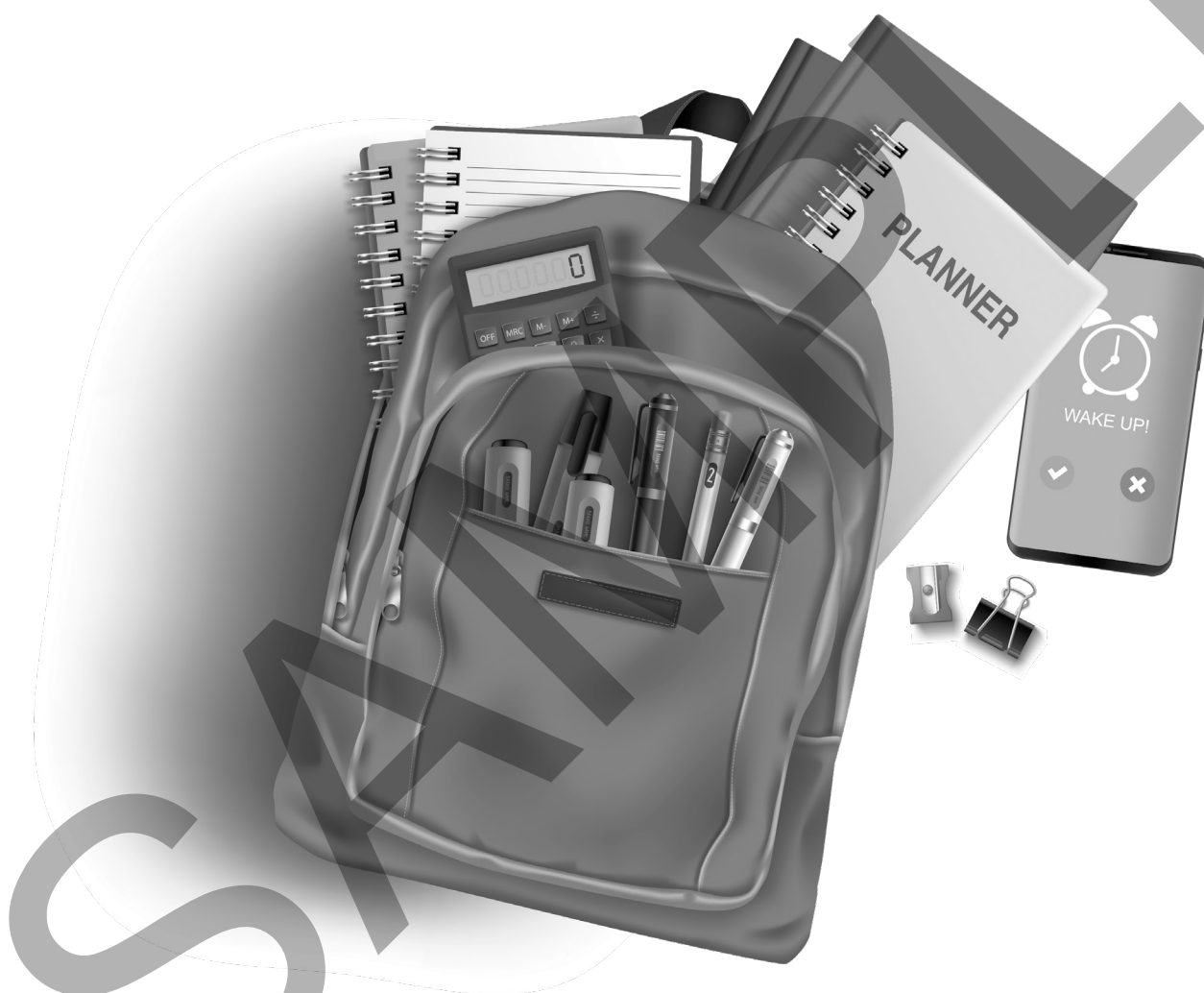


MOVING RIGHT ALONG

Engaging Families for Student Success
in the Middle Grades



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SAMPLE

Presenter's script

This presenter's script provides suggested wording for the *Moving Right Along: Secrets of Success in the Middle Grades* PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose. You may make changes to the PowerPoint as well. Please note, however, that under the copyright license for your Resource Kit (see Section 1), you may use the modifications only for your own personal presentation use. The presentation is written to run for about 10 minutes, depending on the speed at which the narrative is delivered.



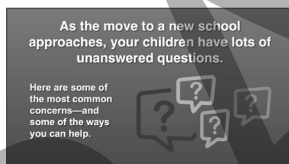
Slide 1
(Opening slide—no narration.)



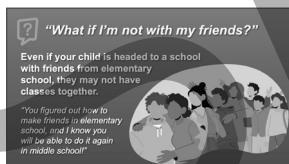
Slide 2
There's a new school on the horizon. It's a big change from the elementary school where both you and your child have gotten pretty comfortable. **[+]** These next few years will be exciting. But they'll also bring a lot of changes—a new school, new teachers, new friends. There's a lot to look forward to—but it can lead to a lot of anxiety.



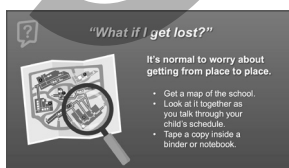
Slide 3
And it's not just students who are nervous. Families who have already been through the transition will confess that there were times they were just as worried as their children! **[+]** How will you know what's going on in school? How will you keep in touch with all those teachers? Will you still know your child's friends? Will your child be ready for more advanced levels of learning? And should you—or even can you—help with assignments? **[+]** Answering those questions—for students and families—is our goal for today and throughout the year.



Slide 4
As the move to a new school approaches, children have lots of unanswered questions, even if they don't talk about them with their families. **[+]** Here are some of the most common concerns—and some of the ways you can help your child address them.



Slide 5
“What if I'm not with my friends?” **[+]** Even if your child is headed to a school with friends from elementary school, they may not have classes together. And sometimes, students find that those old friendships aren't as close as they once were. **[+]** Build your child's confidence by saying, “You figured out how to make friends in elementary school, and I know you will be able to do it again in middle school!”



Slide 6
“What if I get lost?” This may be the first time your child has had to move from room to room between classes. It's normal to worry about the logistics of getting from place to place. **[+]** So get a map of the school. **[+]** Look at it together as you talk through your child's schedule. **[+]** Tape a copy of the map inside a school binder or assignment notebook.

Use a team approach for transition events

For most families, your transition events will be their first encounter with your school. It's your chance to make a great impression—to set the stage for making families and children feel welcome and to make families your partners in promoting school success during their children's years in the middle grades.

Planning successful transition events can be a big job, but it can also give you an opportunity to put the power of school-family collaboration to work. You'll make the job easier for everyone and build staff-family relationships if you recruit a team to plan your transition events. To ensure success:

- **Plan in advance**—get started on next year's transition events shortly after your final event this year.
- **Recruit a representative group** of teachers, administrators, school counselors, families of current middle-grades students and others to assist in planning.
- **Determine the source of funding** for your events.
- **Host a kick-off event for the team.** Schedule it at a time when every member can participate. To make your first meeting a success:
 - Serve refreshments.
 - Conduct a get-acquainted activity.
 - Show the PowerPoint presentation, *Moving Right Along: Secrets to Success in the Middle Grades*, included with this resource kit.
 - Identify a chairperson (or chairpersons) for the team.
 - Give the team the planning checklist found in this section of your binder.
 - Engage the team in creating a vision for the transition events that are suited to the needs of families and students served by your school.
 - Set dates for upcoming meetings.
- **Encourage the team to:**
 - Create a time line for completing tasks, working backward from dates of your transition events.
 - Break tasks down into measurable chunks. Everyone is busy, so dividing the work will keep committee members from burning out.
 - Schedule meetings at convenient times.
 - Work with your school/district public relations specialist to promote events.
 - Work with local media both before and after events.
- **Host an appreciation celebration** following your final transition event.
- **Invite several members of the team** to serve again for the next year. This will provide continuity for future planning.

Use a first-year checklist

As you make plans for welcoming a new class of middle school students and integrating their families into your school community, use this timeline/checklist to:

- **Get an overall picture of your family engagement program.**
- **Incorporate family engagement** into every aspect of the first year of middle school. It's a key component to student success.
- **Select the ideas** that will work best for your school. Check (✓) activities you think will work for your program.
- **Use the “Kit section” column to identify resources** provided in the various sections in this binder. Some activities will be specific to the needs of the families and students at your school, so this resource kit does not provide a “how to” page for each activity listed.
- **Assign responsibility** for completing each activity.
- **Designate due dates** that will work for your program.

✓		Kit section	Person responsible	Due date
	Twelve months before the first day of middle school Recruit a family-staff involvement team to assist in planning and executing activities for the first year.	3		
	Provide materials to educate your team on the importance of family engagement.	3		
	Show your team the presentation, <i>Moving Right Along: Secrets to Success in the Middle Grades</i> .	2		
	Make sure your family handbook has appropriate information for first-year families—update it if necessary.			
	Identify contacts for working with local elementary schools to plan for a smooth transition.	3		
	Review successful transition events.	3		
	Survey current first-year students and families to see how the transition to middle school could be improved.	3		
	Set dates for transition events for incoming students and their families.			
	Determine which staff members will participate in your transition events and what they will do and need to prepare—principal, school counselor, school nurse, school secretary, PTA president, etc.			
	Determine how your community can be involved in making the transition to middle school a success.	3		



Program Profile: Students become ambassadors for their school

When you want to learn something new, you often turn to an expert for advice. In Wake County, North Carolina, fifth graders who will be attending Heritage Middle School also turn to experts. These experts are sixth graders, known as the Heritage Ambassadors.

Each year, counselors at the school ask teachers to select students to represent the school as ambassadors. “We aren’t necessarily looking for A students,” says counselor Jean Carter. “We want students who are comfortable speaking in front of a group.”

Once the ambassadors are selected, they meet several times with counselors to go over expectations. They discuss what to wear, how to speak in front of a group and the importance of answering questions honestly, but in a positive way.

One of the most common questions students ask is about the quantity and the difficulty of the homework. “The fifth-grade teachers are always grateful when our ambassadors say that, yes, there is more homework in middle school,” Carter says. “It gives that teacher extra credibility with her students!”

Students also want to know about safety. “It’s much more reassuring to hear an ambassador say, ‘Kids are very safe at Heritage’ than to have an adult say the exact same words,” Carter notes.

School counselors travel with the ambassadors. This elementary school visit gives them an early introduction to the students they will counsel. “Then when the students attend our open house, the students already recognize me,” Carter says.

In this era of tight budgets, schools may not be able to afford to bring every new student on a field trip to their middle school. The Heritage Ambassadors program is a cost-effective way of bringing the middle school into elementary classrooms across the district.

Here’s how to make it work for you:

- 1. Choose your ambassadors carefully.** They will be the representatives of your school, so it’s important to select students who are mature and who have good judgment.
- 2. Train ambassadors before they visit schools.** Look over the questions students have submitted in advance. Brainstorm about other questions they think are likely. Give ambassadors a chance to practice answering these questions.
- 3. Think about how to match your ambassadors with elementary school classes.** At Heritage, Ambassadors frequently return as “experts” to their former fifth-grade classrooms. That way they can say, “Remember when Ms. Smith told you there was a lot more writing in sixth grade? She was right!”
- 4. Send a teacher or school counselor on the visit.** There may be a few questions that students can’t answer. In that case, the teacher or counselor can step in. In general, however, allow the students to take the lead in answering students’ questions.
- 5. Time the students’ visits to coincide with your overall schedule.** At Heritage, the visits are in April because that’s when students have learned which middle school they will be attending. It’s also the time when students are registering for their electives.



Welcome to middle school letter for families

Here is a sample welcome letter you can send to all families of rising middle schoolers. If possible, send personalized letters to families. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

(School Name)

Dear Families:

Welcome to Middle School!

As we welcome you and your child to **(School Name)**, it is our goal to make the transition to the middle grades a positive experience. This is an important time for your child's personal, social, physical and academic development. Many students—and families—approach this day with both excitement and apprehension.

A strong family-school relationship is invaluable for your child's school success. Remember: You are your child's most important teacher. And you can continue to be involved by supporting your child's learning at home. Let's work together to encourage your child's curiosity, creativity and love of learning.

Throughout the year, we plan to maintain regular communication and to build a foundation of continued collaboration.

We look forward to getting to know you. Working together, we will guide your student toward school success and lifelong achievement!

Sincerely,

Calm your child's nerves about middle school



Whether or not children say they are feeling nervous about entering middle school, they most likely are. Even the most adaptable kids find middle school a huge transition. The following suggestions will help you calm your child's fears and boost excitement about starting middle school:

- **Ask how your child is feeling.** Share a story about a time you were nervous. How did you handle it?
- **Read the school rules** and handbook together. Pay particular attention to attendance requirements and behavioral expectations. Discuss the differences in expectations from elementary school to middle school.
- **Look at a school map** and together visually “walk” through your child’s schedule. Tell your child that everyone gets lost, and it is OK to ask for directions. Encourage your child to tape a map of the school inside a school notebook.
- **Visit the school.** This will give your child an opportunity to see the building and meet some of the faculty members.
- **Give your child a combination lock** to practice opening in preparation for having a school locker. To remember the combination, help your child think of meanings for the numbers. For example, Dad is 38, and your house address is number 9.
- **Foster a sense of belonging** to the school. Find newspaper articles about the school’s sports teams or clubs. Check out the school’s social media posts, too!
- **Establish a regular place** for doing homework and plan a routine, including the time homework will start.
- **Practice getting up** for school. Have your child set an alarm clock for morning wake-up time. Make it easy for your child to get going by having breakfast ready. A healthy breakfast will provide energy for a great start.
- **Teach conversation starters** to help your child make new friends in the crowded cafeteria or hallway. Your child could share a school experience, give a compliment or ask about interests.
- **Encourage your child to ask teachers** or other students for help. Suggest asking an individual student instead of a group. Individuals are more likely to help and less likely to make your child feel like the question was silly.
- **Talk to your child** about how being comfortable at school is more important than showing off a new outfit. It will be easier to maneuver through the day without the pinch of new shoes.



Get to know your school counselor

There is one person in the middle grades whom you should really make an effort to get to know—your school counselor! Your counselor will be an important part of your experience in the middle grades, so it makes sense to meet early. Your counselor will be with you from your first day in the middle grades through your transition into high school.

What does a counselor help students with?

- **Academic issues:** Your counselor will help you plan out your class schedule and make sure the classes you're in are not too hard, not too easy—but just right. Your counselor will also help you decide which electives to take.
- **Future planning:** Already thinking about going to college? Dreaming about the career you'd like to have in the future? Talk to your counselor about what classes you'll need to take now, and in high school, to help you reach your goal.
- **Personal issues:** Your counselor is also there to help you through any personal problems you're having at home or at school, such as dealing with bullying, your pet dying, divorce, peer pressure, depression, resolving conflicts, controlling anger, drug and alcohol abuse ... and any other issue you may be facing. Discussions are confidential, but your counselor will have to tell your families and the school administrators if you are planning to hurt yourself or someone else.

When should students go to a counselor?

Make an appointment to talk with your counselor whenever you have a problem that can't be solved simply by talking to your teacher. Think of it this way: If you're having a problem in a single class, talk to that teacher. But if you're having a problem in several classes or outside of class, talk to your counselor.

Why should students talk to a counselor?

Your counselor is like a teacher, parent and friend combined. Counselors know as much about the school as teachers—but aren't grading your papers. They have life experience like a parent—but aren't going to ground you. They are easy to talk to like a friend—but aren't going to text your secrets to the whole school. So talk to your counselor confidently—you're in a judgement-free zone. Chances are good that you're not the first person ever to deal with a particular problem. Your counselor may have a suggestion you hadn't thought of!