

AN EXCELLENT SIXTH GRADE ADVENTURE

All Kealing Middle School teachers want to see all students succeed. We are ready and willing to help students and their families to achieve that success, even if it looks a bit different from past successes. We know you and your sixth grader are the right fit for Kealing. It might not always feel like it, but your students will leave Kealing knowing they were challenged and are ready for future challenges.

There is no denying that sixth grade can be a very tough year for some children. Leaving the familiarity of elementary school to attend a new school with more students and different teachers each class period and more homework and responsibility can be confusing, if not overwhelming. Add the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development and most sixth graders start to feel like aliens and parents may actually check for antennae.

To assure our sixth graders and their families there are no aliens among us, the Kealing sixth grade teachers want to share some recommendations we've gathered over our combined years of experience. We hope you will find these helpful in guiding your students to success here at Kealing with minimal stress and frustration. And, of course, we look forward to your insights about how we can better support our students and families on this adventure.

HOMEWORK

Kealing homework can feel like more of a burden for students and families than homework from elementary school. Students will have homework on a daily basis, sometimes requiring up to two hours after school. Class work may become increasingly difficult with more abstract concepts being introduced. It is essential for students to understand that no teacher plans for students to suffer over homework. Attempting the homework and asking for help as soon as possible lets teachers know the student is concerned about the work and wants to do well. Obviously you know your student better than we do, but we hope these guidelines will help. Please do keep in mind that the child you know is a pre-teen and changing significantly.

1. **AT HOME:** Set aside a place and scheduled time every day for homework. Some students are more productive right when they get home, while others do better after having some time to relax. Choose a time that works best for your student and a time when you will be available for encouragement and support. Make sure televisions, cell phones, radios, videogames and iPods are turned OFF. Please make sure siblings understand these conditions and are not allowed to bother the student. Some homework projects require a computer and/or the internet. If you don't have one available, be willing to take your child to the local library or arrange for the student to stay after school to use the school library or go to a teacher's office hours.
2. **AT SCHOOL:** Keep a copy of teachers' office hours at home and in the agenda book. Every teacher has office hours Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday every week. When a student is struggling in a class, make a plan for the student to stay after school. Write that plan in the agenda book right after homework time and review it in the morning. Make sure students know exactly how they will get home if they stay late for office hours. Students can go to any teacher's office hours, not just their assigned teacher. For example, students in Ms. Pearce's science class can go to Ms. McDonald's or Mr. Applegate's office hours if they need help on a day when Ms. Pearce does not have office hours.
3. **INCENTIVES AND CONSEQUENCES:** Many students do their best work when they add in a break after forty-five minutes or an hour of homework. Climbing a tree, a quick bike ride and dancing are great ways to make sure students maintain balance between study and play. Try using natural consequences to motivate students to do homework quickly and without argument. For example, they may miss out on playing with other kids in the neighborhood or watching TV with the family if their homework isn't done first. It may take a few times for students to see that you'll really follow through with the consequence, but it will teach students to become more self-motivated.

KEEPING IT TOGETHER

1. **BLOCK SCHEDULE:** Homework should be started the day it is assigned. Since we meet on a block schedule, students have two days in which to complete assignments. Starting A-day assignments on A-days and B-day assignments on B-days helps keep work from piling up, and allows time for students to contact teachers if they have questions about assignments. This will also help keep an assignment from getting a lower grade because it was turned in late.
2. **AGENDA BOOKS:** Check agenda books daily. All students have been given an agenda book, and teachers expect students to use them. There will usually be a homework assignment from each core class, so there should be something written in the agenda every time a core class meets. Agendas also have a monthly view in which long term dates (like project due dates, test dates, etc.) should be written. Students might be more inclined to use the agenda if they also use it to mark birthdays, holidays and other significant personal dates.
3. **ORGANIZATION:** Set one day a week aside for backpack inspection. While all teachers ask students to organize binders, school supplies and other materials a certain way, help your students examine the organization system to see if it works for the student. If not, help your student brainstorm a better system and have them check with each teacher to make sure it is reasonable for each class. Then help your students to stick with it, even if it has some glitches that might need tweaking. It takes consistent thought, effort and planning before organization becomes a habit. Work together to create a system at home for papers adults might need to read and/or sign and stick with it as well. Colored folders in a predetermined area can be used when adults have to travel or work late hours. If a student travels between two homes, please try to keep the same organization plan in place for both homes. Ask teachers about the possibility of resources being doubled so students will have what they need at each home.
4. **TEACHER WEB PAGES:** Thoroughly explore teacher home pages together. Each core class teacher has a web page with information about class content, assignments and downloadable documents. Check the page often to keep track of what your student is doing in class, and when assignments are due. You can also use the page to help make up assignments missed due to absences. Go to kealingmagnet.org and click black box titled TEACHERS' HOME PAGES. Next you will click on the subject, then find the teacher's name. While the pages are updated on a regular basis, please do not let your student depend solely on the page for retrieving homework assignments. It is still essential for students to use agenda books.
5. **GRADESPEED PARENT CONNECTION:** *ParentConnection* is a web-based program for parents, students and guardians to access a student's assignments, current grades and attendance. You can access *ParentConnection* and create an account by visiting the *ParentConnection* page of the Austin ISD website. If you are concerned about a grade you see, please ask your student about it the first opportunity you have to do so. The three codes teachers may use instead of a grade are Msg (missing), Exc (excused) and Inc (incomplete). The code for missing may mean the assignment is in a backpack and simply needs to be turned in or it may not have a name on it. Excused usually means the student does not need to make up the grade, and incompletes may mean the work still needs to be finished due to an absence. If your student isn't able to explain a certain grade, then ask the student to talk to the teacher. If your student still does not know the reason for the grade, please contact the teacher directly.
6. **CONTACTING TEACHERS:** Please encourage your student to talk directly to teachers regarding any questions or concerns about assignments, grades or any hurt feelings a student might have. The average eleven-year-old is freefalling into adolescence and it is normal and common for them to have sudden mood changes. Your student might feel confident one moment and helpless the next. Students need to be reminded that emotions are real, but not permanent, and might be based on misunderstanding rather than fact.
7. **SPEND TIME TOGETHER:** Schedule a family night once a week. Watch a movie together, play games, make dinner together, or choose another activity everyone enjoys. Encourage everyone to share how their week went and to discuss any troubles someone may have. Keep it fun and you'll find the kids reminding you about it!

Thank you for sending your wonderful students to us.

Charlie Applegate
Science

Cara Crouch
Social Studies

Denise Girardeau
Math

Megan McDonald
Science

Logan Pearce
Science

Cindy Stewart
English

Vidal Cid
Science/SMIA

Alexandra Eusebi
Math

Ronald Jackson
Social Studies

Sarah Morgan
English

Sharon Roy
English

Will Shoaf
Social Studies