

Transitions to/at CMS: What the Research Says and Where We Match Up

2014 - 2015

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Best Practices in Easing the Transition between Elementary and Middle School

Hanover Research October 2011

- **Summary of prior research regarding decreased academic achievement in middle school**
- **Identification of potential causes and strategies to offset achievement loss during transition**
- **Features of successful transition programs**

Our 'Why': Intentionally plan for excellence

Using research based recommendations from Hanover Research Institute:

- Take stock, inventory, where we are (gather input from students, parents, staff and administration)
- Prioritize current practice (what are we doing well, what we need to consider refining and/or changing)
- Plan for excellence

Process for Input

- Principal's Advisory Team (PAT)
- Staff Meeting
- School Site Council

1. Strengthen the teacher/student relationships – middle school has more movement and more teachers.

What do we do?

- Flex & Advisory teachers - teach SEL & Service Learning (SEL taught once a week) to increase student/teacher connection
- Monitored via surveys, information shared out during teacher meetings and when presenting survey results to the community
- Ensure one great student - teacher match (grades 5-6)
- Strategic pairing of buddies
- Blocks of time in grades 4/5 ; big blocks on Wednesdays. Results in less movement, increased potential for building relationships.

2. More opportunities for students in decision-making, which relates to the transitions and the lack of control they might feel

What do we do?

- Project Based Learning – voice and choice
- Student leadership that focuses on students as problem solvers with a voice in their environment
- Service learning
- Measured through the Student Survey, results used to design master schedule and provide data related to school climate
- School Climate Committee and Student Council provide venue for student voice
- Electives

3. Size/structure of schools – often middle schools are larger than CMS

What do we do?

- We have a small school so this is not a huge concern for us
- In the past we had a separate schedule for 6th grade to ease transition; 6th grade teachers only taught 6th grade. Common prep for the 6th grade team to monitor students closely
- Small overall class size for CORE
- Separate recess and lunch areas

4. Parent Involvement

What do we do?

- Back to School Night
- STEM and Innovation Fair
- Parent drivers for field trips (mainly 4th & 5th)
- Classroom celebrations (for Reader's/Writer's Workshops)
- PBL showcases and celebrations
- Winter Concert
- Open-door policy
- Publishing parties
- PBL Showcases in the Spring
- Mid-year conferences
- Service Learning

Suggestions for Improvement?

- *involve parents in orientations*
- *teach parents & students about self-advocacy (parent involvement vs. kid's self - advocacy)*

5. Communicate Frequently

What do we do?

- Parent communication through Power School (grades)
- Homework calendar and teacher websites
- Push out to links of the monthly updates from teachers (February)
- Transitions meetings (into 4th and into 6th, high school transition meeting for 8th graders (September)
- Monthly newsletters from the school (Counselor, Dean, Principal, Spotlight on Learning column included)
- Parent Link communications on timely issues/reminders

Suggestions for Improvement?

- *Add 3rd grade parents to Spring CMS communication lists*
- *Mid Year Conferences (PVTAs negotiations)*
- *Power School approach for grades 4 and 5*

6. Collaboration between Parents, Counselor and Dean

What do we do?

- Offer social-emotional learning for all students
- Designated CMS counselor for collaboration and support
- High school transition meeting in September for 8th graders
- Counselor & Dean now write a column for the monthly newsletter
- District Parent Health Liaison works with the Counselor and Dean to promote healthy life choices
- Brown Bag for the new Reader's & Writer's Workshop planned for late February, classroom walk-throughs will be part of this event
- PBIS meeting planned for the Spring
- Student Success Team meetings (SSTs)

7. Articulation with Elementary & High Schools

What do we do?

- Visits with local high school leaders (Superintendent and Principal)
- Math articulation meeting with local public high school (attended by teacher and administrator)
- Woodside HS visit with 8th graders (October)
- Sequoia HS visit with 8th graders (March)
- Transition IEP meetings
- Placement info from 3rd grade teachers
- ORM 3rd grade teachers meet with CMS in May (with students)

Suggestions for Improvement:

- *Provide more information about math for parents - pathways into high school*

8. Instructional Strategies That Work

What do we do?

- Common Sense Media for online safety
- PBL
- CORE for grades 6/7/8
- Math enrichment
- FLEX time
- Service Learning
- Reader's & Writer's Workshop in grades 4-6
- Supportive and safe climate
- Communicate with parents (4 & 5 teachers email parents weekly; monthly for all grades)

Suggestions for Improvement:

- *Explore calendaring & time management instruction for students*
- *Consider Special Education/General Education co-planning time*

9. Reflective Practice on Transitions

What do we do?

- Winter/End of Year climate survey to tweak/respond to midyear results
- Master Schedule survey
- School Site Council Survey in late May, early June
- Data shared with staff and students to make changes mid-year and for following year

Suggestions for Improvement:

- *Orientation survey*
- *Use Illuminate data to ease transitions*
- *Inform 6th grade parents earlier about HS*

10. Enable “testing the water” experiences for students (tours, visits)

What do we do?

- Orientation in August prior to the start of school (lockers, student led tours, teacher meet & greet, schedules)
- Past practice - pass/fail the first semester of middle school
- Elective offering include Academic Skills class (organizational skills)
- Buddies (grades 4 & 8)
- 3rd & 4th grade pen pals
- 3rd graders visit CMS in the spring (meet teachers & penpals, tour the school, meet the 8th grade Student Council)
- Upon request provide 6th grade shadow experiences (for current 5th graders)

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10. Enable “testing the water” experiences for students (tours, visits) *continued*

Suggestions for Improvement:

- *Evaluate content of Academic Skills classes*
- *Consider adding a middle school study skills & organization for 1st semester (elective)*
- *Consider 4/6 buddies (too big an age spread?)*
- *Explore option to shadow elective courses to provide students with more information on course options*

11. Establish Advisory for Adult/Student Relationships

What do we do?

- Small class sizes overall
- FLEX classes (6/7/8 only)
- Advisory

Suggestions for Improvement:

- *Have Advisory & Flex meet regularly - this way teachers can develop relationships with their students*
- *Have smaller Advisory/Flex groups - 8-10 students*
- *Set clear expectations for Advisory - include SEL support, executive function skills in grades 4 & 5 or perhaps for all students at beginning of the year*

12. Support Teachers & Instructional Opportunities

What We Do:

- Genius Hour for 4th & 5th grade provides time for student choice
- Service Learning for 6/7/8 graders (groups based on student interest, students lead, teachers facilitate)
- PBL training was offered to teachers during the summer. The expectation is that each teacher will design at least one PBL unit this year. There is a showcase for each PBL unit where parents are invited to attend to hear the results of the in-depth inquiry.
- Standards based report cards - less emphasis on letter grades
- Frontloading of teachers regarding accommodations/needs of individual students
- 4th grade teachers meet with students during orientation