

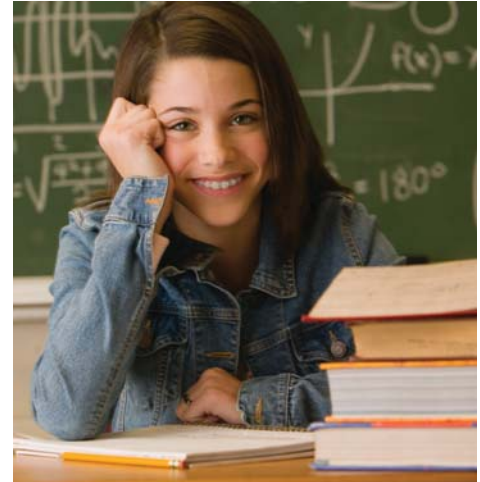
Middle School

A PARENT'S GUIDE

What to know (and do) if your child is in middle school.

In middle school, there are some big decisions to be made. In fact, by the end of 8th grade, you and your child will need to start thinking about post-secondary plans: whether your child will be going to a four-year college, two-year college, technical school, or joining the workforce.

Does 8th grade seem too early to make such an earth-shaking decision? In many ways, it is. That's why students should choose the most challenging math and science courses in every grade, so they're not limiting their options. (In other words, even if there's only a chance your child might go to a four-year college, choose those courses!)



Very Important Fact #1: Middle school is all about accountability and responsibility. Students in middle school are asked to start thinking – and doing – for themselves. Make sure your child has all the organizational supplies he or she needs (things like binders and subject dividers), and a dayplanner to keep track of it all. Time management and study skills are also emphasized: Create a quiet study space for your child at home and make sure that homework is getting done.

Very Important Fact #2: 8th grade is a “biggie.” Teachers call it the “review and transition” year. Not only will students need to start thinking about their high school curriculum, but they’ll also need to do well on the CRCT (Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests) in order to be promoted to the 9th grade. Talk to teachers about what your child should be doing to prepare for these tests, and make sure your child’s math and science skills are up to speed.

+ TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW:

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress (Reports)

An online report on how well the state, each school, and school district are meeting federal education requirements.

CRCT – Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests

Measures how well students are meeting the Georgia Performance Standards. (CRCT tests are given in grades 1 through 8 and test reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.)

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

For students whose first language is not English.

GPS – Georgia Performance Standards

The new version of Georgia's curriculum. (GPS will be phased in between 2004-2008 and will incorporate more performance standards.)

HOPE – Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally

Georgia scholarship program that gives B students an almost-free ride at any of Georgia's public colleges, universities, or technical colleges.

MGWA – Middle Grade Writing Assessment

An 8th grade writing evaluation that can be narrative, persuasive, or expository. (Students choose the type of writing, then choose a topic.)

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

The most recent authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is the principal federal law affecting K-12 educators. It requires that all children be assessed each year in order to show adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics.

PSAT – Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test

Preliminary assessment test that all students take in 10th grade, even if they're not considering college. (For college students, the PSAT is important – it's considered a qualifying test for National Merit Scholarships.)

Hints for the middle school parent:

- + In middle school, subjects that used to be easy (like math) suddenly become challenging – which can be scary! Check in with your child’s teacher a few times each semester to make sure your child is keeping up and successfully making the transition. Some teachers will even provide weekly progress reports.
- + Middle school is also a prime time for peer pressure; be careful your child isn’t getting the idea that being smart in math and science is not cool. Keep talking to your kids about their potential, and all they can do (and be) if they keep pushing themselves.
- + For some kids, it’s less embarrassing to get help from a friend than from a teacher or parent. So, keep that option open. If your child has a friend who’s very strong in math or science, you can arrange for the friend to give “help” sessions, instead of a tutor or teacher.
- + Whenever possible, include your child in parent/teacher conferences. That way, he or she can be part of the conversation. And if your child ever comes home and says, “I don’t like my math teacher” (or science teacher, or any other kind of teacher), you should take that as a hint to call the teacher and see what’s going on.
- + Your child will be studying life science in middle school, and discussions about recycling can be a great way to connect “science” with “responsibility.” Why not put your child in charge of recycling in your household? Have him or her make bins for bottles, newspapers, etc., and take him or her with you to the recycling center.
- + Study skills are huge in grades 6 through 8, so make sure your child is getting homework done. And remember – you don’t need to be an expert on the homework yourself. Just look at the assignment and make sure all the problems have been completed (or at least attempted).
- + In 9th grade, coursework and grades really start to count. Use middle school years as a time to encourage your child to take school seriously and really start thinking about his or her future.
- + Middle school is also the time to start gearing up for the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), which college-bound students start taking in 11th grade. (Even non-college-bound students should take the “practice version” [PSAT/Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test] in 10th grade.) Talk to your middle school teachers about what they’re doing to prepare students for these tests, because it’s never too early to start.
- + If you’re considering technical school for your child, now is the time to start researching different programs. It’s a good idea to find out what kind of math and science courses are required for different fields.
- + Be aware that how well your child does in middle school will influence his or her high school curriculum. Talk to teachers, so you know if your child is performing at grade level. And remember – you have a voice in these decisions! Don’t let your child get pushed in the wrong direction, or have lowered expectations.
- + Encourage your child to start taking part in math- and science-related extracurricular activities, like Math Club and Astronomy Club. Later (in high school) these kinds of activities will help with learning. They’ll also impress colleges and future employers.
- + Help your child create an account on www.GACollege411.org. In addition to providing basic information about tests and scholarships, this website also tracks grades and provides a roadmap for taking the right high school courses.

+ MATH AND SCIENCE LINKS TO EXPLORE :

<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us>

Georgia Department of Education website.
Online information for parents and students.

www.GACollege411.org

Test and scholarship information, as well as grade tracking and course guidance.

www.georgiago.org

Information on helping kids stay in school and complete their education.

www.hotmath.com

Online access to textbooks and step-by-step help with real problems (subscription-based).

www.math.com

Basic information and help with all levels of math.

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com>

Fun and informational.

www.kidsclick.com

Educational software for kids.

<http://dsc.discovery.com>

Programming information for the Discovery Channel.

<http://kids.msfc.nasa.gov>

Kids’ site for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration).

www.nationalgeographic.com/kids

Activities, crafts, and feature stories (subscription-based).

www.coolmath.com

Cool careers in math.

http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/Science_and_Nature/Careers

Cool careers involving science and nature.