

Transition to Middle School Program

Los Angeles Unified School District (Local District 4)
Los Angeles, California

The transition from elementary to middle school is often difficult, occurring at a critical time in the social development of adolescents. The stress of adjusting to a new school and classmates affects not only the students, but also their parents and families.

District 4 of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) wanted to make the transition easier for everyone. Although the district had a traditional orientation program, which allowed fifth-graders to visit middle schools, meet teachers and attend orientations, it wanted to do more. District administrators wanted parents to know more about middle school, what their children would experience, and how to help and advocated for their children. District 4 initiated The Transition to Middle School program, in collaboration with a community organization, Families in Schools, and the intervention office of LAUSD.

Ten schools participated this year. The program targets families of fifth graders, who are invited to attend six workshops taught by volunteer parent leaders working with teachers. The series topics are:

- ♦ The Importance of Education
- ♦ The Middle School Campus
- ♦ Academic Achievement
- ♦ Adolescent Social Pressures
- ♦ Parent Engagement
- ♦ Preparing for College.

The workshops include tours of middle schools, explanations of student data, suggestions on how to communicate with teachers and administrators and discussions about college pathways. Each school identified at least 40 families to participate. Parents learn how middle school differs from elementary school and how to support their early adolescents. They also build relationships with other parents. They gain skills in supporting their children academically, socially and emotionally during the sometimes-challenging transition from elementary and middle school.

“This program is excellent!” said one parent. “In the past, the transition to middle school was both confusing and stressful. The program provided me with information that will make it easier for my daughter to attend her new school.”

Teachers, too, found the workshops useful. One fifth-grade teacher said she understands the transition process much better and is able to “confidently communicate with parents, in detail, on the process of elementary to middle school transitioning.”

The district’s Office of School, Family and Community Partnerships played an active role in developing the program. The office staff, one parent coordinator and seven parent/community facilitators worked with the schools to set up the workshops. Each school’s administrators selected the parent/teacher teams, implemented the workshops and identified parent participants. The transition program cost \$12,000, which was paid for by the LAUSD intervention office.

Parents and teachers evaluated each workshop. The information will help improve the content and conduct of the various workshops. The district also will use the data to evaluate how the students adjust and perform on the first grading period in middle school.

Transition to Middle School will be conducted again and improved in several ways. Mainly, it will start early in the second semester. Parent coordinators and parent/community facilitators will be prepared to work more directly with the schools. The district is so pleased with this program that it is considering initiating a similar partnership to ease the transition from middle school to high school.

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