

A Parent's Guide to: Everything EW Parents Need To Know

The transition from elementary to middle school can be a challenging time for both students and parents. Much of the adjustment anxiety can come from not knowing what to expect and where to get help when you need it. We hope this guide will answer many of your questions and help you feel more comfortable through this exciting, yet difficult transition.

Parents can tremendously increase the chances of a successful transition if they follow a number of important suggestions outlined below:

1. Attend Orientation Day in August before school starts and Back to School Night in September.
2. Make sure your child understands parent and teacher expectations.
3. Teach your child the skills needed to be successful.
4. Form a partnership with each of your child's teachers.
5. Be proactive.
6. Stay informed and involved.
7. Use the SDUHSD Information Portal. The Information Portal allows parents to access their child's class schedule, grades and period-by-period attendance via the Internet. (Information to set up a student account is provided at the beginning of the school year. Contact the Counseling Office if you do not receive the letter.)

Attend Important Events

Orientation Day is a great time for your child to get to know the EW staff, students and school campus. Students take a tour of the school and have the opportunity to ask 8th grade students questions. Students are much more likely to feel comfortable the first day of school if they've attended Orientation Day.

Back to School Night is a must for parents who want to make sure their child has a successful transition to EWMS. Attending Back to School Night shows your child you want to become acquainted with his/her teachers and work as a team with them. Make a list of questions to ask each teacher. Include these important questions:

1. How should my child get the homework when he/she is absent?
2. What is the best way to follow up on my child to make sure he/she is getting all homework turned in?
3. What is the best way to communicate with you?
4. How do you require students to organize their work?
5. What is your policy on late work?
6. What can we do as parents to make sure our child is successful?
7. How can I find out how my child is doing in your class?

Expectations

Parent Expectations

Prior to the first day of school, sit down and talk with your child about what lies ahead.

Talking about their fears and anxieties helps children to deal with their emotions and handle stress in a positive way. Explain to your child your expectations of him/her as a successful student, allowing your child to voice his/her ideas and opinions. Although your child may not like or agree with your expectations, taking the time to explain your reasons will help him/her to feel validated. Tell your child you will be working with him/her on a daily basis until you are sure he/she has learned the skills necessary to be successful in middle school.

Teacher Expectations

The first week of school, review with your child the rules, procedures and expectations of all six classes outlined on each teacher's syllabus or website. Some teachers also provide helpful hints on what students and parents can do to ensure success. Read all information with your child and answer any questions. If you are unsure about a policy, attending ***Back To School Night*** is the very best way to become familiar with teacher expectations.

Teaching Necessary Skills

The two most critical skills that middle school students need to be successful are organizational/study skills and communication/self-advocacy skills. Many parents assume that these skills can be mastered via classroom instruction. While teachers do what they can to teach these skills, classroom instruction cannot take the place of the time a parent spends with his/her child teaching these skills. Students at this age need consistent one-on-one instruction over a period of time if they are to *master* these skills that are so critical to academic success. The good news is that it only takes a few minutes each day for one or two months for middle school students to learn and master these skills.

Organizational/Study Skills

For most students, middle school will be the first time they have had six different teachers--each with a different teaching style and set of expectations. Students may not be used to taking all their supplies and belongings with them to each class. This situation will undoubtedly require organizational skills that most students at this age have not yet acquired. Parent involvement is crucial at this point if a student is to make a successful transition. Help your child learn to stay organized; allowing him/her to feel his/her input is valued.

Help your child create a system for keeping backpack and binders organized starting the first day of school. Everything in the backpack should have a specific place it is kept. Decide on the number of binders needed: One binder for all six classes? One binder for odd classes and one for even? The use of dividers in binders will enable your child to find papers quickly and easily. Some teachers will have preferences on how students keep their materials organized. If not, it is suggested to use larger dividers for each class (math, English, etc.) and smaller dividers within each class labeled "assignments," "notes/handouts," and "tests/quizzes." It is critical that your child gets into the habit of putting every paper in its proper place right away. If your child knows you will check his/her binder(s) and backpack every night, this will train him/her to keep organized on a daily basis.

Have your child write all assignments and due dates in his/her agenda for every class every day. (Agendas are provided at the beginning of the school year). If your child has no homework, he/she should write "no HW." Check the agenda daily to make sure that homework for every class is filled in. For details on how students should use their agendas, go to the EW Counseling website and click on "Parent Information," then "How to Use the Student Agenda." You may also obtain a copy of the handout from the counseling center.

Set up a regular weekly study schedule. Set aside 7-10 hours per week, scheduling breaks if needed. Be specific (ex: Mondays 3:00-4:30 pm). When finished with homework, he/she should study for tests or work on projects. If there is still time remaining, your child should sit quietly and read until the end of study time. Knowing that study time is inflexible, no matter how much homework your child has, helps him/her keep from rushing through homework.

Nightly Procedure

1. Instruct your child to show you his/her agenda at the beginning of study time.
2. Help your child prioritize the order in which every task should be accomplished.
3. Make sure your child has everything within reach he/she will need to complete all assignments and projects.
4. Check-in periodically to ensure your child is on task and to see if he/she needs any help.
5. Instruct your child to show you all work completed at the end of study time. If your child studied for a test, take a few minutes to quiz him/her.
6. Check backpack and notebooks to make sure your child is organized and prepared for the next day. Decide on a certain place in the notebook where assignments should be kept that need to be turned in the next day.

Follow up

Once you feel comfortable that your child has learned the organization/study skills needed, it is critical that you develop a follow-up plan to ensure that these skills are mastered. It cannot be emphasized enough the importance of gradually reducing the time spent checking in with your child. Begin by checking the agenda and backpack every other day, then once a week, until you are confident your child is able to handle the academic demands on his/her own.

If this plan is implemented effectively, after a few weeks your child should develop a habit of good study skills that will bring success in middle school, and provide adequate preparation for the academic rigor of high school. If you encounter obstacles while following this plan, click on "Parent Information", then "Improving Your Child's Grades" on the counseling website for troubleshooting ideas. You may also obtain this handout from the counseling center.

Communication/Self-advocacy skills

While starting middle school can be challenging and often intimidating, it is important for students at this age to begin feeling comfortable asking questions if they don't understand something or need help. This may include getting clarification on homework or asking a teacher why he/she received a certain grade on an assignment.

Although it can be frightening for students at first, the more they ask, the more comfortable they will feel advocating for themselves.

Parents can help alleviate discomfort by role-playing with their child to help him/her decide on the best way to address the issue. The most common mistake students make is confronting the teacher at inappropriate times. Encourage your child to wait to address the issue at a time when his/her teacher is not distracted by other students. Typically, the best time to approach a teacher is before or after the class bell rings or before or after school. Follow up with your child to make sure the issue is taken care of.

After allowing your child to handle the situation, if you are not satisfied with the result, it may be time for you to email the teacher. If a teacher does not get back to you in a timely manner, please contact the counselor. It may be that the teacher's computer is down or he/she has been out sick and unable to contact you. For more information on how to communicate with teachers, please read "A Successful Experience with your Child's Teachers" on the counseling website.

Parents As Partners

At EWMS, we believe that students have a better chance of reaching their potential if parents and teachers work together as partners in the learning process. Although it is the primary responsibility of the teacher to teach the curriculum, parents can play a key role to ensure mastery. The teacher can also help support parents in their role of teaching self-advocacy and study skills. This partnership can be compromised if the parent decides on a course of action without getting the teacher's perspective first. You can empathetically respond to your child's feelings while knowing that more information may be needed to get a complete picture of the situation. If students know that parents and teachers are working together, they are more likely to respond positively to direction.

Stay Informed and Involved

It is important for both students and parents to know what's happening at EWMS. The best way to stay informed is through the EW website found at ew.sduhsd.net. The EW website main page has a Google Calendar with upcoming events and there is also a link to the Seahawk News that contains Earl Warren's Daily Bulletin. Reading the EW Daily Bulletin will ensure that you don't miss an important event or deadline. The website also provides other important information such as school rules and policies, and a school calendar. Encourage your child to pay attention to the daily bulletin read aloud every morning. You can also have the bulletin emailed to your home via the E-Option by calling ext. 4401.

Studies have shown that academically successful students are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports. Encourage your child to find an activity that he/she enjoys. Parents who are actively involved in their child's education and/or extracurricular activities have children who are more likely to be academically successful. Teaching your child the skills needed to be successful is a major step in that direction. However, there are also opportunities to volunteer at EW. Parents have repeatedly said that volunteering helps them stay in the loop and feel more a part of

their child's life. There are numerous opportunities to volunteer at EW. While most are during the school day, there are times that parent help is needed during evening events. Contact the EW PTSA volunteer coordinator for more information.

Please read the FAQs (Frequently asked questions) on the counseling home page for more information.