

Task Force Members,

Several of you have asked about our transition process in the event that a school is closed. The best example I can give is our recent experience with moving some students from Kennedy to New York, which went very smoothly. Below is a summary of some transition activities as compiled by Nancy DeGarmo, principal at New York Elementary School.

Rick Doll
Superintendent

From Nancy DeGarmo:

As soon as we were made aware that new teachers and students would be coming to New York, we started the following chain of events:

Spring 2010

- Emails were sent to new teachers welcoming them and beginning the conversation about transition.
- Starting on day one, we opened the doors and encouraged all parents to come and visit our building anytime that was convenient for them.
- The principal, counselor and social worker attended a Kennedy parent meeting as parents were meeting with Dr. Doll and Kim Bodensteiner. We wanted to support the parents by showing our concern and answering any questions about New York.
- Kennedy students that were within the new boundary were bused to New York for one of our Character Counts assemblies. Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi were the guests. This was a BIG hit! Students were given a tour of the building and were able to visit a classroom. Prior to the children attending, letters were sent to parents explaining the event.
- The PTO sponsored an evening ice cream social which was held on the playground. New York teachers and staff attended to meet and greet parents. Students and parents were given tours of the building at this time. As a parting gift, parents were given magnets with the New York Elementary web address and phone number.
- We also gave tours to any parents that wanted to come and visit the building before school was out.
- The principal made contact with the Lawrence/Douglas County Housing Authority to help promote these events to the residents of Edgewood.

Summer 2010

- During the summer, the principal remained in contact with the Lawrence/Douglas County Housing Authority and attended a noon picnic with some of the residents of Edgewood. (This area is a large part of the revised boundary.)

Fall 2010

- During fall enrollment, we again provided tours of the building and made time for one-on-one conversations with new parents.

- The PTO holds a watermelon feed the night before school starts. Special effort was made to ensure that all parents knew about the event. We used the district's automated notification system, School Messenger, to promote it since we had phone numbers for students.
- I wrote a grant for books for the 5th and 6th grades. The purpose was to provide special activities and events during the 2010-11 school year to help the older students make a better transition with a focus on building relationships with each other. Each student has a copy of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Each class spends time reading and discussing this book throughout the year. So far, we have held one morning activity that I planned where we divided the 5th and 6th graders into teams and held fun competitions so the kids would mix together and get to know each other. We have also visited the KU Trio Program and learned about going to college. Johnson County Community College is coming in April to talk about their school. We will hold at least one more team building activity before school is out. We have made arrangements to take the 5th and 6th graders to KU's Outdoor Challenge course. We are talking about having the New York and Kennedy field days together to promote cooperation between the two schools.
- New York invited Kennedy to participate in the Kansas State Department of Education's Body Venture which came to our school in the fall. Kennedy students were bused over and they really enjoyed seeing some of their former teachers. In addition, the teachers LOVED seeing their students again.
- Back to School Night was planned for one night at New York School and a second night to be held at Edgewood. About 10 parents attended the Edgewood event. Most parents participated in the one at the school. Again, School Messenger was used to promote this event.
- In September, we had another Character Counts assembly. For this event, each classroom designed a shield to represent their class. We had a very formal entrance where all of the classes were introduced and we formally recognized that we are "New York Knights." At this point, I instructed the teachers to stop distinguishing the kids by referring to them as "Kennedy kids" or "a Kennedy teacher," but ALL New York Knights. This simple change of language brought us together .
- During the first parent-teacher conference, the principal maintained a visible presence in the hallway and made a point to visit with parents about their child's transition to New York. I made sure they knew that I was familiar with their child by sharing comments that were unique to their child. I also specifically asked if they were feeling like they were welcomed and accepted at New York. I did not ask them if they liked New York, because I did not want to put them in a position of comparing New York to Kennedy. I just wanted to know if we were doing everything we could to support the transition.

Spring 2011

- As the spring conferences approach, I will take the opportunity to do the same thing as I did in the fall.

It was very beneficial to bring some of the Kennedy teachers to New York. It was essential for some students to see a familiar face the first couple of weeks of school. They also helped the families feel more comfortable with the knowledge that somebody at New York knew them.

In regard to bringing the teachers on board:

- I contacted them in the spring after the initial email and invited them to tour the building. Some of them did and some did not.
- Toward the end of the school year, we had a social at a nearby restaurant and invited the new staff to attend. Again, some attended and some did not.
- At the first faculty meeting of the school year, I used one morning of our time for team building activities. One of these was to divide them into mixed groups and send them out with cameras to take pictures of their group doing funny activities in various places on the school grounds. We also played some active games that required people to remember each other's names.

I would strongly suggest that schools have more time at the beginning of the year for team building and to learn all of the "cultural norms" of the building. We had so many things, such as the mandatory training and other mandated topics, that we did not spend the time we needed going through the staff handbook and the student handbook. These needed to be reviewed as an entire staff so that everyone could be a part of the discussion. As it was, it took until the end of the first semester to feel like we all knew what the handbooks contained.

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