

High Expectations: You and Your Middle School–Aged Child

The middle school years build upon and deepen the skills learned in elementary school. They also prepare your child for high school and life after graduation. You can help your child succeed by being involved with his or her education. Your child is changing, but they still need your involvement.

Support your child's path to success

Talk to your child about middle school and what they expect to happen. Learn about the school your child will attend. Visit the school and obtain a copy of the school's family engagement plan. Discover what extracurricular opportunities or programs may be available to students and ask your child what interests them.

At the beginning of the year, ask the principal:

- Does the school place my child according to his or her ability in core subject areas?
- Does the school begin to prepare my child for high school success? Does this include teaching needed skills such as effective approaches to studying or managing long-term assignments? If so, how?
- What tests does the school use to measure my child's progress?
- How do families know if the teachers meet the state's teaching licensure requirements?
- Can I attend middle school orientation with my child?
- Is there a family resource center at the school?
- Is the school meeting the academic goals set by the state?

Ask the principal for a district or school report card to see if students are making progress. You can refer to the PACER handout "[Understanding Your School's Minnesota Report Card](#)" or go to <https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/p--3> for specific information about your child's school.

Communicate with the school

Teachers are your partners in helping your child grow and learn. They should be helpful and willing to meet with you.

Items to discuss with teachers or principals:

- Explain your child's needs. Staff can better understand and help meet them.
- Share any problems at home that may affect your child's school performance, such as illness or divorce.
- If English is not your first language, ask the school to arrange for an interpreter when you meet with your child's teacher.
- Ask the school to provide materials in your native language. If materials are not readily available in your native language, ask for an interpreter or the school's cultural liaison to provide the information you need.

Support your child in middle school

You can do many things to support your child's progress in the middle grades.

Things you can do at home to support your child:

- Listen carefully to what your child says and talk with them often. Research shows that children who talk with the adults in their lives are not only more successful students, but also healthier, happier people.
- Use the local library and the internet as sources for literacy activities, homework support, and opportunities to pursue outside interests. Ask your child's teachers for ideas if you are not sure where to find good resources.

- Provide your child with enjoyable books. Encourage this habit in your child.
- Make sure your child does his or her homework. Give your child the chance to be responsible and to work on his or her own; encourage those efforts.
- Continue to provide steady guidance. While your child is beginning to show more independence, he or she still needs you.
- Pay attention to how much your child watches television, uses the computer, or plays video games. Parents should put limits on a teen’s screen time, and help them make a plan for media-free time.
- Continue to share family stories with your children, even when they are in middle school.

Advocate for your child, partner with teachers

In middle school, students typically are taught by individual teachers in core subjects. In addition, they may have one teacher, adviser, or counselor as their central contact. While the student may meet with this adult for only a brief period daily, this adult is intended to be “home base” for your child, and your key contact.

Ways to advocate include:

- Contact the key adult immediately if you notice a negative change in your child’s behavior or school work. You want to identify and address problems at school before they worsen.
- If you have a concern about your child’s schooling, request a meeting with a teacher.
- If your child is struggling with assignments, help your child check the teacher’s website or school app. This is where teachers post class notes and homework assignments.
- Attend school open houses or parent nights to meet your child’s teachers.
- Contact the teachers if your child often doesn’t understand an assignment, needs extra help, or feels uncomfortable with any situation. Many teachers will give you their e-mail address or other ways to contact them if you have access to a computer or smartphone.
- Attend scheduled school conferences; be prepared to listen and talk. You may find it helpful to write out questions beforehand. The teachers should be very specific about your child’s work and progress. [PACER’s Academic Tracker Form](#) is a good tool. Think about what the teachers say, and schedule a time to check back with them to see how things are going as the year progresses.

Look ahead to high school

Even though it may seem early to think about the future, middle school is an important step toward postsecondary education or training (for example, college, vocational, or technical schools).

- Communicate your expectations for academic success to your child. For tips, refer to PACER’s handout [A Parent’s Vision and High Expectations are Powerful](#).
- Help your child see that the academic skills strengthened in middle school will support success in high school and beyond.

Find more ideas at the Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center (MNSFEC)

MNSFEC helps families and educators become strong partners in their child’s education. It also encourages community involvement to help all children be prepared for and succeed in school. The Center’s multicultural staff can answer questions from families about their child’s learning and school-related issues. It also provides helpful written materials and offers workshops on topics such improving home-school communication, supporting students and families with culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies, increasing academic achievement, strengthening school readiness, and enhancing family literacy.

All PACER services are free. Call (952) 838-9000 or (800) 537-2237 to see how you can help your child succeed in school. You also can learn more at [PACER.org/about/programs/family-engagement-center](https://www.pacer.org/about/programs/family-engagement-center).

**Many schools have implemented distance learning during COVID-19 and placed restrictions on in-person meetings and gatherings. They may be holding Back to School nights and parent teacher conferences using a video conference platform. If it is not possible to hold an in-person meeting with your child’s teacher or another school staff, contact your school and find out if staff are available to talk by phone or meet by video conference.*