

Parents/Guardians Supporting Elementary School Students through School Closure and Building Changes

The closure and school-change process is impacting our families, students and staff across the District. Our children are experiencing stressed adults at school and at home; this can increase our children's worries and stress. This paper is intended as a resource for responding to their concerns and worries. Children will look to adults for guidance, stability, and reassurance. We will all do our very best to give them the support they need.

Children are already asking questions:

- Why do we have to move out of our school?
- Where will we go?
- It's not fair!
- Will all my friends go with me?
- Why do other kids get to come to my school?

Responses:

It is very hard to make school changes. Our school building is staying open and new kids may come OR our school is moving OR our school is closing and you will be in a new school. How are you feeling about this? What are you thinking?" (Listen to child's comments.)

Sometimes, things happen to children and adults that don't seem fair at all. Let's talk about what we mean when we say "fair." (Discuss) Fair is when the solution seems like justice, like it's the right thing to do. Sometimes, things happen that don't seem right or fair at all. Can you think of some things that have happened to you or other children that didn't seem fair? (Discuss)

Children may raise a variety of issues:

- Brother gets to stay up later at night
- Didn't get invited to a party
- Didn't get chosen for a game or a team
- Being teased or bullied
- People are mean for no reason
- Parent in military service
- Parent has gone away or is absent
- A relative is sick or died
- Economic issues – parent lost job, need to move out of home, not enough food

Sometimes, things happen to us and it seems like we have no control. Other people make the decisions, and we can't always understand why they do things. When this happens, what can we do?

- We can ask questions and try to learn and understand more.
- We can talk to our trusted adults. (Who are some of our trusted adults?)
- We can tell our side and talk about our feelings.
- What are some of the feelings people have when hard things happen, especially when they don't seem fair? (mad, angry, sad, frustrated, afraid, others)

The people who made big decisions about the schools, the Superintendent and the School Board, know that the decisions were hard to make and that it is even harder for the families, teachers and students. They want all schools in the Seattle School District to be great schools, and they hope you will learn a lot at your new school and have lots of fun, too.

What can help you to feel better; to be hopeful? (Let your child think about this and see if they have some ideas of their own. Then, discuss.)

- Talk to friends, family, others
- Listen to music, sing
- Play ball, run, other
- Draw, write, etc.
- Read books, comics, jokes or ask someone to read a book to/with you.
- Eat healthy treats
- Take a nap
- Play with a favorite toy, doll, pet
- Other ideas

Sometimes, things can turn out much better than we think they will. Has this ever happened to you? (Help child to remember any situation that you can talk about together.)

You might be wondering:

Will I make new friends?

Will my teacher like me?

Will people be happy to see me?

Will I still be able to do _____? (favorite activity)

These are questions lots of kids are wondering about. There will be adults who will be glad to meet and help you make new friends, to feel welcome and happy, and to have good activities.

Can you remember when you first came to _____ school? (Discuss) Maybe you were scared or nervous when you first came here. But you did it! You were brave! You were strong! And you can do it again, and I know you will do a great job and lots of people will help you. I will help you.

What can we do to make your new school more comfortable and welcoming?

- Have a good attitude (hope, excitement, plan to work hard, have fun, make friends)
- Practice your skills: how to make new friends, show respect, be a good listener, share your feelings.
- Be on the lookout to find new trusted adult(s) in the new school
- Journal and draw your ideas, thoughts, feelings
- Read appropriate books about change, moving, etc.

I will certainly help you to feel safe and happy. We will keep talking about school whenever you want. Sometimes I will ask you how you are feeling. That will help me to be a good listener and a good helper for you.

**Staff Resources: school counselor, nurse, teacher, librarian
Pamela Hillard, Health Education, 252-0987**