

Handling the Transition from Elementary to Middle School for Students with Disabilities

By Audrey Prince, M.Ed.

Making the transition from elementary to middle school is often difficult for children. This transition is even more difficult for a child with a disability. Middle school is a time when a child becomes an adolescent and he/she faces new challenges, academically and socially. Teachers can help children with disabilities make this transition by promoting the child's feelings of independence while continuing to provide supportive learning strategies.



First, consider some of the challenges a student might encounter when transitioning from elementary to middle school:

- The school is usually bigger with more students.
- The students have different teachers for each subject and less individual attention by any one classroom teacher.
- There is more homework and more emphasis on grades.
- Peers become more important.
- Students want independence and to express their individuality.
- The students have new responsibilities – a locker, remembering clothes for gym class, etc.

The following are some of the ways teachers and parents can help students with disabilities make an easier transition to middle school. Remember, continuing to provide structure while fostering independence is the ultimate goal.

- **Schedule Intentionally** - Program classes so that the locations are closer together. When scheduling, specifically look for teachers who work well with students with disabilities.

- **Color Code Binders** - Students can code their different subjects using a color coding system (blue for Language Arts, green for Math, etc.).
- **Use a Daily Planner** - If the school does not provide a daily planner, a parent or teacher should purchase a daily planner for the student to use. Choose a planner that is easy to use and has a space to record each subject's homework. Make it the student's responsibility to have the teacher or a peer initial or sign the planner, indicating that the homework assignment is correct.
- **Loose Papers** - Often students receive loose papers such as homework worksheets or permission slips requiring a parent's signature. Provide the student with a folder for keeping up with these papers. This folder should go with the student to each of his/her classes.
- **Keep a textbook at home and school** - Some students with disabilities need to keep a textbook both at home and at school to make sure parents/tutors have all the materials necessary to help with assignments.
- **Teach routines** - Use time in the special education classroom or at home to go over and practice new school routines such as opening a locker, reading a class schedule, organizing materials, following effective hallway routines, etc.
- **Plan the IEP** - During the *IEP* meeting for the first year of middle school, spend extra time as an *IEP Team* determining what accommodations and modifications are appropriate for the student. The team may determine that the accommodations which were necessary for the student in elementary school may not be necessary in middle school, and vice-versa. For more help with accommodations see *Handy Handout #79*.

