

Desert Canyon Middle School
Scottsdale Unified School District

Middle School Transition Guide

for Parents



McDowell Mountains

Welcome to Desert Canyon Middle School!

The transition from elementary to middle school can be a stressful time for students and parents. This can be a big, scary step. It's a time of new beginnings, new friends and new opportunities. Students have more options of classes, and this independence can make many students anxious. We know you have questions about how your child will be successful in middle school. What can you do to support your student and make adjustments necessary for success?

Drawing from the experience of our administration, counselors, teachers, staff, and parents who have already had a child in middle school, we compiled some advice to give to parents of incoming 6th grade students. We hope you find this information useful!

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The Big 4 Middle School Student Concerns



Backpacks: Middle school staff know this is a big concern for kids. Since DCMS does not have lockers, students must carry everything they need with them. Sometimes, they carry things that are not needed for that day's lesson or are needed for a specific assignment later in the semester. Clean out your bag daily. Remember; it's a backpack not a time capsule.



Late: The first weeks, teachers are understanding about students being late to class. After a while, your student will work out a system of how to get to their classes. Students line up and teachers meet the students to escort them to the classroom. After a few days, this will be second nature for the students.



Lost: At the beginning of the year, the school will seem very big. At the Mountain Lion Camp Day and Back-to-School Day students will have time to navigate the campus without the older students. Sixth grade core classes are also typically grouped together in one building, so they don't have to find their way around the whole school, just certain areas.



Friends: Finding a connection on the first day is essential for students to have a good start. Your child should make a plan with a friend about meeting and eating together during lunch. At least for the first day(s). This may change as their friend group changes but the comfort of knowing someone on the first day and having a place to eat together will lower the first day jitters.

Facilitating the Transition:

- **Familiarize Yourself with the School**
- **Organization**
- **Academics**

Familiarize Yourself with the School

Before The School Year Begins

- DCMS offers a “Mountain Lions Camp” orientation that gives students the opportunity to see the building, meet teachers, check out the lunchroom and ask questions. The more you and your child know about the workings of the school, the less anxious you both will be.
- Join the DCMS PTO at DCMSPTO.ORG
- Go to the SUSD.org website to find your bus stop.
- Check out the school’s website at WWW.SUSD.ORG/DCMS. Read the previous year’s postings to get an idea of what happens during the year. Some websites have links and specific information just for parents. Review the past Weekly Principal’s Newsletters.
- Talk to students and parents of children who attend DCMS school. Ask questions about the lunchroom, teachers, electives, and anything your child would like to know more about.

During the first weeks of school

- Attend the new parent orientation meeting and Open House. At Open House, ask questions about grading practice, attendance requirements, homework requirements, and how your child can be successful.

During The School Year

- Be involved with and communicate with the teachers. Don’t assume that middle schools don’t like or want parents involved. We want parents! Teacher phone numbers and email are posted on the

website and ParentVue. Email is the first initial, last name @susd.org (ie: Jsmith@susd.org).

- Visit our website (WWW.SUSD.ORG/DCMS) regularly for updates about school events. Visit ParentVue, StudentVue, and Google Classroom often to connect to homework pages and to find ways to get involved.
- Check your child's backpack and agenda book often.
- Attend as many events as you can. This will allow you to meet and interact with staff.

Organization

Before The School Year Begins

- Work on organization at home – good habits at home will translate to good organization when school starts!
 - Discuss and try out different organizational systems (calendar, white board, bulletin board, folders, sticky reminders, setting a schedule, agenda book). Let your child choose a system he/ she feels most comfortable with and practice using it with their summer activities.
 - Put your child in charge of manageable tasks to help him/her develop organizational skills and a sense of responsibility.
 - Time management: Give your child the chance to plan and execute his/ her own time and responsibilities

During The School Year

- If ParentVue/StudentVue shows missing homework assignments, organization may be the culprit. Take a look at the daily agenda book, backpacks and binders regularly. Check to see how things are organized and get a sense of what your student is bringing home. We often find missing work at the bottom of the backpack.
- Middle school teachers expect the student to take more responsibility for academics than parents, so the best thing you can do is let them do as much on their own as possible, even if that means they struggle sometimes.

Academics

Before The School Year Begins

- If they have not already, help your child master his/her math facts. They should know to add, subtract, multiply and divide digits 0-10 without hesitation.
- Look at your child's writing. Make sure he/she knows the grammar basics—starting a sentence with a capital letter and ending with a period. Practice writing over the summer in easy ways (e.g. letters, journals) if they need to practice the basics.
- Have your child read over the summer for pleasure (comic books, newspapers, fun fiction—anything that keeps a book in his/her hand).

During The School Year

- Plan for about 60 minutes of homework a night and additional time if your child is playing an instrument. Try as much as possible to establish a routine and stick to it.
- Find a quiet but visible place for your child to do their homework.
- Check ParentVue and/or StudentVue often (both students and parents!). Use it to check the homework pages and to keep track of grades and assignments.
- If your child's grades go down, don't panic. Work with your child and your child's teacher on a strategy. ParentVue and StudentVue lets you track whether or not homework is getting turned in and know when tests have been graded. Students have the opportunity in many classes to re-take tests so they can master the material.
- Your child will have several teachers, which means different teaching styles. Help your child learn to deal with the diversity they will experience in communication, teaching strategies and feedback procedures.

What Will My Child Be Learning in Middle School?

There are standards set by the state and adopted by the district that detail what your child will be working to accomplish at each grade level. You can find these standards at the Scottsdale Unified School District's website here:

<https://www.susd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=1382>

or www.SUSD.org >Academics > Curriculum

Peer Issues

- Help your child learn to navigate changes they can expect to see in middle school. Friend changes, strong emotions, and development of new interests are all part of the experience. Empower your child to take charge of his/her growth and not to feel like (or be) the victim when they experience challenges.
- Don't get caught up in the drama
- There will be lots of different types of kids in middle school. Your child has an opportunity to meet kids with the same interests and make new friends. This can be helpful to point out if your child is worried about going to a bigger school.
- Our school does not allow cell phones to be used during the day. It's our hope that students will talk and learn interpersonal skills that will help them in the future beyond the screen.
- Peer pressure/problem solving skills:
 - Parents can help by role playing or coaching their kids through tough times. (e.g. what can you say or do if one of your friends wants to sit with someone else at lunch). It is tempting to want to step in but this ultimately won't be as useful as helping your child learn how to handle the situation on his/her own.

- Be careful to separate your own experiences in middle school from what your child is experiencing. It's important not to project our own perhaps negative middle school experiences on our child and add to their anxieties.
- A parent and student concern in middle school is bullying. Bullying is taken very seriously by all our staff. They have received training and do their best to deal with incidents as they are made aware of them. Since school staff don't witness or hear about everything, it's helpful to talk with your child at home about what he/she is experiencing and help problem-solve with them. Let the Assistant Principal know what is happening to come up with a plan.

For tips and links to other information, including definitions, go to the Scottsdale Unified School District's Student Services page:

<https://www.susd.org/Page/517>

General Support for your 6th Grader

- Check in with your child often - ask about how the day went or what did you learn today? You may only get a one-word answer, but the fact you asked is still important to them.
- Support your child in his/her efforts to become independent. Trust but verify.
- Encourage your child to try new things and to regard failure and mistakes as important parts of learning and growing. Assure your child that one mistake won't negatively label them in the eyes of the teachers and administration at middle school. It's how they respond and grow that is important.
- Get involved in something. Join an athletic team or club.
- Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition. Check out some of the references mentioned in our resources section. It can help you feel less anxious to get advice and know you are not the first to be dealing with challenges.
- Show your child that you are in touch with the school and that you know who is who and what is going on. Let them know even though you may not be at school like you were in elementary school, you are still connected.
- Remember, our middle school staff have a lot of experience dealing with kids this age. We are sensitive to their issues and needs.
- Maintain strong family connections with your 6th grader. They may push you away on the surface, but they do want you to be there... really.
- Be alert to signs of depression or anxiety in your child and seek help. If you see signs, talk with the counselors at school and let them know what is going on. They can alert teachers and provide you with resources on where to go for assistance.

Prepare Now

What can you do:

3 Months (May) before school starts

- Work on foundational academics such as math facts and basic grammar
- Review the school's website
- Have conversations about having multiple teachers, participation in athletics or clubs, and a larger school.
- Reach out to the school Counselor or Assistant Principal with individual questions.
- Journal about concerns going to middle school
- Plan for a fun family summer

2 Months (June) Before School starts

- Explore a museums and outside activities as a family
- Join the Public library reading rewards club and read for fun

1 Month (July) before school starts

- Go to the school website to download supply lists
- Go Back-to School clothing shopping making sure the new clothing is within the dress code.
- Create an organizational system for homework and materials

1-2 weeks before school starts

- Attend the Mountain Lions camp
- Adjust sleeping hours to match that of the school year.

What could a typical day look like in Middle School

- Wake up and start with a good breakfast. (Breakfast is also sold in the cafeteria)
- Retrieve prepared book bag and go to the bus stop or car
- Put on school ID
- School gates open at 7:20 and close at 7:43. The first bell for first period rings at 7:40, students must be seated by 7:45. Students arriving after 7:45 are marked tardy.
- Line up waiting for the teacher to escort students to class.
- Follow the teacher's directions during the lesson.
- The teacher will release students. Don't follow the bell.
- Repeat for each class
- Lunchtime- leave your backpack in the pit area of the cafeteria.
- Get in line to purchase lunch or go directly to a seat if you bring lunch.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Wait to be released to commons (recess)
- Listen for the whistle to return to class.
- End the school day by waiting in the pick-up area or boarding the bus.
- Tie or attach the ID/Lanyard to the backpack.
- Have a snack when your child gets home
- Allow for an hour of rest or physical activity. Using the computer or cell phone does not count.
- Start homework with the shortest or easiest assignment first.
- Use the agenda book as a check off list to see what has been completed.
- Charge your computer
- Prepare the backpack for the next day and place it in the same easily retrievable place nightly.
- Go to bed at a reasonable time

SOURCES

Adopted and modified primarily from the “Middle School Transition Guide”. Adams 12 Five Star School, Thornton, Colorado.

MS staff interviews and “Supporting Students in Their Transition to Middle School” by National Middle School Association and The National Association of Elementary School Principals.

“Smoothing your child’s transition to middle school” by GreatSchool Staff 2010.

“Five ways parents can help their kids transition smoothly to middle school” by Phyllis Fagell 2019.

RESOURCES

Scottsdale Unified School District’s website www.susd.org

Adolescent Brain: This is one helpful article on the teen brain. More is learned every day about how basic brain development affects teenagers and can explain some of what is seen in adolescence.

<http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/09/the-teen-brain.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: For information on adolescent health issues and development.

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/>

Helpful Books

“W.T.F.: Why Teens Fail- What To Fix”, Frank Griffitts, John Iannarelli, Adam Brooks, Shannon Butler, Tanya Corder, Brooke Scritchfield, Laura Latham, Katey McPherson, Stephanie Siete, and Travis Webb. (2012)

“How to talk so Teens will Listen and Listen so Teens will Talk” Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish, HarperCollins (2006).

“Staying Connected To Your Teenager: How To Keep Them Talking To You And How To Hear What They’re Really Saying,” Michael Riera, Da Capo Press (2007)

