Student Transitions Guide

Supporting New Students in Your School: A Guide for Schools

Student First

Introduction

The Student Transitions Guide is intended to provide school staff in Saskatchewan a framework to support students who are transitioning to a new school. This document explains the correlation between transition to new schools and reduced levels of achievement. It also outlines the importance of supporting new students, helps schools identify if a student needs support, what may be required and an action plan that will assist schools.

There may be local considerations that are not included. It is strongly recommended that each school in Saskatchewan develop a local student transition protocol to provide the best opportunity for success for all the new students in their school.

The Importance of a Smooth, Welcoming Transition

Being a new student in a school can be overwhelming. A transfer to a new school is a major event in a student's life especially if it is mid-year, and additional support is warranted in most cases. The school must attempt to reduce the impact of this transition. Many students who encounter multiple school transitions in their educational career have lower attendance, lower credit attainment and lower likelihood of graduation. The data for Saskatchewan shows students who make a transition between First Nations schools and provincial schools, in either direction, are much less likely to experience success and therefore significant efforts should be undertaken to mitigate any challenges that are experienced by students in that situation. While changing schools does not necessarily cause these results, students with these profiles are more likely to have had transitions to new schools. Thus, these students are often in need of greater support. With an increased awareness of the importance of good mental health, this is another reason to provide strong support to students new to your school.

Consider

- **Why is the student changing schools?** A student moving because a parent/guardian has a new job may not require the same attention as a student moving because of dissatisfaction with a previous school, safety issues, family breakup or bullying.

- **Where is the student coming from?** Consider if the student is just moving across town, has moved to a new town or city, and has come from out-of-province or out-of- country as either an immigrant or a refugee.

- **Is there a pattern?** The more transient a student is, the less likely it is that the student will experience success and graduate. Thus, students with a history of numerous moves will require more attention than those for whom this is a first move.

- **What time of year is it?** Students moving at the beginning of the year have a better chance of establishing peer relationships and are more likely to be introduced to school procedures and the school culture in general. Students who move mid-year may be quickly acclimated into the classroom, but may feel isolated, uncertain and unwelcome. Newcomer students may have a more difficult time integrating even at the beginning of the year.

- **How old is the student?** Younger students often adjust more easily to a new school and new classmates. Middle-level and high school students may have a more difficult time feeling socially accepted.

- **What is the academic background of the student?** Determine which courses have been completed or partially completed. Develop an understanding of the student's past performance – reading levels, standard assessment achievements, Common Framework of Reference (CFR) levels for EAL students and marks. Some of this information will be available through the Confidential Student Summary available through the Student Data System, in the cumulative record file and through discussions with staff at former schools.

- **What is the social background of the student?** Knowing behavior and attendance patterns, whether the student is outgoing or reserved and whether there was a strong social network at the previous school will help meet the needs of the student.

- **What supports existed for the student?** Knowing if the student had support from community agencies will help the school meet the needs of the student more effectively. If required, the school may be able to connect the student with similar supports in the new community.

- **Are there language or cultural aspects that need to be considered?** Consider reviewing cultural background in cases of newcomer students.

- **Is the student a newcomer to Canada?** The Confidential Student Profile may have information about the student's home language, country of origin and CRF level. Identify supports and resources required to address the student's social behavioral, language and integration needs.

What Types of Supports Can the School Provide?

Enrolment and Orientation: Get to know the student and their family. Ensure the student has the information needed to get through the school days (school policies, practices and norms). Some of this may occur even before the student and their family comes to the school.

Establishing Comfort: Ensure the student has opportunity to become familiar with and immersed in the culture of the school. Establish a relationship with the family. Monitor social interactions, behavior and academic progress.

Monitoring: Continue focused contact with the student. Provide opportunity for the student to meet with a transition contact in the school. A transition contact could be any adult in the school who is committed to ongoing support for the student (homeroom teacher, counsellor, vice principal, etc.). Continue regular interaction with the family.

Academic: Identify any challenges that need to be addressed. Ensure that academic policies/expectations of the school are understood. Provide any professional supports that are required as quickly as necessary (counselling, student support services, etc.). Effort should be made to support the completion of courses that were started in another school. While information from the previous school is very helpful, care should be taken to ensure the student has an opportunity for a fresh start, if that would be beneficial.

Social/Emotional: Ensure the student has an opportunity to socialize with other students. Identify anything that may interfere with socialization and strategize ways to mitigate those. Find a transition contact (adult) in the school who is responsible for connecting on a regular basis with the student, at least for the first month or two. The transition contact can discuss interests and potential extra-curricular activities with the student.

Health and Wellness: Identify any physical accommodations that need to be made (*e.g.*, mobility, vision, hearing). Does the student have an ongoing medical condition (allergies, seizures, etc.)? Does the student appear to have basic physical needs met (*e.g.*, nutrition, hygiene, sleep)?

Action Plan

Not all of these suggestions will apply to all students or situations. Schools should feel free to adapt any or all of the following ideas/actions/considerations to create their own protocol for introducing and supporting students transitioning into their school. The school protocol should identify individuals who will be responsible for each action in order to ensure that a comprehensive plan is implemented for each student. Transition to the new school is a gradual process and requires ongoing support throughout the year in many cases.

Area of focus	Considerations early in the transition process	By the end of the first month (some ongoing)
School Building & Procedures	- Administrator contact with parent/guardians. - Introduction to office staff. - Learn about the school. - Orientation of the school, including a floor plan and expectations re: doors- when are they open, which ones can/should be used. - School property -- tour, expectations, boundaries. - Access to information -- website, school phone numbers, email, automatic messaging system. - Provide the school handbook. - School policies -- attendance, lunch, bussing, before and after school expectations, dress code. - Review the bell schedule. - Important dates in the school calendar. - Procedures for visiting the school (parent/guardians). - Student council. - Lunch procedures, cafeteria, lunch or breakfast programs. - Library -- location, services, procedures. - Fire/emergency procedures. - Discipline policy and supports. - What to do if the student is absent or late. - Leaving the school early. - Assembly procedures. - Fundraisers. - Student numbers, accounts, lockers.	- Contact parent/guardians to be sure they understand the procedures or review procedures that need to be followed. Discuss the transition supports that are in place for the student. - Conference with the student's teacher(s) to assess how the student is adjusting to the school environment. - Review with the student how he/she is adjusting possibly creating a success plan if greater support is needed.

Area of focus	Considerations early in the transition process	By the end of the first month (some ongoing)
	• Fees. • School division personnel and services. • Supplies needed/supplied. • Introduction to the teacher(s) they will have immediately. • Phys Ed class -- expectations (clothes, changing, showers).	
Academic Information Administration / Student Services:	• Print Confidential Student Summary and share with appropriate teachers. • Review of previous academic progress, assessments, etc. • Student Info System -- student and parent/guardian access. • Academic student supports established. **High School:** • Credit requirements. • Courses available, switching/dropping procedures. • Timetable created. • Distance education and online learning opportunities. • Credit recovery/completion options that are available.	• Check student attendance and academic progress. • Visit with the student and contact parent/guardians to determine comfort of student in the school. • If needed, create additional supports for the student.
Academic Information Teachers:	• Teacher expectations of and obligations to students and parent/guardians. • Learning and assessment plans. • Regular teacher contact with parent/guardians. • Field trips. • End of year, end of semester evaluations, procedures.	• Contact with parent/guardians regarding the student's adjustment to the class. • Conference with the student to determine areas of strength and concern.

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Personal Information	• Review of student needs. • Bussing -- who, when, where, expectations. • Provide paperwork/forms that need to be completed. Assist student and family in completing if necessary. • After school needs and expectations.	• Conference with the parent/guardians and student to determine if the needs are being met. • Conference with the teacher(s) to assess adjustment and progress.
Social/Emotional	• School counsellor. • Student support personnel/services. • Teacher time to get to know the student. • Attach to a key adult in the school (may ensure transition activities). • Attach to a "buddy" in each class. • Establish a peer group. • Have the student consider any teams, clubs or activities they might be interested in the school, and facilitate involvement. • Ways for parent/guardians to be involved in the school community. • Introduction to the community and services available (parent/guardians). • Health and social services that are available and how to engage (parent/guardians). • For newcomer students, consider contacting your Settlement Worker in School (SWIS), if available in your division.	• School counsellor meet with the student to discuss the friends the student made, the comfort in the classroom(s), the academic comfort, etc. • Key adult should be in contact with the student daily, and report to the principal/student services issues that arise. • Assess the student's involvement in social/extra-curricular activities in the school. • Conference with parent/guardians regarding involvement in community, health and/or social services if deemed necessary.

Area of focus	Considerations early in the transition process	By the end of the first month (some ongoing)
Health and Wellness	• Identify any medical or physical needs that need to be met immediately, and create a plan to accommodate. • Eye/hand coordination. • Vision. • Hearing. • Occupational health related. • Speech and Language pathologist involvement. • Sleep patterns.	• Monitor any apparent hygiene, nutrition, sleep pattern/energy level concerns and provide support and guidance.