

Commack Middle School

Commack, New York



FAQS

Frequently Asked Questions

...asked by entering 6th graders

...answered by veteran 6th, 7th, & 8th graders*

** Special thanks to Christine Preuss, D-House counselor, for working with our students to design and update this document.*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM UPCOMING 6TH GRADERS

HOW SCARY IS IT GOING INTO THE 6TH GRADE?

It's a little scary at first, but not really that bad. In the beginning of school it's easy to get lost, but the teachers know that and are really understanding about your being a little late to class or getting confused about how to open your locker or where to find your class. They are there to help you. Don't be scared; give yourself time to adjust and you'll be okay.

HOW IS MIDDLE SCHOOL DIFFERENT?

Middle school is different from intermediate school because you have different classes with different teachers. Each class lasts 40 minutes, and you change classes during the day. There are 9 periods (classes) in a day. Also, some classes, like music and gym, you have on alternating days; for example, you would have gym class every other day. Finally, there are a wide range of clubs, activities and sports for you to join.

WHAT IS A GUIDANCE COUNSELOR AND WHY DO WE HAVE COUNSELORS?

A guidance counselor is a person who you can see to talk to about anything, including your feelings, your schedule, how to improve your grades, or even about somebody who is bothering you. Your counselor is a great resource in the middle school, a central person to go to and help you succeed. Your counselor will introduce him/herself to you during your Reading/Language Arts class early in the year. Don't worry, going to your counselor is always a good thing. He or she can help.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE LATE THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF SCHOOL?

If you are late the first few days of school, the teachers won't mind. They know you're just getting used to the building and that the lockers are new for you. They will help you find your classes and then, after a week or so, your teachers will expect you to be on time. If you find that you can't get to some particular class on time, go see your counselor to help you solve the problem.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I COME IN LATE TO SCHOOL?

If you arrive late to school, go to the attendance office which is between the auditorium and the main office, to sign in. If you are having problems getting to school on time, see your

guidance counselor and he/she can help you with time management or any other issues that might be preventing you from getting to school on time.

WHY DO WE NEED LOCKERS AND HOW OFTEN DO WE USE THEM?

We have lockers to stay organized and so we aren't overloaded with carrying books. We use them usually three-four times a day: before homeroom, before and after lunch, and at dismissal; but you are allowed to go to your locker between periods anytime you want. Your locker will be located in your house, close to all your academic classes.

WHAT IF I CAN'T GET MY LOCKER OPEN OR I FORGET MY COMBINATION?

You will get your hallway locker along with your schedule and a chance to learn your combination and try to open your locker during certain days in August. You should copy your locker combination on something that you wouldn't put in your locker, and **you should never tell anyone your combination**. A "locker problems" table will be set up outside the cafeterias for the first few days of school and you would go to that table if you forget your combination or need your locker repaired.

If you forget your combination or can't get your locker open sometime after the first week, you should report the problem to your first-period teacher, who will remind you of your combination or help you report your locker to the custodians as broken. In addition, you can also go to a secretary in your house office about your locker.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN A "HOUSE" IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL? DO I STAY IN THE SAME HOUSE FOR ALL THREE YEARS?

The middle school has three "houses," which are basically smaller learning communities within our school. Our houses are named the "C-house," "D-house," and "E-house."

All of your academic classes (reading language arts, social studies, math and science) will be in your house. Each house has its own office where you'll find the assistant principal in charge of your house, a department chairperson or lead teacher and secretaries. All of the students and teachers on your interdisciplinary team will be in your house. Additionally your homeroom and your locker are located in or near your house.

Sixth graders are all located in the E-house. The E-house is closest to the library, your "wheel" classes and the auditorium. C-house and D-house are both made up of a mixture of both 7th and 8th graders.

HOW DO TEAMS WORK?

You will be part of an interdisciplinary team, made up of the students and teachers of your main academic subjects. The team helps keep a sense of small community, as your teammates will have most of the same teachers and similar assignments and team activities.

WHERE IS THE LOST-AND-FOUND? CAN I GO TO IT ANY TIME?

The Lost-and-Found is located in a closet in the main hallway outside the main office. You must ask a security guard to open it for you. You will be able to find a security guard (look for the yellow or black jacket) near the front entrance around the main office. The best time to check the Lost-and-Found is before or after school or during your lunch period.

I HEARD THAT THERE IS A "BUBBLE" AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL. WHAT IS THE BUBBLE AND WOULD I EVER HAVE TO GO THERE?

The "BUBBLE" is a glassed-in room that sticks out (like a bubble) into the main hallway from the main office. This is where your parents would drop off your lunch and other items that you may have forgotten at home, and you would check there on your way to the cafeteria to see if your parents had left something for you. It's also where you would meet your parents if they wanted to sign you out of school during the day.

HOW MUCH HOMEWORK DO YOU GET?

You get about an hour's worth of homework each night. Some nights it might take over an hour to finish all your homework. Some teachers give more homework than others; math teachers give homework every night. The homework assignments are all different. They help your teachers see if you understand what they have taught.

HOW DO YOU REMEMBER ALL OF YOUR HOMEWORK?

At the start of the school year, you get an agenda book to take around with you all day and then to take home at night. In your agenda book, you have places to write down all of your homework assignments and upcoming tests. Your agenda book also helps you keep track of due dates for long-term assignments (LTAs).

Most of our teachers also use eBoards on the school's website for posting their homework assignments and extra-help sessions. To find a teacher's eBoard, go to www.commack.k12.ny.us, then click on *Middle School* in the yellow strip at the bottom of the homepage. Then find *CMS eBoard Directory* under *Important Links*. Next find the subject your teacher teaches and your teacher's name. Click on the name to see that teacher's eBoard.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU'RE SICK AND MISS CLASSES AND TESTS?

It is your responsibility to get the assignments and complete the work you missed. The best way to find out the work you missed is to call one of your "homework buddies." On the first few days of school, most of your teachers will allow you time in class to write down in your agenda book the names and numbers of two other students who will be your homework buddies for that class.

If you don't understand what you missed or how to do the work, ask your teachers! And be sure to talk to your teachers about when you can hand in the missed work and to schedule a date to make up any tests. You can also email your teachers from home if you are out sick. Sometimes, they can send you some of the work.

WHAT IS HOMEROOM AND WHAT DO WE DO IN IT?

Homeroom is the first period you attend every day. In homeroom, your homeroom teacher takes attendance. We recite the "Pledge of Allegiance" every day, and the "National Anthem" is sometimes sung on Mondays. We have announcements about clubs, sports and other special activities that are going on at CMS that day. The P.A. announcements are posted daily in the cafeteria and outside each house office, and they also can be found on our website; go to www.commack.k12.ny.us, then click on *Middle School* in the yellow strip at the bottom of the homepage. From there, find *Announcements* under *Important Links* in the right-hand column, and double-click on it.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SUBJECTS?

The main subjects are math, science, social studies, and reading/language arts (RLA). RLA is a double period, meaning it lasts for two periods; you will get a break between the periods.

WHAT IS "ELO"? IS THERE A GRADE? HOW OFTEN DO YOU MEET?

ELO stands for "Extended Learning Opportunities." It is a class where you spend 20 minutes reading a book of your choice and 20 minutes doing your homework. The class usually meets on alternating days for the entire year; if you have two ELOs, then you would probably go to ELO every day. You do not receive a grade in this class, but you need to be prepared with a book.

WHEN DO SIXTH GRADERS BEGIN A LANGUAGE AND WHAT LANGUAGES ARE OFFERED?

Language selection occurs during the 5th grade, and, along with your parents, you would select a first and second language choice. There are three languages to choose from: Spanish, Italian, and French. The world language classes begin in sixth grade, meeting on alternate days all year long, and you will receive a grade in that class each quarter.

WHAT IS THE WHEEL? WHAT CLASSES ARE IN THE WHEEL? HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

The wheel is made up of four courses that you take during the year. Each one of those courses lasts for 10 weeks. The courses are: Art, Health, Family & Consumer Sciences, and technology. In Art you paint, use pastels and work with clay. In Health you learn about puberty, drug abuse and healthy eating habits. In Family & Consumer Sciences, you learn about decision-

making, recipes, and kitchen safety. In Technology you use tools to make a knock-hockey board and some other cool projects.

HOW DO YOU STAY ORGANIZED?

There are many ways to stay organized. Some of them are:

1. Carry a binder for every subject or carry a "morning binder" for all your morning classes and an "afternoon binder" for your classes after lunch.
2. Keep a homework folder so you don't have to carry all your binders home every night.
3. Keep your papers organized with dividers naming each subject area (e.g., RLA, math, science) and also sub-areas under each subject (e.g., "notes," "homework," "journal writing").
4. Use your locker at least three times a day and keep it neat and clean. Don't leave food or drinks in your locker overnight.
5. Use your agenda book to keep track of assignments.

WHAT IS AN "LTA"?

"LTA" stands for "long-term assignment." LTAs are projects that you work on over a period of time, usually two or three weeks. Each one is usually worth about 10% of your grade in that subject that quarter. *Suggestion:* Don't do the LTA the night before it is due. Spread out the work over the time given.

DO YOU EAT LUNCH WITH THE PEOPLE IN YOUR GRADE?

In the 6th grade, yes, you do. In the 7th and 8th grades, you can choose to eat in either of the two other cafeterias. (There are three cafeterias altogether.) In the beginning of the year, you have a few days to find people you'd like to sit with; then, after that, you sign a seating chart and stay at the same table for the remainder of the year. If you ever want to change your seat, you have to ask one of the cafeteria teachers or aides to change the seating chart.

At the summer orientation for new students, a list of students will be posted in the new cafeteria showing which students have lunch each period. You can look at the list to see who you know and might want to meet in the cafeteria for lunch the first day of school.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A STUDENT BULLIES YOU?

If a student bullies you there are many people here to help you. You can go to your counselor, a dean, a teacher, the principal or an assistant principal. It's really important to tell an adult if someone is bothering you. The bully will not be told that you were the one who reported the problem.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I'M IN CLASSES WITH KIDS FROM THE OTHER INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL AND DON'T SEE MY FRIENDS OFTEN?

If you are on a team with people you really don't know, the simplest thing to do is talk to them and be friendly. If you just start by saying "hi" and asking them questions about what teachers they have or what subjects they like or what they like to do after school, you will get to know them better. In CMS you have a good chance to meet new people and make new friends, but remember to keep the old ones. A great way to meet new people and also to spend time with your old friends is to get involved in clubs and intramurals.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY IN A SUBJECT?

Every week, teachers are available for extra-help after school and sometimes before school, as well. Your teacher will tell you when s/he is giving extra-help and, if that day is not good for you, you should talk to your teacher about other times or ways to get help. You can also ask your guidance counselor about how to be more successful in your classes.

WHAT IS STRESS? AND WHAT DO I DO IF I FEEL TOO MUCH STRESS?

Stress is the tension in your mind and body that causes you to feel sad or mad. This is caused from trying to do too many things at once.

When you have too much stress you should go to your guidance counselor and tell him/her your problem. Your counselor will work with you and give you stress-management tips.

CAN I BRING MY IPOD OR CELL PHONE TO SCHOOL?

If you bring your Ipod or cell phone to school, they should stay in your locker. After school, you can call or text your parents to pick you up. The rule at school is that you can't have your phone or Ipod out during the day, **even in the cafeteria.**

HOW DO YOU GET HOME AFTER GOING TO A CLUB MEETING, EXTRA HELP or DETENTION?

After school there are late buses that will take you home or your parents can pick you up. The "late buses" leave at 3:30 pm and 5 pm. The late buses all make fewer stops than the regular buses, so you need to check the sheets that are taped to the back doors of the school and near the front main entrance to the school, to figure out which bus to take home; this bus will take you either to your regular stop or to another stop near there.

If your parents are picking you up at either 3:30 or 5 o'clock, they need to go to *the back parking lot* and you need to exit the building through any of the back doors. You will wait on the curb until your parent sees you and drives along the curb to where you are standing. You may step off the curb only to immediately get into your parent's car. You are not allowed to walk across the parking lot alone to where your parent's car is parked.

CAN 6TH GRADERS PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS?

Students in 6th grade can participate in intramural sports, held before and, for some sports (like bowling), after school. A few 6th graders try out and make the danceline, kickline or cheerleading team; however, interscholastic athletics are open to 7th & 8th graders only (by law).

WHAT CLUBS CAN I JOIN?

6th graders can join almost all the clubs offered at CMS. Here is a list of the clubs that CMS plans to offer to 6th graders in 2012-13:

Art Service Club	Math Olympiad	Science Research Club
Art & Literary Magazine Club	Mock Trial/Debate Team	Select Band
Best Buddies Club	Musical Show Club	Select Chorus
Chamber Orchestra	Newspaper Club	Stage Crew
CMS Unplugged	Rocket Club (fall & spring)	StarBooks
Europa Club	School Store Club	Student Government
Jazz Band	Science Olympiad Club	Tri-M Music Honor Society
Lego Club	Science Quiz Bowl Club	Yearbook Clu

WHAT IS A GO CARD AND HOW DO I GET ONE?

A G.O. (Government Organization) Card is your student I.D. card with your picture on it, that the Student Council validates to entitle you to discounts on school things (e.g., the yearbook, school dances) as well as savings on purchases at selected stores in Commack.

Student Council sells the G.O. cards (the validation on your I.D. card) for \$5 at the beginning of the year; announcements are made during homeroom when the cards go on sale. During your lunch period, you can go to the tables set up outside the cafeteria to purchase your validation.

HOW DO KIDS CELEBRATE THEIR BIRTHDAYS AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL?

At the Middle School, birthdays are celebrated privately, not in school. Although some teachers may recognize it's your birthday and say "Happy birthday!" to you, class celebrations are

not allowed. There are other things you are not allowed to do, for good reasons. You may not carry around a bunch of balloons because they are distracting to other and disruptive in class; you may not decorate your locker because the tape mars the finish on the locker doors; and you may not share any food you brought in especially for your birthday (like pizza or cupcakes for everyone at your cafeteria table) because the school recognizes these may pose a risk to other students' health.

HOW CAN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL WEBSITE HELP ME?

The middle school website has a lot of valuable information for students and parents as well. To access the site, you first need to go to the district website for Commack: www.commack.k12.ny.us, click on *Middle School* at the bottom of the homepage in the yellow strip. At this site, you can read the daily school announcements that are read in homeroom. Some teachers and/or interdisciplinary teams post their assignments on their eBoards (see page 5 above for how to get to the announcements and to a teacher's eBoard).

You can also find information about clubs, our library's data bases, letters we send to parents, and lots of other stuff! Just click on the icons on the right and at the bottom of the Middle School's homepage.

WHAT IS THE DRESS CODE?

The details of the dress code are listed in your agenda. In general, the dress code tells you some pretty common sense things about what is appropriate to wear to school. There are no hats allowed in school, and your coat needs to be left in your locker. When you wear shorts to school, they have to be long enough to reach your fingertips. Flip flops can be dangerous on the stairs. This is all about people being comfortable and safe walking around school.

WHAT IS MYP? ARE ALL MY CLASSES GOING TO BE I.B. OR MYP CLASSES?

"MYP" stands for "Middle Years Program," and the MYP is a part of an international organization (the International Baccalaureate Organization or "IBO") that puts teachers in contact with other teachers around the world so that they can share ideas about curriculum and how to teach us.

All the classes at the Middle School are MYP classes and all the students are I.B. students. You probably won't notice much different in your classes, except that your teachers are more likely to ask you "unit questions" that have many answers, to relate the topic they're teaching to other things, to give you rubrics that tell you how an assignment will be graded, and to make you aware of things that are going on in our world that are related to what you're learning in the class. You should take your time responding to a unit question; your answer will take shape or may change as you learn more information about a topic. You'll probably be encouraged to ask your parents how they would answer the unit question and then to figure out why their answer is different from yours.

At CMS we all strive to acquire the traits in the I.B. Learner Profile, and every quarter each house recognizes students who exhibit those traits. The MYP, and all the I.B. programs, aims "to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world." The Learner Profile describes students who are what we try to be:

- **Inquirers:** You are curious and ask important questions to inquire into the world around you. You research independently and love learning throughout life.
- **Knowledgeable:** Through your enthusiastic exploration of local and global issues you build an in-depth knowledge and understanding across all subject areas.
- **Thinkers:** You think both critically and creatively to help solve problems and make responsible decisions.
- **Communicators:** You are able to understand and express yourself confidently in more than one language. You work well and enthusiastically in team situations.
- **Principled:** You demonstrate honesty, a sense of fairness and respect towards those around you. You take responsibility for your own actions.
- **Open-minded:** You take pride in who you are. You are respectful of other's opinions, traditions and values. You consider more than one point of view when making decisions.
- **Caring:** You are considerate towards the needs of others. You are committed to making a positive difference to others and to the environment.
- **Risk-takers:** You are confident and show courage in new situations. You are keen to try new things. You defend your beliefs.
- **Balanced:** You recognize the importance of caring for yourself - physically, emotionally and intellectually!
- **Reflective:** You think carefully about how you learn through different experiences. By being able to recognize your strengths and limitations you can set goals for further learning and developing.