

FAQs on the fifth grade to middle school transition

Summer vacation just started, but preparing for next year now can help ease the transition for incoming Robert J. Elkington Middle School (RJEMS) students.

In Independent School District 318, the 2008-2009 school year will be the first school year that Grand Rapids fifth graders will be located at RJEMS. Many parents and students have posed questions about how a student's educational experience will differ at RJEMS from an elementary experience.

There is no single answer to how a student's educational experience will change. It is, however, fair to say that for next year's fifth graders, some things will remain as they were in the elementary buildings and some things will certainly change.

Below is a list of frequently asked questions regarding the 2008-2009 transition of fifth graders to the middle school. Parents of incoming fifth graders are also encouraged to stay informed this summer. The school district will be posting updated information in coming months on the fifth grade to middle school transition. Updated information will be provided at www.isd318.org and in local newspapers. **Look soon for dates and times on a RJEMS parent open house currently scheduled for August.**

Fifth Grade to Middle School FAQs:

Q: Will fifth graders be moving from class to class each hour as sixth, seventh and eighth graders do?

A: No. Fifth graders will remain with one teacher for the bulk of their school day, just as do students in the elementary buildings. That said, however, students may have one-class switches (music for example) as is already being done in some elementary buildings.

Q: Will fifth grade students be sorted for classes based on their elementary attendance area school? (For example, will fifth graders residing within the Cohasset Elementary attendance area be in classes only with other Cohasset area students?)

A: No. Fifth grade students attending middle school will be intermixed without regard to elementary attendance area. Intermixing students allows the school district to maximize teachers, textbooks and other educational resources. While a student might find this process a little scary at first, remember that all the incoming fifth graders will be in the same situation. They will quickly adjust, keeping old friends from their elementary schools and forging new friendships with kids coming from different elementary buildings.

Q: Can I request a specific teacher for my fifth grader?

A: No. However, if your child has a specific need or learning style that needs to be addressed, you are welcome to call assistant principal Roy Johnson (327-5807) to discuss your child's needs. The middle school staff and district administration will work hard to ensure that every child's needs are met to the greatest degree possible.

Q: Will next year's fifth graders have recess, as elementary students do?

A: Yes and No. Fifth grade "recess" will look a little different next year. Fifth graders will certainly be given time to blow off steam and energy. But, there is no elementary playground equipment at the middle school. There will, however, be appropriate indoor/outdoor recreation time provided for fifth graders.

Q: Will my fifth grader be in a larger class than they would have been in elementary school?

A: No. In fact, additional middle school staff has been hired to **lower** fifth grade class sizes next year. The additional staff is being funded by budget reductions to central school administration.

Q: Will fifth graders intermingle with older middle school students?

A: To some degree, yes. But, fifth graders will likely not intermingle with older students any more or less than they already do on the school bus, in the community and even in the family setting. Fifth graders will have their own lunchtime and educational wing at the middle school. That wing is currently under construction, paid for by funds that were originally earmarked for the construction of a new bus garage.

Q: Why did the school district decide to move fifth graders to the middle school?

A: The school board of ISD 318 mulled several options, knowing that more space in the elementary buildings was needed to house all day, everyday (AD/ED) kindergarten. AD/ED kindergarten began the 2007-2008 school year to provide improved educational opportunity for our youngest students. To supply the space needed, the school board explored the concept of moving fifth graders to the middle school and then eighth graders to the high school. However, the board heard resoundingly from the public that they did not want eighth graders in the high school and instead opted to only move fifth graders to the middle school.

Q: What can I do as a parent to make this transition easier for my child/student?

A: Do the same things you did as the parent of an elementary student. Stay informed and involved in your child's education. If you notice problems, difficulties or behavioral changes in your student, contact middle school staff or administration right away – problems are better solved earlier rather than later. Visit the ISD 318 website to keep up to date on information that might impact your child's education. Finally, be positive and supportive – kids take their cues from their parents. A child who sees that his/her parents

aren't worried about the middle school transition will likely have a positive approach as well.

Q: Is there going to be a change in administration at the middle school next year?

A: Yes. Jeff Britten has been hired as new middle school principal, following the retirement of Len Rothlisberger. Britten will begin his new job as RJEMS principal on July 1.

Those who have additional questions or concerns may call the RJEMS at 327-5800.