

# **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 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. Ms. Ryan is the grade 6 school counselor. Ms. Jocelyn Perez can also be a great resource for parents - she is the school counselor for other grades.. And our principal, Jennifer Spirelli and new Assistant Principal, Kamillah Dawkins, 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 at 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. Homeroom teachers will help explain how their schedules work.

## **School hours:**

The cafeteria opens 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. Students are marked as tardy as of 8:15. Classes end at 2:45, and the activity period or Academic Coaching 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. The District and the PTSA have engaged a traffic engineer to better assess the area around the Farragut Complex.

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.

**Schedule:**

In 6th grade, students follow a 6-day schedule. ELA classes meet for 80 minutes (only in 6th grade) while all other classes are 40 minutes.

**Supplies and Organization:**

Supply lists are posted on the FMS website on July 1st. 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.

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 book bags and backpacks in their lockers during the day. Students can walk around school with a small string bag but not their larger backpack.

**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 the subject line 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. Here's how to register:

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 478-62060 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 log on to the Parent Portal midway through each quarter in order to view student progress. Paper report cards are no longer provided. Ten days to two weeks after the quarter ends, FMS will send an eblast 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.

Teachers generally import grades into the portal when work has been returned. A zero indicates that the assignment was not submitted at the point when the teacher has entered the grades. An ! is a placeholder that means that a grade has not been entered yet. The teacher may be in the process of updating the portal or that work may have been submitted and the teacher may be in the process of grading. Three asterisks (\*) also indicates a missing assignment. Some teachers input "INC" to mean that the assignment has been submitted but it is missing components and needs to be revised and resubmitted. An "INC" as a quarter grade sometimes means that a student had an extended illness and is still making up work at the end of the quarter when the portal was closed.

#### *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.

#### *Google Classrooms*

Each class will have their own Google classroom which will be set up on the first day of school with the teacher's help. Teachers will invite their students to join the class and provide a code if needed. Your student can see all of their assignments within Google classroom. Parents can access Google Classroom by having their child log in with the given Google credentials. We also suggest parents download the Google classroom app onto their smartphones to make keeping track of assignments and grades a bit easier for you.

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

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 will keep it in their locker until lunchtime.

There are 20 minutes allotted for lunch and 20 minutes allotted for recess in the school yard. There simply is not enough time for students to cross Hillside Avenue to play at Reynolds Field. In addition PE classes use Reynolds field during the lunch periods.

Each day, the cafeteria supervisor distributes recess passes for those kids who would rather be in the library. Students form a line and are handed the pass they ask for. 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.

**Physical Education:**

PE is every other day for 40 minutes. Students are not required to change clothes for PE class. They should wear comfortable clothing and sneakers on days they have PE.

**Communications:**

Paper flyers are not used in middle school. Most communications for school events come through The Hastings Daily and eblasts, so be sure you are signed up to receive them (by contacting [communication@hohschools.org](mailto:communication@hohschools.org)) It is also helpful to check your child's teacher's google classrooms. And many times, for better or worse, we must rely on our children to tell us things. Jennifer Spirelli also has a monthly newsletter, which can be found on the FMS homepage under "Quick Links." It also comes out in the Hastings Daily at the start of each month. The newsletter has information about upcoming events and what is occurring in the classes.

**Homeroom:**

Homeroom is the 1st period. 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. Assignments are on Google classroom so that students can access them from home. Students can also show their responsibility for their work by emailing their teacher themselves.

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 more than two 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.

**Early dismissals:**

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

**When your child forgets something:**

You can drop an item off at the security desk but the school asks that it is important or necessary items. The class is interrupted to inform the teacher to tell the student to go down to security at the end of the period to pick up the item.

Sixth grade is a good time for students to learn the natural consequences of forgetting items. Rather than calling home, students are encouraged to problem-solve and find ways to compensate for the missing item.

**Parent - Teacher Conferences:**

Parent – Teacher Conferences take place in November. Parents will receive a notice in October about scheduling conferences online. 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 may 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.

**Cell phone use:**

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. In repeated examples the administration calls home to come up with a plan.

Students are not allowed to bring cell phones on field trips. Teachers will be in contact with the school throughout the trip and can relay an urgent message to a student, if necessary.

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 smart phones or social media! 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 or also referred to as Academic Coaching 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 - 4:15 typically. 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](mailto:rubinom@hohschools.org))

*Orchestra* (John Carini: [carinij@hohschools.org](mailto:carinij@hohschools.org))

*Chorus* (Jon Riss: [rissj@hohschools.org](mailto:rissj@hohschools.org))

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 and modified sports:**

Drew Wendol, Athletic Director, 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 on an Intramural Google Classroom page, throughout the school, and he makes announcements in PE classes. The students can come to whichever sport they like and show up whenever they want. Parents can email him at [wendola@hohschools.org](mailto: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. The PE department typically holds parent and student meetings prior to each season to discuss expectations.

### **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, Tammy Black and Emma Sollars, 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 Jennifer Spirelli & Kamillah Dawkins prior to the meeting to set the agenda. Agendas are then blasted to the community a few days before each meeting.

*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.