



Student Mobility Impacts Schools

Graduating to a New Grade Level

When we think of moving to a new school, we often forget the transition from elementary to middle and middle to high school. These moves can be just as challenging for students as attending school in a new town.

When students are in grades 3-5, friendships deepen as school work becomes more interactive. Students at this age are becoming more independent but usually spend the majority of their day with one teacher. The transition to middle school may mean that students are separated from other students they have gone through elementary school with. This situation creates stress as students lose some degree of familiarity. The individualized setting is gone as “students have to adapt to a social cli-

mate that is usually more impersonal as they rotate through departmentalized classes with a number of teachers with different teaching styles and expectations” (NYU, 2009).

High school is a time when students begin to make independent decisions directly impacting their future and parents tend to exert less influence on academic and extracurricular choices. Students are pressured with “what to do after graduation and for many, college decisions are also present” (NYU, 2009).

Schools can help by discussing upcoming changes and the exciting opportunities that await. Some schools arrange visits at the end of elementary and middle



“Educators should be aware of the challenges typical at different points in a student’s academic career.”
(NYU, 2009)

school so students feel more familiar with their surroundings when the new school year begins. New study skills and obligations may be introduced and students may familiarize themselves with advanced educational tools (binders, homework journals). Regardless of how much easier we attempt to make the transition, trepidation due to change is understandable and should be expected.

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Special points of interest:

- ♦ *Identifying with a student who doesn’t want to move.*
- ♦ *The challenge with mobility.*
- ♦ *Creating a helpful environment for new families.*
- ♦ *Parent-Teacher Organizations can help!*
- ♦ *When you’re the “new kid” in school.*

The “New” Kid

When adults are new to a job, it takes time to establish bonds with colleagues. In fact, some of the friendliest people at first may turn out to be people you’d rather avoid. They may be prone to gossip or what some might term as “busy bodies.” On the

other hand, someone who you thought to be disinterested might turn out to be your closest confidant.

For children, the same can be said. When a child moves, he must seek out friends often

associating with those who are approachable. The “class clown” may find it highly entertaining to amuse the new student while a student prone to bullying may take advantage of the “new kid.”

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I'm Not Moving!

Alexander's Dad has a new job a thousand miles away and Alexander is not sad. He's mad. *Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move* by Judith Viorst is an honest account of how we often feel when we must leave behind friends, neighbors or perhaps even a favorite babysitter. Alexander is certain that there may be kids in the neighborhood that are his brother's age, but not his.



*"I don't like it, but I'm packing too."
(Viorst, 1998)*

Although Alexander dreams up plans to keep him from moving, he finally concedes but this will be the last time. Younger students will enjoy and commiserate with Alexander's emotional journey as he begins to accept the inevitable. Ask students how they would say goodbye if they were moving. Also, ask students how they would like to be treated if they were new to a school or came to a new place without any

friends.

As a thought-provoking exercise, older students may write a continuation of what happens to Alexander once he has moved. Will he meet any friends at school? Will Alexander fit in, or become determined to run away?

When students see moving through Alexander's eyes, they understand the varied emotions that come with saying goodbye to a place you enjoy and people you love, and the anxiety inherent to meeting new people in a new place.

Mobility

A study conducted in 2000 revealed that "the United States has one of the highest mobility rates of developed countries; annually about 20% of all Americans move" (Fenwick, Smith & Blackman, 2000). Students who move during the year are not only stressed from the move itself, it is compounded by academically challenging change, such as adjusting to new rules and understanding a new teacher's expectations.

*The fear of leaving friends, teachers, a familiar school, and a routine can be hard.
(About.com, 2009)*

As we begin a new school year in a few months, educators need to consider the students who moved during the summer and those who will move during the school year. Test

scores are accessible but what do we truly know about the academic potential of a new student? How can we assess the various academic levels of students when they move across state borders, or even from one district to another? These are questions that educators, and individual schools, must ask if students are to successfully overcome a move without a consequent loss of academic progress.

The "New" Kid (continued)

As educators, we need to move kids in positive directions. Start off by introducing students you know to be studious and hard workers. Consider asking a trustworthy student to be a "buddy" for a week or two to the new student, amenable to answering questions or concerns. This provides a new student with the opportunity to form positive relationships with new peers.

There are a wide array of books that depict believable, likeable characters that students can relate to. Discuss the benefits as well as the downside to moving. This allows students to understand what the new student may be feeling while giving her a



*"Normalizing the experiences for parents and students can be the first step in minimizing any negative impact."
(NYU, 2009)*

chance to share worries, fears or concerns. When educators ask students to place themselves in someone else's shoes, it's a huge step in developing empathy and a life lesson for considering the feelings of others.

The Move to Mango Street

Esperanza Cordero lives on Mango Street. Her family doesn't pay rent or share a yard. Esperanza no longer has to worry about a landlord; Esperanza can even be loud! But the house on Mango Street isn't what Esperanza had in mind. "For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I now how those things go" (Cisneros, 1984).



"I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it."
(Cisneros, 1984)

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros is one of many stories centered around a young girl named Esperanza Cordero. Students will be captivated by Esperanza's heartbreaking honesty as she lives in a reality that includes a rundown neighborhood and many "someday" promises that have yet to come true.

Ask students to think about the following:

*Esperanza has a "vision" of a house she would like to live in. Do you think people want the same things in a house? Why or why not?

*What makes a *house* a *home*?

*The story ends with Esperanza stating she knows "how those things go." What do you think the future holds for Esperanza?

*How can the meaning of words change by someone's tone of voice? Ex. You live *there*?

*Esperanza says what she remembers most is moving a lot. Why is moving difficult?

Lend a Helping Hand

Parents often visit a school prior to a move if possible. If parents are moving to a new location near family, a relative may drop by the school to see what needs to be done to make the transition easier. If your school does not have a helpful tip-sheet for parents who are moving, ask your administrative team if one can be handed out. It will be a valuable resource. Include the following advice for parents:

*If possible, tour the school with your child before enrollment.

*Contact the school for bus route information if needed.

*Help your child memorize their new address and telephone number.

*Accompany your child the first day of class and meet the teacher if possible.

*Encourage extra curricular activities or sports where your child has an opportunity to meet new friends.

*Be mindful that your child's grades may fluctuate due to the move.

"Moving to a new school is usually the hardest part of a move for kids."
(About.com, 2009)

*Leave happy notes in your child's lunch or backpack.

*Keep the lines of communication open and share your fears and concerns of moving as well.

Back-to-School

Summer is often a period of transition if parents have a scheduled move. A back-to-school event prior to the start of school can go far in helping a new family feel welcome. Parent-Teacher organizations are an invaluable resource and may become a critical avenue of communication within the community. Encourage your local organization to establish a welcoming committee

that provides contact information and checks in with a new family during the first few months of school.

We are all prone to becoming so comfortable in our own community that we forget what it is like to be on the outside



"Being a new kid at school is tough, but being a new parent can be difficult as well."

(PTO Today, 2009)

looking in. "Sometimes it can be harder for a new family to feel comfortable in a small school family than a big school that gets flooded with newcomers" (PTO Today, 2009).

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Daphne Morris, M.Ed., met Trevor Romain in 1992 when he visited a school as a guest speaker. Impressed by Trevor's profound and meaningful impact on students, Daphne joined The Trevor Romain Company in 2006. A former elementary school principal, Daphne holds two Master's degrees in education.

June Q&A

Q: A new student at the beginning of a school year is welcomed naturally as most classes participate in *getting-to-know-you* activities. During the school year, a new student can interrupt a class lesson or student involvement as the focus turns to the new student. How can teachers welcome a new student effectively with minimal impact on classroom instruction?

When a new student is introduced, curiosity naturally takes a front seat to instruction. Within the first few weeks of school, develop a "welcoming classroom" committee that consist of no more than four students. When a newcomer arrives, it is the committee's job to share their textbooks until the student has their own, introduce others, and oversee outside class activities, such as lunch and recess. This allows you an opportunity to get a feel for the student's personality as well as their academic level as you observe her with others. Some students enjoy a grand entrance of introductions which can be done at the end of the day; others would rather come in as quietly as possible and ease into the daily routine with little fuss. Also, having in mind where a new student will sit avoids last minute rearranging and a loss of instructional time.

Resources:

About.com. "How to Help Kids Settle into a New School." <http://moving.about.com/od/movingchildrenandteens/a/settlenewschool.htm> (accessed April, 2009).

About.com. "Moving Family: How to Break the News to Children." http://moving.about.com/od/movingwithdependents/a/child_cope.htm (accessed April, 2009).

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

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