

Transferring to New Heights

Have you ever had a personal experience that left a significant impact on you? Everyone goes through something that had a positive or negative effect on them. For me, one event was transitioning from my high school to Town & Country school, a private school that specializes in educating students with learning differences. This took place in January 2022, during the coronavirus pandemic. At first, attending a new school was very scary because I would meet new faces and had to become familiar with a new setting. But after I became accustomed to Town & Country's classrooms and made several new friends, I felt very joyful because of its smaller environment, and their kind-hearted students and teachers. To better understand how much this experience meant to me, I must take you back to the events before I transferred to Town & Country, the day I "tagged along" with a current student, and the way I ultimately benefited from switching to a new school.

In 2021, when I was a freshman at my former school, I took all of my classes online, except for one that I had on campus. My parents chose to put me in virtual courses to keep our family safe from the coronavirus. However, these classes were fast-paced and challenging. Fortunately, my Mom worked with me in order to help me better understand the material in each course. I remember when my Mom and I listened to a lecture, we would hear the teacher hastily speaking. In addition, I recall walking through the noisy, crowded hallways of my high school's freshman academy building to my only class in person. There were about twenty to twenty-five students in each classroom. But then, in October 2021, my Mom asked me: "What do you think about moving to a new school?" I swiftly responded: "Oh, yeah absolutely! Anything but virtual

classes!” A few weeks later, my Mom and I visited a private school called Town & Country. When we met with their high school principal, she explained to us several things, including: student dress code, lunch period, and safety procedures for reducing the spread of the coronavirus, such as wearing a mask. Then, she showed us a couple of the classrooms. I recall noticing the small number of long, grey tables in each class, as well as the fewer number of students—roughly ten to twelve. After our visit, the principal offered me to “shadow”, or see what a full school day was like, with an enrolled Town & Country student in the same grade as me. Even though I was at first unsure, I accepted her idea. Then, my Mom and I scheduled my “shadow day” for November 18th.

On the morning I shadowed at Town & Country, I remember feeling slightly nervous, as I heard the shuffling noises of my Mom packing my lunch in a brown paper bag. “It’ll be okay, Nathan.” Mom reassured me. “The principal said you would be paired up with another student for the day.” This made me feel less anxious. When my Mom and I entered the school lobby, the principal greeted us. After Mom and I said goodbye to each other, the principal escorted me to the school’s ginormous gym for the first hour. Upon entering, I was introduced to the P.E. teacher and several new faces. One of them was the student I was shadowing with. “This is Nathan. He is going to be following your schedule today.” the principal informed him. “Okay!” he said happily. While I stood on the gym’s smooth grey floor, I noticed the tall row of burgundy-colored bleachers against the wall adjacent to the exit. A few minutes later, the principal left through the door we entered. On this day, the P.E. class was in their soccer unit. After we did several drills, particularly ball handling, the students and I played an indoor soccer scrimmage. The gym teacher played some music during the game as blasted from the large, black ceiling speakers. I felt very tired, but also happy, at the end of the first hour. In second period biology, I saw four

wooden tables that were a few inches away from each other in the small, rectangular classroom. In addition, I met more students and teachers, who were very caring as I saw their smiles and listened to their joyful voices. There were eleven to twelve students in each of the classes I shadowed in. At 11:00 A.M., after our third class, it was our lunch hour. I noticed many round, dark-brown tables, with two black chairs pushed under each of them, scattered throughout the massive, white-brick walled room when we entered. We sat close to the back as I saw the excited faces of the other students. When it was 3:00 P.M., the end of the final class period, I told the student I shadowed with thank you for helping me navigate the day more easily. "Of course!" he replied as we said goodbye to each other. When I walked to the front lobby, my Mom was waiting for me with a slight smile on her face. "How did it go?" she asked. "It was really good!" I joyfully replied. After the visit, I discussed the day with my parents and decided that I wanted to attend Town & Country. My parents enrolled me to start on January 3rd, 2022, the beginning of the second semester, and the results I have received as a new student were spectacular.

There were several positive effects I faced after I switched to Town & Country school. The first impact is that I was able to make a larger amount of close relationships with my fellow students and teachers. Sadly, before I transferred to Town & Country, I didn't have many friends in high school due to the coronavirus pandemic. Now, being able to have discussions with my peers, hearing their loud laughter and seeing their happy faces, made me feel grateful. In fact, one of those friends was a student I had known since we were two years old. A few hours after my shadowing day, my Mom informed me that this friend's mother texted her, saying that he saw me, but I didn't notice him. "Oh, no way!" I remember saying to her in a shocked tone. A second effect is that I was able to learn in an environment that suited my needs. Several examples of this include the smaller classrooms and the fewer number of students in them, which made it easier to

concentrate. The third outcome is that I was included in a wide variety of clubs and activities at school. This includes playing on the basketball team, being a member of the videogame club, and participating in the National Honor Society (NHS). The final result I faced was that I learned I was diagnosed with autism, which I've had since I was eighteen months old. This took place a few hours after my Mom and I visited Town & Country in October 2021. When I first found out from my parents I was autistic, I was confused and shocked. "Why haven't I been told about this?" I remember asking my Mom. "We kept this information from you because we wanted you to reach an age in which you can better understand your diagnosis and explore it on your own." she added.

To summarize, transferring to Town & Country significantly helped me because I was able to interact with more people and learn in a much calmer environment. There were two lessons that I learned from this experience. The first lesson is that when you begin something new, you must anticipate that there will be obstacles and adjustments that need to be made, and that you must have patience and perseverance to reach your goals. A second lesson I received is that when I switched to Town & Country, I noticed that each student was facing similar struggles associated with their diagnosis like me. When I was in high school, my family and I tried various methods to help me learn easily, which was hard and exhausting. Now at Town & Country, I've been reassured that my family and I are not the only ones attempting to overcome a difficult obstacle, because my fellow students and their families are also experiencing challenges like us.