

What You Need to Know About Your Student's Transition from Elementary to Middle School



Planning Tips and Timelines



San Mateo
County
SELPA

San Mateo County
Community Advisory Committee

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The transition from elementary school to middle school can be a challenging time for both students and their parents. While many students will have had some exposure to the typical experiences of middle school – changing classes, expectations of different teachers, changing clothes for PE –getting to know a new and usually bigger campus, new teachers, meeting students from other elementary schools and perhaps even navigating public transportation for the first time can be challenging and anxiety producing!.

To ease the concerns of both parents and students, we hope this guide, while not specific to your school district, will help you to anticipate and plan for some of these changes. We hope that with this information, you will formulate your own questions regarding the process that is in place in your district.

To clarify how the process works between your current elementary school and the new middle school here are some key elements to consider or ask about with either your current school or the middle school.

Activities which bridge the transition from elementary to middle school:

- **Special Education Parent Orientation Meeting** – Your neighborhood middle school may or may not offer this. Usually, it will take place in the late fall or shortly after the winter break. At this meeting, the various special education programs and supports available at the middle school will be discussed as well as the process for holding a transition to middle school IEP for each student. Parent input indicates that the most optimal time for this meeting to occur would be prior to the general middle school open house, so that specific special education questions and concerns will be addressed prior to the more general school open house. It is a good idea to attend the general parent orientation meeting so that you learn about the greater context of the school. Extra-curricular activities, for example, are increasingly important in helping your student feel connected to their school.
- **Middle School Open House** – typically in the fall of your student’s last elementary grade year, this meeting will be held. If your district is large enough to have an “open enrollment” policy and it is your intent to apply for attendance at a middle school other than your neighborhood one, you should plan to attend that open house meeting as well as the one at your neighborhood middle school. Note that you must abide by the specific rules for the open enrollment process within your district. Many middle schools will have generic meetings where a broad overview of the programs available for all students will be described. This may or may not include both parents and students and usually has a question and answer sessions at the end. This may not be the venue for addressing individual special education concerns that are specific to your student.
- **Behind the scenes** – the Special Education Director’s office will compile a list of all students identified with IEPs who will transition to middle school the following school year. This list typically is compiled and shared in the very late fall or early winter. Often, the two schools have conversations around the more complex student cases in order to best identify programs which are most appropriate to address a student’s goals, supports and services. Additionally, personnel from the middle school may request an

observation of your student in the classroom setting to gain clarity about your student's unique needs. Additionally, your student's Case Manager may want to facilitate a visit to the classroom that may be recommended. If you have questions about parts of this process, it would be best to begin with your current case manager. They can most likely direct you to the appropriate personnel at your assigned middle school to answer very specific questions about programs and supports. The process of bringing together the educators from both the elementary and middle schools is a crucial piece of the transition process. It is important that specific needs of specific students be communicated between schools. This may include observation of students by middle school personnel in the elementary school setting, discussion with academic teachers about the specific needs of some students.

- **Support to students in the transition process** – Some middle schools offer a program of “shadowing” or pairing up with current students. While the number of students who can take part in this programs is usually limited, it is important to ask if your middle school has a program available to ensure that your student with special needs gets his concerns and questions answered. Through some of these transitional activities, studentren with special needs may be provided with school maps, school tours, or school orientations.
- **IEP transition meetings** – The usual agenda for IEP meetings will be followed. You will be notified in writing of the time and place for the transition IEP meeting. These meetings are almost always held at the middle school your student will attend. These meeting may be addendum meetings, if your student's annual review has already taken place. If the meeting is an addendum meeting, there will be representatives from both the elementary and middle schools, along with you the parent. It is important that your student be involved in the discussion about his middle school program or plan.

Encourage your student to attend this meeting, as your student will most likely be present for some, if not all, of their high school IEP meetings. This is to prepare your student for their need to self-advocate, once they turn 18 and sign their own IEP. The current IEP should be reviewed, as well proposed changes to the goals, placement or level of services, if appropriate. Often times, there will also be a discussion of a proposed class schedule and your input, as well as your student's, is invaluable regarding which classes you believe are appropriate and necessary for your student's first year in middle school. If there has been personalized communication among the elementary and middle schools with you and your student, changes to the proposed middle school IEP should be minimal. If you have questions unanswered, this is the forum for doing so. You may want to consider the following if they have not yet been addressed:

- Are there orientation days over the summer?
- Is the registration process complete?
- Are there upper class mentors to support the incoming students?
- If you student has accomodations or modifications, how will these be communicated to your student's teachers?
- Who is the contact person over the summer and in the fall to whom you can go for answers to questions?

- **If your student attends a COE class:** If your student attends a special day class operated by the County Office of Education, you can anticipate that there will be a transition IEP held sometime in the Spring, or the transition plan may be discussed with you at the annual IEP review. Some districts will communicate with you their desire to consider having your student become a part of the middle school community within your local school district. If this is the case, you will be invited to make a visitation to the proposed classroom setting within the middle school. You will be encouraged to visit the proposed classroom prior to the transition IEP and you are encouraged to make a list of your questions.
- **If your student attends an NPS:** If your student attends a non-public school (NPS), you can anticipate that there will be a transition IEP held sometime in the Spring, or the transition plan may be discussed with you at the annual IEP review. Some districts will communicate with you their desire to consider having your student become a part of the middle school community within your resident school district. This is because it gives your student experience on a bigger campus and prepares them more adequately for the transition to high school. It gives them time to establish friendships, learn to navigate a large campus, and adjust to the reality of having more than one teacher. If this is the case, you will be invited to make a visitation to the proposed classroom setting within the middle school district. If this is not the case and your student will continue to attend the NPS, this will be communicated to you. You are encouraged to bring a list of questions you may have.

The transition process is an opportunity for the elementary school and their personnel as well as parents and students to transfer important information and knowledge to the receiving middle school. This is a collaborative process, so be sure to communicate your concerns and wishes to the team that meets with you. Typically, students are both excited and at the same time concerned about the transition to middle school. They look forward to a bit more freedom, more choices, the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities and develop friendships with other students, but at the same time, they admit to being “nervous” and “scared” about the process. At the same time, once they have made the transition, most realize that their fear and anxiety is typically unfounded. There are however, unrealized expectations – both academic and personal- that pre-adolescents experience. With preparation and support, students can make this transition an exciting and fulfilling part of their life’s experiences.

GENERAL TRANSITION TIMELINE

The timelines below are general timelines and events. You will find that there may be some milestones in place by both your elementary and middle school and/or activities not available, depending upon what your district has in place.

Fall of Last Elementary Grade Year:

- Call/watch for your local middle school for:
 - Date of Special Education parent orientation meeting
 - Date of middle school open house
 - Parent/student tour of the middle school

Winter of Last Elementary Grade Year:

- If your local school district has an open enrollment policy, obtain information about what you need to do to enroll your student in your preferred school.

Spring of Last Elementary Grade Year:

- Events to plan for:
 - Special Education orientation meeting
 - Middle school open house
 - Your student's transition meeting to work with your team to determine the best educational program for your student
 - Visit the proposed placement (if appropriate)
 - Your input on classes in which your student will be enrolled