Transition program helps 5th-graders adjust to middle school

Visits to the school, Q&A sessions and more are designed to ease the move

The transition from 5th grade to 6th grade can be a difficult experience for many students. Once they reach middle school, students are required to change classrooms more often, use lockers for the first time, meet new students and be more organized in general, all while dealing with the onset of adolescence, said Krissy Westfall, the middle school counselor.

“It’s scary for the students, but it’s scary for parents too, because their children are entering a whole new world,” she said.

That’s where the school district’s 6th-grade transition program comes in. The program is designed to ease students’ and parents’ fears by showing them around the middle school, introducing them to faculty and staff and answering questions.

Cairo-Durham Middle School Principal Kerry Overbaugh said the goal is to help students and parents recognize faculty and staff before the school year begins.

“If they know who we are before they get here, that’s one less thing for them to worry about,” she said.

The first step toward that goal took place in April, when middle school faculty and staff visited the district’s two elementary schools to meet fifth-graders.

From May 12-16, the district’s five 6th-grade classes will spend a day at the middle school, where they will follow a daily class schedule, meet teachers, see what it’s like in the hallways between classes, and learn what 6th-graders wish they had known before starting middle school.

An orientation for parents will be held at the middle school on Tuesday, May 27, at 6:30 p.m. Parents can meet 6th-grade teachers and see an example of a class schedule their child might follow.

A 6th-grade orientation will be held at the middle school on Wednesday, Aug. 20 at 6:30 p.m. During the last week of August, 6th-graders can drop off supplies in their lockers and get copies of their schedules to find out where their classrooms are before the school year starts.

Parents, students and middle school staff are also invited to a picnic at Cairo Town Park on Monday, June 23, 11:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The picnic will give everyone an opportunity to become acquainted and have fun in an informal setting.

More information, including dates and times, will be mailed home to parents soon.
Foreign language week a success

If the answers are Javier Bardem and Marion Cotillard, then it must be the Foreign Language Week trivia contest. The week is an annual event designed to highlight the district’s foreign language program and raise students’ awareness of world cultures. This year’s activities included trivia contests at the middle and high schools, a Passport for Learning challenge at the middle school and a poetry exercise at the high school.

In the trivia contest, Javier Bardem and Marion Cotillard were answers to the question, “What foreign actors recently won Academy Awards?” Bardem, who is Spanish, won for his role in “No Country for Old Men,” while Cotillard, who is French, won for her role in “La Vie en Rose.” Other questions included, “What are the six official languages of the U.N.?” (A: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese). Trivia contest winners received a $50 U.S. savings bond.

New to the middle school this year was the Passport for Learning challenge, in which students were asked to find out information about staff members, such as “Who was born in Canada?” and “Who lived and worked in a medieval castle?”

At the high school, students in Spanish language classes read Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen’s collection “The Great Zoo,” a series of poems that highlighted social conditions in his country. The students then created make-believe creatures based on Guillen’s poems.

Pattilynn McLaughlin, left, won the high school’s trivia contest, while Emily Munger, right, won the middle school’s contest. Each received a $50 U.S. savings bond as their prize.

Construction project set to begin in April

The Cairo-Durham Central School District anticipates conducting a construction project commencing in April 2008. This project will be conducted at:

- Cairo-Durham High School
  1301 Rt. 145, Cairo, NY 12413
- Cairo-Durham Middle School
  1301 Rt. 145, Cairo, NY 12413
- Cairo Elementary School
  424 Main Street, Cairo, NY 12413
- Durham Elementary School
  4099 Rt. 145, Durham, NY 12422

The project will consist of the following: replacement boilers at Cairo Elementary; three new classrooms at the middle/high school; 1 new PLTW technology classroom; girls softball field upgrade; infrastructure improvements to the electrical system at Durham Elementary.

Pursuant to the Education Commissioner’s Regulation 155.5(d), the Cairo-Durham Central School District will provide a safe school environment throughout this project, including an update of the school emergency plan to reflect any temporary exits or procedures needed as a result of the construction work at the Cairo-Durham High School, Cairo-Durham Middle School, Cairo Elementary School and the Durham Elementary School. Fire drills will be held to familiarize students and staff with any temporary exits. The construction area will be separated from occupied areas of the building, and all construction workers will be required to wear photo identification badges, and noise levels will be kept to a minimum while the building is occupies. All applicable federal and state rules and regulations will be strictly adhered to throughout the length of this project.

Specific questions or concerns about this project may be directed to the business manager or the director of facilities at 622-8534.

Sincerely,
Sally M. Sharkey
Superintendent of Schools

Mark your calendars

- May 1: Middle School BIT meeting, 3:15 p.m.
- May 2: CE/DE interim report cards issued
- May 2: Cairo Elementary Effective Schools Assembly: K-1, 9:30 a.m.; 2-3 10:15 a.m.; 4-5, 1:15 p.m.
- May 5: Grade 8 state science exam
- May 6: Cairo Elementary PTA banking day
- May 7: Durham Elementary PTA meeting, 7 p.m.
- May 9: High School Quiz Night
- May 13 & 15: DE kindergarten screening, 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
- May 15: Durham Elementary - grades 3-5 spring concert, 7 p.m.
- May 16: Cairo Elementary Grandparents Day, 9:30-10:45 a.m.
- May 19: CE/DE BIT meetings, 3:30 p.m. at each school
- May 20: Cairo Elementary spring concert, 7 p.m.
- May 21: High School awards night, 7 p.m.

Board of Education

The Board of Education meets twice a month in the High School Media Center. Community members are encouraged to attend.

Upcoming meetings:

- May 13, 7 p.m.
- May 22, 7 p.m.
- June 12, 7 p.m.
Youth athletic programs growing
Basketball, wrestling help students stay active in winter, when it’s often too cold to play outside

Two new youth athletic programs offer Cairo-Durham elementary school students a chance to have fun, make new friends, and get some exercise.

The district’s youth basketball and wrestling programs attracted scores of students this winter, and each was successful enough that they will be offered again next year, said Ron Agostinoni, the district’s athletic director.

“Agostinoni guessed that one reason the programs were so successful was that they were offered during winter, when it’s often too cold for children to play outside.

“It doesn’t matter why they participate as long as they enjoy themselves. Anyone who wants to play can play,” he said.

Wrestling program new this year

Greenville has run its own program for several years, but this was the first year Cairo-Durham teamed up. The program was offered to students grades 1-8 and attracted about 60 kids this year, Jones said.

Many students who don’t play other, more popular sports often find wrestling to be highly rewarding, Jones said. So, having a place for them to train is important.

“It’s not like some sports where you can pick up a ball and practice in your backyard or your driveway,” he said. “With wrestling, you need a place for people to come together.”

Jones added that he’s already thinking about what the program will mean once the wrestlers get to high school.

“If you want to have a successful high school program, you have to get the kids started early. I think this program will do that,” he said.
Property tax cap is wrong answer for state’s schools

The possibility of a property tax cap in New York State has been the subject of much discussion recently. While all New Yorkers would likely welcome some form of property tax relief, doing so at the expense of public schools is the wrong answer.

Below are some highlights from a legislative position paper on the tax cap issue signed by 48 school district and BOCES superintendents, including Cairo-Durham Superintendent Sally M. Sharkey.

### Bad public policy could make things worse

- Tax caps tend to hurt poor communities most. A 3 percent property tax increase in a poor district will raise less money than a 3 percent increase in a wealthy district.
- Caps don’t change costs imposed by the state and federal governments. The state’s Triborough Law mandates annual raises for teachers even when contracts have expired.
- New York already has a cap - the contingency budget cap. When voters fail to approve a school district budget, spending is capped at a figure tied to the inflation rate.
- Caps have had catastrophic impacts on schools in other states. According to some experts, California went from “first to worst” in the ranking of the nation’s schools. In Massachusetts, districts have been forced to layoff dozens of teachers at a time to stay within the cap.

### What should be done to address this issue?

- Move to state-funded health insurance. If the state pooled all school, municipal and county employees into a single, state-run health insurance program, it would take enormous pressure off property taxes.
- Pay pension costs at the state level. Pension costs are outside school districts’ control, so this is an area where state-funding makes better sense.
- Require full funding for all new state mandates - and relief from existing ones.
- Keep the state’s promise to fund schools. If the state follows through on Foundation Aid formulas enacted last year, it will go a long way toward relieving pressure on local property taxes.

### School district tax code for state income tax forms

Cairo-Durham’s tax code is 076. If you live in the Cairo-Durham school district and are required to file a New York State income tax return, you must enter this code on your tax forms.

### 2008-09 budget process – important dates

- May 6 – Budget proposal available for public review
- May 13 – Voter registration - 12-8 p.m. at the high school
- May 13 – Budget hearing - 7 p.m. in the MS/HS media center.
- May 13 – Applications for absentee ballots due
- May 20 – Budget vote - noon to 9 p.m. in the middle school cafeteria