

# Supporting a Successful Middle School Transition

By Dr. Bryn Harari, Principal

Transitioning to Middle School is an important milestone in your child's life and educational journey. Middle School represents a time of tremendous growth and change - physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Students transitioning to Middle School are often excited about the opportunities for greater freedom and independence. At the same time, they may feel anxious about living up to new expectations. Social connections, acceptance, and belonging are extremely important to them. Even the most capable and dedicated students may be distracted from academic pursuits if they are not experiencing security in their social connections. Succeeding academically and fulfilling parent and personal expectations are very important to them; every student wants to experience success. At The Hebrew Academy of Orange County we leverage student enthusiasm by introducing new ideas, experiences, and perspectives at every turn. Our program is designed to cultivate confident, caring critical thinkers who thrive in a competitive world. Our award-winning curriculum, highly effective instruction, and caring teachers make this happen

A successful Middle School transition can usher in a positive Upper School experience stretching all the way through high school. This period represents a developmental milestone that requires special recognition, support, and consideration from parents and teachers. Our teachers incorporate social development, academic challenge, as well as targeted, individualized support to ensure that students get *what* they need *when* they need it.

At The Hebrew Academy we pay close attention to the range of needs of Middle School students to ensure that their transition is successful.

This Parent Guide will help families work together with teachers and the Administration at The Hebrew Academy to help fifth-grade students successfully transition from Lower School to Middle School. This Guide provides:

- 1) Information regarding the **skills, behaviors,** and **attitudes** that are associated with success in Middle School;
- 2) Information regarding what your student's teachers and administrators will be doing to facilitate readiness; and

- 3) Recommendations for parents about how to support student readiness *prior* to the transition.

## **Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes for Successful Transition to Middle School**

**Successful students have healthy lifestyles.** They eat healthy food, drink enough water, get regular exercise, and get enough sleep. These habits don't just make students feel better; these habits help the brain develop and enable students to learn better. Mental health is critical and can be supported by a healthy lifestyle. Successful students are able to manage a typical degree of stress and anxiety. They draw on exercise and other healthy habits to provide rest, relaxation, and stress relief.

**Successful students set challenging but realistic goals.** These include life goals, long-term educational goals, short-term learning goals, and personal goals.

**Successful students show a strong determination to learn.** They have excellent attendance. They pay attention in class. They complete homework. They actively participate in class discussions. They don't just want to learn and not just for the sake of their grades.

**Successful students take responsibility for their own learning.** They study with few interruptions. They finish every assignment carefully and neatly and turn them in on time. They study for quizzes and exams, and they work diligently on projects.

**Successful students display positive attitudes.** These include self-confidence, self-motivation, and determination.

**Successful students make wise choices.** They develop a strong sense of personal values and ethics, they use time and resources responsibly, and they avoid problems with addictive substances and behaviors- including screen time.

**Successful students develop insightful social skills.** They relate well with parents, teachers, classmates, and people of different abilities, ages, and social groups. This includes respect, being a good listener, and leadership skills.

These *Habits of Mind* will facilitate success for *all* students throughout life, on any path they choose.

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|  <p><b>1. Persisting</b><br/><i>Stick to it!</i><br/>Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.</p>  |  <p><b>2. Managing Impulsivity</b><br/><i>Take your time!</i><br/>Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.</p>   |  <p><b>3. Listening with understanding and empathy</b><br/><i>Understand others!</i><br/>Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas; Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.</p>           |  <p><b>4. Thinking flexibly</b><br/><i>Look at it another way!</i><br/>Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.</p>   |
|  <p><b>5. Thinking about your thinking</b><br/>(Metacognition)<br/><i>Know your knowing!</i><br/>Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.</p>   |  <p><b>6. Striving for accuracy</b><br/><i>Check it again!</i><br/>Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.</p>  |  <p><b>7. Questioning and problem posing</b><br/><i>How do you know?</i><br/>Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed &amp; developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.</p> |  <p><b>8. Applying past knowledge to new situations</b><br/><i>Use what you learn!</i><br/>Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.</p> |
|  <p><b>9. Thinking &amp; communicating with clarity and precision</b><br/><i>Be clear!</i><br/>Strive for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over-generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.</p> |  <p><b>10. Gather data through all senses</b><br/><i>Use your natural pathways!</i><br/>Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all the senses. taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.</p> |  <p><b>11. Creating, imagining, and innovating</b><br/><i>Try a different way!</i><br/>Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality</p>  |  <p><b>12. Responding with wonderment and awe</b><br/><i>Have fun figuring it out!</i><br/>Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.</p>            |
|  <p><b>13. Taking responsible risks</b><br/><i>Venture out!</i><br/>Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.</p>   |  <p><b>14. Finding humor</b><br/><i>Laugh a little!</i><br/>Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at one's self.</p>   |  <p><b>15. Thinking interdependently</b><br/><i>Work together!</i><br/>Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.</p>   |  <p><b>16. Remaining open to continuous learning</b><br/><i>Learn from experiences!</i><br/>Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.</p>                |

Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick. *Learning And Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2008.

## What does The Hebrew Academy Do to Support Middle School Transition?

### Academic Support and Monitoring

Your student's transition from Lower School to Middle School will be closely supported and monitored. Using a variety of highly specialized educational tools and resources, every student's academic progress is monitored by teachers and administrators. In the event that a student requires additional support in any of the core curricular areas, or in areas of social-emotional development, parents are notified by their teachers or by the administration. We partner with parents to provide targeted support and information about how to help the student.

### Learning Skills for Middle School Success

The Hebrew Academy has designed a unique Middle School Transition curriculum to guide students in developing key skills for success. This curriculum is taught by Upper

School teachers and administrators and includes topics such as time management, independent thinking, problem-solving, communication and social skills.

### **Getting to Know Their Future Teachers**

In addition to receiving specific guided support from their elementary school teachers to prepare for the Middle School curriculum, fifth-grade students have multiple opportunities to meet the Middle School teachers and engage in learning activities that

"My daughter is learning life skills and critical thinking in ways that simply aren't taught elsewhere."  
- 6th grade parent

prepare them for Middle School. This eases the way for students, by initiating personal relationships with their future teachers prior to the new school year. Our Middle School teachers work closely with our fifth-grade teachers to understand the needs and learning styles of their incoming students.

### **Getting to Know Middle School Students**

Our teachers and administrators prepare future Middle School students to take leadership roles by providing positive mentorship to transitioning students along with plenty of opportunities to gradually increase their presence in the Middle School. Fifth-grade students are invited by their older peers for "Visiting Days" in the Middle School during which older students are paired with younger students as mentors and coaches. Students have the opportunity to participate in special programming aimed at orienting them to the Middle School program and routine, even before they transition.

### **What Parents Can Do During the Fifth Grade Year To Facilitate Middle School Readiness**

**Begin conversations early with your student about the transition.** Acknowledge both the excitement and benefits of the change, as well as any fears or concerns they may have. Encourage your student to embrace the challenges and opportunities, and demonstrate your confidence in them. If there are areas for growth, work steadily and collaboratively with your student to improve those areas. Start early, and work incrementally. Avoid placing big or vague expectations on your student, such as "You better get a handle on this because next year you're going to be expected to do it all." Instead, work with your student's teacher to identify "bite-size" pieces to work on, such as organization, time management, best effort, and follow-through.

**Trust the experience and recommendations of your student's teachers.** They are familiar with the Middle School curriculum and expectations, and they understand your child educationally. Every teacher at The Hebrew Academy strives to support your student in reaching their highest potential.

**Understand the developmental milestones that your student is facing.** The Middle School student is undergoing an intense period of development. Understanding the stages of development will help you determine the best ways to support them. Your Administrator can provide recommendations for resources that will help you understand the needs of your student.

**Work closely with the Administration.** If you are requested by the Administration or your student's teacher to support your student in any particular area of readiness, it is in your student's best interest to partner with the school to provide support. Your student's success relies on a strong partnership between you and the school.

**Foster and support the skills, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes** associated with a successful transition to Middle School and [Habits of Mind](#).

**For more information about Middle School at The Hebrew Academy, contact our Admissions Director at [admissions@hacds.org](mailto:admissions@hacds.org) [www.hacds.org](http://www.hacds.org) (714) 898-0051**

