and they are another source of help for students.

Team Leader-This person is one of the core teachers that schedules conferences, facilitates meetings, and manages the team's activities. He/she is the first point of contact when a student's school performance needs to be addressed.

See Activity 1, page 36

2. Glossary of Middle School Terms:

After School Detention (ASD)-A disciplinary consequence that takes place after the completion of the regular school day. Students serve ASD for minor infractions.

Advanced Classes-These classes comprise students who are identified academically intellectually gifted (AIG) and students who have received recommendations from teachers because they are performing at an extremely high level. Most middle schools offer advanced classes in language arts and math. Advanced classes in other subject areas are more often available in magnet schools.

Agenda- One of the most important objects a student will possess in middle school is his/her agenda, which is provided to all students. The agenda is essentially a planning book in which students can write down homework assignments, upcoming projects, dated activities, or any other important information. Using an agenda can help students with short-term and long-term goal-setting and planning. The agenda is arranged by weeks, and is sectioned off into days. Each day has spaces to write information about each class that a middle school student would have- language arts, math, social studies, science, health/PE, and an elective. Teachers expect students to practice being responsible by writing down the information from the board and letting their parents check the agenda daily. At the bottom of each day, there is also a space for parents to write notes to the teacher, or vice versa. Therefore, it can be used as a communication tool. Because 6th graders will have many different classes and teacher expectations to keep track of, writing everything down is essential.

Binders-Most teams require an organizational system comprised of binders and/or folders. A 3" binder is usually required and acts as the student's desk, the place where he/she keeps most of his/her things for class.

Core Classes-Although elective choices may vary by individual middle schools, all middle schools require each regular education student to take Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science.

Discipline-It is important that middle school students are aware early of the policies for the county and for the school. Wake County policies can be found in the Parent/Student handbook, and individual school policies can usually be found at the front of each student's agenda. Students need to understand the differences between their elementary school rules and the new middle school rules and expectations. Topics such as dress code policy and other common violations should be talked about at length with students. Though specifics cannot be addressed by the elementary schools on each middle school's rules, it is important to begin dialogue about some of the differences.

Electives-These are classes that students take in addition to core classes that allow for variety in their day. Some examples of electives may include drama, dance, chorus, or art. In 6th grade, most schools require that students take a keyboarding class, unless they are in a band, strings, or Reading/Math ALP. Students also take a class entitled Healthful Living, which comprises health

education and physical education (PE). Classes can be held quarterly, semesters or year-long.

End Of Course (EOC) tests -These tests are given to students who take high school level courses such as Algebra or Geometry.

Inclusion-Students with special needs can have their instruction provided to them in the regular classroom setting. Hence, there is no pull-out for AIG or IEP students from their regular classroom settings. AIG students are typically served in the advanced classes, while IEP students may be instructed in the In Class Resource (ICR) classroom settings. IEP students may also be served through resource classes that coincide with their specific area of need.

Lockers-Students in middle school have to deal with lockers as one of their transitional activities. Most middle schools provide lockers for the students, but often students must provide the lock. The students do not need to visit their lockers after every class period. Often teachers provide times for students to use their lockers and go to the bathroom. Advise students to get their locks over the summer and to practice their combinations. In the fall, homeroom teachers will allow students time to practice and will always keep a list of students' combinations in case they forget! Teachers will always have a default key to unlock lockers when combinations are forgotten.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS)-Some schools are PBS schools. This is a program established within the school for teaching and rewarding positive behavior.

On Team/Off Team-In most schools, students are considered to be on team if they have lunch with one of their core teachers. Conversely, they are considered off team if they have lunch with an elective teacher or H/PE teacher.

SPAN-Student/Parent Access Network system is designed to give students and parents at the middle access to their electronic records, including schedules, attendance, and grades.

Student Services-The location that includes the counselors', social worker's office, NCWise Data manager's offices and reception area maintained by the guidance technician.

Supply List-By the beginning of the school year, schools provide a list of needed supplies for a student to have by team and/or elective teachers. Most schools have supply lists posted on their school's website.

Teams-In most middle schools, students will be assigned to a team. The team is traditionally comprised of four core teachers. Some variations may include two teacher teams, where both teachers teach 2 subjects each; or three teacher teams, where at least one teacher teaches more than one subject. Teaming is an important component to the middle school concept. Teaming allows the teachers to work together to create interdisciplinary units, which enhances student learning. Teams go on field trips or have team days. Schools try to balance teachers on teams such that teacher personalities are diverse. Having a mix of different personalities hopefully ensures that each child can almost always find at least one teacher on their team with whom they connect. In addition, students are placed on teams in a way that promotes academic and demographic equity.

Team Area-This area may also be referred as Team Hallway or Pod but is the designated area of the school in which the student's core classes are located. Students will spend the bulk of the school day in their team area.

Team Conference-Parents can request to schedule a conference with their child's core teachers to discuss their child's performance and/or express concerns. Teams are great for parents because the parent can contact one teacher and get information to, or from, his or her child's whole team of teachers. In most schools, the team leader is responsible for scheduling the conference. However, counselors can be asked to schedule conference and/or invited to attend team conferences. Teachers do like to meet as a team but teacher conference can be requested and scheduled as well.

Transition Time-The time between classes is usually very short ranging between 3-5 minutes. This is plenty of time as long as students do not continuously stop in the halls and engage in long conversations with friends. Some schools use a bell system that will inform students when each class ends and when the next one begins, while some schools only use a bell that begins school and another at dismissal.

See Activity 2, page 37

II. Academic



Academic

1. Standards-based Grading (Elementary School)

Elementary schools in Wake County use standards based grading. The student performance level is determined by a variety of assessment data for each object that is addressed that grading period. Work habits and conduct grades are separate from the student's content proficiency.

Level 4 - Extends targeted grade level standards: represents the student exceeding grade level expectations set by the state and that a student will be successful in the next grade or quarter and whose curriculum may be enriched.

Level 3* - Demonstrates proficiency of targeted grade level standards with evidence of application over time: represents the student meeting the grade level expectations set by the state with evidence of application and that a student has the necessary skills and concepts to be successful and confident in the next grade or quarter. Example: A third-grader clearly understands the concept of multiplication, can recall the facts quickly, and can use the multiplication to solve everyday problems. The teacher has collected evidence of this mastery and recorded it on the student's math profile.

Level 3 - Demonstrates proficiency of targeted grade level standard: represents the student meeting the grade level expectations set by the state and indicates that a student has the necessary skills and concepts to be successful in the next grade or quarter.

Level 2 - Inconsistent and needs support to meet targeted grade level standards: indicates that the student has not yet met grade level expectations set by the state and that a student does not have the necessary skills and concepts to be successful in the next grade or quarter. The student still needs teacher support to be successful with the concept or skill; the student is not yet independent. This should alert parents that close communication is needed for further student support.

Level 1 - Insufficient performance of targeted grade level standards with support: indicates that the student has not yet met grade level expectations set by the state and that a student does not have the necessary skills and concepts to be successful in the next grade or quarter. This should alert parents that close communication is needed for further student support. (*)

(*)Excerpts from WCPSS: Understanding the Elementary School Report Card,

2. Letter Grading (Middle School)

In middle school, students earn letter grades of A, B, C, D, or F on their report cards. They may also be assigned a grade of "I" for "Incomplete" if, because of an emergency, they do not complete work by the end of the grading period. The "Incomplete" becomes an "F" if work is not finished by an assigned time. Letter grades have the following numerical values:

A 93-100

B 85-92

C 77-84

D 70-76

F less than 70

FF failed for violation of attendance policy(*)

(*)Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2010-2011.

See Activity 3, page 38

3. Standards-based Grading vs. Letter Grading

Letter grades are quite different from standards based grading. In *standards based grading*, students are assessed as being at, above, or below grade level using the 1, 2, 3, 3* or 4 number system. Work habits and conduct grades are separate from the student's content proficiency. Students are not given a letter grade for assignments or tests. Rubrics are used to assess whether or not the student is performing at, above, or below grade level, and a level number is given. The *letter grade system* is used to measure how well a student has mastered a specific objective, rather than being assessed on broad concepts over time. This is often shown in a percentage of the questions that the student got correct. Most sixth grade teachers use a percentage scale. For example, some teachers may use these percentages: homework 15%, class work 15%, quiz 30%, and test 40%. Please understand that a '3' in elementary school does not equate to an 'A' or 'B' on the percentage scale. It is important to remember that the best way to determine if a student has mastered a concept is the average of his/her test and/or quiz grades.

4. Honor Roll Recognition

Most middle schools recognize students who have made the honor roll. An honor roll is a list of students who have made either all A's (the A honor roll) or have made a combination of all A's and B's (the AB honor roll) on their report card during each quarter's marking period. Middle school recognitions may include certificates, rewards, names being read on announcements, lists of names in the local newspaper, and/or awards ceremonies.

5. Homework Requirements

Homework at the elementary level is used for skills practice and is an indicator of understanding of concepts. It is not supposed to be used to determine a student's level of proficiency. In middle school, students have homework to complete every night, presentations to give in class, and big group projects to turn in. It is the foundation for future tests. Homework at the middle school level most often is graded and averaged in as a portion of a student's grade. Rising 6th graders must understand that they will be held accountable for correctly completing homework, and that their grades may drop if they consistently do not turn in completed homework in a timely fashion. Parents should encourage their students to find a "homework buddy" on their team to ask about assignments and missed work when they are absent. Several middle school teachers have websites that parents and students can access for assignments information.

6. Time Management/Study Habits

In middle school, time becomes a precious commodity. Students normally have at least six classes in a school day- with six different teachers, six different expectations, and sometimes six different homework assignments! Along with being responsible for all of the above, students must also be responsible for managing time; both at school and at home. One major academic process that students must fit in to their busy schedules is homework- whether completing homework assignments, major projects, or studying for tests. Learning and utilizing study skills will both qualify and quantify time for a 6th grader. Students should use completed work as a study guide along with notes from class. When studying ahead, they should review notes their each night.

See Activity 4, page 39

7. Description of Core Classes

Sixth grade students study language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and healthful living.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Following the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts*, the emphasis in WCPSS Sixth Grade Language Arts Curriculum is on personal expression. Drawing on personal and related experiences, students explore and express individual perspectives through oral language, written language, and other media/technology. In addition, students develop their use of language for informational, argumentative, critical, literary, and language usage purposes.

Students read a wide range of texts to interpret and evaluate, as well as to develop an appreciation for literature. Sixth graders develop comprehension strategies, vocabulary, an understanding of language structure and grammar rules, as well as high order thinking skills through their encounters with print and non-print text. Reading and writing instruction is linked, and students write for a variety of audiences and purposes. Students use effective sentence construction and develop editing skills to improve sentence formation, usage, mechanics, and spelling. Writing samples are compiled in a writing folder and include evaluation and problem-solution essays, fiction, autobiographical accounts, poetry, letters, and responses to literature. Rubrics are used to guide and evaluate writing products. In addition to short stories, poems, drama, and nonfiction selections, six grade students should read several longer works. Some suggested titles can be found on the revised Wake County Book List. Students are also encouraged to choose titles for independent reading from the Starting Points Reference Guide. The Starting Points Reference Guide contains a wide variety of young adult literature from various genres and includes works from our Battle of the Books program.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics offerings in the sixth grade are *Sixth Grade Math* and *Advanced Sixth Grade Math/Algebraic Thinking I*. The K-8 mathematics program is based on the study of five "strands."

- *Number and Operations*
- *Measurement*

- *Geometry*
- *Data Analysis and Probability*
- *Algebra*

Moving forward without mastery of these strands leaves gaps in the student's background that can cause difficulties in future mathematics courses.

Notes Regarding High School:

- Most high schools operate on a Block Schedule. Therefore, as long as a student completes the middle school curriculum, there is sufficient time to take all high school courses necessary to fulfill the university requirements for graduation during the four years of high school.
- North Carolina's *Future Ready Core* requires four mathematics courses to be taken for high school graduation.
- High school Mathematics courses taken and successfully completed in middle school will count as credit toward high school graduation. However, the grade will not contribute to the student's *GPA*.

SIXTH GRADE MATH

To be recommended for this course, the student should have mastered most of the elementary mathematics curriculum. This course will provide a good transition from the elementary mathematics program to the middle school mathematics program. The major concepts include: negative rational numbers, percent, transformations in the coordinate plane, probability, equations and inequalities, and multiplication and division of non-negative rational numbers. The students will create and solve relevant and authentic problems using appropriate technology.

ADVANCED SIXTH GRADE MATH/ALGEBRAIC THINKING I

To be recommended for this course, the student must have mastered all mathematics strands in K-5. These students need to demonstrate a desire and ability to accelerate in mathematics. Emphasis will be placed on problem solving skills and applications of the topics listed in Sixth Grade Math in addition to extensions and enrichment activities with these topics.

PRE-ALGEBRA

To be recommended for this course, the student must have mastered all mathematics strands in K-6 and demonstrate a desire and ability to accelerate in mathematics. **This course concentrates the study of seventh and eighth grade mathematics into one year.** Students develop an understanding of the principles and concepts of elementary algebra, informal geometry, and probability. Students use patterns to investigate relationships, solve problems, and informally describe algebraic methods. They investigate linear and non-linear equations and inequalities through use of models.

SCIENCE

Science instruction at the sixth grade level is built on the concepts and skills acquired in elementary school. Learners will study North Carolina's integrated science curriculum that focuses on the National Science Education Standards: Systems, Order, and Organization; Evidence, Models, and Explanation; Constancy, Change, and Measurement; Evolution and Equilibrium; and Form and Function. Units covered include:

- *Scientific Inquiry*
- *Technological Design*
- *Lithosphere*
- *Cycling of Matter*
- *Earth and the Solar System*
- *Energy Transfer/Transformation*
- *Population Dynamics*

Through these units of in-depth study, students will begin to master science inquiry and technological design skills. Learners will approach science as hands-on learning by designing and conducting investigations, utilizing technologies and information systems, and using models and simulations to demonstrate an understanding of knowledge. Relevant topics will be covered including North Carolina examples, real life situations, and economical and ethical issues. This integrated study will incorporate the following strands: The Nature of Science, Science as Inquiry, Science and Technology, Science in Personal and Social Perspectives. The goal of this program is to provide a rigorous science background to all learners.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The focus for sixth grade is on the continued development of knowledge and skills acquired in the fourth and fifth grade studies of North Carolina and the United States by considering, comparing, and connecting those studies to the study of South America and Europe, including Russia. As students examine social, economic, and political institutions they analyze similarities and differences among societies. While concepts are drawn from history and the social sciences, the primary discipline is geography, especially cultural geography. This focus provides students with a framework for studying local, regional, national, and global issues that concern them, for understanding the interdependence of the world in which they live, and for making informed judgments as active citizens.

(*)Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2010-2011.

http://www.wcpss.net/curriculum-instruction/docs_downloads/planning-guides/2011-12ms-planning-guide.pdf

8. Elective Courses

Each middle school offers a program of electives. Electives are courses that students can choose based on their interests. Elective courses may be offered in nine-week, trimester, semester, and/or year-long formats. In some schools, students may participate in an *exploratory wheel* as part of their elective experience. The wheel may include keyboarding, visual arts, music, dance, and/or theater. In other schools students may take one or more year-long or semester-long electives. **Elective offerings vary by school; therefore, each school prepares a registration sheet that lists the electives it will offer. The availability of electives depends on student interest, an appropriate facility, and staffing.**

(*)Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2010-2011.

(*) (*See Activity 7, page 43*)

9. Healthful Living

Healthful Living is required for all 6th grade students and includes health education and physical education. These two courses complement each other as students learn how to be healthy and physically active for a lifetime. Because our

health and physical fitness needs are so different from a generation ago, the nature of healthful living is changing. Poor health choices (i.e., use of alcohol and other drugs, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity) now account for more than 50% of the preventable deaths in the United States.

Through a quality healthful living education program, students will learn the importance of health and physical activity and develop skills to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle creating a heightened quality of life. Students will learn how to apply the concepts of proper exercise in their daily lives, discover ways to handle stress, avoid harmful and illegal drugs, learn about the relationship between nutrition and weight management, develop healthy interpersonal relationships (including conflict resolution skills), develop teamwork and character-building skills, and learn how to achieve positive health and fitness goals.

In sixth grade, students will learn a variety of communication techniques that will allow them to employ critical thinking skills to make positive health decisions. Students will appraise their own health and fitness status, understand sound nutrition principles and develop sensible exercise practices. This knowledge will be applied as they demonstrate the ability to set, pursue and achieve personal health and fitness goals. Students will engage in physical activities that provide opportunities for rhythmic/dance movement, lead-up games enhancing basic sport skills, offensive and defensive game strategies, game rules/etiquette, problem solving, fair play, and sportsmanship.

Because of the nature of health education, discussion may include sensitive topics. By contacting the school principal, parents may request in writing that their child be excluded from certain health topics owing to personal/religious beliefs.

(*)Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2010-2011.

10. Support/Tutoring Programs

Academic support and tutoring opportunities will vary from school to school. After and during-school programs might include ALP, Communities in Schools, Helping Hands, Girl Power, among others. The most effective way to explore academic options is to contact the student's team leader. Other resources to explore include: contacting student's teacher, grade level counselor and school's PTSA.

III. Social



Social

1. Problem-solving, Making Good Choices, and Responsibility

It is important to remember that students' first priority in middle school is to learn! That being said, social skills can greatly enhance their chance of having a positive environment in which to learn. As with everything in life, students will get out of middle school what they put into it. Efforts and choices will directly affect grades, opportunities to participate in sports and/or other extracurricular activities, peer interactions, and relationships with adults both in and out of school. Part of growing up and gaining independence involves gaining the trust of both teachers and parents. To do so, students must demonstrate responsibility and the ability to make good choices across settings. The students' ability to problem-solve and choose positive ways to interact with parents, teachers, and peers will aid in making their middle school experience successful.

2. Making/Choosing Friends

One of the cool but scary things about middle school is seeing all of the new faces. Knowing how to make new friends will be extremely important in the middle school setting. Several different elementary schools feed into one middle school, and students are assigned randomly to teams. As a result, students may not be on the same team with their friends they may have had while in elementary school. Some students might already know a lot of students from their old elementary school, but many students do not know anyone at all because they were the only ones from their elementary school to come to a particular middle school. Going to middle school is a great opportunity to make new friends. Some tips for making new friends are:

1. Get involved in school activities
2. Introduce yourself to students who sit around you in your classes
3. Choose different partners during group work assignments in your classes
4. Sit with different groups of people at lunch
5. Consult school and/or public libraries for books on how to choose friends
6. Conduct an Internet search for appropriate websites with tips for making friends

See Activity 5, page 40

3. Peer Pressure

Middle school is a time of great transition emotionally, physically, and socially. All of these changes can either be nurtured, or hindered by peers. Remember, peer pressure can be either positive or negative. Examples of positive peer pressure might include encouraging friends to study by offering to study them or motivating them to work hard at a sport. Examples of negative peer pressure might include someone encouraging students to spread rumors, be disruptive in class, or skip school. In order to best handle social pressure, the following tips might be helpful:

1. Find friends with similar interests, values, and beliefs
2. Be assertive—tell friends what you like/don't like
3. Don't use alcohol or other drugs
4. Avoid situations in which you know that you could get into trouble
5. Learn to handle conflicts in a positive way
6. Talk with trusted adults about situations that you don't understand and/or that make you feel uncomfortable

See Activity 6, page 41

4. Bullying

Bullying is unfair (meaning the "bully" uses some sort of power over his/her victim) and one-sided (meaning only one person or one group of people is engaging in bullying behavior in the situation). Bullying happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose. Help is available to students who feel that they are being bullied. If a student witnesses a bullying situation, they have the power to be part of the problem or part of the solution depending on their reactions to the situation. They can exacerbate the situation by doing nothing, encouraging the bully, or pretending not to see. Students can help the situation by helping the victim to get out of the situation, encouraging the victim to get help, and/or reporting the situation to an adult. (*)

(*) Excerpts from *Steps to Respect, A Bullying Prevention Program; Committee for Children, 2001.*

It is imperative that every student knows at least three appropriate things to say and/or do when they are victims of bullying.

Another aspect of bullying involves forming cliques. Groups of friends with similar interests are healthy and natural. However, cliques are formed when students

gather together and begin excluding other students from their group based on superficial reasons (i.e. not pretty enough, not smart enough). Stereotyping, discrimination, and negative social interactions with other groups are possible outcomes of joining cliques.

Cyberbullying- Cyberbullying occurs when students use a data device such as a computer or cell phone to bully or harass other students. This may occur in various ways including text messaging, using social network sites to message each other, and via email.

6. Interactions with Older Students

Most middle schools are designed so that 6th graders are in teams, and interactions with upper classmen are limited to elective courses, lunch, and before/after school. Just as in elementary school, positive social interactions of all students are encouraged, and bullying is not tolerated. If students find themselves in uncomfortable situations in which they feel they need help, they should be aware that teachers, counselors, and/or any other school personnel are there to help them.

IV. Extracurricular Activities/ Getting Involved



Extracurricular Activities/Getting Involved

1. Sports

An activity that rising 6th graders often look forward to in middle school is the opportunity to represent their school in athletics. Only 7th and 8th grade students can try out and participate on a sports team. However, here are a couple of ways 6th graders can get involved in supporting their school athletic programs:

- a. Be a Manager- Most of the coaches in middle school will reserve the role of team manager for an eager 6th grader. Most students that become managers for a sports team either want to try out for the team in the future or just have a genuine interest in the sport. Students wanting to be managers should be aware that it is a significant time commitment and could take away from other activities. Students interested in being a manager should contact the appropriate coach as soon as possible. Often times, there are a lot of students that want to be manager so coaches may choose on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- b. Be a Fan- 6th grade students should be encouraged to come to athletic events and support their teams and their school. Games are not only a great way to plug into the school, they are a great way to meet new friends and hang out with your old ones.

2. Clubs

Like sports, some clubs only allow 7th and 8th grade students to participate. Usually, these clubs are considered honors and only students that maintain good grades as 6th graders are eligible to participate. Such clubs may include National Junior Honor Society, Beta Club, Service Club, and MathCounts.

There are some clubs and extracurricular activities available for 6th graders. Some include Student Council, Battle of the Books Club, Book Club, Chess Club, Model United Nations, Science Olympiad, Dance Team and/or the Step Team. Clubs and extracurricular activities will vary depending on the middle school so students are encouraged to visit their school's website and contact club advisors to find out about these clubs.

3. Music/Band/Drama

Band, Chorus, and Orchestra are a few other ways for middle school students to get involved in their school culture. If rising 6th grade students wish to participate in band or orchestra, most schools require students with no prior experience to start playing an instrument in 6th grade. Families are responsible for providing instruments for their children. If chorus is offered as an elective suggestion, students interested in that course should select chorus as a choice of interest. Other programs such as Honors Chorus, school plays, and productions may require that students try out to participate. Many of these programs require after school and evening commitments for performances.

V. Registering for Middle School



Registering for Middle School

1. Registration Information

Managing paperwork for registration can be a large task to complete. Often times, your students are entering a variety of schools which may all have different processes for registering students. Elementary counselors should take advantage of the opportunities offered by Wake County to meet with representatives from middle schools that your students typically attend. Building lines of communication between you and the schools your students feed into can help in disseminating the right information to your parents and students about their schools.

Typically, 5th grade counselors receive a packet of pre-coded green registration sheets and a packet from central office containing elective sheets from all Wake County middle schools. Class placement recommendations are made on green sheets by appropriate school staff, and then the green sheet and elective sheet (specific to child's middle school) are sent home. Best practice would be to explain both the registration sheets and elective sheets to all 5th grade students before sending them home.

See Activity 7, page 42

2. Communicating with Middle School Counselors

Just because your students with conflicts have left elementary school, it does not mean they have left their conflicts behind. Elementary school counselors can be proactive by giving the middle school counselor a heads up on potentially disruptive conflicts. One effective way for elementary counselors to do this is to complete a student at-risk list, which can be beneficial to middle school counselors receiving these new students. Student at-risk lists give middle school counselors an opportunity to address concerns with students early in the school year. Wake County Counseling and Student Services should have a template student at-risk list for elementary counselors to use that can be securely emailed to middle school counselors. Counselors should fill out the forms completely by checking the area of concern and providing specific information regarding the child/ren. Also, elementary counselors should consider contacting the middle school counselor personally to discuss further and/or more serious concerns.

3. Making Information Accessible

Parents and students transitioning to middle school have a lot of questions. How do we register? What electives do you offer? When can I have a tour of the school? To address these questions and concerns that fill the counselor's email and voice mail, counselors should consider posting information for new parents & students on the school's website.

Creating a website dedicated to 6th grade registration will centralize information and make it more readily accessible to rising 6th graders and their parents. Suggestions for information that can be posted on the website include open house dates, tour times, parent workshop locations, and orientation information. Posting downloadable forms that new parents typically need is another way to service parents while saving you time. Most schools have a webmaster that can help create a website or a link on the school's website dedicated to registration.

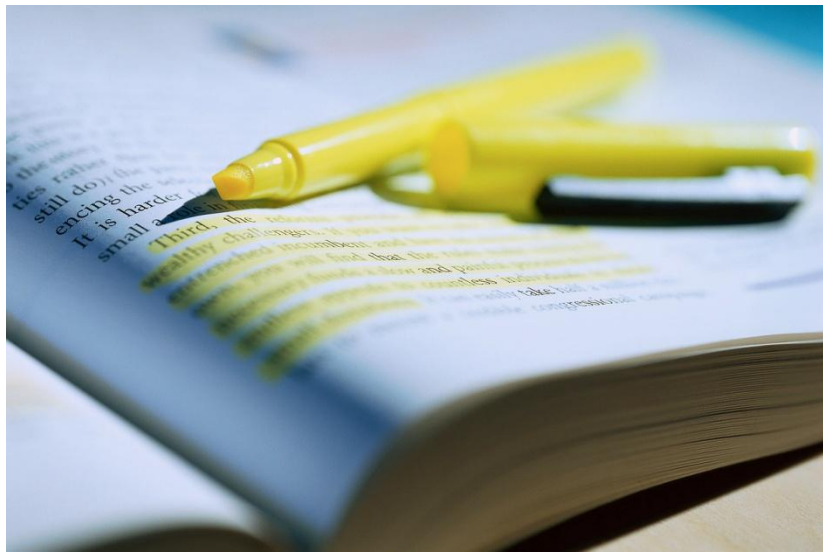
4. Transition Programs

A strong transition program should include opportunities to visit the school, meet teachers, and learn about how the school works. These types of programs will vary from school to school; they can range from a summer transition camp to an orientation night. It is important that parents contact the specific middle school to learn if a transition program is available. The more opportunities students and parents have to learn about the school the smoother the transition will be for everyone.

Sixth grade teachers are very supportive and helpful during the transition time. Students are not counted tardy during the first week, and teachers are available to help the students find their classrooms. Rules and procedures are explained, written, in print, practiced often, and are sent home the first week of school to be signed and returned. Following rules and procedures are basic life skills. The teachers teach responsibility and accountability.

See Activity 8, page 44

VI. Tips for Parents



Tips for Middle School Parents

Parent participation in education is closely related to student achievement. Both of you will be affected by this change to middle school. The key during adolescence is to balance your support while promoting responsibility and independence in your child.

- ✓ Become informed about your new school by attending orientations, going to open houses, reading school guides and student handbooks and visiting its website regularly for current information.
- ✓ Remember that schools are opened during the summer. Take this as an opportunity to visit your child's as often as possible before the first day of school. Moving into a new building can be a bit scary sometimes. Being familiar with the school building before the first day of school can help lessen your child's anxiety.
- ✓ Consider your child's feelings. Your 6th grader may not want you joining them for lunch, but you can stay involved by volunteering in your child's school, chaperoning on fieldtrips and/or joining the PTSA.
- ✓ Know the name of your child's team, the homeroom teacher, the team leader and the school counselor for his/her grade. Students of all ages benefit when family and school cooperate and have a positive relationship. If you have questions or concerns don't hesitate to call or email the school staff.
- ✓ Provide the supplies from the various teachers' lists. Ask to see your child's agenda (assignment notebook with information and communications from teachers) regularly. Ask them to **show** you his/her homework, rather than asking, "Did you do your homework?"
- ✓ Be sure to limit after-school recreational activities, provide a quiet study area and set the expectation that your child will be working regularly on homework and long-term projects. Set rules about TV and computer use. Organization and time management skills must be developed so students will be prepared and not feel overwhelmed.

- ✓ Know the dress code for your school and check to see that your child is wearing "school friendly" attire daily. Be more cognizant of the need of increased personal hygiene as developmental body changes occur.
- ✓ Check the calendar for your specific school. Know when interims and report cards go out, dates of early release days and any dates of special activities (e.g. Picture Day, athletic events, EOGs).
- ✓ Be sure the main office has current contact information - don't assume your child will know or share changes in phone numbers or addresses. Provide updated information to Guidance Technician and/or NCWise Data Manager.
- ✓ Talk to your child about school and peers. Listen for comments that reflect how they are feeling and what they are thinking. Expect your child to make mistakes and have personal struggles. Give them time to think and make decisions about how to handle their problems and deal with the consequences.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for your child to develop their interests and socialize with friends, but be sure to monitor their choices. Peer acceptance and self-esteem issues become increasingly important in the middle school.
- ✓ Consult the professional development section of your child school's library for books and/or videos on academic and social issues such as ADHD, organizational skills, behavior interventions, or character education. In most schools, these resources are available for parent checkout. Encourage your child to check out from the school or public library about organizational skills, bullying, and self-esteem.

Homework Hints

Here are some tips for you and some ideas to pass along to help your children make the most of their study time.

- ◆ Provide a place to study that is free of distractions such as television noise and people talking on the phone. (But provide soft music or white noise if it helps your children concentrate.)
- ◆ Instill a positive attitude. Help your children to think, "I can do this."
- ◆ Keep all necessary supplies in one place, such as at a desk or computer station. Having pencils, paper, and calculators all in one spot means your children won't have to search for them, which saves time.
- ◆ Have separate folders for each course to help keep paperwork organized, so it doesn't get lost in the bottom of a backpack.
- ◆ Establish a regularly scheduled time for doing homework. This time probably should not be immediately after school. Young people need a little time to relax.
- ◆ Have your children start with the most difficult assignment first.
- ◆ Let your children take five-minute breaks every so often.
- ◆ Keep the resources they need available. Start a personal reference library for your children, and keep it current. Begin with the basics: dictionary, thesaurus, almanac, desktop encyclopedia, atlas. Add reference books on specific topics related to your children's classes and interests. If you have a computer, consider buying an encyclopedia on CD-ROM or access online encyclopedias and reference sites.
- ◆ Encourage your children to study with other students when appropriate.
- ◆ Remind your children to do as much work as possible during the school day, and if they ride the bus and they feel it's possible, to take advantage of that time to get work done as well.
- ◆ Recommend that your children keep an assignment notebook so they know what homework must be done each day.
- ◆ Suggest your children hang on to past quizzes and tests to prepare for future ones.
- ◆ Encourage your children to make connections between their homework and any cultural or family history.
- ◆ Praise your children for doing their homework.
- ◆ Keep in contact with your children's teachers to be aware of the quality and quantity of work being turned in.

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Stay Connected

Student Parent Access Network (SPAN)

Many middle schools use Wake County's Student Parent Access Network, or SPAN, to keep in constant connection and communication with parents. This unique system allows both students and parents to get up-to-date information on progress reports and grades, discipline, and attendance data with a click of a button. Parents will be required to fill out a SPAN registration form at their student's school, or by using the link below, to be granted access to SPAN. All the parent will need is an email address, and once they are registered, login information will be emailed to them. This will allow both parents and students to keep track of current grades and missing assignments from home. Find out if your child's new middle school uses SPAN as soon as possible, and get registered at the school or by clicking on the link below.

<http://www.wcpss.net/span/>

Other Online Communication Tools

Find out if your child's new teachers use popular online communication tools such as Schoolnotes.com or Blackboard to communicate with students and parents. Many times you will find out that middle school teachers use these sites to give a weekly or daily update of what is being taught in their classrooms, including test and quiz dates or project due dates. These tools are easily accessible and usually linked straight from the school's website or a teacher's own website, and are very helpful in keeping parents and students informed of what's going on in the classroom.

VII. School Counselor Activities



Activity 1

Who's Who in the Middle School?

This game is used to help transition students into middle school by introducing them to key helpers within the school. 6th graders often know that they need help with something, but are unsure of who to ask. This lesson helps them to know the names and locations of people within the school. It also acts as a platform to tell students more about a particular person's job (like School Resource Officer, School Nurse, or School Counselor). This can also be used as a short activity to begin discussion with students about what you do as a school counselor.

Instructor: 6th Grade Counselor

Timeframe: Beginning of 6th grade school year

Materials:

- Two different colored index cards
- Markers
- A large map of the school OR a chalk board or dry erase board to draw a rough map

Directions:

- On one set of index cards place the name and job title of each person to be highlighted to the students; one name per card
- On the other set of index cards describe different situations in which students may need help
- Have the students work in small groups. Give each group a stack of the 2 sets of index cards.
- Instruct the students to try as best they can to match the person/job to the situation that best describes why they would see that person
- After the students have done their best guessing, go over the answers
- Then allow students to take turns going to the board and taping the person's name to where they are located in the school. Adjust answers as necessary.

Examples of people/jobs:	Examples of problems:
-Grade Level Counselor	-Come late to school and need to sign in
-Administrator	-Having a problem with a bully
-Data manager	-Lost your agenda
-School Resource Officer	-Problems with a friend
-Guidance Technician	

Activity 2

Middle School Website Scavenger Hunt

This activity is designed to help students find out important information about the middle school they will be attending. A good time to use this activity in the classroom or computer lab would be at the end of 5th grade to help the students learn more about their new school for the fall. Students will explore and learn information about their school such as important dates (i.e. school dances and sporting events), school mascots, extracurricular activities, teacher emails, and school procedures. Counselors will need access to a computer lab and students will need to know the school they will be attending the following year.

Instructor: Elementary School Counselor

Timeframe: End of 5th grade school year

Materials:

- computer for each student/access to computer lab
- pencils
- scavenger hunt worksheet

Directions:

- Reserve your school's computer lab well in advance of activity.
- Find out the website addresses of all of your feeder schools and have them handy in case the kids do not know them.
- When in the computer lab, give each student a copy of the middle school scavenger hunt worksheet and a pencil.
- Tell students to log onto their computers and go to their school's website and then complete the scavenger hunt worksheet.

Examples of items students should find when looking on their middle school's website:

- What is your new school's website address?
- What are the email addresses of two sixth grade teachers?
- What sports does your new school participate in?
- What clubs/extracurricular activities does your new school have?
- What is the name of the principal at your new middle school?
- What is the name of the grade level counselor at your new middle school?
- What are the names of two 6th grade teams at your new middle school?
- What is your new school's mascot?

Activity 3

The Incredible Power of the Zero

The following activity is designed to demonstrate to students the incredible effect that a zero can have on their grade. In middle school, most teachers will allow students to turn in late work for a reduced percentage in a grade or "partial credit". However, if students do not take this opportunity, that missing assignment will become a zero and can drastically affect their overall homework average. This is a quick activity that should be used during the early days of middle school and combined with other introduction to middle school activities.

Instructor: 6th Grade Counselor

Timeframe: Beginning of 6th grade year

Materials:

-pencil

-paper

-example of a student's homework average before and after they receive a zero.

Directions:

The counselor will need to come up with a scenario in which a fictitious student with a decent homework average forgets to turn in an assignment. Students can use simple math to compute the student's new average.

Example:

"John currently has a 100, 98, 90, and 88 for his homework grades to give him a 94 homework average. However, Tuesday he had soccer practice and was so tired when he got home that he decided not to do his homework. He knew his teacher would allow him to turn it in for partial credit by the end of the week but he got so busy again that he forgot. His teacher was forced to put a zero in the grade book. The next week John got his interim report and was surprised at his homework average. What was John's new homework average with the "zero"?"

Answer: 74.8

Activity 4

The 5 W's of Study Habits

This activity will help students to think about and record the best way to study, tailored specifically to them.

Instructor: Elementary Counselor or 6th Grade Counselor

Timeframe: End of 5th grade year or beginning of 6th grade year

Directions:

Ask students to write the 5 W questions down the left hand side of a paper- who, what, when, where, and why. Students will be writing down study habits for each question that is specific to them. Ask each of the questions separately, explaining each and asking students to volunteer answers that are specific to their studying style.

Who? (Who can help you when you need it- teachers, parents, classmates)

What? (What to study? Take home all materials needed.)

When? (Best time to study- as soon as you get home, after a snack, etc.)

Where? (Best area to study in- free of distractions, plenty of space)

Why? (Why should you study?)

If there is ample time, have students add a last question, How?

How? This can be used to start a discussion about learning styles, particular ways of studying (lighting, snack or no snack, noise level, etc), or any other topics that you would like to touch upon.

Activity 5

Clumps

In middle school everyone is searching for an identity and often times this leads to the formation of cliques. This activity is designed to give students the chance to understand what it feels like to be left out or be excluded from a group. The counselor will need access to a classroom and plenty of room to move around.

Instructor: 6th Grade Counselor

Timeframe: Beginning of 6th grade year

Directions:

Have students stand up and move around the room. Give them time to "mingle" and maybe even give them a topic to discuss, such as "What are you doing this weekend?" When students have had ample time to talk to some of their peers, call out a number. The students then have to "clump" themselves into groups of that number within a few seconds. Students left standing without a group are told to return to their seats. Repeat this process until there are only two or three students left standing. Remind students they can not always group with the same students each time. Next lead a discussion to explore how students felt during this activity.

Examples of leading questions:

- How did it feel to be included in a clump? Or left out? Or couldn't find a group to join?
- How did you feel when you were with your friends vs. when you were with people you don't usually hang out with?
- Can cliques be good or bad?
- How can belonging to a clique help or hurt your self-esteem?
- What kind of cliques do you see at your school?

Activity 6

Steppin' Out

This activity is designed to help students recognize their own level of tolerance versus other students' level of tolerance for potentially offensive statements.

Instructor: Elementary School Counselor or 6th Grade Counselor

Timeframe: End of 5th grade or beginning of 6th grade year

Materials: Masking tape

Description:

- Place masking tape on the floor to create a horizontal line
- Have students line up on one side of the line
- Explain to students that you will be reading a series of statements, and that when they hear a statement they believe to be offensive, they need to step over to the other side of the line
- There are two different ways to go on with this activity:
 - The first way focuses more on the sensitivity level of the individual students. This is done by asking students to continue moving forward one step for each statement that they find offensive.
 - The second way focuses more on peer pressure. This is done by having the students move back over the line in between each statement. This requires students who hear offensive statements to make a step over the line each time, even if no other students join them.
- An additional activity to add to the end would be to re-read some of the statements using different tones of voice. This will help demonstrate to students the magnitude of how their tone of voice can completely change the way in which a statement is received.
- Discussion questions:
 - Whether you focus on sensitivity, peer pressure, and/or tone of voice, it is important to discuss these topics with students.
 - Were there times when you stepped out when you normally would not have? Normally would have? Why?
 - What did you learn from this activity? How could you apply it in your own life? What did this tell you about people's perceptions?

Examples of statements (they should be a mix of neutral, over the top, and positive):

"Nice shirt"

"You throw like a girl"

"That's so gay"

"Where did you get that?"

"Brainiac"

"Man, you're stupid"

"You're so skinny/fat"

"Band geek"

"Your mama"

"Why are you acting black/white?"

Activity 7

A Unit on Middle School Transition

This is a three-part lesson plan designed to gradually introduce middle school registration as well as address middle school concerns for students that are about to transition to middle school.

Instructor: Elementary School Counselor

Timeframe: Spring of 5th grade school year

Lesson One: Addressing Common Middle School Issues

Give pre-test before lesson starts:

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

On a scale of 1-10, rate the following:

1-----5-----10
Not at all-----A lot

1. I am excited about going to middle school. _____
2. I am worried about going to middle school. _____
3. I feel prepared to go to middle school. _____

Answer the following:

4. What are you excited about when you think about being in middle school?
5. What worries you when you think about being in middle school?

Have several students share what they are excited about, then have several share what they are worried about. Themes that are common in these discussions include older students, harder classes/work, getting lost in the new school, bullying, different expectations, not being able to open locker, and having more responsibility. Assure students that they are not alone in having these feelings, and then give any factual information that you have that can allay fears.

Throughout all three lessons, encourage students to ask questions about any aspect of middle school. The goal is to get students to become comfortable and confident in moving on to middle school. If a student asks a question that you cannot answer, try to get the answer from a middle school counselor or other school staff members, and then relay the information to students during the next lesson.

Between lessons one and two, look at all pre-tests. Develop lesson two based on the biggest worry that your students have.

Lesson Two: Addressing Your Students' Concerns

Tailor your lesson two to meet the specific worries and concerns addressed by the 5th grade students at your school in Lesson One. Again, throughout the lesson, have students ask questions and answer them as factually as you can.

Lesson Three: Registration for 6th Grade

Give students "practice" registration sheets with information on both sides. Explain each section, and have students write down what you are explaining on their practice sheets. For example, under the recommended placement section, explain that their teachers have recommended core class placement for 6th grade, and so the students will not have to fill out that section. Students will write "I do not fill this out" beside this section.

On the flip side of the sheet, have a sample middle school electives page. Talk about the importance of choosing the right elective (i.e. not choosing an elective because your best friend wants to be in the same class). If Middle School Program Planning Guides are available, have students look up the electives on that particular sheet and read the descriptions out loud. Remind students that each middle school's elective choices are different, so they can only choose from the electives printed on their specific middle school's sheet. Have students rank order their preferences for practice.

Talk about due dates for getting registration sheets turned in, and what could happen if the sheets are not returned!

At the end of the lesson, pass out the green student registration sheets and a parent letter explaining the registration process and timeline.

Finally, pass out the same pre-test questions as a post-test to determine whether or not students feel more at ease about middle school issues.

Activity 8

Transitional Camp Overview

Instructor: Middle School Counselor

Timeframe: Summer before 6th grade school year

Purpose/Objectives

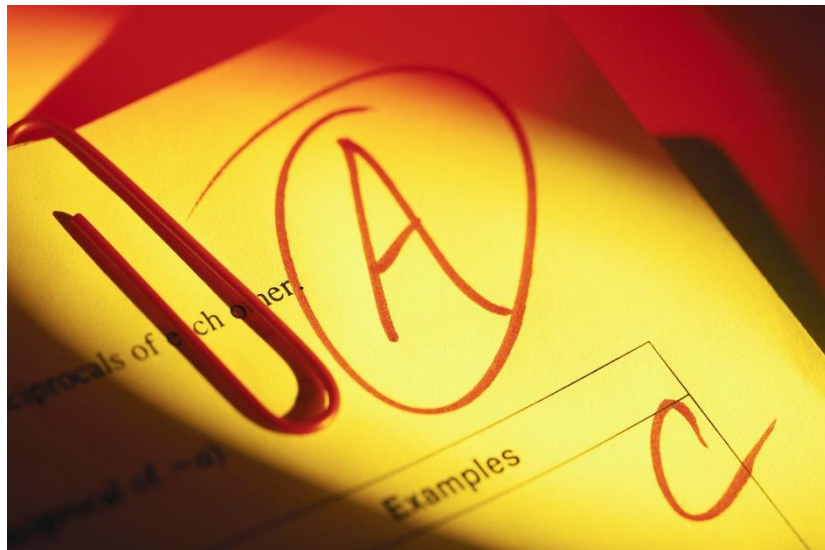
To support the transition from elementary to middle school, rising 6th grade students must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful academically and socially in middle school. The major objective of implementing an orientation camp is to address the transition concerns for both rising 6th grade students and their parents.

General concerns for transitioning students include finding their classrooms, meeting new students, adjusting to tougher academic standards, and learning common practices at the school. Parents are often concerned with academic standards, school practices, and their student's teachers and courses.

Organization of Programming

Organizing an orientation camp involves collaborating with a variety of stake holders. Coordinators of these events may seek partnerships with student organization groups, parent organizations, teachers, administrators, and other staff to implement a day-long camp. Counselors may want to consult schools like Ligon Middle or East Milbrook Middle for creative ideas regarding their transition orientation camps. Collaborations with student organizations drive programming for rising 6th grade students, while parent organization collaborations drive programming for rising parents.

VIII. Resources



RESOURCES

Academic Information Websites

Wake County Public Schools - policies, calendars, current news

www.wcpss.net

www.wcpss.net/school-directory/middle.html - individual middle schools

NC Dept. of Public Instruction - course of study, EOGs, school report cards,

www.dpi.state.nc.us/

College Foundation of North Carolina - careers, high school planner

www.cfnc.org/

Eric Digests - education articles clearinghouse

www.ericdigests.org/

Middle School Websites

National Middle School Association

www.nmsa.org/

PBS Kids - for elementary and middle school students

www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/middleschool/

Kids Health - articles, games, resources for parents, kids & teens

www.kidshealth.org

Girls Power - information & activities for girls and parents

www.girlpower.org

Kids Portal for the US Government - information & activities related to school, careers, recreation, etc.

www.kids.gov/

How to Study

www.How-to-study.com

Studying and organization

www.big6.com/kids/

National PTA - see parent resources

www.pta.org

The Public School Parent's Network

www.psparents.net

Bridges - student achievement for parents and students

www.bridges.com/

Parent Guide to K- 12 Success

www.greatschools.net/

Mental Health & Social Issues Websites

National Mental Health Association - issues, information for all ages

www.nmha.org/

National Association of School Psychologists - helping children achieve

www.ansponline.org/

National Mental Health Information Center - information for all ages

www.mentalhealth.samsha.gov/

Bullying

www.freespirit.com/ - materials and student site

www.cyberbully.org/ - for parents

www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp - interactive for students

The New School Connection

Movin' On Up: How do we help today's fifth graders prepare for the dramatic transition from elementary school to middle school? *Jeff Nash reports.*

<http://www.wcpss.net/schooltv/10-2008/>