



Franklin Pierce School District

Succeeding in Sixth Grade

Part Two

HEY! You did it! Both you and your child survived the transition.
Now, how do you get your child excited about learning?

Important things to know about— Making school meaningful

- Motivating your children by connecting their learning to their goals.
- Identifying your child's inborn talents.
- Tying talents to classes and activities.
- Encouraging children to learn and explore.

What can you do to motivate your child?

The best way to motivate your child is from the inside out. Kids' inner motivation is a much, much stronger force than rules enforced from the outside. Help them see the connection between achievement in school and what they want to be and do, and let their inner energy do the rest.

Middle schoolers are just beginning to wonder about themselves and how they'll fit in the world. Some are thinking about what kind of life they would like to lead when they grow up. Show them how they can use school to learn about themselves and what they might become. Learning will make more sense to your children then, because it will be about **them** and **their** goals. And anything about **them** motivates middle schoolers!

Since middle school is the first time students get to choose some of their classes, the more they know about themselves, the better their school choices. Eventually, they'll get to use writing, research, and science projects to learn more about things that they care about. Understanding their interests will help students be more engaged in learning.

So, the first step is to focus on your child. *Me? I'm not a career counselor*, you may be saying.

Believe it or not, parents are often a child's first and best, career counselor! All you have to do is help your child follow this great advice from theologian Frederick Buechner: *Child, find the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.*

Middle schoolers are asking these questions of any adults who will listen:

- *Can you help me figure out what I'd be good at?*
- *Do you know how I can learn where I might fit in life?*
- *Can you help me get into the grown-up world so I can see how it works?*
- *Can you tell me where to go or who I can talk to about me?*

Yes, they can talk to you! You see what they love to do at home and what they are willing to learn on their own. This joy and curiosity points to their in-born talents and skills. If they love to do it, they have a talent for it.

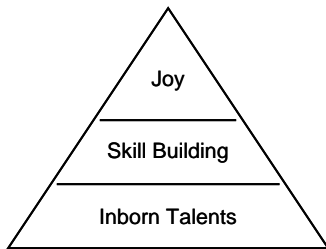
Once you know their interests, you can read the class schedule together, making sure they take some classes and join activities that interest them. If you are unsure about classes and activities that match their talents, ask a teacher or a counselor. ***It's very important for children to feel that they are working on some of their goals.***

Later, families can help find people in the community doing what their children want to do. Advice from like-minded people is great for teens! When your children are a little older, you can help them find mentors in the areas that interest them.

***Mentors—like Love and Math—
are MAGIC for teens.***

Identifying your child's talents

Real success, it turns out, always starts with an in-born talent. Malcolm Gladwell states in his article, "The Physical Genius," that we need to see success as a triangle. **Inborn talent** is the foundation of all success; **skill building** is the hard work that goes into success, and **joy** is the motivation that drives the work. It's the love of the activity **for itself** that motivates the long, hard skill-building process that leads to success.



Here are five steps you can start to take now and continue to use throughout middle and high school:

1. Watch for your children's joy. What are they doing when they are so 'lost' in what they're doing that they forget to eat? Their joy points to their talents. Help them connect feeling happy with activities that engage them, and then tell them: *You're talented!*
2. When they are doing something they love, point out the talents and skills they are using, like problem-solving and math in automotive repair, or leadership when they coach younger kids.
3. Middle schoolers want to change the world, make life better, or help others. Show them how their talents and interests make a difference. For example, good engineering makes people safer. Cosmetologists make people look and feel better, and the arts enrich our lives.
4. Connect their talents and interests with school classes and community activities. For example, a budding teacher will need strong math and English skills, as well as lots of volunteer work with children's groups. Automotive technicians will need math, writing, and technical skills.
5. Tell children that it's worth studying things they might not enjoy right now in order to be able to do things they love later on.

When successful people talk about their work, two things stand out: they are using their strongest skills to do something they love, and they have a deep interest in helping others. Every child is born with talents and interests. It's our job to show our children how they can use their talents and their schoolwork to be successful and happy.

How one family encourages learning

Here's how one family is identifying and developing their son's inborn talents and interests. We'll call him "Alex." Listen to his parents:

We noticed that Alex was very observant and curious, even as a baby and a toddler. He was always interested in how things worked. He spent lots of his playtime building things and taking them apart, so we had lots of construction toys—Legos and blocks when he was young, models and electronics kits when he got older.

Alex was always making 'potions' in the tub. And one time he got out about 20 paper cups and put a bit of every powdered spice in the cupboard into a cup and mixed it with water to see what dissolved and what didn't. Then he let the cups sit for days to see what happened when the water evaporated. We told him that someday he would be a great scientist.

Later we steered him towards hands-on activities for kids at the community center. We made sure he took math and science every year in middle school, and he helped in the computer lab during study hall.

Now Alex is talking to his science teacher about starting a rocket-building club. And our neighbor, who is an engineer at Boeing, has offered to take him to work with her for a few days this summer so that Alex can see how 737s are made.

Remember...inner motivation rules!

Ask your child—

What do you like to do so much that you feel happy and 100% **you** while you're doing it?

If you could change one thing about the world, what would you change? How would you start? What skills and knowledge would you need?