

It would seem like the change from 5th grade to 6th, or from 6th grade to 7th wouldn't be so very significant a thing. Yet for most kids it is a major change because the change involves coming to a new building and arriving as one of the 'younger' kids. It also may be the year when suddenly fitting in socially and being 'cool' matters for the first time! It really doesn't matter to a third grader what they are wearing on that first day of school. For new middle schoolers a lot of thought and anxiety has been invested in the decision!

For every kid delighted to be here on the first day of school there were others with expressions of fear, uncertainty and dread on their faces.

To help kids and parents adapt to the change as quickly as possible, preparations began last spring. Counselors and administrators made visits to Ticasuk Brown, Badger Road, and North Pole Elementary schools. Kids saw a video tape about life at NPMS and had opportunity for question and answers. Later, classes arrived here for tours of the building, a hot dog lunch, and more Q & A. Two parent nights were held where parents could see the videos, tour the building, and have their own questions answered.

A week long summer camp opportunity here saw many incoming middle schoolers launching rockets and exploring the mysteries of the GPS. These students have a running start at knowing the layout of the building and how to find their way around, and have already mastered their lockers.

"Back to School night" provided opportunity for one last look or a first look for those new to our community.

Over the years the consensus I have heard is that once parents and kids have toured the school and understand the layout and procedures, it has helped to relieve some of the anxieties.

Even so, the first day butterflies are real. The details of the spring tours and question-answer sessions may have been forgotten during the summer break. Young minds are fixed on specific questions, more or less in this order:

- Did I wear the right stuff to school?

- Where are my friends?
- Will I be able to open my locker?
- Where do I go next?
- Did I wear the right stuff to school?
- Do I have any friends in this class?
- Where do I go next?
- Will my locker work this time?
- How do I get lunch?
- Will there be a spot for me at the lunch table with my friends?
- Did I wear the right stuff to school?
- Yikes, there is a gym locker too?
- Where do I go next?
- What should I wear tomorrow?
- Who should I call first when I get home to see what they did

today?

A good question that most of them didn't think about until the last minute was, "What number bus should I ride home on?" Even so, year after year, everybody makes it home happy and exhausted after the first day of school!

Teachers know kids will be lost and confused and tardy to class. Some lockers are going to have 'issues' at first, and the lunch period will be as long as it needs to be to accommodate everybody. Kids will be wanting and needing help but reluctant to ask. Teachers will be alert to signs of trouble and will intervene to assist as smoothly as possible. Instead of finding old friends in some classes, students will find the opportunity to make new friends.

Despite all this, kids are marvels of flexibility. By the end of the first week of school our rotating schedules, lockers, and lunch routines will all be mastered. Kids will even have memorized the class schedules of their best friends! Teachers new to the building will be consulting the kids to know what the next period is!

The grim reality of homework assignments will take a little longer to become accustomed to!

One thing I can predict about this year with certainty is this:

Every last one of them will be smiling on the last day of school!