

# Building the Foundation for High School and Beyond

## *A Course Guide for Parents of Sixth Graders*

### Why Start Now?

**Y**ou are probably thinking that your child is just starting middle school so you have plenty of time to think about the future. But, according to many research studies, the middle school years are a critical time in your child's life and will set the course for his or her future. Middle school is the time to strengthen study habits, identify interests, and build a foundation for educational success.

Our goal is for every student to graduate from high school, prepared to be successful in post-secondary experiences. Most college graduates earn more money during their working years than those who only have a high school diploma. Today, most jobs require more than a diploma. Businesses want employees who know how to think and solve problems.

As part of our commitment to provide a customized world-class educational program for each student, the Howard County Public School System is implementing a Middle School Program of Studies designed to be more rigorous and relevant to students' lives to better prepare them for high school, college, and careers.

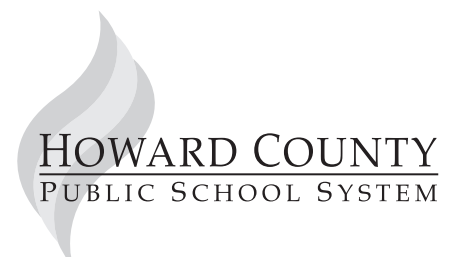
This guide was created to help you and your child learn about each course your child will take next year. The courses are organized by subject and identified by course numbers, which you will find on your child's Middle School Course Registration Form. After reviewing this guide, if you still have questions, please share them at your child's middle school orientation, or contact your child's School Counselor.

### Tips for Success

- Encourage your child to challenge himself or herself by working up to his or her ability in appropriate classes.
- Recognize study habits are an important part of academic achievement. Your child will need to learn to organize his or her materials, write down homework assignments, and complete homework assignments independently.
- Encourage your child to take advantage of opportunities to explore interests. Well-rounded students are the happiest students.
- Continue to attend parent conferences and stay involved in your child's academic success. Do not hesitate to contact your child's teachers or school counselor if you have questions or concerns.
- Help your child set short- and long-term goals. Praise your child for successes and provide support when needed.
- Be patient. Adolescence is a time of great growth and change.

### What You Should Know About High School

- While sixth graders are not expected to know what courses they want to take in high school, it is important for students and parents to have a general understanding of the course offerings. A full list of high school courses is available at [www.hcpss.org](http://www.hcpss.org) under Academics.
- Students must pass High School Assessments in Algebra, Biology, English and Government or have a combined score of 1602.
- The mathematics courses taken in middle school inform the mathematics and science placement in high school.
- High school grade point averages are reported when students apply to college. It is important to find the right balance between course rigor and grades.
- Students must complete 75 hours of service learning. Most HCPSS students complete this requirement in middle school through a curricular project completed during each of the three years.



# Sixth Grade Course Descriptions

The following are general guidelines for course placement along with descriptions of Grade 6 courses.

## READING PLACEMENT

Students who generally perform on grade level take one semester (two quarters) of the Innovation and Inquiry Reading Modules that address reading through an inquiry approach. Connections, a Reading Transition course using Junior Great Books products, will be mandatory. The students must take one other module and may take more if desired. These nine-week course offerings will be determined by each middle school principal and may include *The Future of Water*, *Taking Action to Change My World*, *Reading as a Scientist: Inventions* or *Expanding and Exploring Career Options*.

Students requiring explicit reading instruction to support decoding or comprehension will be placed in a reading course with appropriate academic interventions: Seminar-D (Decoding), Seminar-C (Comprehension), or a class with direct instruction by a reading specialist or special educator. Students who may benefit from more instructional time in English Language Arts will be enrolled in English Language Arts (ELA) Seminar that is supplemental to the English Language Arts class.

Students who generally perform above grade level are not required to take modules, but they may do so if their schedule permits.

## READING AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS COURSES

### English Language Arts 6 6911

Students read thematic-based texts and construct both written and spoken responses. Students construct short and extended responses to argument, explanatory, and narrative tasks. Grade 6 students develop analytical and evaluative skills and apply such knowledge when responding to print and non-print texts. (The Resource section of this course is designed for students with more significant needs who may be eligible to take the Alternative Maryland School Assessment or who require a self-contained setting for a period of time.)

### ESOL English Language Arts 6911E

This course offers entering and emerging English language learners instruction and practice using the four domains of language acquisition through developing linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage, and language control.

### English Language Arts G/T 6912

This course is designed for students on the path to taking the English 12 Advanced Placement course and AP examination. This course requires students to address the demands of the sixth grade English Language Arts Curriculum, as well as specific critical reading, writing, and thinking demands necessary for continued success throughout the high school English GT program. In addition, curriculum compacting allows motivated students to collapse material and benefit from a more student-facilitated classroom.

### English Language Arts Seminar 6914

Students have opportunities to learn and apply reading, writing, and language-acquisition strategies that connect directly to learning outcomes in English Language Arts 6.

### Seminar-C Reading (Comprehension) 6915

Comprehension intervention courses are research-based or evidence-based and provide explicit instruction by staff specifically trained to administer the program.

### Seminar-D Reading (Decoding) 6916

Decoding intervention courses are research-based or evidence-based and provide explicit instruction by staff specifically trained to administer the program.

### Innovation and Inquiry Reading Modules 6917

#### Connections

This module is designed to provide a review of foundational reading strategies and skills necessary for continued success in the English Language Arts program. Students practice and apply the skills to Junior Great Books texts.

#### The Future of Water

Although nearly three-quarters of the Earth is covered in water, ensuring safe access to water will remain a high priority for the future. During this module, students will identify and investigate an issue of interest related to the numerous stressors on the

world's limited water resources and apply the content and practices from a variety of fields including science, social studies, and technology to propose and develop a solution related to their selected topic.

#### Taking Action to Change My World

Youth empowerment is a vital component of prevention programs to promote safe and healthy youth, and through youth empowerment students have the ability to implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people. In this module students will enhance their health literacy by exploring youth empowerment as it relates to the power of the bystander in bullying prevention. Students will experience rich opportunities for promoting a safe school climate and culture in which bullying is not tolerated.

#### Reading as a Scientist: Inventions

This module allows students to address the complexities of reading scientific texts. Because science texts often include new and complex information, students must be armed with strategies for making meaning of such texts. Students learn how one section or portion of scientific text builds on other parts and how the parts, when taken in their entirety, bring understanding and clarity.

#### Expanding and Exploring Career Options

Middle school is an exciting and challenging time for sixth graders, who are making the transition from childhood to adolescence, discovering their interests, and beginning to establish their identity as unique individuals. In this module, students will prepare for college and careers by exploring a variety of interests and talents, developing an understanding of current and emerging career possibilities, and identifying how career choice can be a reflection of self. Students will create, share, analyze and reflect on career biographies to expand their career aspirations and connect classroom learning to real-world roles and opportunities. The Big6™ problem-solving framework will be emphasized.

# Sixth Grade Course Descriptions

## Sample Mathematics Sequence

Gr.	On Grade Level	Above Grade Level	Gifted and Talented
6	MSM I	MSM II	Pre-Algebra
7	MSM II	Pre-Algebra	Algebra I
8	Pre-Algebra	Algebra I	Geometry
9	Algebra I	Geometry	Algebra II
10	Geometry	Algebra II	Precalculus
11	Algebra II	Math Analysis/ Trigonometry	AP Calculus AB
12	Math Analysis/ Trigonometry	Business Calculus	AP Calculus C

**Students who take Algebra and/or Geometry in middle school still need to earn three mathematics credits in high school. In fact, all students are strongly encouraged to take four years of mathematics in high school to be better prepared for college.**

*Opportunities to accelerate through the math sequence are provided in high school through scheduling, summer school, and dual enrollment options.*

## MATHEMATICS PLACEMENT

Students who generally perform on grade level will be enrolled in MSMI.

Students requiring a deeper understanding of grade level content (MSMI) will be concurrently enrolled into Common Core Math 6 Seminar.

Students who generally perform above grade level will be enrolled in MSMII.

Students who were successful in 5th Grade G/T mathematics, as well as 5th grade students who placed into G/T during the school year, will be enrolled in Pre-Algebra G/T.

## MATHEMATICS COURSES

### Middle School Mathematics I (MSMI) 6921

In this on-grade-level course, students will focus on the mastery of four critical areas: 1) connecting ratio and rate to whole number multiplication and division and using concepts of ratio and rate to solve problems; 2) completing understanding of division of fractions and extending the notion of number to the system of rational numbers, which includes negative numbers; 3) writing, interpreting, and using expressions and equations; and 4) developing understanding of statistical thinking. (The Resource Section of this course is designed for students with more significant needs who may be eligible to take the Alternative Maryland School Assessment or who require a self-contained setting for a period of time.)

### Middle School Mathematics II (MSMII) 6922

In this above-grade-level course, students will focus on the mastery of six critical areas: 1) connecting ratio and rate to whole number multiplication and division and using concepts of ratio and rate to solve problems; 2) completing understanding of division of fractions and extending the notion of number to the system of rational numbers, which includes negative numbers; 3) writing, interpreting, and using expressions and equations; 4) developing understanding of statistical thinking; 5) developing understanding of and applying proportional relationships; and 6) developing understanding of operations with rational numbers and working with expressions and linear equations.

### Pre-Algebra G/T 6923

In this gifted and talented course, students will focus on the mastery of three critical areas: 1) formulating and reasoning about expressions and equations, including modeling an association in bivariate data with a linear equation, and solving linear equations and systems of linear equations; 2) grasping the concept of a function and using functions to describe quantitative relationships; and 3) analyzing two- and three-dimensional space and figures using distance, angle, similarity, and congruence, and understanding and applying the Pythagorean Theorem.

### Common Core Math 6 Seminar 6925 (taken concurrently with MSMI Grade 6)

In this seminar course, students will deepen their understanding of grade level content (MSMI) while reviewing these two critical areas: 1) developing fluency with addition and subtraction of fractions, and developing understanding of the

multiplication and division of fractions in limited cases (unit fractions divided by whole numbers and whole numbers divided by unit fractions); and 2) extending division to 2-digit divisors, integrating decimal fractions into the place value system and developing understanding of operations with decimals to hundredths, and developing fluency with whole number and decimal operations. This course focuses on the application of mathematics, strategies for problem solving, the development of the Standards for Mathematical Practices, and Disciplinary Literacy.

## SCIENCE

### Science I 6941

Students will study weather, geologic processes, Earth systems, and astronomy. The skills and processes of science will be integrated within each unit of study as students focus on building scientific literacy in each of these core ideas of Earth science. Students will be expected to demonstrate developmentally appropriate fluency in scientific thought and action including the use of science tools. They will regularly engage in laboratory investigations that enhance their understanding of the content, practices, and cross-cutting concepts of science. (The Resource section of this course is designed for students with more significant needs who may be eligible to take the Alternative Maryland School Assessment or who require a self-contained setting for a period of time.)

### Science G/T 6942

Students will engage in an enriched curriculum that provides for increased depth of learning. In addition, a major goal of the gifted and talented science program is to provide an opportunity for students to engage in extended and authentic science research. Students will participate in various class research projects and activities designed to help them develop the foundational skills necessary to produce an original science research project by the end of the eighth grade year.

**Most high school courses in the core subjects have an honors and gifted and talented level. In most cases, students do not take a formal test to enroll in honors or gifted and talented courses in high school. Initial course placement is based on teacher recommendation. Input from parents is always welcome.**

# Sixth Grade Course Descriptions

## MS G/T Research 6945

G/T Research is designed for sixth grade students who participate in multiple G/T content area classes. Taught by the G/T Resource Teacher, this class provides a curricular framework for students to become producers of new knowledge as they apply the research skills modeled in the curriculum to an original investigation in a self-selected area of study. Participating students are expected to culminate their research investigation by creating an original product to be shared with an authentic audience. Participating students receive instruction in advanced-level skills that they also apply in their advanced-level classes.

## SOCIAL STUDIES

### Geography and World Cultures 6952

Students will study the first part of a two-year program entitled *Geography and World Cultures*. Course content includes the study of physical and human geography, North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. (The Resource section of this course is designed for students with more significant needs who may be eligible to take the Alternative Maryland School Assessment or who require a self-contained setting for a period of time.)

### Geography/World Culture G/T 6953

Students participating in gifted and talented social studies receive a differentiated program. Teachers engage their students in more rigorous critical thinking and problem-solving activities and through differentiated curriculum objectives which require deeper analysis and understanding. All students complete two social science research investigations linked to the curriculum or participate in National History Day®.

## RELATED ARTS

### Art 6974

Students will be engaged in a variety of studio experiences in drawing, painting, printmaking, crafts, and sculpture. Activities are designed to utilize creative problem-solving skills while incorporating the elements of art, modeling new techniques and media, and developing perceptual skills through observation. Students will use compositional devices to organize ideas into two and three-dimensional artworks.

### Band 6965

Students perform music representing various styles and genres with an emphasis on developing ensemble skills. Students

also meet periodically on a rotating basis during other class times to receive small group instruction to focus on instrument-specific skills and techniques. After-school and evening rehearsals and activities, such as concerts and countywide assessments /adjudications (not to exceed 20 per school year), are integral to the course and grades may reflect such participation.

### Chorus 6964

Students perform music representing various styles and genres with an emphasis on developing ensemble skills. Depending on the schedule, students may be able to receive small group instruction periodically on a rotating basis during other class times to focus on vocal skills and techniques. After-school and evening rehearsals and activities, such as concerts and countywide assessments/adjudications (not to exceed 20 per school year), are integral to the course and grades may reflect such participation.

### Family and Consumer Science (FACS) 6975

Students develop knowledge and skills they need now as teenagers and will use the rest of their lives. FACS projects and activities encourage students to develop the critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills needed to be contributing members of their families and communities. Through food labs, students will enjoy using basic, healthy ingredients to plan and prepare tasty and nutritious meals and snacks. Through studying and applying financial management principles, students determine how to earn, save, invest, and spend money wisely.

### Health 6982

Students will participate in the following units: Tobacco, Alcohol and other Drugs; Disease Prevention and Control; Human Sexuality; and Safety and Injury Prevention. Parents may exclude their child from instruction in Human Sexuality by providing a written request.

### General Music 6976

Students experience music through four strands of study: keyboard, guitar, world music drumming, and music technology. Each of the strands provides opportunities for students to participate in music representing various styles and genres from throughout the world.

### Orchestra 6966

Students perform music representing various styles and genres with an emphasis on developing ensemble skills. Students also meet periodically on a rotating basis

during other class times to receive small group instruction to focus on instrument-specific skills and techniques. After school and evening rehearsals and activities, such as concerts and countywide assessments /adjudications (not to exceed 20 per school year), are integral to the course and grades may reflect such participation.

### Physical Education 6981

The sixth grade physical education curriculum includes a balanced program of individual, dual, team, rhythms, dance, and fitness activities. Students are provided information and resources to live healthy and physically active lives.

### Technology Education 6977

Students will develop an understanding of technology and its impact through exploratory experiences. Through group and individual activities, students experience ways in which technological knowledge and processes contribute to effective designs, abilities, and skills to create solutions to technological problems. Students participate in design activities to understand how criteria, constraints, and processes affect designs. Brainstorming, visualizing, modeling, constructing, testing, and refining designs provide firsthand opportunities for students to understand the uses and impacts of innovations.

## World Languages

**French 6931** } (only offered at Mount  
**Spanish 6932** } View and Murray Hill  
**Chinese 6933** } middle schools)

Beginning in 6th grade, students may choose to study French, Spanish, or Chinese. All students participating in a world language will develop their ability to read, write, and communicate on a variety of topics, such as descriptions of people and things, classes in school, extracurricular activities, weather conditions, dates, leisure activities, etc. Students will also gain knowledge of other cultures, make connections to other disciplines, and compare the language and culture to their own.

**Students who take a world language in middle school and choose this pathway for graduation still need to earn at least two credits of world language in high school.**