

Alexander Hamilton Jr. / Sr. High School – Elmsford, New York 10523

Guidance Department

(914) 592-8532

Monica Ahern
mahern@elmsd.org

Stephanie Luccioni
sluccioni@elmsd.org

Rosemary Young
Secretary / Registrar
ryoung@elmsd.org



Luccioni & Ahern

Important Dates:

September 28
Yom Kippur
SCHOOLS CLOSED

October 9
Progress Reports
Mailed Home

October 12
Columbus Day
SCHOOLS CLOSED

October 17
PSAT

October 20
Fifth Annual
College Fair

October 21
Superintendent's
Conference Day
SCHOOLS CLOSED

Barbara Peters
Superintendent

Peter Giarrizzo
Deputy Superintendent

Marc Baiocco
Principal

Fitzgerald Georges
Assistant Principal

Dear Middle School Parents,

Welcome Back! We hope all of you have had a relaxing and enjoyable summer. Time to sharpen the pencils and get back to work! For those of you who are new to Alexander Hamilton, The Beacon is a quarterly newsletter from the guidance office that contains reminders and articles for middle school parents.

Kids' Biggest Middle School Fears

Help ease the transition to a new school by tuning into what worries your child most.

By Deborah Wilburn

Whether your child starts middle school in 5th grade or 8th (and no matter how confident he is at the prospect), chances are there's something about it that has him scared silly. What concerns kids most, and how can parents help them work through their fears? An informal survey of parents, students, and experts who work with adolescents turned up the following:

- **Being late for class**
- **Not having friends**
- **Facing the cafeteria**
- **Being too different**
- **Tough classes**

Being late for class. Yes, preteens have loads of energy, but even they find it challenging to move from class to class on time. "You have to get to different classes in two minutes," says Skyler Moran, 11, a 6th grader in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. "I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it." It's especially challenging if a kid also needs to stop at his locker or visit the restroom. The consequence for lateness, at least in Skyler's school, is detention. No kid wants to get in trouble because he wasn't fast enough!

What you can do: Reassure your child that he's not alone. Brainstorm ways to streamline the process. What will he do if he's not sure where a particular class is located? Who will he ask for directions (for example, the teacher of his previous class, or his advisor)? Is he good at keeping his books and papers organized? If not, help him clean up the mess so he doesn't waste precious minutes between classes. Remind him that he'll have to save socializing for lunchtime or after school.

Not having friends. James is a 7th grader in Murfreesboro whose main concern at the start of middle school was making friends. He says he was worried about "the new people I would meet, and not being part of the same group as in elementary school." Middle school can be an especially difficult time for girls, given the rotating nature of girls' friendships, the emergence of queen bees, and the shifting social order.

What you can do: "If your child's best friend is going to a different middle school, be sensitive to his loss," says Gemma Ainslie, Ph.D., a psychologist in Austin, Texas. Then try to focus on this time of new beginnings. You might ask, "Do you know anyone from your old school who is going to be there?" If she scoffs at your attempts to identify potentially friendly faces in the crowd, try to identify her fears and put them in perspective. You might say, "You had friends at your old school, what do you imagine might happen that you wouldn't be able to make friends at the new one?" or "Are you worried that the kids from your elementary school won't want to be friends anymore?" Don't feel like you have to supply a steady stream of solutions. Sometimes it helps kids just to voice their fears to a sympathetic listener. Ainslie also recommends that parents point out areas where friends won't change, such as in a church youth group, dance class, or sports league.

Facing the cafeteria. Akin to "no one will like me," many kids live in fear of walking into a crowded lunchroom, getting their tray, and then having nowhere to sit. Skyler, the Pennsylvania 6th grader, explains: "Kids separate themselves by groups — the cool kids, nerd kids, good kids, bad kids. Sometimes you can get

kicked off a table." But Skyler has his own coping strategy: "I sit at a different table every day," he says.

What you can do: Encourage your child to strategize ahead of time. Suzanne Smith, the parent of a 7th grader in Potsdam, New York, says lunchtime was a big issue for her shy daughter. "Eating lunch was fraught with social collapse," she says. "Social levels are established in this room and adolescents live and die by it." Smith says that "after a fair amount of discussion," she suggested that her daughter talk to someone ahead of time to make a plan to sit together and avoid that moment of "where do I sit, where will I be welcome?" It seemed to work — but it's a process that Smith's daughter repeats at the beginning of each school year.

Being too different. Nothing is worse for middle schoolers than standing out in a way they haven't chosen, which means anything at the far end of the "normal" curve. For a girl, it could mean being the tallest in the class or the most developed; for a boy, it could mean being the shortest or the clumsiest. At some schools, fashion is the arbiter of all things cool, and middle schoolers (especially girls) live in dread of showing up with the wrong backpack, brand of jeans, or style of shoes.

What you can do: First, understand that tweens are a stage that marks the beginning of their search for an identity. "Until a young person is able to carve out an identity he is comfortable with, the mantra is 'don't stick out,'" says Lesa Rae Vartanian, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Indiana University-Purdue University in Fort Wayne, Indiana. "Kids who insist on 'being different' through odd hair color or clothing choices often aren't doing anything that unique," adds Vartanian. "They're just aligning with a slightly different group."

How, then, do you cope with a child obsessed with fitting in? First, whatever it is about your preteen's personality or appearance that concerns her, don't say, "That's silly," or "It doesn't matter." Minimizing her feelings (even with the best of intentions) will only make her feel more alone. Another no-no: Bromides like "just be yourself and everyone will love you." "Kids don't believe it," says Judith Baenen, head of St. Mary's Academy, a K-12 school in Englewood, Colorado. Not only that, but preteens' self-esteem drops during this time, due to a combination of hormonal activity (remember, too, that puberty is setting in) and brain development. "What they really need is your unconditional love and support," says Baenen. On a practical note, she advises parents not to buy their tween's entire wardrobe before school starts. "Wait until your child gets to school and sees what everyone else has," she says.

Finally, emphasize the positive as one way of boosting an insecure preteen's confidence. "Teach your children to think in terms of 'you are' statements rather than 'you should be,'" says Theresa Thorkildsen, professor of education and psychology at the University of Illinois in Chicago. If, for example, a boy is small in stature but fast on the playing field, his parents could coach him to view his size as an asset rather than a liability.

Excerpts From: "Scholastic Parents" - <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3746305>

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The Fifth Annual College Fair is Coming!

Tuesday, October 20th, 2009

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HIGH SCHOOL**
98 So. Goodwin Avenue
Elmsford, NY 10523

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