

What You Need to Know About Your Student's Middle School to High School



Planning Tips and Timelines



San Mateo
County
SELPA

San Mateo County
Community Advisory Committee

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The transition from middle school to high 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 middle 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 middle school and the new high school, here are some key elements to consider or ask about with either your current school or the high school.

Activities which bridge the transition from middle to high school:

- **Special Education Parent Orientation Meeting** – Your neighborhood high 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 high school will be discussed as well as the process for holding a transition to high school IEP for each student. Parent input indicates that the most optimal time for this meeting to occur would be prior to the general high school open house, so that specific special education questions and concerns can 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.
- **High School Open House** – typically in the fall of your student’s last middle school 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 high school other than your neighborhood one, you should plan to attend that open house meeting as well as the one at your neighborhood high school. Note that you must abide by the specific rules for the open enrollment process within your district. Many high 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 high 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 high 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 high school to answer very specific questions about programs and supports. The process of bringing together the educators from both the middle and high 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 high school personnel in the middle school setting, along with discussion with academic teachers about the specific needs of some students.

- **Support to students in the transition process** – Some high 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 high 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, students 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 attends. This meeting will be an addendum meeting, if your student’s annual review has already taken place. If the meeting is an addendum meeting, there will be representatives from both the middle and high schools, along with you. It is important that your student be involved in the discussion about his high school program or plan.

The major difference between middle and high school service delivery is that there will be, in most cases, an elimination of individual services, along with a corresponding increase in group services. This is because your student is earning credits for in-class and homework. Students are typically not pulled out individually, as this will interfere with direct instruction in the classroom, negatively impacting their grades and possibly credits earned.

Encourage your student to attend their transition to high school 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 high school. If there has been personalized communication among the middle and high schools with you and your student, changes to the proposed high 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 high 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 high 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 high 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 adulthood. It gives them time to establish friendships, learn to navigate a large campus, and adjust to the reality of having a credit-based system. If this is the case, you will be invited to make a visitation to the proposed classroom setting within the high 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 high school and their personnel as well as parents and students to transfer important information and knowledge to the receiving high 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 high 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. Once they have made the transition, most realize that their fear and anxiety is typically unfounded. 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 middle and middle school and/or activities not available, depending upon what your district has in place.

Fall of 8th Grade Year:

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

Winter of 8th 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 8th Grade Year:

- Events to plan for:
 - Special Education orientation meeting
 - High 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