



## **HELP!**

**My child with special needs is going to middle school.  
How can we get ready?**

*Middle school is a big step for every one. As a parent of a child who receives special education services, there are things you can do to make the transition easier. This brochure will attempt to answer the most common questions asked by parents of students entering middle school to help guide you in supporting your child.*

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## What may be different about Middle School?



Generally at middle school the student's schedule will be made up of several classes with different teachers, including short passing periods between classes. However, your child's program will be dictated by his/her Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Students have a lunch break during which they will eat, "hang-out" or engage in some informal sports activity. Some school sites may offer the option of clubs, organized activities or mentor programs. The students in middle school are approaching adolescence. They seek a feeling of security and of belonging to a group. There may be social and academic challenges. Resources and support are in place or available to address these challenges.

## Special Education Case Manager

All students with IEPs have a special education Case Manager. This person will be your "go to person" for almost everything in middle school. The name is on the front page of the IEP. Before the last day of elementary school, be sure you know the name and number (or e-mail) of the Case Manager for Middle School.

## Can my child and I visit the school before the first day?



Absolutely! If possible, ask your student's current special education Case Manager to arrange a field trip for all students in the program to visit the school during the spring to tour the campus and meet the staff. Offer to drive so you can go too. If this is not feasible, call the school principal in the summer and ask permission to bring your student to school for a visit. Be sure to ask for a school map when you visit. The school may offer an orientation for all students, but it is often helpful for special education students to

visit before the orientation and find their way around the campus so that they will be able to pay attention to other information at the regular orientation.

## How can I help my child learn to follow the schedule for middle school?



Ask for a copy of your student's schedule BEFORE the first day of school. Schedules are not usually available until about a week before school starts, but you should be able to get a copy before the start of school. If you are concerned, have this written into the IEP as a "support for transition between programs" (bottom of LRE page). Getting the schedule in advance gives you the opportunity to check and make sure your child is in all the correct classes. Mistakes can and do happen. Make multiple copies of the schedule: one for home, one for the inside of the locker, one for the student's notebook or binder, and others to

replace the ones that inevitably get lost. Make copies of the map you picked up at your visit and mark all the student's classrooms on the map. You might even color code the map and the schedule so they match. Once you have the schedule, if you feel it is necessary, you could ask the school secretary if you could come by one more time to walk the campus and help your student learn his schedule.

## What about the locker? How will my child find it, remember the combination (or hold on to the key)?



Students may be issued lockers either at orientation or on the first day of school (after you pay for the lock). Inquire ahead of time about getting a locker that is near your student's first class or at the right height or near the special education Case Manager's room. You need to determine which of these things are most important for your child, depending on their disability and level of independence. Some schools use combination locks; others use locks with a key. You and the student's current Case Manager should discuss this in advance

and determine whether the student might have difficulty with the lock. Getting your child's lock prior to the beginning of school can be helpful, no matter what type of lock is used. If it's a combination lock, you can help him/her memorize the combination. If it's a key lock, you can have extra keys made and figure out the best way to

help your child be sure there is always a key available. Attach each key to a lanyard. Hang one in the locker, put two in the backpack, and leave one at home. Some Case Managers will keep a spare key for each of their students.

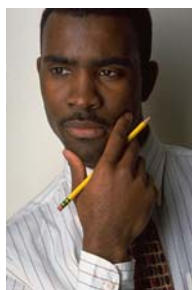
### **What about P.E.?**



All of the above advice is also good advice for the P.E. locker if there is one. If students at the school dress out for P.E. there should be a P.E. locker. P.E. locks are typically given out after the start of school when you pay for their P.E. clothes (and lock). Again, sometimes you can get the P.E. lock before the start of school as well. In rare instances, you may be able to get a P.E. lock with the same combination and/or key as the locker. Schools do not normally like you to bring your own locks (some forbid it) because it limits their ability to access the locker.

Many special education students are enrolled in a general education P.E. class and are expected to dress out for P.E. They are also expected to participate in the activities of the class to the best of their ability. Most middle school P.E. staff have experience teaching special education students and are prepared to make accommodations for students with disabilities. If your child is going to dress out for P.E., you may want to ask to have their locker close to a supervised area to help with any issues that may come up. The IEP should specify how your child will participate in P.E. If your child requires assistance with dressing and/or needs significant modifications for physical education, these should also be noted in the IEP.

### **What accommodations will my child need?**



All accommodations are tied to the student's disability. For example, students with learning disabilities might need support in recording assignments or extra time for certain projects. Some students benefit from "progress checks" with all teachers on a weekly or monthly basis to help parents keep informed about work turned in or overdue.

Students with hearing loss may need an FM system. In elementary school, this might have been a classroom system with speakers that can be heard by all students. In middle school when each student has 5-7 classes, it is more typical to have a personal FM system that the student carries from class to class.

Students with physical disabilities may need an extra set of books to keep at home. Middle school textbooks can be very heavy, but they are also very expensive, so only ask for this accommodation if there is a genuine need.

*If you have specific concerns regarding safety and privacy address those issues at your IEP. See SELPA's website for a brochure detailing accommodations and modifications at [www.venturacountyselpa.com](http://www.venturacountyselpa.com) and click on SELPA Publications.*

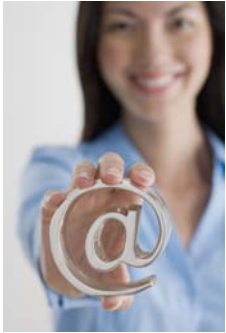
### **What about the first day of school? How will I know where to drop off my child?**



Most schools have designated drop off areas that will be explained in the school handbook, orientation materials or by your child's Case Manager. Most middle school students are not typically "met" by staff at the beginning of the day. They are expected to get to their first class on their own. If this is not possible for your student, then you will either need to walk him/her to class, find a buddy to walk him/her to class, or make other arrangements through the Case Manager or Principal.

If your child receives transportation provided by the district, make sure you have contacted the transportation department prior to the beginning of school to obtain pick up and drop off schedules.

## **What is the best way to check up on my child's progress and communicate with the Case Manager and other teachers?**



Email is usually the preferred method of communication. Most schools have a web site and/or an email list for their teachers. Through email you can communicate with all teachers at the same time or with only specific teachers, depending on your needs. Ask your teacher and Case Manager what method of communication works best for them.

It is suggested that you wait for a week or so after school starts to email the teachers unless you have something regarding medical or safety concerns that the teacher needs to know before the first day. Give the teachers the opportunity to get to know your student before asking them questions or giving them lots of information that they might not remember in the rush of getting the school year up and running. It is important to keep the lines of communication open and to convey both positive information as well as concerns.

Remember that although this is a new chapter in your child's education, your child's team will need to know how things are going. If you know your child is having difficulties, be sure to let your child's Case Manager know what is happening.

## **How will I know if all the teachers have a copy of my child's IEP?**

The reality is that all general education teachers probably won't have a copy of the full IEP. It is the role of the special education Case Manager to communicate directly with the other teachers and provide them with the appropriate portions of the IEP (i.e., goals and accommodations). The full IEP is usually kept in the student's cumulative file which is available to all teachers. If you are concerned about whether or not they have the IEP, send them an email to confirm that it has been made available to them. If there are specific parts of your child's IEP that you feel general education teachers should have, request that your Case Manager provide it to them.

## **Is there anything else I can do to help my child be successful?**



Keep your child's current IEP in a convenient location, so that you can easily refer to it if questions arise. Introduce yourself to the school's administrator. Be available to the teachers and responsive to their requests. Remember, they have your student's best interests at heart, just like you do. If you can, offer to help out by running off materials, driving to a field trip, or offering any special talent you have. Join the PTA, and be an active participant. Special education parents can offer a perspective that general education parents may not have when they are planning activities like a jog-a-thon, a dance, an assembly, or other special event. You might even suggest and help organize an Ability

Awareness assembly, program, or event for the whole school. It is important to become familiar with the school's website. It will contain information for parents regarding school events and activities.

## **Other sources of information for special education parents:**

- Your school district special education department
- Ventura County SELPA (805) 437-1560, or visit our website at [www.venturacountyselpa.com](http://www.venturacountyselpa.com) (click on Information for Families)
- Rainbow Connection Family Resource Center (805) 485-9643
- United Parents for Families of Children in Crisis (805) 384-1555
- Ventura County Autism Society (805) 496-1632