Chapter 5. *Supports for Transitions*

*Transitions are critical times; addressing transitions present opportunities
to prevent problems and enable learning.*

Starting school, changing schools, moving to the next grade level, encountering hassles before and after school, during lunch – students (and their families) are confronted with a variety of transitions every day and throughout each year of schooling. Many schools pay too little attention to providing supports for transitions. When this is the case, opportunities are missed for promoting healthy development, addressing barriers to learning, and preventing learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Transition stressors can be barriers to school adjustment and thus learning and teaching; they also can exacerbate other factors that interfere with learning at school. Such stressors can lead students and their families, especially those who are particularly vulnerable, to behave in counterproductive ways and can have life-shaping consequences. Transitional problems can be viewed as stemming from external or internal factors or both.

A comprehensive approach to providing transition supports requires interventions within classrooms and school-wide, among schools, and with the community (see Exhibit 5.1). The activity overlaps the other five intervention arenas of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. Immediate goals are to prevent and address transition problems. In addition, transition periods provide opportunities to promote whole child development, increase positive attitudes and readiness skills for schooling, address systemic and personal barriers to learning and teaching, and (re)engage disconnected students and families.

Exhibit 5.1
  Key Transition Concerns and Examples of Supports for Transitions

Newcomers to a school – new students and their families, new staff, volunteers, visitors (Examples of interventions: comprehensive orientations, welcoming signs, materials, and initial receptions; social and emotional supports including peer buddy programs; accommodating special concerns of those from other countries and those arriving after periods of hospitalization)

Daily transitions -- before school, changing classes, breaks, lunch, afterschool (Examples of interventions: preventing problems by ensuring positive supervision and safety; providing attractive recreational, enrichment, and academic support activities; using problems that arise as teachable moments for enhancing social-emotional development)

Lengthy periods away from regular instruction – summer, intersession, hospitalization (Examples of interventions: supports for maintenance and catching-up, recreation and enrichment programs, service and workplace opportunities)

Matriculation challenges – new classrooms, new teachers; grade-to-grade; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; in and out of special education programs; school-to-career/higher education transition (Examples of interventions: information; academic, vocational, and social-emotional counseling and related supports; pathway and articulation strategies; mentor programs; programs to support moving to post school living and work)

Reports of early outcomes from transition interventions indicate reductions in tardies, vandalism, and violence at school and in the neighborhood. Over time, transition programs reduce school avoidance and dropouts, as well as enhancing school adjustment and increasing the number who make successful transitions to higher education and post school living and work. And, initial studies of programs for transition in and out of special education suggest the interventions can enhance students' attitudes about school and self and can improve their academic performance. It also is likely that transition supports add to perceptions of a caring school climate. All this can play a significant role in a family's decision about staying or changing schools.

FRAMING AND DESIGNING SUPPORTS FOR TRANSITIONS

Exhibit 5.2 provides a guide for school improvement planning related to developing a comprehensive approach for addressing transition concerns.

Exhibit 5.2
Prototype Framework for Addressing Transition Concerns*

	Subsystem for Enhancing Development and Preventing Problems	Subsystem for Immediately Addressing Problems	Subsystem for Follow-up &Addressing Continuing Problems
Starting School & Arriving New			
Matriculation Challenges			
Daily Transitions			
Lengthy Periods Away from Regular Instruction			

*Transition planning focuses on addressing concerns (a) in classrooms, (b) school-wide, (c) by a network of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeder pattern), and (d) in collaboration with the community.

While the nature and scope of transitions vary, there are common features in planning and implementing transition supports. As with every intervention, considerations about time, space, materials, and competence arise at every step. Multi-year strategic development requires gap analyses and priority setting. And, as with all student and learning supports, the work is strengthened when there is broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions and being responsible for effective implementation (e.g., students, staff, home; representatives from the police, faith groups, recreation, businesses, higher education, etc.). Given the substantial overlap involved in providing supports for transitions, coalescing resources from school, family, friends, peers, and community can enhance school capacity to handle the variety of transition concerns confronting students and their families and enhance cost-effectiveness. Garnering the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders enlarges the pool of potential volunteers.

In establishing priorities for system development, the emphasis is on strengthening the most important interventions and filling the most critical gaps. What follows are examples commonly identified as priorities for improving supports for transitions. For more specific examples, see the self-study survey in Appendix D.

Focus on Students Starting School and Newcomers

School systems and individual schools are quite variable in the degree to which they are prepared to address new students and families. And, of course, newcomers vary in terms of their capability and motivation with respect to transitioning into new settings. As a result, a newcomer may perceive a setting positively (e.g., friendly, inviting, helpful) or negatively (e.g., unwelcoming or even hostile, nonaccommodating). Schools can reduce learning, behavior, and emotional problems by prioritizing strategies for addressing newcomers' transitional needs and enhancing their positive perceptions.

Welcoming and Social Support for Everyone. Schools are concerned with enhancing a positive "climate" for learning. A good place to start is by improving welcoming and social supports for all newcomers. A positive welcome is desirable at each initial encounter between school staff and a new student and family, a new colleague, and all visitors. Each point of contact represents an opportunity and a challenge to positively assimilate newcomers into the school – welcoming and orienting them, linking them with appropriate social supports (e.g., peer buddies, mentors; orchestrating their entrance into ongoing groups and activities), and assisting them to make successful transitions. (See the Center's resource entitled: *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/welcomeguide.htm).

Immediately Addressing Adjustment Problems to the New Setting. Beyond greeting and orienting, transition supports include using the first weeks after arrival as a time to monitor and follow-up with personalized supports (e.g., social-emotional, academic, task-related) for those having difficulty adjusting to the new situation. Every school needs early warning and response procedures to

- quickly identify any new student, family, or staff who is having adjustment problems
- provide supports that aid those with minor adjustment problems
- initiate special assistance when necessary to those who have major adjustment problems

Such supports attend to both motivation and capability concerns.

Particular attention must be given to addressing the complex transitional needs of highly mobile students, recent immigrants, and new staff. The greater the numbers and rate of student and staff mobility and of families arriving from other countries, the greater the priority for pursuing strategies to enhance welcoming and social support.

Daily Transitions

Many schools have significant problems with tardies, bullying, substance abuse, and other forms of out-of-classroom behavior that contribute to poor student performance and a negative school climate. To prevent such problems, a common priority is to focus on strategies to address before, during, and after school transitions. During such transitions, the aims are to ensure positive school-wide supervision and safety, increase the range of attractive recreational, enrichment, and academic support activities, and enhance social-emotional development.

Enriching Before, During, and After School Recreation and Academic Supports. Well-designed and structured recreation and enrichment activities are basic elements in preventing problems and encouraging proactive behavior. Offered before school, they lure students to the campus early and thus reduce tardies. Offered at lunch, they can reduce the incidence of harassment and other negative interactions. After school, they provide alternatives to antisocial interactions in the community, and paired with positive opportunities for enriched and personalized academic support, they offer renewed hope for those who have learning problems.

Using School-wide Supervision and Follow-up to Counter Transition Problems and Promote Social-Emotional Development. Unstructured times at school are "dangerous," especially for vulnerable students. Breaks and lunch often result in office referrals for behavior problems and calls home expressing concern over inappropriate social and interpersonal behaviors. These are times when social groups (including gangs) gather together and provoke or intimidate others. When problems arise outside the classroom, those monitoring the situation have natural opportunities for helping students enhance social-emotional and moral development.

In general, daily transitions provide many *natural* opportunities that can be used as personalized, teachable moments to enhance learning and development. And, as feasible, follow-ups that deepen the learning can be arranged.

Matriculation Challenges

Articulation Programs. Students frequently have significant difficulty making the transition from grade-to-grade and going from elementary to middle school or from middle to high school. Indeed, many "dropouts" occur during transitions to high school. Priorities here include

- providing all students with opportunities to prepare themselves psychologically for such changes

- identifying and intervening on behalf of any student having difficulty during the actual period of transition

- offering follow-up opportunities, as feasible, to support those moving to post school living and work.

Comparable interventions are useful in helping family members address articulation concerns.

Counseling. Schools are unlikely to ever have the type of student-counselor ratio that is advocated. Therefore, an early priority often is the recruitment, training, and supervision of interested personnel and volunteers/mentors to fill certain gaps (e.g., to provide basic information relevant to students' academic and vocational futures). Such supports can free up counseling personnel to provide more social-emotional counseling and related supports to those in need.

Lengthy Periods Away from Regular School

Research findings stress that students' skills and knowledge often deteriorate when youngsters are not in school for significant periods of time. This is a particular concern with students from low-income families, and thus this subgroup might be a high priority. Prolonged absences due to illness also warrant special attention.

Addressing significant breaks in schooling requires enhancing school and community opportunities for maintaining and increasing abilities and positive motivation and enabling students to catch-up. Some of this involves establishing academic opportunities (e.g., tutoring, summer school). For reluctant students, motivation considerations call for designing such instructional approaches to look and feel quite different from a typical school day.

Beyond formal academics, summer and intersession breaks are times for providing youngsters with enrichment opportunities that emphasize whole-child development (e.g., arts, recreation, sports, service and workplace experiences). These are particularly valuable times for schools to collaborate with libraries, parks and recreation, service organizations, and local businesses that can provide jobs and internships.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR CHAPTER 5

Schools must plan, develop, and maintain a focus on ways to address the variety of transition concerns confronting students, their families, new staff, and others who come to the school. In reviewing school improvement plans, school staff need to ask:

> • *How are new students and families welcomed and positively assimilated into the school?*
>
> • *What is done when a student is not adjusting well to a new school or a new class?*
>
> • *How are behavior problems minimized before and after school? at lunch?*
>
> • *Do articulation and related counseling programs provide more than orienting information and simple skills?*
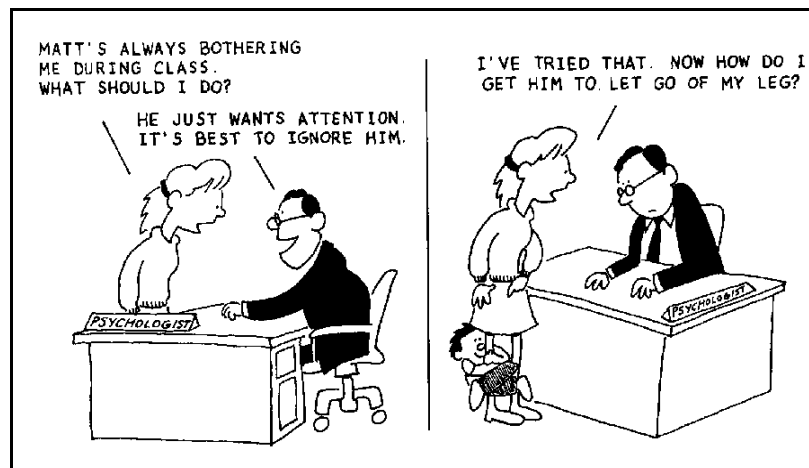
As effective transition supports are implemented, concerns turn into opportunities to enhance healthy development and address barriers to learning and teaching. And, supports for transitions play a critical role in the emergence of a positive school climate.

For more specific examples of ways to enhance *Supports for Transitions,* see the self-study survey in Appendix D.(Also accessible at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionssurvey.pdf)

For Free and Easily Accessed Online Resources Related to *Supports for Transitions*

See our Center's Quick Find on
Transition Programs/Grade Articulation/Welcoming
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

Also see related topics listed on the Quick Find menu
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm

MATT'S ALWAYS BOTHERING ME DURING CLASS. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

HE JUST WANTS ATTENTION. IT'S BEST TO IGNORE HIM.

I'VE TRIED THAT. NOW HOW DO I GET HIM TO LET GO OF MY LEG?

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