

What is transition?

"It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions. Change is not the same as transition. Change is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal"

William Bridges from *Managing Transitions*

Bayport Blue Point Schools

Planning for a Successful Transition to
Elementary, Middle & High School

The 8th to 9th Grader...

- Becomes more self aware/self conscious.
- Thinking becomes more critical, complex.
- Looks for acceptance more from peers, less from adults.
- Needs independence, yet still rely on adults for support.
- Takes more foolish risks to align with peers and avoid embarrassment.

The Elementary to Middle School Transition...Factors

- Social Factors
- Organizational Factors
- Motivational Factors
- Physical Factor
 - Puberty

SOCIAL FACTORS

Students' perceptions of the **quality of school life decline as they progress from elementary to secondary school, with the largest decline occurring during the transition to a middle level school (Diemert, 1992)**. Meeting social needs during the transition from an elementary to a middle level school is a major consideration because most programs focus more on academics and regulations. In Diemert's survey of 23 fifth-graders in a middle level school, of the top 11 (out of 23 possible) needs identified by boys, 6 were social, 2 were academic, 2 were procedural, and 1 was academic and procedural. Of the top 10 needs identified by girls, 5 were social, 2 were academic, and 3 were procedural.

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Students who move into middle level schools from elementary grades that rotate students between classes at least part of the day reported feeling better prepared to enter a middle level school. Waggoner (1994) investigated transition concerns and the self-esteem of 171 sixth-graders. Students from teamed settings in elementary schools demonstrated a stronger affiliation in school activities and fewer concerns about the transition to junior high school than students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Teachers in teamed settings felt their students exhibited fewer indicators of stress related to progressing to junior high school than teachers of students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Sixty-six percent of all students surveyed believed they would be better prepared for seventh grade if they had more than one sixth-grade teacher (Waggoner, 1994).

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

In middle level schools, it is important to emphasize mastery and improvement, rather than relative ability and social comparison. Empirical evidence suggests that middle schools tend to stress relative ability and competition among students more, and effort and improvement less, leading to a decline in task goals, ability goals, and academic efficacy. *Working in groups, focusing on effort and improvement, and being given choices all support a more positive task-focused goal structure (Anderman & Midgley, 1996).*

Summary... Parents, Students & Teachers Concerns

- Students greatest concerns
 - Amount of homework
 - Class difficulty
 - Organizational issues (getting lost, locker, schedule, resources)
- Parents greatest concerns
 - Peer pressure academically and socially
- Students look forward to
 - Making new friends
 - Having more freedom
 - Attending school events

(Akos and Galassi, 2004)

Summary... Parents, Students and Teacher Concerns

- Parents identified academic ability as important to making it in school
 - Time management
 - Ability to stay on task
 - Social skills
 - Behavior (Zeedyk et al, 2003)
- Expanded social experiences in high school represent a new opportunity for students who experienced exclusion in MS (Kinney, 1993)

Summary... Parents, Students & Teachers Concerns

- Teachers concerns ... students feel pressure
 - Perform well in class
 - Experience challenging courses
 - Difficulty making new friends

(Akos and Galassi, 2004)

Research

- Involve collaboration between schools (Mizelle, 1999)
- Schools should communicate to identify distinctive features of academic, social and organizational logistics and philosophies (e.g., course grading, rigor of courses, disciplinary procedures, length of periods, extra-curricular activities available, role of counselors) (Gibson, 1969)

More Research

The transition into middle level schools is accompanied by intellectual, moral, social, emotional, and physical changes taking place in at least part of the transition group at any given time. Students making the transition into middle level schools need to receive assistance prior to, during, and after the move so that their social, psychological, and academic well-being is not compromised.

Effective and comprehensive transition programs help

- (1) build a sense of community;
- (2) respond to the needs and concerns of the students; and
- (3) provide appropriate, faceted approaches to facilitate the transition process.

The following are suggestions for planning transition programs (Weldy, 1991)

Curriculum

- All High School Counselors Meet with 8th Graders...Class Visits
 - Scheduling and Programming/ Transitional Issues
- HS Curriculum Night for 8th Grade Parents (Chairs and TICs)
- Self-Selection Process ...phase-in middle school
- Improve Course Offerings Booklet (or other communication media to support self-selection)
 - Expectations
 - Assignments
 - Flowcharts

Expand 6 & 8th Grade Parent Conferences to Include:

- Counselors play an important part with families
 - Involved all families
 - Recognize the anxieties that accompany transition
 - Consider transition as an ongoing process (starting in the middle of the school year and continuing at the next level). Conference can start early in school year.
 - Review Occupational, Career and Academic reports specific to each child (GuidanceDirect)
 - Help select next years program or schedule
 - Explain the similarities and differences in academic, social and organizational expectations (Akos & Galassi, 2004)

Academic Interventions must be in place

- Provide targeted early intervention in order to promote academic recovery in falling students (Roderick & Camburn, 1999)
 - RTI
 - IST
 - CSE
 - Annual Reviews
 - Team Meetings
 - Counselor Monitoring of Academic Achievement

Communication is the Key

Provide students and families with a wealth of information about the academic, social and the organization of new school (Mizelle, 1999)

–Provide Pertinent Information through...

- Monthly Counseling Center Newsletters
- Improved Counseling Center Websites
- School Correspondence
- PTA and other groups collaborate
- Parent Portal (e-school and Naviance)

Effective high school transition programs address the following key areas

- Providing parents and students with information about the new school.
 - High school tours
 - Small-group sessions with school counselors
 - High school teachers trade places with new school grade teachers for one day.
 - Pen pals with Band, Student Council, or honors level students, athletes and other groups that are common to both grades.
 - Summer camp for rising 9th graders

Effective high school transition programs address the following key areas....

- Passes/invitations to social/athletic events at new school (supervised)
- News letters and websites dedicated to providing information to incoming students.
- Designate willing parents as new grade ambassadors to formally and informally communicate with incoming parents
- Scheduling system that allows extensive collaboration with parents and school staff.

Peer and Social Interaction

- Provide opportunities for peer interaction and social support.
 - Open house hosted by current ninth graders
 - Supervised attendance by incoming grade social functions.
 - New comers festival a few weeks before school starts.
 - Assigning "buddies" to incoming 9th grade classes.
 - Separating lunch schedule by grade level to decrease interaction with older students.
 - Regular open hours with counselors so students can drop in to discuss problems or concerns.
 - Phone line to an assistant principal so parents have easy access to assistance should social problems arise.

Parent Involvement

Provide opportunities for parent involvement.

- Actively seek parent volunteers and involve volunteers in the day-to-day activities of the school.
- Develop a Transition Newsletter that parents begin to receive when their child is in the second half of the previous grade. Continue the newsletter through the first half of following grade.
- Refrigerator magnets or key chains with counselors' names, phone and e-mail contact information.
- Quarterly phone calls by teachers, counselors, or advisors.
- Have a staff member simulate an attempt to contact the school to assure that lines of communication are indeed open.

Faculty Communication

Provide opportunities for communication between school's teachers and support staff.

- Create a "transition" team of teachers, counselors, parents and students from the both schools that meets regularly to identify issues and propose transition activities and improvements.
- Invite teachers from the old school to visit team or department meetings from the new school (and vice versa) on a regular basis.
- Schedule an annual joint faculty meeting with feeder schools to identify common concerns and opportunities.
- Create departmental "liaison" positions, in which new school teacher Ms. A. stays in touch with Mr. B. at the old school on a regular basis.

Parent Committees

- Parent Committee to address the following:
 - Curriculum (e.g., academic rigor of courses)
 - Facilities (e.g., location of classrooms, restrooms)
 - Safety and discipline (e.g., rules and discipline code)
 - Provide accurate information (e.g., organization and logistics)

Provide academic support for incoming class students.

- Create a support class that meets on a regular basis for all students and which addresses transition issues, counseling, academic expectations, etc. (after school 1x per week)
- Assign each incoming student an adult advocate/ advisor/ mentor who assists the student with transition and attends to each student's academic progress and social adjustment.
- Create tutorials and other academic support activities, using teachers, adult volunteers and older students to help struggling students.

Final Thoughts

“The success or failure experienced during this transition can be a turning point in the social and academic lives of students.”

(Schiller, 1999)

