

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

Educators Resource Guide

WCPSS

Office of Counseling and Student Services

www.wcpss.net

Dear Educator,

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 for middle school. As educators, 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 was created in an effort to support counselors and teachers in this endeavor. The information within this tool can be used as a template; feel free to tailor it to your school's goals and student needs.

Sincerely,

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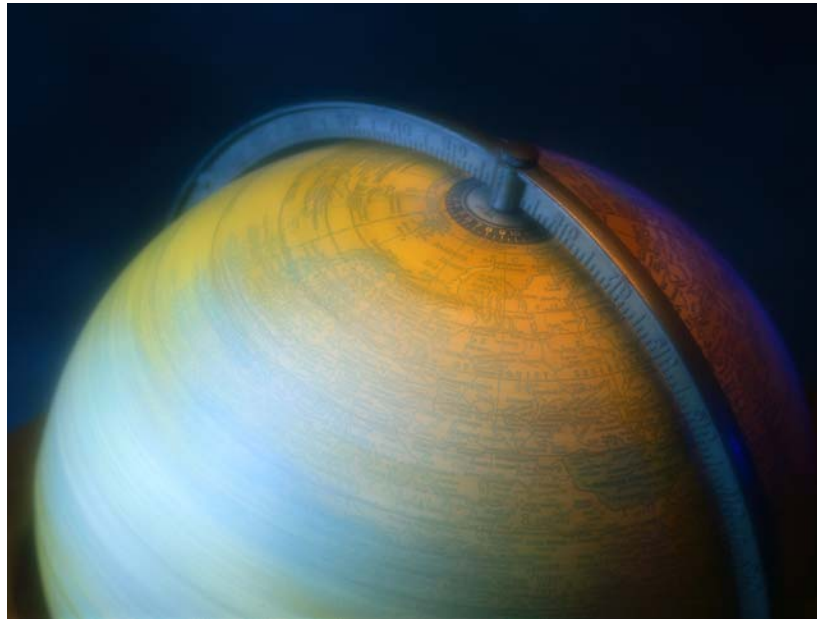
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I. General Information



General Information

The transition to middle school can be challenging for students due to differences in middle and elementary school settings. This section will provide general information about the functioning of the middle school.

1. Glossary of middle school terms:

AVID- AVID stands for "Advancement Via Individual Determination." There is a selection process to be placed in AVID, and this course usually takes the place of an elective course.

OSS- Out of School Suspension

ISS- In-School Suspension

ASD- After School Detention

ALP-Accelerated Learning Program

PBS- Positive Behavior Support. Some schools are PBS schools. This is a program set in place at the school for teaching and rewarding positive behavior.

Agenda- A daily planner the students use to write down assignments and school activities

AG- Academically Gifted. AG students are served through differentiated instruction in the regular classroom setting.

EOG- End of Grade tests. This is the standardized testing system in North Carolina for grades 3-8.

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

SST- Student Support Team- This team meets to discuss intervention strategies for students.

2. 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.

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.

Administration- 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.

School Resource Officer (SRO)- This presence on campus can be intimidating if students are unaware of the role the resource officer plays within the school. The resource officer is not a security guard, but a Wake County deputy. 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.

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 withdraw process for students leaving the school.

See Activity 1, page 35

3. What are 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 man teams, where both teachers teach 2 subjects each; or three man 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 this mix of teachers' personalities means 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. 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.

4. Required courses:

Although elective choices may vary by individual middle schools, all middle schools require each regular education students to take Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science. In 6th grade, most schools require that students take a keyboarding class, unless they are in a band, strings, or AVID. Students are also required to take a healthful living/P.E. class.

5. Day-to-Day Specifics

Students in middle school have to deal with lockers, class changes, bathroom breaks, and a variety of other 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!

Transition 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.

6. 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.

See Activity 2, page 36 for a great "pull-together" activity

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, <http://www.wcpss.net/curriculum-instruction/report-cards/elementary.html>

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, 2007-2008.

See Activity 3, page 37

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 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 a quarter marking period. Middle school recognitions can include certificates, rewards, names being read on announcements, lists of names in the local newspaper, and/or awards ceremonies.

4. 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. Homework at the middle school level most often is graded and averaged in as a portion of a student's grade. This must be explained to rising 6th graders so they 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.

5. 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.

See Activity 4, page 38

6. Agenda and Binders

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. 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. At the bottom of each day, there is also a space for parents to write notes to the teacher, or vice versa. Because 6th graders will have many different classes and teacher expectations to keep track of, writing everything down is essential.

In addition to agendas, most teams require an organizational system comprised of folders and/or binders. Students will be provided with a list of needed supplies by the beginning of the school year.

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 2006-2007. 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*.

The K-12 mathematics program is based on the study of five "strands."

- *Number and Operations*
- *Measurement*
- *Geometry*
- *Data Analysis and Probability*
- *Algebra*

Study of these five strands emphasizes the skills and concepts students need to be successful in algebra.

Moving forward without mastery of the strands leaves gaps in the student's background that can cause difficulties, especially in Algebra I and Algebra II. Because algebra is a foundation for further study in mathematics, it is extremely important that students be properly prepared before attempting Algebra I.

Notes Regarding High School:

- Mathematics courses taken in middle school do not count as credit toward high school graduation.
- Three or four mathematics courses are required by the state to be taken in grades 9-12 for high school graduation depending on the course of study chosen.
- Algebra I is not offered as an advanced course in 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.

The 6-8 mathematics program provides opportunities for both enrichment and acceleration. Middle schools group students by class and within class for instruction in mathematics according to student needs.

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 and applications of these concepts as well as those concepts developed in previous years. Students develop understanding of concepts, writing skills, and calculator skills that are assessed by the North Carolina End-of-Grade Mathematics Test.

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. Students develop understanding of concepts, writing skills, and calculator skills that are assessed by the North Carolina End-of-Grade Mathematics Test. This is an appropriate placement for AVID students.

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
- Solar System
- Energy Transfer/Transformation

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

Social Studies is required for all middle school students. In middle school social studies, students continue their geographic exploration of the world. They begin their study of social studies as they explore continents of the world other than North America. In grade 6, learners study South America, Western and Eastern Europe, and Russia and the former Russian Republics. Grade 7 concludes the middle school global studies program with the study of Asia, Africa, and Australia. They conclude middle school social studies with a study of North Carolina history and geography in grade 8. Students continue their exploration of five skill competency goals, which stretch across the K-12 social studies curriculum. In all three grades, students analyze different forms of government and compare these to the government of the United States. Students also study the peoples of these continents with their physical and cultural differences.

HEALTHFUL LIVING

Healthful Living is required for all 6th grade students and includes health education and physical education. These two courses compliment 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. 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 about the important health risks for their age group, appraise their own health and fitness status, and employ a variety of critical thinking skills to make positive health decisions. Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to set personal goals, understand the principles of diet and exercise, and develop sound exercise practices. Students will engage in physical activities that provide for challenge, 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 that their child be excluded from certain health topics owing to personal/religious beliefs.*

(*Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2007-2008.

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.(*). (Activity- registration process)

(*)Excerpts from the Middle School Program Planning Guide, 2007-2008.

9. 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.

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

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

3. Cliques

Groups of friends with similar interests are healthy and natural. However, cliques are formed when people gather together and begin excluding other people 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.

See Activity 5, page 39

4. 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 smoke, drink alcohol, 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 40

5. 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.*

6. Older Students

Most middle schools are set up such 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:

1. 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.
2. 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. Transition to Middle School



Transition to 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. Take advantage of the opportunities through Wake County to meet with representatives from middle schools that your students typically attend. Building lines of communication between you and your schools you 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 sheet by appropriate school staff, and then 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 41

2. Communicating with Middle School Counselors

Just because your students with conflicts have left your school, it doesn't mean they have left their conflicts behind. Many students travel together to their middle schools and still carry the same grudges they struggled with in elementary school. If there were problems with them in elementary school, middle schools will most likely have the same problems as well. Give the new counselor a head's up on potentially disruptive conflicts. Middle school counselors can address these concerns.

3. At-Risk List

At-risk lists are beneficial to counselors receiving new students. These lists give them an opportunity to address concerns with students early in the school year. Fill out the forms completely by checking the area of concern and providing specific information regarding the child/ren. Also, consider contacting the counselor personally to discuss further and/or more serious concerns.

4. 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 your email and voice mail consider posting information for new parents & students on your school's website.

Creating a website dedicated to 6th grade registration will centralize your information and save you time when you need it most. Suggestions for information to post on your 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 you create your website the way you need it. If your school doesn't have a webmaster or he/she is too busy, try asking a student for help. Many students know how to create websites and they can make them as basic or fancy as you like.

5. Transition Programs

Many schools offer a variety of programs to help students transition into middle school, but often times different programs are lead by various departments and are decentralized. Consider centralizing transitional programs and combining efforts. A strong transition program should include opportunities to visit the school, meet teachers, and learn about how your school works. Provided in this packet is an orientation structure to help new students and parents transition to middle school. The more opportunities

students and parents have to learn about your school the smoother their transition will be for everyone.

See Activity 8, page 43

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, read school guides and student handbooks and visit their web site regularly for current information.
- ✓ Your 6th grader doesn't want you showing up for lunch, but you can stay involved by joining and volunteering with PTA.
- ✓ 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. Know the name of their team, the homeroom teacher and the school counselor for their grade.
- ✓ Provide the supplies from the various teachers' lists. Ask to see their student agenda - assignment notebook with communications from the teachers - regularly.
- ✓ Organization and time management skills must be developed so students will not feel overwhelmed. Be sure to limit after -school recreational activities, provide a quiet study area and expect to see your child working regularly on homework and long-term projects. Set rules about TV and computer use.
- ✓ Know the dress code for your school and check to see that your child is wearing "school friendly" attire daily.
- ✓ Check the calendar for your specific school - know when interims and report cards go out, if there are early release days and any dates of special activities.
- ✓ Be sure the main office has current contact information - don't assume your child will know or share changes in phone numbers or addresses.
- ✓ Talk to your child about school and peers. Listen for comments that reflect what they are feeling and 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.
- ✓ Peer acceptance and self -esteem issues become increasingly important. Provide opportunities for your child to develop their interests and socialize with friends, but be sure to monitor their choices.

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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VII. 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.

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:

- School Counselor
- Administrator
- School nurse
- Lead Secretary
- Data manager
- School Resource Officer
- Media Specialist
- Guidance Technician

Examples of problems:

- Come late to school and need to sign in
- Having a problem with a bully
- Lost your agenda
- Problems with a friend

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.

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?
- Find the emails of two 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 school 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.

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.

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.

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.

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"

"Where did you get that?"

"Brainiac"

"Why are you acting black/white?"

"Band geek"

"That's so gay"

"You're so skinny/fat"

"Your mama"

"Man, you're stupid"

Activity 7

Three Lesson Unit on Middle School Issues/Registration

- Lesson one: pre-test, 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: personalized to the needs of your students

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 aren't brought back!

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

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

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. *Into the Blue*, the transition orientation camp for Ligon Middle School involves two simultaneous programs during the course of the day. Collaborations with student organizations drive programming for rising 6th grade students, while parent organization collaborations drive programming for rising parents.

Orientation Camp in a Box

Provided for you in the following section are tools and templates you can use to design your own orientation camp.



Into the Blue Agenda

2007 *Into the Blue*, Ligon GT Magnet Middle School
Thursday, August 23, 2007

Student Sessions

9:00 am - 9:25 am	Registration (Auditorium Lobby)							
9:10 am - 9:25 am	Opening Remarks Keynote Address: Welcome to Ligon (Auditorium)							
G r o u p s	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9:30 am - 10:10 am	RM 2207	RM 2208	RM 2303	RM 2301	RM MEDIA	RM MEDIA	RM GYM	RM GYM
10:15 am - 10:55 am	RM 2303	RM 2301	RM MEDIA	RM MEDIA	RM GYM	RM GYM	RM 2207	RM 2208
11:00 am - 11:15 am	Lunch (Cafeteria)							
11:20 am - 12:00 pm	RM MEDIA	RM MEDIA	RM GYM	RM GYM	RM 2207	RM 2208	RM 2303	RM 2301
12:05 pm - 12:45 pm	RM GYM	RM GYM	RM 2207	RM 2208	RM 2303	RM 2301	RM MEDIA	RM MEDIA
12:50 pm - 1:00 pm	Closing Remarks (Auditorium)							

¶ 2207/2208 - Getting Lost at Ligon

¶ 2301/2303 - We have Homework?

¶ Media Center - Here at Ligon we...

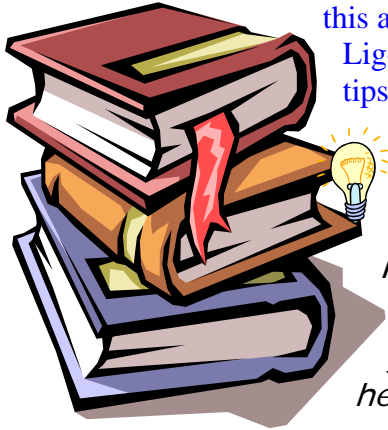
¶ Gym - Who are my new classmates?

Parent Sessions

00 am - 11:00 am	Optional Parent Fair (Arts Lobby)
:00 am - 11:30 am	Parent Arrival/ Meet and Greet Speakers: Welcome to Ligon (Auditorium)
:35 am - 11:45 am	6 th Grade Team Introductions Speakers:
:50 am - 12:10 pm	Informational Session Speakers:
:15 pm - 12:25 pm	Ligon Parent Organizations Speakers: PTA, LSB, Boosters & LAB
:30 pm - 12:45 pm	PBS Presentation Speaker:
:50 pm - 1:00 pm	Closing Remarks (Auditorium)

We have homework?

A lot of people talk about how much tougher middle school is than elementary school, especially when it comes to Ligon. In middle school, you have homework to complete every night, presentations to give in class, and big group projects to turn in. In this activity you are going to learn what makes a successful Ligon student. Remember to pay attention; these study habit tips might be a lifesaver come report card time!



School Tip:
Do you need extra help with Math or Language Arts, or maybe this week's lesson is a little confusing in Science? Ask Mr. Martinez about seeing a peer-tutor. There are Ligon students who are trained to come and help you learn what you are missing.

Who are my new classmates?

One of the cool but scary things about middle school is seeing all of the new faces. Ligon has students from elementary schools all over Wake County. Some students might already know a lot of people from their old elementary school, but many students don't know anyone at all because they were the only ones from their elementary school to come to Ligon. In this activity, you are going to meet and learn about all your different classmates.



School Tip:

Are you a social butterfly and comfortable with meeting new students? If so, ask Mr. Martinez about being apart of the Ligon Social Club. Be a buddy to new students having trouble adjusting to Ligon and welcome new students throughout the school year.

Getting Lost at Ligon

Moving into a new building can be a bit scary sometimes, especially if the school is as big as Ligon. In this activity, you will participate in a scavenger hunt. Learn where all the bathrooms and classrooms are while completing each of the tasks. Your guide will help you navigate around the school.



School Tip:

If you get lost looking for an elective class, carry your Ligon map with you located on the right-hand side of your folder, or ask anyone around for directions.

Here at Ligon we...

Part 1.

Middle school can be really different from elementary school; there's more homework, you have different teachers for each subject, and electives that are way more fun and interesting. Take this time to get to know your Ligon Leaders and ask them questions you might have about Ligon. Are opening lockers that hard? Do you have enough time to get classes? Which electives should I sign up for?



School Tip:

Remember who your Ligon Leader is, if you have questions about something or just want to talk to an experienced Ligon student, just ask him or her. Your Ligon Leader will be here to help you get use to Ligon.

Part 2.

Ligon is a special school with a special history. Be an official Ligon Little Blue by learning our school song or what the adults call the “Alma Mater”. Don’t be shy; just pretend you’re on American Idol but without the mean judges!

Hail Dear Ligon

*Reared against the eastern sky,
our Alma Mater stands on high,
With out-stretched hands she beckons
All who heed her call.*

*Hear! as she speaks with wisdom smart,
To us, who will to do her part.
"Let me, oh let me teach you
Truth and freedom all.*

*Hail dear Ligon, Our Alma Mater,
We, thy sons and daughters heed thee.
Hail, Alma Mater! Hail, Alma Mater!
Hail! Hail! Hail!*

Student Volunteer Descriptions

Student Facilitators

- Facilitators will lead the activities for the incoming students at Into the Blue (ITB).
- Help design activities that will take up approx. 35 minutes of time.
- Help set up and clean up classroom for activity.
- Assist incoming students with school schedules at the end of ITB.

Student Guides

- Lead group of incoming students from one activity to the next.
- Register incoming students at welcoming table.
- Help set up and clean up ITB materials around the school.
- Assist incoming students with school schedules at the end of ITB.

Student Helpers

- Welcome incoming students and parents and provide appropriate directions.
- Help set up and clean up ITB materials around the school.
- Assist with other duties as needed throughout the day.
- Assist incoming students with school schedules at the end of ITB.

Dates Needed

- Practice and Setup Day – Wednesday August, 22nd (12pm – 3pm.)
- Into the Blue – Thursday August, 23rd (8:30am – 1:30pm)

Student Guides

8:30am – 9:10am Operate Registration Table
Collect Materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Group list of rising 6 th graders
<input type="checkbox"/> Registration Sign-in Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Name Tags
<input type="checkbox"/> Markers
<input type="checkbox"/> Folders (with group # written inside)
9:10am – 9:25am Enter Auditorium
9:25am Gather group (will be announced by Ms. Douglas)
Lead group to each session at the end of time.
11:00am – 11:15am Lunch
<input type="checkbox"/> Lead Group to Cafeteria
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Cafeteria Routine (recycling, clean up, use RR)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sit with Group
12:45am Lead to Auditorium
1pm - 1:30pm Assist new students with class schedule directions

Student Facilitators

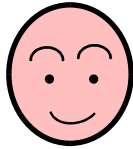
Set up classroom or area (8:30am – 9:25am)
1 st Session – Handout Pre Test at beginning of session - Collect
4 th Session – Handout Post Test at end of the session - Collect
12:45pm - 1pm Clean up classroom or space
1pm - 1:30pm Assist new students with class schedule directions
* Turn pre & post test to Mr. Martinez (box in Student Services)

Student Helpers

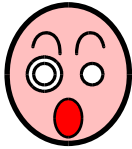
8:30am – 9:10am Welcome Arriving Families
9:10am – 9:25am Operate Registration Tables
9:30am – 10:10am Great Late Arrivals and lead them to appropriate area
10:10am – 1pm Help where necessary
1pm - 1:30pm Assist new students with class schedule directions

Complete this side at the **beginning** of *Into the Blue*. Circle the face that best represents your answer for each question. Turn this sheet in to your group leader.

1. How do you feel about starting middle school?



I'm Prepared

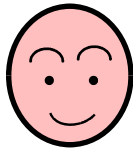


I'm Nervous

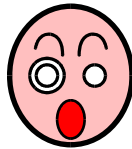


I'm Scared

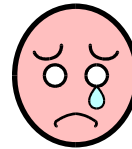
2. How do you feel about getting around the school?



I'm Prepared

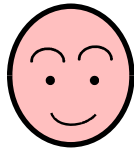


I'm Nervous

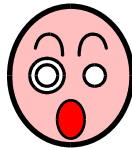


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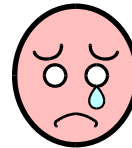
3. How do you feel about meeting new students?



I'm Prepared



I'm Nervous

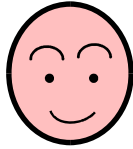


I'm Scared

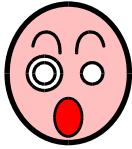
4. What kinds of things would you like to learn today?

Complete this side at the end of *Into the Blue*. Circle the face that best represents your answer for each question. Turn this sheet in to your Ligon Leader.

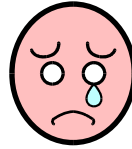
1. How do you feel about starting middle school ?



I'm Prepared

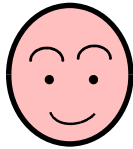


I'm Nervous



I'm Scared

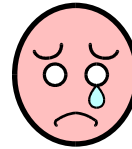
2. How do you feel about getting around the school?



I'm Prepared

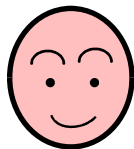


I'm Nervous



I'm Scared

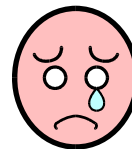
3. How do you feel about meeting new students?



I'm Prepared



I'm Nervous

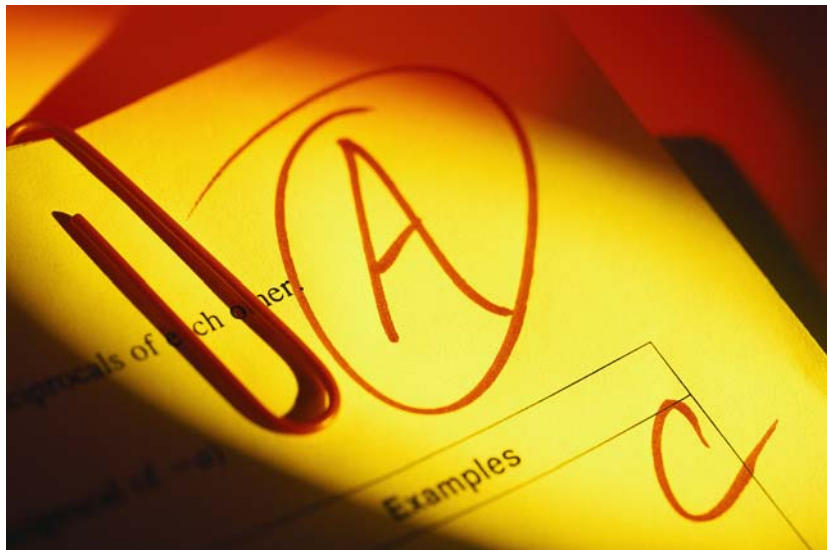


I'm Scared

4. What did you like best about *Into the Blue*?

5. What did you like least about *Into the Blue*?

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.freepirit.com/ - materials and student site

www.cyberbully.org/ - for parents

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