



Return to Learn

Guidelines for Transitioning Students Back to School from Extended Absences

Students transitioning back to school after an extended absence due to a mental illness or chronic medical condition need support as they reintegrate back into the school learning environment. The *Return to Learn* guidelines are designed to establish the rationale, roles and responsibilities, and procedures for planning and implementing accommodations and supports that a student may need to effectively transition back to school following an extended absence. An extended absence is generally defined as missing more than a week of school.

Transitioning a student back to school from an extended absence requires coordination and communication. To effectively accomplish this, transition planning requires a system of care that involves teaming and collaboration among school staff, family members, and community treatment providers (e.g. hospital staff, psychiatrists, physicians, etc.) both prior to and after the extended absence. Ongoing communication is essential to promote a shared understanding and to develop and implement an effective plan that appropriately meets the student's educational needs for successful school reintegration. It is also important that school teams identify a point of contact for the student who can case manage the transition and facilitate ongoing communication.

For a student who is absent for an extended period of time, such as for hospitalization, it is important for school personnel to demonstrate compassion toward families and students during the transition and to recognize the need for flexibility with expectations during this period of time. As a student transitions back to school, he or she may experience various cognitive, social, emotional, and academic challenges. The stresses of re-entry may slow ongoing recovery, whereas positive supports can enhance recovery and reintegration. These challenges should be addressed during the transition planning process.

The transition plan takes into account three related concepts that should be considered in order to develop a clear and effective transition plan. The three concepts are:

- ***Attendance & Stamina:*** student's capacity to attend school and remain in the classroom;
- ***Academic Engagement:*** student's ability to complete past/current/future work, spend time on both classwork and homework, and manage the type and difficulty of the work; and
- ***Level of Support:*** supports needed to increase attendance, stamina, and academic engagement.

Successful transition planning involves a comprehensive understanding of the student's individual needs as the student recovers and reintegrates back into the learning environment. The team should develop and implement a plan that reflects the individual supports needed during the absence and for a finite period after the student returns to school. The goal of the plan is to ultimately 1) increase school attendance and time in classroom; 2) increase the amount of work, time spent on work, and/or the type or difficulty of work the student is expected to

complete and make-up; and 3) a decrease in the amount/type of accommodations and supports as the student recovers and reintegrates back into school.

Students will follow a very individualized course of recovery. Therefore, it is important to note that not all students will start at the same point, progress at the same rate, or pass through all phases of recovery. Generally, it is expected that identified students may need the support of a transition plan for several weeks or more as they reintegrate back into the school environment. It is vital that school professionals work with parent/guardian(s) and treatment providers to develop a transition plan with this understanding in order to effectively support students in all phases of their recovery/transition. The phases of transition/recovery described below provide a framework for discussion when the team is developing the transition plan:

- 1. No School or Work**
 - No homework, assignments, tests, quizzes; rest at home only
- 2. No School; Minimal Work**
 - Short periods of sustained work
- 3. School Part-Time with Maximum Instructional Supports**
 - Shortened days with built-in breaks
 - Modified environment (e.g., no hallways or cafeteria & work in library)
 - Established learning priorities
 - Exclusion from standardized and classroom testing
 - Extra time/assistance on assignments
 - Rest and recovery when out of school
- 4. Full-Time School Attendance; Moderate Instructional Supports**
 - Built-in breaks
 - Established learning priorities
 - Limited homework
 - Alternative grading strategies
 - Modified or limited classroom testing
 - Exclusion from standardized testing
 - Moderate level of extra time, assistance and/or modification of assignments as needed
- 5. Full-Time School Attendance; Minimal Instructional Supports**
 - Built-in breaks
 - Limited formative and summative testing
 - Exclusion from standardized testing
 - Minimal level of extra time, assistance and/or modification of assignments as needed
 - Continuation of instructional modification and supports in academically challenging subjects that require cognitive overexertion and stress
- 6. Full-Time School Attendance; No Instructional Supports**
 - Attends all classes
 - Maintains full academic load/homework

Any supports provided to the student in the *Return to Learn* protocol should supplement any accommodations already outlined in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan if the student is eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Act or Section

504, respectively. The school team may need to consider further evaluation through Child Study or the IEP or 504 team meeting if a student’s functioning in the school environment does not improve over time.

The roles and responsibilities of school professionals, parents/guardians, and treatment providers are described below to clearly identify the team responsibilities in this process.

Roles and Responsibilities	
School Administrators (Principal, Assistant Principal, Dean, and/or Designees)	Supervise and coordinate all mental health and medical health staff to align practices and support the return to learn plan for students. Meet with parents, distribute documents and forms as necessary, and advise staff on academic, behavior, and emotional needs of the student.
School Counselor	Collaborate with teachers and students to review the class schedule, monitor attendance and establish academic/behavior accommodations and supports. Collaborate with school administration to support the transition back to school.
Classroom Teachers	Review the transition plan and implement accommodations needed to support the student’s progress and recovery.
School Nurse/Health Clinic Specialist	Collaborate with teachers to provide medical health education and awareness regarding the possible impact on the student’s functioning as they return to school. Review physician’s orders and other medical documentation to support and develop the Individual Health Care Plan and assist in the development of 504 Plans as necessary. Collaborate with parents and student to support the transition back to school.
School Psychologist	Collaborate with teachers to provide mental health education and awareness regarding the possible impact on the student’s functioning as they return to school. Collaborate with school counselor to support the emotional and behavior needs of the student.
School Social Worker	Communicate with outside providers and agencies to facilitate the student’s transition back to the school environment. Collaborate with the school counselor to support the emotional and behavior needs of the student.
Student Assistance Specialist	Communicate with parents, the juvenile justice system and/or other agencies to implement and oversee judicial mandates as required. Provide substance use education and monitor mental health wellness of the student. Collaborate with School Resource Officer and other mental health team members to facilitate the student’s transition back to the school environment.
Athletic Trainer	Review physician’s orders and other medical documentation to support and develop the Individual Health Care Plan and assist in the development of 504 Plans as necessary. Collaborate with parents and student to support the transition back to school.
Transition Contact	A transition team member can form a connection with the student, check in periodically, provide assistance, monitor the transition plan and supports, and liaison with parents and treatment providers

Parents/Guardians	Inform the school when his/her child is expected to be on extended leave. Collaborate with school professionals in providing a release of information and supporting documentation to assist the team in determining the child's level of need and level of support.
Treatment Provider	Communicate with school professionals and parents on the student's needs, recovery, and progress.

References

Fairfax County Public Schools. (2017). *Return to Learn Protocol*

Shaw, S. R., & McCabe, P. C. (2008). *Hospital-to-School Transition for Children with Chronic Illness: Meeting the New Challenges in an Evolving Health Care System*. *Psychology in the Schools*. 45(1). 74-87.

UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools. (2014). *Transitioning from Psychiatric Hospitalization to Schools*. Retrieved from <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/hospital.pdf>

TRANSITION PROCEDURES

Prior to Initiating the Transition Meeting

1. A team should be identified that includes an Administrator, School Counselor, Parents/Guardians, Student, School Nurse or Health Care Specialist, School Social Worker/School Psychologist, and Classroom Teacher. Depending on the individualized needs of the student, other staff who may have expertise or knowledge of the student could include the Student Assistance Specialist, Special Education Supervisor, Special Education Teachers (if the student has an IEP), Athletic Trainer, Attendance Officer, community-based mental health or medical provider.
2. All transition documents should be reviewed from the Department of Pupil Services intranet.
3. The team will identify a Transition Contact (one of the core team members (e.g., counselor for mental health) after considering the relationship with the student or nature of the absence.
4. The Transition Contact will contact the parents or student, if appropriate, to collect information regarding the extended absence in order to determine who should attend the transition meeting.
5. The Transition Contact will contact the parent to obtain a release of information from any treatment providers, if appropriate, to share important records needed for planning.

Initiating the Transition Meeting

1. When school administration or school staff are informed that a student is returning to school after an extended absence, the Transition Contact should be contacted immediately.
2. The Transition Contact will then contact the parents and/or student to schedule the Transition Meeting within one to two weeks prior to the student's return and send the meeting invitation letter and *Return to Learn* brochure.
3. Transition Contact should invite members of the school-based team as well as any community providers who are supporting the student to attend a transition meeting.
4. If a student returns to school unexpectedly, the Transition Contact should initiate a transition meeting within five (5) school days.

Developing and Implementing the Plan

1. The team reviews the meeting agenda with the team: introduce transition team members, state purpose of meeting, review current levels of functioning, identify level of needed supports, develop the transition plan, and determine a timeframe for review.
2. The team reviews and considers all available information including recommendations from the student's treatment provider(s).
3. The transition plan should be developed during the transition meeting, and the plan should identify the accommodations and supports, the timeframe for implementation, the school-based staff who will be assigned to implement the plan, and how it will be monitored.
4. The team determines the appropriate accommodations and supports to include in the plan. The team should use the *Transition Planning Inquiry* as a guide and consider the information provided by parents and private providers when determining specific educational accommodations and the level of supports that are appropriate. Note: Treatment providers may recommend academic or educational recommendations that are

not appropriate, feasible, or permissible, so it is important to have established two-way communication in these situations.

5. The team discusses what confidential information is important to share with the student's teachers, support staff, and administrators (when, how, and by whom) and what information does the student and family want to share with peers/classmates (when, how, and by whom).
6. The Transition Contact should provide a written copy of the plan to teachers and other relevant staff in order to support implementation (e.g., Individualized Education Program).

Providing Follow-Up Support

1. The Transition Contact should monitor the implementation of the plan through communication with stakeholders following the first week of the student's return.
2. Periodic monitoring should occur and the frequency will be based upon individual student needs.
3. If adjustments are needed, a follow-up transition team meeting should be held.

SCHOOL SUPPORTS FOR TRANSITIONING A STUDENT BACK TO SCHOOL

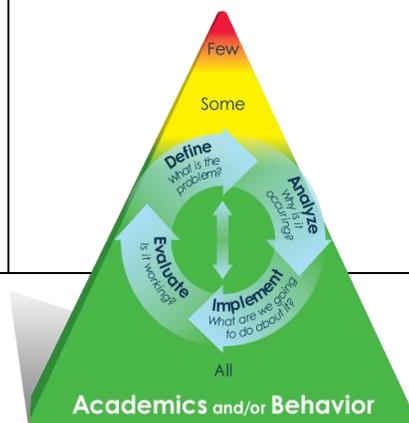
To facilitate a smooth transition back to school, school-based professionals should collaborate and plan with the parents. The table below provides school teams and parents with an overview of the potential academic, behavioral, and mental health supports that may be available. Please include parents in the discussion and explain that appropriate services are determined based on individual student needs through collaboration between school teams, families, and community providers.

	Academic	Behavior	Social-Emotional
Tier 3	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modified Instruction/Assessments • Alternate Assignments • Individualized Instruction • Specialized Instruction (e.g. Reading, Math) • Reduced or Partial Day Schedule • Decrease in Academic Workload • Virtual Loudoun, Virtual Virginia, Homebound, Child Study 	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan • Individual Behavior Plan/Intervention • Restorative Conferences 	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Counseling • Restorative Conferences • Student Referral and Assessment Program (SRAP) • Referral to WRAP-Family Connections or Multi-Disciplinary Team • Home Visits
Tier 2	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Evidenced-Based Strategies/Intervention • Structured Flex/Resource • Temporary Modified Class Schedule/Reduced Day • Temporary Decrease in Academic Workload • Tutoring • Check In/Check Out • Mentoring • Consult with educational diagnostician, school counselor, school psychologist • Assistance Moving around Building and/or Carrying Items • Virtual Loudoun, Virtual Virginia, Homebound, Problem Solving Team 	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check In/Check Out • Small Group • Restorative Circles • Consult with school counselor, social worker, school psychologist 	Increase Intensity, Frequency and/or Duration of Tier 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Counseling • Restorative Circles • Support Groups • Consult with school counselor, social worker, school psychologist
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation (Reteach/Model/Reassess) • Recognition/Feedback • PEER buddy • Virtual Loudoun, Virtual Virginia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation (Reteach/Model/Reassess) • Recognition/Feedback • Differentiate Classroom Management System • PEER buddy • Bathroom Pass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation (Reteach/Model/Reassess) • PEER buddy • Recognition/Feedback • Opportunities to Rest

TRANSITION PLANNING INQUIRY

Directions: The Transition Plan will be developed to support students who are transitioning back to school from a long-term absence due to a variety of reasons (such as but not limited to physical illness, mental health treatment, hospitalization, residential treatment, etc.). The transition team will determine the student’s needs based on the student’s current level of functioning and develop a plan of support. The questions provided below are intended as points of inquiry to develop a thorough understanding of the needs of the student, but not all questions will apply to all students and other questions can be considered. The transition plan should be completed after the relevant questions are considered by the team. The Transition Plan shall be maintained in the student’s cumulative file.

Attendance and Stamina	Academic Engagement	Level of Support
<p><i>How was the student performing academically prior to the absence?</i></p> <p><i>Did the student receive instruction/support while absent?</i></p> <p><i>How much work, if any, did the student complete while absent?</i></p> <p><i>What is the student’s current physical health, mental health, and academic status?</i></p> <p><i>What recommendations are provided from outside treatment providers?</i></p> <p><i>What are the student’s academic strengths?</i></p> <p><i>What are the student and parents’ concerns regarding physical health, mental health, and academic functioning?</i></p> <p><i>School concerns regarding physical health, mental health, and academic functioning?</i></p> <p><i>Given the student’s current functioning, what is the student’s expected level of attendance and stamina at school?</i></p>	<p><i>What type and complexity of work is the student expected to complete?</i></p> <p><i>What amount of work is the student expected to complete?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need reduced homework assignments while transitioning back to school? If so, what homework is essential?</i></p> <p><i>What missed assignments are essential?</i></p> <p><i>What missed tests/quizzes are essential for the student to demonstrate mastery of course knowledge?</i></p> <p><i>How much time should the student spend on classwork and homework?</i></p>	<p><i>Does the student need modification to his/her schedule for any reason while transitioning back to school? Consider shortened day, reduction of course load, specific subjects at certain times, leaving class early to avoid crowded hallways, etc.</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need access to the school nurse/health clinic specialist?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need a healthcare plan or do revisions to the healthcare plan need to be made?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need environmental modifications or adaptations to the physical environment to support physical needs?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need support from the school counseling office? How frequently and in what context?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need to leave class quickly for mental health or other support?</i></p> <p><i>Do the parents need to complete any additional documentation (e.g., medication authorization, release of confidential information, etc.)?</i></p> <p><i>Does the student need to be referred to child study so the team can consider a referral for Section 504 or special education?</i></p>





Return to Learn Transition Plan

Loudoun County Public Schools

Name	Student ID	School	Date
Team Members			
Transition Contact Name and Title			
Reason for Absence			
Current Physical Health or Mental Health Concerns (include input from all stakeholders, such as the student, parents, school professionals, and treatment providers; consider both short-term and long-term effects, medications and relevant side effects, physical capabilities and limitations, social-emotional strengths and coping skills, and recommendations from treatment providers):			
Accommodations and Supports			
Please indicate how you will support the educational needs of this student. Include timeframe and/or dates that supports will be implemented, who will be responsible for implementation, and how each component of the plan will be monitored. If relevant, consider whether changes require an IEP or 504 meeting.			