



Transitioning to MIDDLE SCHOOL

A milestone in Success

Dr. Bryn Harari, Hebrew Academy Principall

Reprinted from the Jewish Community Chronicle - November Issue

Mixed emotions are typical for incoming Middle Schoolers. Students undergo tremendous growth and change between elementary and middle school—physically, emotionally, and cognitively. “My son was a little anxious and also excited about starting 6th grade,” says Karen Berger, who has three children at Hebrew Academy. “He’s looking forward to having more independence and challenging school work but is also a little wary of the new responsibilities. But, after the first few weeks, he has settled in and is enjoying it.”

Educators and parents play a crucial role in helping students make a successful transition to middle school and beyond. The following strategies build on parent-child communication and are specifically tailored to the Middle School transition.

Encourage a Healthy Lifestyle.

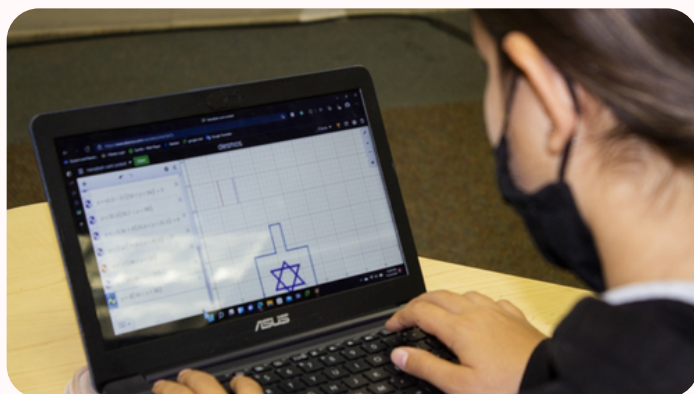
Successful students eat nutritious food, limit sugar and artificial flavors, drink plenty of water, exercise regularly, limit screen time, and get plenty of sleep. Developing healthy habits equips students to handle stress and anxiety more confidently and ensures they have the energy to engage fully in their learning.



Our middle school students receive coaching in all major sports. The confidence, motivation, and sense of accomplishment translate beyond the field, contributing to their well-being and empowering them to set and achieve ambitious goals.

Challenge Them to Set and Reach Goals.

Students who thrive in middle school set and strive toward ambitious goals for short- and long-term learning and life. When motivated to achieve their academic and personal goals, students have better attendance, pay more attention, actively participate in class, and complete assignments on time.



The Hebrew Academy incorporates design and project-based learning to create meaningful opportunities. Using algebraic expressions to create Chanukah drawings and graphs, students see the practical application of math.

Empower Them to Make Good Choices.

Middle School is the right time for parents to guide students to take more ownership in making decisions. When we trust and enable students to make good choices and take responsibility for themselves, they gain confidence and independence. In addition, through trial and error, they strengthen time/resource management and problem-solving skills that help them excel as scholars.



Hebrew Academy students engage in community service through the Mitzvah Project, where they have fun and develop a sense of civic and personal responsibility. (Middle Schoolers volunteer at the OC Friendship Circle carnival.)

Encourage and Teach Them to Collaborate.

Next-generation skills rely heavily on the ability to collaborate and solve problems. By providing opportunities for students to work together, they build social and communication skills and learn to relate well to parents, teachers, classmates, and people with different experiences.



Life and career skills are part of the daily curriculum at the Hebrew Academy. Our Upper School empowers students to share, speak, and hear one another, cultivating empathy and the ability to listen deeply.

Parents Play a Role, Too.

If your student is starting or preparing to transition to middle school, talk with them to see how they're feeling and invite them to discuss their feelings with you. Emotions can range from

excitement to fear or anxiety. Reassure them that their feelings are normal and healthy. Remind them that everything doesn't have to be perfect for it to be good.

Encourage them to address their concerns or questions with adults at school. It will convey your confidence in them, and teachers understand the major developmental milestones for middle schoolers and can provide you and your student with guidance and support.

How the Hebrew Academy Supports Middle School Transition

To help nurture confident, caring, critical thinkers ready to thrive with competitive, next-generation skills, the Hebrew Academy has developed a unique middle school transition program. We have developed our curriculum explicitly teaching success skills such as time management, problem-solving, and communication well before middle school. We continue to devote weekly time to building these skills in the middle school curriculum. Our 5th-grade teachers collaborate with middle school teachers to provide insight into the individual learning styles of each incoming middle schooler. We partner closely with parents to ensure children progress academically, socially, and emotionally. When needed, we work together to provide targeted support. We offer a sheltered 6th-grade transition. Students have a Homeroom teacher who teaches them three or more daily subjects helping our students develop close relationships and requiring less change to different classrooms and teachers throughout the day.

"As a parent, I was most worried about my son's ability to connect socially and make friends," explains Karen. "But the 7th graders have made him feel welcome and part of the group. In addition, the older students at Hebrew Academy do a great job mentoring the younger ones."

The steps we take to ensure our students' successful start in middle school benefit them throughout their educational journeys. As your partner in your child's education, we are ready to welcome them into a nurturing, academically challenging, and engaging learning community.