

Own the Launchpad: Setting 5th Graders Up for Middle School Success

Attendance drops in 6th grade, and for many students, it never fully recovers. Right now, your 5th graders are at their most comfortable and most connected, and that's exactly the moment to teach them what's coming.

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1

Help Every Student Identify a Future Trusted Adult

Students thrive when they feel known. That takes practice. 5th grade is a critical time to build the social and emotional skills they'll need to navigate the middle school transition.

In 5th Grade:

- ✓ Talk explicitly about "Who will be your person next year?"
- ✓ Invite middle school counselors or teachers from the feeder schools to visit
- ✓ Teach students how to introduce themselves to an adult
- ✓ Practice what to say when they need help



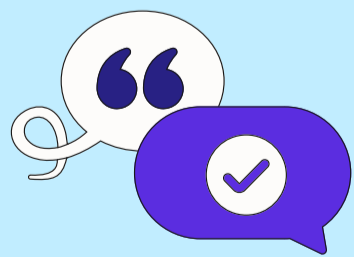
You're teaching access, a hidden skill essential to student success. By 5th grade, students are ready to own these skills. And they're about to need them.

Practice Sentence Starters:

"Hi, I'm new here and I'm trying to figure out how this works."

"I'm having a hard time keeping up with assignments."

"Can you help me understand what I missed?"



Practice these out loud. Role-play the awkward introduction, the moment they need help, the conversation they'd rather avoid. When students have rehearsed something once, they can do it for real.



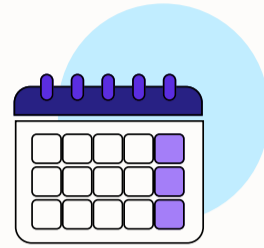
2

Normalize That It Will Feel Uncomfortable

New environments take adjustment. Schedules take time to learn. Finding “your” people takes a little while. Teaching students to expect all of this means they recognize it as normal when it happens.

Teach Students:

- ✓ New environments feel awkward
- ✓ Schedules feel confusing
- ✓ You might not know where to sit
- ✓ You might not know who your people are yet



Steps 5th Grade Leaders Can Take:

- Run transition assemblies
- Host panels with current middle schoolers
- Have honest conversations about what changes

Success is 90% preparation. That means two things: preparing students for what new feels like, and preparing them with the skills to navigate it.

3

Teach Why Attendance Matters Even When You Don't Feel Like Going

In elementary school, attendance is adult-driven. In middle school, it often shifts to student agency. 5th grade is where you begin handing that ownership over.

Reinforce a message like:

“Every time you show up when it's hard, you're proving something to yourself. Not to your teacher, not to your parents. To you. And that proof stacks up. The kid who shows up in October even when they don't know anyone yet is the same kid who shows up in November with a friend. Attendance builds on itself.”

You're reframing attendance as resilience before they even set foot in middle school.

4

Give Students a Plan for Hard Days

5th grade teachers and counselors can do something incredibly practical: replace the avoidance pathway before it forms. **Teach students what to do when they're overwhelmed:**



Go to the counselor



Email their teacher



Ask for deadline clarification



Tell a trusted adult

When students have a plan, they use it. You're building the habit now, when the stakes are lower and the support is close.

