

# **A USER'S GUIDE TO FARRAGUT MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR SOON-TO-BE 6TH GRADE PARENTS (CREATED BY THE HASTINGS PTSA)**

Welcome to 6th grade! We all think that the big middle school transition comes in 5th grade, but it actually comes the next year when our kids enter 6th grade. This is the year when kids move from class to class and have close to 9 teachers. It can take them until at least November to get used to things. They forget their homework; they bring home the wrong homework; they forget the book they need to read; they forget their instruments... FMS does a great deal to help kids keep things organized (they provide agendas, recommend supplies that can help, and ask teachers to have robust web pages), but it is a definite learning curve. And then there are the emotions and the hormones and social media thrown in to add to the excitement! As hard as it can be, though, our kids really do flourish in 6th grade. They love being able to switch from class to class, and they love having more freedom and responsibility.

This document is an attempt to clarify a few key points about how FMS operates to help ease the transition. And remember: FMS provides all students with a school counselor who can also be a great resource for parents. And our principal, Gail Kipper, and assistant principal, Chris Keogh, are very accessible and more than happy to talk with parents about concerns.

The Parent / Guardian tab on the FMS website also has some very useful information (calendars, activities, forms, etc). Please be sure to check it out!

## **Receiving your child's schedule:**

Draft schedules will be posted on the portal the end of August. Class lists that show all the students in your child's classes are not provided. Students receive their final, updated schedules on the first day of school during homeroom, which is the first period of the day on A-C-E days (see below for an explanation of the block schedule). Homeroom teachers will help explain how their schedules work.

## **School hours:**

The library and cafeteria open at 7:30 for those students who need to come early. Students may go to their lockers at 8:05 and then go to their first period class; instruction begins at 8:15. Classes end at 2:45, and the activity period (see below) ends at 3:15.

## **Drop-off and pick-up protocol:**

The area around the middle school and high school is, unfortunately, highly trafficked. If possible, please have your child walk to school. If you have to drive or pick up your child, please enter the driveway in front of the school from westbound Mt. Hope Blvd (do not attempt to make a left from Farragut Parkway and circle into the driveway). If your child is not promptly exiting the school, please do not wait in the driveway and block traffic. Instead, go around the block and re-enter the driveway. Please also remind your kids to be aware of cars as they cross the crosswalks near the school; far too often, kids are on their phones and are not paying attention as they cross busy streets.

## **Block schedule:**

Starting in 6th grade, students follow a 6-day block schedule. A particular class may meet on an

A-C-E day for 80 minutes; another class may meet on a B-D-F day for 80 minutes. In 6th grade, though, ELA classes meet every day for 80 minutes. The block schedule provides greater teaching time, and kids gain the opportunity to learn how to manage their time and plan how best to complete their assignments. The block schedule also gives kids more time to get homework done since most classes don't meet each day.

### **Supplies:**

Supply lists are posted on the 6th grade team page toward the end of the June (students are not expected to have all of their supplies on the first day of school; they should have them by the first Friday after school starts). On the list you'll find pocket folders or 1" binders and/or composition notebooks for most core subjects (large zip binders are no longer recommended for 6th grade). The supply chart can look overwhelming at first because it captures all the items needed for each of the nine classes, but rest assured that most of these supplies are truly used throughout the year. As the year goes on and they better understand their learning/organizational style, some students may decide with their teachers that they will use different strategies / supplies for organizing their work. Students are encouraged to make a system for organizing their locker and book bag and to dedicate time on a weekly basis to file papers and straighten up.

Teachers, especially the 6th grade Team Coordinator, and the school counselor can help with all of this. FMS also offers an organizational class to those kids who need extra support; parents should contact their school counselor for more information.

Each year, every child receives an FMS agenda notebook where they will record their homework assignments. This agenda notebook also has a tool where they can plan how they will get their work done each day. At the front of the agenda notebook, you will also find all sorts of useful information, including staff phone numbers, the FMS code of conduct, general information and procedures, an explanation of student services, and expectations of student behavior. Many parents don't realize just how useful these agenda notebooks can be! Of course, the agenda is only effective when students use it consistently, bringing it to class and back and forth from home to school. This provides another opportunity for students to take responsibility for their learning.

### **Lockers:**

Students have access to their lockers before school, after school, and before and after lunch. Students leave their bookbags and backpacks in their lockers during the day.

### **Accessing technology:**

#### *Parent Portal (eSD)*

From your computer or mobile device, you can find information about your child's schedule and attendance on the Parent Portal. For grades 5-12, you can also view report cards and grades and comments on formal assessments (tests, quizzes, graded homework for some subjects and projects). Keep in mind that not every learning activity is assessed formally on a daily basis. And, numeric grades don't always tell the entire story of a child's learning. Teachers may reach out to parents via email to share notable academic successes and struggles. Similarly, parents can communicate the same to teachers via email. As teachers spend most of their day interacting with students, please keep email communication brief and to the point (be sure to use your child's first and last name in all communication), and understand that teachers may not be able to answer until the end of their teaching day.

If you've been at FMS for 5th grade and are already registered for the Parent Portal, you are set to continue using it. If you are new to FMS *or if you've never registered for the portal*, please register. Please note that teachers email parents with the emails that are registered through the Parent Portal, so it is critical that every parent register. Here's how:

At the left side of the district home page, under Quick Links, you'll find a link to the eSchoolData Parent Portal. You must register first using your child's School ID (found on their schedule or report card). This registration must be verified by the district, which often takes a few days. There's a link for Online Registration on the portal's logon page. If you need help, a link to instructions is just below the Parent Portal link on the home page. If you need further help, please contact Michele Porter, the Registrar, at 478-6207 or email her at [porter@hohschools.org](mailto:porter@hohschools.org). You can also contact Michele Porter to verify that your information is correct.

FMS sends an e-blast encouraging parents to logon to the Parent Portal midway through each quarter in order to view student progress. Paper report cards are no longer provided. At the end of each quarter, FMS sends an e-blast announcing when report cards are posted on the Parent Portal. Because the parent portal does not store past year's report cards, FMS recommends that parents print out final report cards at the end of each year.

#### *Student Portal*

Starting in the 6th grade, students can also access their grades through the Student Portal. Students learn how to access the Student Portal during technology class. Whatever is shown on the Parent Portal is shown on the Student Portal. The technology teacher can reset passwords as needed.

#### *Teacher Web Pages*

This is the platform that includes teacher web pages, homework assignments, and class resources. All of the teacher pages have now been standardized. You can click on the calendar to access assignments, or you can click on links for current or past due assignments.

#### *6th grade team page*

Here you will find information about grade-wide activities such as trips, special events, and projects. The supply list will be posted here, as well as copies of permission slips and other relevant documents. The team page also contains a calendar that aggregates major assignments from all subjects. Students and parents can use this page to help in time management.

#### **Snack/Lunch/Recess:**

Students are given time each day during the 3/4 block to eat a snack. Please be sure to pack one; a mid-morning snack gives kids a much-needed energy boost! As students eat their snack at their desks, which are shared with other students in other classes, please be mindful of allergies and avoid snacks with nuts.

If your middle school child buys lunch, you can pay for it through an online account that you replenish as needed. Go to [www.mypaymentsplus.com](http://www.mypaymentsplus.com) to register. You'll need your child's school ID number to do so. (And your child will need to enter that ID number in the cafeteria, so be sure he/she knows it.) Or, you can save yourself the service fee by sending a check to the school with your child made out to "Lunch Fund" with your child's ID number in the memo portion of the check. Your child will need to

hand it off to the cashier when he or she purchases lunch.

Kids who bring their own lunch should keep it in their locker until lunchtime.

There are 20 minutes allotted for lunch and 20 minutes allotted for recess. There simply is not enough time for students to cross Hillside Avenue to play at Reynolds Field.

Each day, the cafeteria supervisor distributes recess passes for those kids who would rather be in the library, computer lab, and game room. Students form a line and are handed the pass they ask for. There are twenty passes for each of the three alternate locations. Passes are usually all handed out within a minute or two, although on days when there is indoor recess there may be a little more of a wait. Video-game playing is not allowed during recess or before or after school.

### **Shoes and clothing for gym:**

Students are not required to change for gym. They should wear comfortable clothing and sneakers.

### **Communications:**

Paper flyers are rarely used in middle school. Most communications for school events come through eblasts, so be sure you are signed up to receive them (by contacting Jeanine Genauer at [Genauerj@hohschools.org](mailto:Genauerj@hohschools.org)). It is also helpful to check your child's teacher's webpage, as well as the 6th grade team webpage, on a regular basis. And many times, for better or worse, we must rely on our children to tell us things. Gail Kipper also has a monthly newsletter, which can be found on the FMS home page under "Quick Links" (it also comes out as an eblast).

A class directory with phone numbers and emails is provided at Back to School Night and is also available in the main office.

### **Homeroom:**

Homeroom is the 1st period of the day on A-C-E days. Attendance is taken period by period every day.

### **Student Absences:**

When students are absent, they are expected to complete the classwork missed. During the first week of school, students are given the opportunity to identify homework buddies in each academic class. Students will record contact information for these homework buddies in their agenda book.

Students can reach out to their homework buddies to find out what work was missed when absent. Often times, copies of needed documents are available on the teacher webpage so that students can access them from home. Students can also show their responsibility for their work by emailing their teacher themselves using their school Google email account.

When students return to school, they should also visit their teachers after school to make sure they know which assignments they have missed. If they are absent for several days, their school counselor can assist with getting their missed assignments. Be sure to call the Attendance Line at 478-6223 and leave a message stating the reason why your child is absent.

### **Late starts and early dismissals:**

Late starts, where school starts at 9:35, happen periodically (please check the PTSA calendar).

During late starts, each class period, including lunch, is shortened. It is often useful for kids to bring lunch from home on late start days. On late start days, school ends at 2:55. If you need to drop your child off earlier, there are supervised areas where your child can wait for the start of school.

Early releases also take place periodically. School ends at 11:45 and does not include lunch.

**When your child forgets something:**

To minimize disruptions during class time, students will not be “buzzed down” to the office for items that are dropped off for them during the school day. Instead, notifications with the student’s name are posted on the Drop Off Board, which is in front of the main office. Students are reminded by teachers throughout the day to check the board for notifications. Classes will be interrupted only in emergencies.

**Parent - Teacher Conferences:**

Parent – Teacher Conferences take place in November. Parents can schedule up to 3 conferences total with the teachers of their choosing (there simply is not enough time for parents to meet with all of their children’s teachers). The 6th grade Team Coordinator, though, can coordinate conferences with a fuller suite of teachers on an as-needed basis in order to discuss and address any global concerns that many impact many classes; please contact the Team Coordinator to arrange this. Please also remember that parents can always schedule time to meet with teachers outside of conference times.

**Use of Mobile Devices:**

All FMS students must keep their cell phones and other mobile devices in their lockers all day, including during lunch and recess. They can retrieve their phones at 2:45. If students must call home, they may use an office phone; if parents must reach their children, they should call the main office. Cell phones that are misused will be confiscated and returned at the end of the school day. This policy also extends to field trips.

And remember: even though your kids swear that they are the only ones without a cell phone or an Instagram, it’s really not true. Plenty of FMS students survive without them! Consider whether your child is developmentally ready to face the challenges brought on by technology and social media, and remember that most social media sites require children to be at least 13 years old!

**Activity period:**

The activity period is the time after the last period from 2:45 - 3:15. Students should visit any of their teachers at this time to get additional help or to work on homework. Please plan extra curricular activities and appointments accordingly so that students are available for this activity period until 3:15.

**After school activities:**

There are several clubs that kids can join after school. Flyers about these clubs are posted throughout the school, and a list of clubs is provided at Back to School Night. Clubs run from 3:15 - 4:30 typically. The new Maker Space is open on Tuesdays after school. You can also go to the Parent/Guardian tab on the FMS website to see a list of extracurricular activities.

**Music program:**

Orchestra, Band, and Chorus are offered at Farragut Middle School. All students are welcome to join as beginners. Please contact the teacher directly. Weekly instrument lessons take place during the

school day according to a rotating schedule so that the same academic class is not missed each week. Students are responsible for making up the missed class by checking in with the teacher during the activity period on the day of the lesson.

*Band* (Mike Rubino: rubinom@hohschools.org) meets as a class on "D" days and "F" days during the 3/4 block. The second and fourth quarter, it meets on "D" days only. Group lessons take place on "A" days.

*Orchestra* (John Carini: carinij@hohschools.org) meets as a class on "B" days and "F" days during the 3/4 block. The First and third quarter, it meets on "B" days only. Group lessons take place on "B" days.

*Chorus* (Jon Riss: rissj@hohschools.org) 6th Grade Chorus rehearses on B days during the 3/4 block, and also on D days during the 3/4 block in Quarters 1 and 3.

When Chorus and Orchestra/Band meet on the same day, students are shared between groups. All groups perform in the Grades 5/6 Spring and Winter Concert.

#### **Intramural sports:**

Drew Wendol, one of the PE teachers at FMS, runs an Intramural program for all middle school students (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) throughout the year. They run sessions during the morning (starting at 7:00am) in the fall, winter, and spring and offer a variety of sports and games throughout the year, such as basketball, soccer, matball, dodgeball, and volleyball. Mr. Wendol posts all of the information throughout the school, he makes announcements in PE classes, and he posts information on his school webpage. The students can come to whichever sport they like and show up whenever they want. Parents can email him at wendola@hohschools.org to find out more information.

Mr. Wendol also posts information about a variety of community athletic offerings (camps, clinics, teams) by the Middle School PE locker rooms.

Modified sports start in the 7th grade. Modified sports are at the level below Junior Varsity. Several sports are offered each season. Students choose a sport and then are expected to attend practice 5 days a week, typically from 3:15 - 5:30 or so, as well as any games.

#### **PTSA and SEPTA meetings:**

The *Hastings PTSA* is a nonprofit, membership association that seeks to bring together the home, school and community on behalf of all children and youth. The PTSA holds parent meetings every 6 weeks.

Please reach out to your FMS liaisons with any concerns that could be part of the agenda for these meetings (you can find out who your liaisons are by going to the district home page, clicking on the "Community" tab, and then clicking on the PTSA link). The FMS VPs meet with Gail Kipper prior to the meeting to set the agenda. Agendas are then blasted to the community a few days before each meeting.

Feel free to contact the PTSA at [hastingsonhudsonptsa@gmail.com](mailto:hastingsonhudsonptsa@gmail.com).

*SEPTA* is a unit of the New York State PTA organization with local chapters that focus on supporting families and children, especially those with any kind of special need. *SEPTA* exists to be a source of information on research and progress in the field of special education and learning disabilities. Membership is open to all parents, family members, guardians, teachers and professionals with an interest in the education and well being of children with special needs.

*SEPTA* holds coffees periodically. You can contact *SEPTA* with suggested agenda topics at [hastings.septa@gmail.com](mailto:hastings.septa@gmail.com). To learn more about *SEPTA*, please go to the district home page; click on the “Community” tab, and then click on the *SEPTA* link.