

Strategies for Welcoming New Students Into the Classroom

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TPEP Alignment [Criterion 5]: The teacher candidate fosters and manages a safe and positive learning environment using a variety of classroom management strategies that takes into account the cultural, physical, emotional and intellectual well-being of students appropriate to their grade level.

I. Introduction

How can teachers help students transition smoothly into their classrooms?

Every student undergoes a stressful transition when they change schools. Most students undergo this transition at the same time as their peers when they move from elementary school to middle school, or middle school to high school. Some students experience this transition separately from their peers part-way through the year and have to face this challenge alone, along with living in a new house in a new area. This transition disrupts a student's social structure, sense of structure, and feelings of safety, which are crucial for their development and ability to learn. I looked at ways that teachers can assist students in these areas during these transitions.

Table 2: Number of Times Students Changed Schools by Eighth Grade

Number of school changes	Percentage of students who changed schools
0	5%
1	31
2	34
3	18
4 or more	13

Source: ECLS-K data, 1998-2007.

Note: Data derived from interviews of parents who were asked in each survey round a version of the question: "Since spring 2004 how many times has your child changed from one school to another?"

Welcoming Strategies for Educators

- Reaching out to parents and ensuring that their concerns are addressed immediately.
- Create a Buddy System and ask for volunteers early in the year so that they are prepared when a new student arrives.
- Set clear behavior expectations that promote respect, kindness, and inclusivity.
- When new students arrive make sure that they know the rules but give them a short window to get accustomed to the new expectations before strictly enforcing them.
- Schedule check-ins with new students and allow for all students to provide anonymous feedback to ensure they feel heard and supported.
- Show them that you are happy they are there and you are excited to get to know them better.

Preparation Strategies for Parents

- Encourage participation in extracurricular activities.
- Reach out to other families in the area to set up times for the kids to meet and spend time with each other. School can be a lot less intimidating when seeing a familiar face on the first day.
- Get involved with the school while establishing and maintaining communication with the teachers.
- Allow your child to vent about their frustrations freely while trying to help them focus on the positive aspects of the move.
- Help your child set good study habits and offer to help when needed.
- Set realistic expectations and celebrate the small victories.

II. Social

A student's social structure is disrupted when they move to a new area. This also leads to a lot of anxiety as students try to make friends in a new area. This problem can be exasperated or alleviated by social media and access to the internet. Social media allows students to stay connected with their friends from previous area and help them feel like they aren't alone. Studies showed a correlation between having contact with new, or old, friends and increased self-esteem. However, social media can also be dangerous and make these students feel even more left out as they watch their friends continue their lives without them, or they can become reliant on their old friends and not try to make new friends. Students experiencing multiple moves may not try to make new friends because they don't see the point if they are going to move soon (Ruff & Keim 2014). This can lead to loneliness and isolation.

Researchers asked students transitioning to Middle School about several different sources of support that they received and if they endorsed them. Above friends, 92.9 percent of these students reported that their parents were helpful in their transition (Fite et al., 2018). During Middle School, students' primary social focus shifts from their parents to their friends. However, before this happens, how the parents feel about the transition can be the greatest indication of how students are handling the transition (Evangelou et al., 2008) and studies showed correlations between decreased parental concerns and student stress (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Table 1: Middle School Transition Strategies and Transition Difficulty

Strategies	% of Youths Who Endorsed
Parents	92.9
Friends	79.8
Locker time before school started	75.0
Teachers	71.4
Fifth-grade tour	54.8
Older students at the school	34.5
School counselors	29.8
Peer role models	28.6
Information sent home	26.2
School administrators	17.9
School orientation	16.7
Transition program held over summer	16.7
Extracurricular activities (such as sports)	15.5
After-school program	11.9
Transition difficulty	
Very difficult	6.0
Somewhat difficult	22.6
Neutral	27.4
Somewhat easy	23.8
Very easy	20.2

III. Structure

Moving to a new school and area can disrupt students' routines and sense of security and well-being. Having to adjust to new schedules and commute routes can lead to anxiety and stress. Each teacher also has different classroom expectations and sometimes what they are teaching does not line up with what students were taught before. It is very important for school records to be shared and reviewed to see where students were at to better understand where they need to go. This can be challenging for teachers to achieve on their own so they must rely upon their administrative staff to acquire this information.

A failure to share academic data in a timely manner can result in a mismatch between learner readiness and the levels of challenge students face in their new classrooms.

(Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

During my internship I asked a recent student why they weren't focusing on an assignment and they said "I learned about this last year, and I'll probably learn about it again next year." It can be difficult for teachers to rely on others when trying to help a student so one way that teachers can prevent this type of interaction when waiting for records to be sent is to go over the curriculum with the new students, or create a pre-test for new students to find out where they are at in their education.

V. Conclusion

Transitioning to a new school disrupts students' social structure, sense of structure and routine, and feelings of safety. This causes impacts in and out of the school. In order to help them be the best students they can be, educators need to look at the students as a whole and make sure that they have everything they need to be successful. There are strategies for educators and parents to help students feel welcome, supported, and ready to learn in their new environment and make the most of their experience there.



Photo from Schoolnursesupplyinc.com If there is no school-wide anti-bullying material, make sure that there is in your classroom.

IV. Safety

The most important necessity of students before they are able to learn is safety. If students do not feel safe then they will never be able to learn and they will not be able to fully control themselves enough to be able to learn anything. One of the primary concerns of new students is bullying. This is especially true for those transitioning from Elementary School to Middle School when their bodies are changing and they are unsure of how it is changing and how that change will be perceived by others. Students that have already been subjected to bullying before have increased stress levels, decreased academic performance, and decreased self-esteem (Mulling & Irvin, 2000). The stress associated with the students' fear for their safety also correlates to many other aspects of negative school experiences such as performance anxiety, poor student-teacher relationships, disciplinary actions, and general health and well-being.

