



6th Grade: The Middle School Turning Point



Family Action Guide & Roadmap

NEMS School Counseling Office | CCPS Student Services Department

A Research-Informed Resource Aligned with ASCA National Model Standards



Welcome Families!

Middle school is a major turning point. The attendance habits, academic routines, and collaborative conversations you build with your 6th grader today directly open doors for high school credit success, Career & Technical Education programs, trade certifications, and college pathways.

Use this hands-on toolkit to set up stress-free weekly routines, try out engaging dinner-table career prompts, and track key milestones throughout the school year.



Tool 1: The Non-Punitive Weekly Portal Check-In Checklist



Goal: Build student executive functioning and accountability through support—not punishment.

Setting Up Your Routine

- **Choose Your Day & Time:** Pick one consistent 15-minute window each week (e.g., *Sunday at 5:00 PM*).
- **Sit Side-by-Side:** Open the student portal together on a shared screen or phone.
- **Lead with Positives First:** Celebrate completed assignments, strong attendance, or effort before looking at missing work.

3-Step Collaborative Problem-Solving Protocol

When you notice a low grade, missing assignment, or unexcused absence, use these prompts to keep the conversation productive and constructive:

Step	Focus	Conversation Prompt to Use
1. Inquire	Identify the roadblock without judgment.	<i>"I notice this math assignment is listed as missing. What got in the way of turning it in?"</i>
2. Plan	Empower your child to create a recovery step.	<i>"What is our action plan to get this turned in or reviewed with your teacher?"</i>
3. Support	Connect to school supports if needed.	<i>"Do you need to visit morning tutoring or should we email your counselor/teacher together?"</i>



PARENT SPOTLIGHT: Why Missing Assignments Matter (A Real-World Example)

Imagine a student who is currently doing great in class with an **A (95%)**—they have earned scores of 100%, 75%, and 88% on formative work (40% of grade) and a 100% on a major summative test (60% of grade).

Here is how quickly missing assignments can change that grade:

- **If they miss 1 Formative Assignment (a single missing homework or classwork score of 0):**
 - Their grade instantly drops from an **A (95%)** down to a **B (86%)**.
- **If they then miss 1 Summative Assessment (a single missing test or major project score of 0):**
 - Their grade plummets from a **B (86%)** all the way down to an **F (56%)**.

Because summatives carry 60% of the overall course grade, a single zero on a major project or test cuts their category average in half—taking a student from an A straight to a failing grade. Checking the gradebook regularly for missing work is the single best way to protect your child's progress!

Tool 2: Casual Career & Pathway Conversation Prompts

Goal: Connect your student's hobbies and interests to postsecondary options (*Career & Technical Education, Trades, Certifications, 2-Year & 4-Year Degrees*) without pressure.

Try asking these open-ended questions during dinner or a drive:

- **Exploring Interests:** *"If you could spend a whole day learning how to build, create, or fix one real-world thing, what would it be?"*
- **Problem-Solving & Trades:** *"What kind of hands-on projects or community challenges sound exciting for you to help solve?"*
- **Connecting Hobbies:** *"How do you think the math or science skills you're learning right now apply to jobs like engine mechanics, video game design, or healthcare?"*
- **Reflecting on Strengths:** *"What is something you learned this week that made you feel proud or curious to know more?"*
- **Workplace Preferences & Environments:** *"Would you rather work outdoors, in a laboratory, on a computer, or directly with people every day? What sounds most fun?"*
- **Skill Identification:** *"What is a skill you noticed a friend, teacher, or adult using recently that you'd love to master yourself?"*
- **Impact & Passion:** *"If you could start a business or create a product to make life easier for people in Cecil County, what would it do?"*

Tool 3: Seasonal 6th Grade Roadmap

Fall: Establishing Foundations

- [] **Aim for 90%+ Attendance:** Keep total absences under 2 days per month to stay on track.
- [] **Establish Daily Study Spaces:** Set up a consistent, distraction-free home workspace for daily reading and homework routines.
- [] **Log Into PowerSchool:** Verify access to the online gradebook and attendance tracker.
- [] **Discuss Career Inventories:** Your child has completed two Naviance lessons to help align their interests with potential careers. You can view their results through Clever by using their school log-in.

Winter: Mid-Year Check & Policy Awareness

- [] **Monitor & Review Grades:** Regularly check your child's grades and keep an eye out for missing assignments—a single zero can drastically pull down an overall score and impact future course placements.
- [] **Discuss 9th Grade Credit Shift:** Remind your student that unlike middle school, high school courses earn strict credits where an 'F' stays on the transcript. You need those credits to graduate!
- [] **Twilight:** If your child is falling behind, has missing work, or needs some extra help, consider signing them up for Twilight! Contact the guidance office or your child's teacher for more information.
- [] **Track Mid-Year Growth (STAR Benchmark Testing):** Review your child's winter STAR Reading and Math scores to track their academic growth compared to the fall baseline and identify any needed mid-year learning supports.

Spring: Pathway Exploration & Finishing Strong

- [] **Beat the "Spring Slump":** As the weather warms up, student focus often dips. Help your child maintain their homework and attendance routines through the final marking period to end the year strong.
- [] **Support MCAP State Testing:** Ensure your child gets a good night's sleep and eats a healthy breakfast during spring Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) testing, which measures their proficiency in grade-level standards.
- [] **Reflect on Extracurriculars & Clubs:** Talk with your child about activities or clubs they may have missed out on this year, and brainstorm new sports, after-school programs, or school activities they want to try in 7th grade.
- [] **Review Spring STAR Progress:** Check your child's final STAR Reading and Math assessment results to celebrate their full-year growth and identify any summer enrichment goals.
- [] **Celebrate Executive Functioning Growth:** Recognize your child's organizational progress over the year.

Recommended Reading, District Guides & Digital Resources

Early Warning Indicators & Research Foundations

1. Johns Hopkins University – Everyone Graduates Center (Balfanz et al.)

- **Family Takeaway:** Demonstrates that 6th-grade attendance (missing 10%+ of school) and core academic marks are the strongest predictors of high school graduation—far more predictive than elementary test scores.
- https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/preventing_student_disengagement.pdf

2. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (Allensworth & Easton)

- **Family Takeaway:** Highlights how 6th–8th grade Math and ELA trajectories set the stage for 9th-grade GPA stability, high school credit accumulation, and access to advanced options like CTE or AP courses.
- <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/track-indicator-predictor-high-school-graduation>

Cecil County Digital Portals

- **PowerSchool Parent Portal:** Track real-time attendance, daily marks, and set up automatic alerts on mobile devices. ([CCPS PowerSchool](#))
- **Schoology Learning Management System:** Access daily classroom assignments, teacher announcements, project rubrics, and course materials. ([CCPS Schoology](#))
- **Naviance Student Portal:** CCPS platform starting in 6th grade for career interest inventories, skill assessments, and postsecondary pathway exploration. ([Naviance Login](#))
- **CCPS School Counseling & Student Services Portal:** The official district hub for school counseling contact details, academic intervention pathways, responsive counseling services, and district-wide student support teams. Use this portal to connect directly with your child's counselor or learn about academic support programs. ([CCPS Counseling Portal](#))
- **Parent Guidance & Mental Health Resources:** A dedicated district resource providing monthly family webinars, social-emotional well-being guides, and mental health tools specifically tailored to help families navigate the middle school transition. It offers proactive strategies for supporting your child's emotional growth and stress management. ([Parent Guidance Portal](#))

- **Cecil County Public Library (CCPL) Virtual Integration:** A joint partnership between CCPS and the public library system that grants all CCPS students automatic access to free online 24/7 tutoring, homework help, digital research databases, and e-books using their standard CCPS student ID number. This is an exceptional tool for establishing strong home-study habits. ([CCPS Family Resources](#))



State & District Pathway Guides



- **CCPS Middle School Education Planning Guide (EPG):** The official Cecil County Public Schools guide detailing middle school course descriptions, grading and promotion policies, advanced math tracks, and exploratory elective options. ([CCPS Middle School EPG](#))
- **CCPS High School Education Planning Guide:** The official guide detailing Maryland's 22-credit high school graduation requirements, course sequences, Cecil County School of Technology (CCST) CTE programs, and college dual-enrollment options. ([CCPS High School Guide](#))
- **CCPS Cecil County School of Technology (CCST) Program Directory:** Explores all hands-on Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways offered in CCPS, including program entry criteria and industry certifications. ([CCST Program Directory](#))
- **MSDE Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs of Study:** Official Maryland state frameworks mapping early career exploration to high school career clusters, industry certifications, and dual-enrollment pathways with Cecil College. ([MSDE CTE Portal](#))
- **Maryland Youth Apprenticeship Navigator:** State resources provided by the Maryland Department of Labor to help middle and high school families discover regional trade programs and youth apprenticeships. ([MD Youth Apprenticeships](#))
- **Attendance Works Family Toolkits:** Free downloadable family templates, attendance habit trackers, and practical tips available in multiple languages to support home attendance goals aligned with state standards. ([Attendance Works Family Resources](#))



Student Services & Counseling Contact Card



We are here to partner with you every step of the way! Reach out anytime to schedule an individual student check-in, request academic tutoring supports, or access translation services.

Cecil County Public Schools (District Level)

- Department: CCPS Department of Student Services & School Counseling
- Central Office Phone: (410) 996-5400
- Main Website: ccps.org/administration/student-services
- District Services: District-wide enrollment/transfers, specialized student support, mental health partnerships, and language/multilingual services.

North East Middle School Counseling Department

- Main Website: <https://nems.ccps.org/>
- Office Phone: (410) 996-6210
- Guidance Resources: <https://nems.ccps.org/guidance-resources>
- Guidance Office: (410) 996-6212
- Hours: Monday – Friday | 7:30 AM – 3:00 PM
- Language & Translation Support: Available upon request for all family meetings and materials
<https://www.ccps.org/instruction/multilingual-education/language-access-services>

Thank you for investing in your student's future!