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## Syndication

### Not All Kids' Schools are Created Equal



May 25, 2009 ★★★★★

By Jacqueline Bodnar

Each year, more than 40 million moves take place, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. A large portion of them take place in summer, because people wait for the school year to end so they can relocate before the next one begins. Parents have been doing this for years. And while most of the focus is on how the child will fare with making friends and liking their new surroundings, there is additional cause for concern when it comes to academics. Not all schools provide the same academic level, even within a single grade level.

#### Same School, Different Information

"There is a difference between grades, even the same school system in the same school district in the same state," explains Stacey Kannenberg, author of Let's Get Ready for Kindergarten and Let's Get Ready for First Grade. "It really comes down to each teacher and their teaching style and enthusiasm for teaching. Sadly, we don't have national standards for each grade that or easy for parents, kids and teachers to find."

Kannenberg spent time polling preschool teachers in order to see whether they knew what kindergarten students are tested on. She found that there is a big communication gap, and that the majority do not know, which makes it difficult to adequately prepare their students for what they will encounter in school.

#### Leaving the State

Many people end up moving from one state to another, making it even more probable that they will encounter a gap in the educational standards. Some states are known for being ahead or behind other states academically. This could cause a problem when, for example, your child is cruising along in the fifth grade in one state, only to find that he's not adequately prepared for the same grade when moving to a new state.

"The real disconnect occurs when students transfer from a school in another state," explains Denise Hains, a guidance counselor at Millbrook Middle School in New York. "Within state, I think public school districts are probably on a par with each other, academically, but I would say academics vary tremendously from state to state."

As a case in point, Hains dealt with an 8th-grade student who transferred from Alabama, where she had been doing well in accelerated algebra. However, in New York, the accelerated algebra teacher noticed right away that she lacked the skills and ability to do the work, and the girl was placed back into the regular math class. This type of story is common when transferring to different schools, especially if it is a state-to-state relocation.

Issues can also arise when you transfer a student from private school to public school, because the schools in question are not always on the same pace, academically. For high school students, these differences could become an issue that impacts their graduation date if they are behind and need additional courses in order to catch up.

#### Being Prepared

"Most schools and school districts feature their report cards online. Different from a child's report card, the school and/or district report card contains valuable information related to attendance, test scores, and teacher-to-student ratios," says Joe Bruzzese, a professor in the graduate school of education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, as well as being the author of Parents' Guide to the Middle School Years.

Several online sites online offer a report-card-type of look at schools. The information is free and easy to access. Parents can also read parent reviews of schools, and can contact guidance counselors at the schools where they may be moving. They can give you an idea of where they stand academically in regard to where your student is currently attending school.

"Although the numbers won't tell the complete story, the report card gives parents an opportunity to find a school that is similar to the one their child currently attends,"

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adds Bruzzese.

*Making a Smoother Transition*

Today moving to new schools is common and it doesn't have to be as much of a difficult situation as once thought. With some preparation and being proactive, you can help the entire process go more smoothly. Knowing where your child is academically and where they will need to be in the next school is important. You can find information like this out through places such as Student Online Achievement Resources (SOAR), where they will provide standardized test to get an idea of where your child is. Once you know where there are any deficiencies, you can opt for tutoring to help bring them up to speed before making the transition. This will help ensure they don't struggle upon entering the next classroom.

Other things you can do to help make the moving to a new school easier on your child include contacting the guidance counselor where you are moving to. A school guidance counselor will be able to help your child get acclimated by pairing them with the right classes, teachers, and even setting up a buddy system so they have another student to help show them around.

Once you get to the new school, set up a tour and see if there is an opportunity for meeting the teacher and even the student that will be showing your child around. Then, be patient and give your child time to get adjusted. Focus on the positives and help assure them that they will fit in and become comfortable in time. If you feel your child is struggling, don't hesitate to speak with their teacher and the guidance counselor to see what can be done to address the situation.

**Looking to research schools?**

Start here:

Great Schools  
www.GreatSchools.com

School Matters  
www.SchoolMatters.com

Student Online Achievement Resources  
www.soarathome.org

*Jacqueline Bodnar is a freelance writer that lives in Port Orange, Fla. with her husband and two children.*

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