

May

Time to Help Students and Families Plan Successful
Transitions to
a New Grade or a New School

The traditional school year draws to a close:

Teachers, students, and families appreciate their work together . . .

and anticipate the changes ahead.

>>>>new teachers

>>>>new schools

>>>>new peer groups

>>>>new opportunities, challenges, and stressors

Transitions are truly risky opportunities

Transitions arise related to each new step in formal education and in moving to and from special programs and to post school living and work. For those making such transitions, well-designed support during the period of transition can make a great difference in their lives. From the first grade-to-grade transition to the move to middle school and high school and every other move to a new school, all call for well-conceived programs designed to support transitions.

This means programs that prepare students and their families for the transitions *and* follow-up to ensure the transition has been a good one.

About Support for Transitions to a New Grade or a New School

Programs are needed that

- C provide closure related to what the student is leaving behind
- C enhance articulation between the old and the new
- C welcome newcomers and ensure they have the type of social support that facilitates positive acceptance and adjustment in the new setting
- C assess transition success
- C implement timely corrective interventions when transitions are not successful

Clearly, interventions to enable successful transitions make a significant difference in how motivationally ready and able students are to benefit from schooling. Available evidence supports the positive impact of early childhood programs in preparing young children for school. The programs are associated with increases in academic performance and may even contribute to decreases in discipline problems in later school years.

Evaluations show that well-conceived and implemented programs can successfully ease students' transition between grades, and preliminary evidence suggests the promise of programs that provide welcoming and social support for children and families transitioning into a new school. Programs that aid in the transition in and out of special education need better implementation and related evaluation. Available reports suggest such interventions will enhance students' attitudes about school and self and will improve their academic performance. Finally, programs providing vocational training and career education are having an impact in terms of increasing school retention and graduation and show promise for successfully placing students in jobs following graduation.

It has taken a long time for schools to face up to the importance of establishing transition programs. A good beginning has now been made, but there is much more to do. A major example of need involves the current push for greater inclusion of special education students. Such a policy can only succeed if sophisticated transition programs are developed.

In enhancing what your school does to support transitions, the following self-study survey can be used as a stimulus for staff discussion and brainstorming.

Support for Transitions: Self-Study Survey

The emphasis here is on planning, developing, and maintaining a comprehensive focus on the variety of transition concerns confronting students and their families. The work in this area can be greatly aided by advanced technology. Anticipated outcomes are reduced levels of alienation and increased levels of positive attitudes toward and involvement at school and in a range of learning activity.

A. What programs for establishing a welcoming and supportive community are at the site?

1. Are there welcoming materials/a welcoming decor?
 - >Are there welcome signs?
 - >Are welcoming information materials used?
 - >Is a special welcoming booklet used?
 - >Are materials translated into appropriate languages?
 - >Is advanced technology used as an aid?
2. Are there orientation programs?
 - >Are there introductory tours?
 - >Are introductory presentations made?
 - >Are new arrivals introduced to special people such as the principal and teachers?
 - >Are special events used to welcome recent arrivals?
 - >Are different languages accommodated?
3. Is special assistance available to those who need help registering?
4. Are social support strategies and mechanisms used?
 - >Are peer buddies assigned? Are peer parents assigned?
 - >Are special invitations used to encourage family involvement?
 - >Are special invitations used to encourage students to join in activities?
 - >Are advocates available when new arrivals need them?
5. Other? (specify) _____

B. Which of the following are used for grade-to-grade and program-to-program articulation?

1. Are orientations to the new situation provided?
2. Is transition counseling provided?
3. Are students taken on "warm-up" visits?
4. Is there a "survival" skill training program?
5. Is the new setting primed to accommodate the individual's need?
6. other (specify) _____

C. Which of the following are used to facilitate transition to post school living?

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|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. vocational counseling | 5. job opportunities on campus |
| 2. college counseling | 6. a work-study program |
| 3. a mentoring program | 7. life skills counseling |
| 4. job training | 8. Other? (specify) _____ |

D. What programs are used to build staff capacity to support transitions?

1. Is there ongoing training for team members concerned with Support for Transitions?
2. Is there ongoing training for teachers, office staff, administrators, peer buddies?
3. Other? (specify) _____

- E. Which of the following topics are covered in educating stakeholders?
1. understanding how to create a psychological sense of community
 2. developing systematic social supports for students, families, and staff
 3. developing motivation knowledge, and skills for successful transitions
 4. the value of and strategies for creating before and after school programs

Indicate below any other ways that are used to provide support for transitions.

Indicate below other things you want the school to do to provide support for transitions.

A Few Examples of Grade Articulation Programs

The following descriptions are from the Center's Technical Assistance Sampler entitled:

A Sampling of Outcome Findings from Intervention Relevant to Addressing Barriers to Learning

School Transitional Environment Project, or STEP

This primary prevention effort is designed to assist young adolescents complete the expected transition to junior or senior high school by modifying key elements of the school setting. The school environment is reorganized to more closely resemble the elementary grades, with students attending all core courses together, regular student-teacher contact, and opportunities for informal social interactions. The role of homeroom teacher is restructured as well, serving as the link between students and their families, schools, and communities. Homeroom teachers are both instructors and social service counselors. By preventing students from experiencing school change as a stressful life event, STEP aims to help students cope better with other life stressors occurring simultaneously.

An earlier version of STEP was *The Transition Project*: This Project aimed at increasing levels of peer and social support during transition to high school and reducing the difficulties of mastering transition tasks. It has two primary components: (1) restructuring the role of homeroom teachers to include guidance and counseling and (2) reorganizing the regularities of the school environment to reduce the social setting flux. Midyear and end of ninth grade assessments were collected on participants and matched controls measuring self-concepts, perceptions of school environment, and eighth- and ninth-grade attendance and grade averages. By the end of ninth grade, participants had significantly better attendance records and grade point averages as well as more stable self-concepts than controls. Further, by the final evaluation point, they also reported perceiving the school environment as having greater clarity of expectations and organizational structure and higher levels of teacher support and involvement.

For more information, see:

Felner, R.D., Ginter, M. & Primavera, J. (1982). Primary prevention during school transitions: Social support and environmental structure. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 10*, 277-289.

Felner, R., and A. Adan. *The School Transitional Environment Project: An Ecological Intervention and Evaluation*. In *Fourteen Ounces of Prevention: A Casebook For Practitioners*, 1988.

Felner, R., S. Farber and J. Primavera. *Transitions and Stressful Life Events: A Model For Primary Prevention*. New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1983.

The Social Support Program

This program provides teacher support, group support, and parental support to poor academic transition students. Sixty-six first year 6th graders were put into one of three groups: no-intervention, a group receiving Components A, B, and C, or a group receiving Component A only. Results showed that for full

and partial intervention, mean GPA improved from pre- to post-intervention and from pre-intervention to follow up (only significant for full intervention group). The full intervention group had lower depression scores at post-intervention and follow up than pre-intervention. Full and partial intervention had lower anxiety scores at post-intervention and follow up than pre-intervention. Full and partial intervention groups' stress decreased over time on peer relationships only. The partial intervention group showed significantly greater teacher reported problems on socialized aggression and anxiety/withdrawal at post-intervention and follow up than full intervention and no intervention groups.

For more information, see:

Greene, R.W., & Ollendick, T.H. (1993). Evaluation of a multidimensional program for sixth-graders in transition from elementary to middle school. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 162-176.

The Bridge Program

This is designed to ease transition between middle and high school. It is a one-semester transitional program for all incoming ninth grade students and provides them with a variety of activities that promote academic achievement, responsibility, school spirit, fellowship, acceptance, and empowerment. Bridge students had 70.7% of their grades in core classes at or above C, whereas the previous non-Bridge ninth grade class had 68.5% of grades at or above C. As tenth graders, they averaged 75.8% of their grades above C, compared to non-Bridge tenth graders who averaged 68% of grades above C. Also, non-Bridge ninth graders had a 22% withdrawal rate from school (dropouts and transfers) while only 5% of Bridge ninth graders withdrew. Regarding discipline, Bridge freshmen were disciplined less (22%) compared to non-Bridge freshmen (34%). The majority of students and staff supported the program and thought it was effective.

For more information, see:

Sheets, R.A., IZard-Baldwin, G., & Atterberry, P. (December, 1997). Bridge: A Program Designed to Ease the Transition from the Middle Level to the High School. *Bulletin*, 81(593). The National Association of Secondary School Principals. For more information about the Bridge program, contact Gloria IZard-Baldwin at gizard@cks.ssd.k12.wa.us.

Sixth Grade Transition Groups

The goal is to increase students' ability to successfully negotiate the academic, social, and emotional challenges that accompany transition to middle school. Three hundred eight fifth graders received a social competency/stress reduction program. Results showed that 94% of the students said they found the group helpful, 72% said that Day 3 was most helpful, and 92% would recommend it to fifth grade students next year.

For more information, see:

Hellem, D.W. (1990). Sixth grade transition groups: An approach to primary prevention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 10(4), 303-311.

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As students end a school year, new interventions needs arise. Minimally, there is a need to anticipate transitions and assist students and their families in the move to the next teacher(s) and setting. Ideally, efforts should be made to facilitate positive expectations and the beginnings of a strong working relationship.

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If you want to know more about assisting students and families with transitions, see the following Center Materials and Resources at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>>Quick Finds:

**Support for Transitions*

**Transition Programs/Grade Articulation*

>>*Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families*

(a Technical Aid Packet)

>>*What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families*

(a Guide to Practice)

>>*Support for Transitions to Address Barriers to Learning*

(a Training Tutorial)

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