

TAHOMA MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT SURVIVAL GUIDE

We know that there are many questions about middle school, so this list of questions and answers was compiled with the help of the teachers, students and parents. If you need further clarification on any of these issues, please feel free to contact us at 425-413-3600 or www.tahomasd.us

ACTIVITIES/ATHLETICS/RECOGNITION

✓ **What are some of the recognition programs in place for students who are “doing the right thing” by turning work in on time and making good behavior choices?**

- We attempt to recognize and reward students in numerous ways including
 - Student of the Month: A boy and girl who exemplify that month’s district outcome is chosen from each team and is recognized at an assembly.
 - Team Celebrations: Teams have teambuilding activities and celebrations through the year.
 - Awards Night: At the end of year, we recognize students with high GPA’s and positive contributions to class.
 - Bear Bucks: Students who contribute positive acts for the school community or someone in the school will receive a “brick” and receive a small prize and have their name read on the announcements.
 - Bear Pride: Students who are involved in activities, community service, earn good grades and make improvements are recognized through a certificate and accompanying stickers.

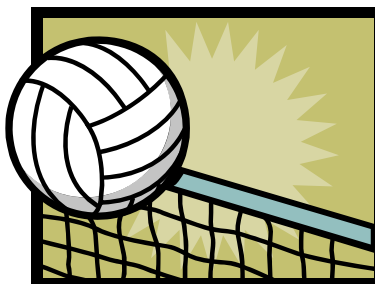


✓ **What type of after school activities are available?**

- Other than the homework centers listed later under academic supports, we have other activities in which students can participate: 6th grade intramural sports, yearbook, drama club, and jazz band. More information on each of these programs will come out in the fall.

✓ **Does my student need a physical to participate in 6th grade sports?**

- Yes, all sports (grades 6 – 12) require a recent physical. Clearance forms are available in the main office.



ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

- ✓ **What is the start, drop off, and end time for school?**
 - School starts at 8:30. Students should be dropped off no earlier than 8:15 since there is not supervision for them until that time.
 - School ends at 3:00 p.m. After school homework centers and other non-athletic activities end at 4:00 p.m. Students are not permitted to stay on campus unless they are participating in a teacher-supervised activity.

- ✓ **When is student orientation?**
 - Student orientation for all incoming 6th grade students is usually the last week in August. In early August, please look for the orientation flyer sent via e-mail on school messenger or check on the school's website.

- ✓ **How do I contact my student during the school day?**
 - Unless it is a medical or family emergency, we ask that parents and students coordinate their plans with each other in the morning before school. Unfortunately, with over 600 students at the school and limited office staff, we are unable to run messages to all the students.

- ✓ **How does my student manage all the assignments and expectations without having their own desk?**
 - The 6th grade year is really the first year of teaching long-term organizational skills. Students will need to use either a binder or an accordion style folder to organize their work into content sections. Obviously having parent support at night to open up the backpack and binder and to make sure everything is in its place is helpful. Also, every academic class uses the planner. This planner includes what homework needs to be completed that night.

- ✓ **Will my student have his/her own locker? How is it used?**
 - Students will have a locker assigned to them. Some students will be asked to partner up.
 - The student is responsible for the contents of the locker and its security. We ask that students do not share their locker combination with anyone.
 - Students can keep unneeded books, cold lunches, and other school-related items in the locker. We ask that non-school related items stay at home. Minor decorations such as a small stick-up mirror, etc. are acceptable.

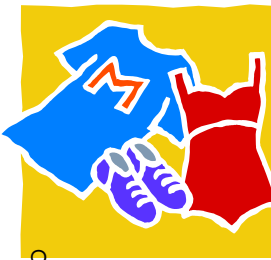
- ✓ **My students' team of teachers don't allow backpacks in the classroom? Why not?**
 - At TMS, we are fortunate to have a locker for every student. However, our rooms were built in 1924, and they are not as large as most modern-day classrooms. Therefore, many of our teams ask students to gather their binder and books before class and leave the bulky backpack in the locker. This leaves more room for students and teachers to move around. Teachers help students learn how to organize themselves to make this successful.

- ✓ **How can I get supply lists?**
 - A general supply list for each grade level will be on the website during the summer. In August, more specific supply lists for each team will be available. These will be items that all students on that team need to have.

- ✓ **When will my student get their schedule so they know which team they are on and what electives they have? Can I change the classes?**
 - Schedules will be available for pick up at orientation in August. Check the website for exact dates and times. Students will also meet their teachers and find out their team at orientation.
 - Because we balance both the teams and the electives very carefully during the summer, we are unable take requests for changes. The only exception is into a program that can accept larger numbers such as band.
- ✓ **Is there recess or longer break in the day?**
 - The only long break in the school day is at lunch time. Even then, we do not have the facilities and supervision to allow for students to run and play tag or football every day (unless we have parent help). We are always looking for parent volunteers who would be interested in helping supervise lunch activities. Let your PTA representative know if you are interested.
 - There are a couple of reasons why longer breaks in the day are not provided more frequently. First, experience and research has taught us that most student discipline such as harassment and bullying takes place during non-structured time. By reducing that time, you reduce opportunities for bullying and harassment. Additionally, with Health & Fitness or an elective class for 75 minutes each day, students have an opportunity to be up and moving around for a substantial amount of time during the school day.

HEALTH & FITNESS

- ✓ **Why do the students wear uniforms for Health & Fitness and do they have to take showers afterwards? Also, what if I cannot afford the uniform?**
 - At this age, it is not hygienic to wear the same clothes for school as well as Health & Fitness classes. Therefore, we standardize what students wear to make sure it is appropriate for working out. A uniform is purchased at the beginning of the year. In August, you will receive a fee sheet that reviews the fees that are due at the beginning of the year. As always at TMS if there is a financial hardship coming up with money at the beginning of the year, or you cannot afford it in general, please contact the cashier, and we can work out a plan for payment or ask PTA for scholarship money to assist your family. The PTA uses the standard of qualifying for free or reduced lunch to consider scholarships.
 - Showers are not required and most students opt not to shower after class. A change of clothes and deodorant seems to be sufficient.



✓ **Will the boys and girls be separated during Health & Fitness?**

- No, the Washington Administrative Code has interpreted federal Title IX law to say that Health & Fitness classes must be heterogeneously grouped by gender. Therefore, for most of the activities there will be boys and girls in the same class.



GRADES

✓ **How does the grading system work compared to 5th grade?**

- It is difficult to answer this question, because the grading systems across the elementary schools differ. However, we do give letter grades at 6th and 7th grade. Each assignment turned in is worth a certain number of points. Points are taken off if the assignment is not turned in on time or if answers are incorrect. Tests and comprehensive projects are usually worth more than daily assignments. The number of points that your student earns is divided by the number of points possible which creates a percentage. This percentage is translated in a traditional manner to a letter grade. While the system used in some 5th grade classes does not generally translate into grades, the following might be used as a guide:

Grade Comparison for Elementary/Middle Schools

Letter Grade	+ and ✓	1-4
A	+	4
B	✓ to ✓+	3
C	✓ to ✓-	2
D/F	✓- to -	1

✓ **What if I don't like a teacher's grading policy or system?**

- You are always welcome to share your opinion about a grading system, though the responsibility of teaching and assessment lies with the classroom teacher who determines a student's grade.

✓ **Why would absences impact my student's grade?**

- Many teachers in secondary school give a small number of participation points. These points reflect the benefit that a student gets and gives by being in class that day. Usually these points cannot be made up even for an excused absence. See your teachers' grading explanation to see if they give participation points. In addition, extended absences due to illness or vacation make it very difficult for students to get work caught up and make it difficult to stay current with the new learning that is taking place. We highly recommend scheduling your family's vacations for non-school times.

✓ **What type of communication can I expect from the student and the school?**

- Information is posted on the website which is updated frequently. Additionally, important information may be communicated by our "School Messenger" system. Having accurate phone numbers and e-mail addresses on file will allow you to receive these communications.
- In a perfect world, teachers would be able to call home to every parent at the end of each school day. However, with over 130 students, teachers are unable to do so. Fortunately,

teachers have set up a number of systems to help keep the parent informed. First, all teachers use their SWIFT website to post the assignments given that day. Students and/or parents should check this website daily. In addition, on-line grades are updated every two weeks. Finally, a parent can always e-mail a teacher for an update and expect an answer within 48 hours.

- In the “First day packets”, a parent handbook with important dates, review of discipline policies, and PTA information will be included.

✓ **What supports are in place for academics?**

- We offer 6th grade students a couple of options. First, there are homework centers after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This after school program has a certificated teacher from the student’s team who can assist students in their core academics. More information about the structure of the after school help will come out in September. Additionally, teachers will work one-on-one with students on an as-needed basis. Please contact your student’s teacher for that additional help.

✓ **How will I be notified about the rules and consequences of the school?**

- Your student will receive a student’s rights and responsibilities handbook. This handbook will have the attendance policy, discipline policy, helpful phone numbers, staff list, etc. Please make sure to read the handbook with your student and return the signature page (just like in elementary school!) After the first week, continue to look at your student’s planner daily to look for homework and other reminders that your student has written down.

✓ **Can I visit my student’s classroom? Can I visit my student at lunch?**

- Because middle school students are self-conscious about being singled out, we usually don’t have parents visiting the classroom unless they have a specific volunteer responsibility that was arranged ahead of time. If you would like to see a particular class, please contact the teacher 24 hours in advance so we can make the arrangements. For doctor’s appointments, parents should come to the front office and have their student released from class. Parents should not go to the classroom to retrieve students. Parents or other community members visiting at lunch must be on the cleared volunteer list since they will inevitably have contact with other children without being directly supervised by a teacher. In addition, anyone visiting on campus needs to check in through the front office and receive a visitor badge.

✓ **How long is lunch? Are there long lines for the hot lunch?**

- Lunch is 30 minutes long with an additional 5 minutes to get to the next class at the end of lunch. Students are expected to sit down and eat in the cafeteria for the first 15 minutes. After their area is clear, the students are dismissed to walk around the cafeteria or go outside to the field. All 7th grade students have lunch together and all 6th grade students have lunch together. There are enough seats in the cafeteria for all students at a lunch and no “saving” of seats is permitted.
- As accounts are being set up and paid for the first couple of weeks of school, the line is long and moves more slowly.



There is still plenty of time for a student to eat their lunch during the lunch-time, but the line will go faster after the first couple weeks of school. Please note that lunches may be paid in advance on-line through the website.

✓ **Is breakfast served?**

- Yes, breakfast is available during the 15 minutes before school starts. Students on free or reduced lunch qualify for free/reduced breakfast. Otherwise, the pricing structure is available on the district website under the food service department or by calling district office at 425-413-3400.

TRANSPORTATION

✓ **How do I know which bus my student is on?**

- The Voice of the Valley publishes the bus runs in the publication a week before school starts. In addition, you can call transportation at (425) 413-3220.

✓ **How does my student get a bus pass?**

- For liability reasons, we need a note from the parent (exact information required is included in both the student and parent handbooks.) The student drops the note off in the morning and picks up the pink bus pass in the afternoon prior to getting on the bus. Permanent bus passes are possible. Please contact the front office for permanent passes. Finally, there are no bus passes on early release days unless it is for a daycare reason.



DISCIPLINE

✓ **What is an infraction? Why would my student get one? Does it go on their “permanent” record?**

- An infraction is a written record of a student not following the rules. Parents sign the white copy of the infraction. It states the student behavior, the staff member’s response, and the consequence for a student.
- Infractions are issued for everything from gum chewing to fighting. If it is a low-level incident, a phone call may not take place, just the parent signature. If the incident involves a consequence such as a Friday School or higher (in school suspension, out of school suspension), there will always be an additional letter and phone call from an administrator.
- Infractions go into a discipline file in the dean of student’s office and on the discipline file on the computer.

✓ **What happens if a student who has always followed the rules now starts acting out, getting poor grades, and not listening to his/her parents?**

- 6th and 7th grade is a time of transition not only for schools, but for families. Most students will re-test boundaries that the family established long ago to see if the boundaries are still there. Parents should anticipate some changes in behavior. If you ever have a question or concern about what has happened at school, please call so that you can hear both sides of a story.
- We recommend to parents that they stay with their consistent form of parenting through middle school. The student may not make it easy on the parent, and the parent will hear “I am the only one with a 9:00 p.m. bedtime; who can’t see Rated R movies, and who has to check-in with my parent.” But, rest assured, yours won’t be the only student with those guidelines.
- If a student is acting out and getting poor grades, it is good to find out possible reasons from the teachers. Is there something happening socially at school? Is the work very hard for the student? Are some changes happening in the household? The counselor can help investigate changes in counseling avenues to behavior and recommend different parents.
- Finally, we highly recommend that parents know the first and last names of their child’s friends and their phone numbers. If your student is going over to someone’s house for the afternoon or evening, call and make sure there will be an adult present. Share with the adult your expectations for behavior and content on television, video games and websites.



Keys to Success at Middle School

- ★ Stay focused on school work. Balance outside activities with homework.
- ★ **ATTENDANCE, ATTENDANCE, ATTENDANCE**
- ★ Ask for help from a teacher or parent if help is needed in school work or in a social situation
- ★ Be involved in school activities
- ★ Find “study buddies” in your classes that you can call if you have questions about homework.
- ★ Check the teachers’ SWIFT websites daily