

NAVIGATING THE

Transition to Middle School

A thoughtful guide for CHA families

The transition from elementary school to middle school is an exciting milestone for both students and families. Whether your child plans to remain at Chestnut Hill Academy through 5th grade or explore independent or public school options earlier, thoughtful planning can help make the process positive and manageable.

The goal is not to find the most prestigious school, but the school where your child will be happiest, most engaged, and able to thrive.

At a Glance

GRADE 3	GRADES 4-5	THROUGHOUT
Explore options while keeping the focus on curiosity, character, and the joy of learning.	Research requirements, visit schools, prepare thoughtfully, and stay organized.	Maintain balance, communicate openly, and keep the process in perspective.

Grade 3: Begin Exploring

Third grade is a wonderful time to start learning about future opportunities while keeping the focus on your child's current experience.

Focus on What Matters Most Continue nurturing your child's curiosity, confidence, and love of learning. Middle schools consistently tell us they are looking for students who are kind, authentic, hardworking, and engaged members of their communities.

Learn About Different School Options Begin exploring local public and independent schools. Review their missions, programs, extracurricular offerings, and school cultures. Consider the environment in which your child learns best.

Involve Your Child Invite your child into age-appropriate conversations about the future. What excites them? What type of learning environment helps them succeed? What questions do they have about middle school?

Connect with Other Families Families who have already gone through the process can offer valuable perspectives about admissions, school culture, and making a successful transition.

Consider the Path Ahead Some families explore middle school options beginning in fourth grade, while others choose to remain at CHA through fifth grade. Both paths can be excellent choices, and our team is happy to help families think through the options that best fit their child.

Grades 4 and 5: Research, Preparation, and Decision-Making

As admissions timelines become more concrete, families can take a more active role in preparing for the transition.

Understand School Requirements

Each middle school has its own admissions process. Requirements may include:

- Standardized testing, such as the SSAT or ISEE
- Student and parent interviews
- Essays or questionnaires
- Teacher recommendations
- Application materials and deadlines

Begin reviewing requirements early so there is plenty of time to plan.

Prepare for Standardized Testing

Registration for SSAT and ISEE testing often opens in late summer. If testing is required, securing a spot early is recommended.

CHA offers SSAT/ISEE preparation opportunities, and some families also choose outside tutoring or test-prep programs. Whatever approach you choose, it is important to maintain balance and avoid unnecessary stress.

Attend Open Houses and Information Sessions

School visits are one of the best ways to understand a school's culture and community. We encourage families to attend open houses, tours, and admissions events throughout the fall.

Participate in CHA's Middle School Information Session

Each year, CHA hosts a Middle School Information Session where families can learn about the admissions process and meet representatives from local middle schools.

Reflect on School Fit

As you gather information, focus on finding the right fit for your child. A successful middle school experience comes from alignment between a student's strengths, interests, learning style, and the school's environment.

Stay Organized

Applications often have multiple components with deadlines that fall in late fall or winter. Creating a simple timeline can help your family stay on track and reduce last-minute pressure.

Complete Applications Authentically

Encourage your child to approach essays and interviews as opportunities to share who they truly are. Admissions teams want to understand a student's interests, character, and potential, not just their achievements.

Throughout the Journey: Keep Perspective

Maintain Balance Make sure your child continues participating in activities they enjoy, whether that is sports, music, art, clubs, or simply spending time with friends.

Keep Communication Open Check in regularly with your child about how they are feeling throughout the process. Remind them that admissions decisions do not define their worth or potential.

Stay Present It can be tempting to focus entirely on the future, but some of the most valuable growth happens right now. Encourage your child to fully enjoy their elementary school experience while looking ahead with excitement.

The Bigger Picture

Middle schools are not simply looking for strong students. They are looking for young people who demonstrate curiosity, resilience, kindness, integrity, and a willingness to contribute to their communities.

At CHA, our goal is to prepare students academically while also helping them develop the character, confidence, and leadership skills that will serve them wherever their educational journey takes them next.

Start early. Stay organized. Keep the process in perspective.

With thoughtful support, the transition to middle school can be exciting, rewarding, and full of growth for the whole family.