

Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School

Making a transition to a new school causes anxiety in students and can challenge the coping skills of many adolescents, especially those at risk. Typically the move to a new school includes changes in school climate and size, peer relationships, academic expectations, and degree of departmentalization among peers.

Cauley, & Jovanovich. (2006)

In April, 2011, we asked several of the school districts we work with what they had in place to assist students as they moved from one level of schooling to the next. The focus of this document is on

- (1) sharing their responses, answering a couple of questions, and highlighting some relevant resources
- (2) clarifying where this subset of transition interventions fit with respect to the full range of *Support for Transitions*
- (3) delineating where *Support for Transitions* fit in a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*.

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(1) What Was Shared About Transition Interventions to Facilitate Success at the Next Level of Schooling

We received responses about district-wide plans, with some comments from staff working with specific schools. The following is a representative sample (with a bit of editing and formatting). These were shared by colleagues in the hope the information would be helpful to others across the country and that the examples would stimulate additional sharing. As we receive other examples, we will add them to this resource document.

Please send information for sharing to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

From a Large County School District in KY Serving Both Urban and Rural Schools
(responses from elementary liaison and middle school assistant superintendent)

For Students Entering Early Childhood or Kindergarten

Ages and Stages (a developmental questionnaire) is completed by parents and scored by members of the Early Childhood staff OR through cooperation with the ... Metro United Way staff. Parents are encouraged to share results with the receiving school.

For students entering Kindergarten from our Early Childhood programs, the district Early Childhood office coordinates a series of transition and orientation to school experiences for children and parents. The planning of these activities is conducted by a designated transition committee. Examples of the activities include: monthly activity calendars sent home for parent/child work, summer Kindergarten countdown activities, a summer transition activity book is sent home with every pre-school child entering Kindergarten, and parent training session are offered to ease the transition.

Student support staff members are actively involved on the Early Childhood Transition planning committee and in the Parent University sessions for transition to middle schools.

For Elementary Students Moving on to the Next Grade

Individual schools use several techniques to prepare returning students to meet expectations of the next grade. These include: classroom visits, class meetings, message boards for incoming students, letters written by current fourth graders for example and sent to current third graders so they know what to expect from a student's viewpoint. Elementary schools host orientation nights to help parents and children locate classrooms, meet the teacher and begin to become familiar with classroom expectations and routines.

A series of camps in the areas of science, social studies, mathematics, and literacy emphasize project based learning opportunities for students to provide culminating experiences that review and help students synthesize critical content information before transitioning to the next instructional level.

Transition to and from Middle School

To facilitate joint transition planning among elementary and middle schools in a feeder pattern (or neighborhood), planning sessions are held annually first with the principals and then cluster meetings are held for schools. Transition strategies are required in each school's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and in the District Improvement Plan.

For families, the district hosts Parent University in May and in August of each school year to welcome parents and students and to provide information on developmental milestones for students.

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What it Looks Like at a Middle School

Middle schools, of course, not only transition elementary school students into their buildings, but they also transition their eighth graders into high schools. The largest undertaking for the purpose of transitioning new students into our middle schools is Parent University. This is a collaborative effort between the middle school and elementary school staffs. Sessions are offered to parents as a means of preparing them and their children for middle school. All of our middle schools conduct new student orientations. Most also conduct town meetings within the first two weeks of school, which serve as mini orientations. At these town meetings, administrators meet with each academic team to set expectations. A few schools assign new students to older peer mentors. Middle school teachers make introductory phone calls home during the first few weeks of school. Student agendas are utilized in all of our middle schools for the purpose of informing parents, but also as a means of two-way communication. A few middle schools offer looping on certain teams as a means of minimizing the stress involved when students transition from sixth to seventh to eighth. Still other middle schools conduct summer orientation camps for sixth graders.

To prepare our eighth graders for high school, all of them receive annual training in our district's high school career theme options, so that they can make informed decisions that possibly could impact their future careers.

All elementary, middle and high schools participate in the Showcase of Schools, so that parents can familiarize themselves with the numerous programmatic choices that our school system offers once they transition to the next level.

Middle school staff members, including some middle school principal volunteers, and elementary staff members work collaboratively to offer Parent University. All parents of new middle schoolers and their children are invited. The Middle School Assistant Superintendent provides major financial support for the student agenda planners which every middle school issues to their students. A session is held for students and their parents during Parent University, where utilization of the planners is explained. Middle school parents are provided with tips on dealing with their young adolescents. These tips are sent to middle schools from the middle school office on a monthly basis in the Middle Years Newsletter. Middle schools then select various articles from the Middle Years Newsletter to send out in their individual school newsletters. Finally, a Middle School Survival Guide is available on-line for all middle school parents/guardians as they transition from elementary to middle school.

Transitions are addressed in all school's Comprehensive School Improvement Plans. However, transitions are complicated by County Public Schools' student assignment plan. Some middle schools have numerous feeder schools. But in some situations, there are obvious primary feeder schools and in those situations, the sending elementary school and receiving middle school tend to work much more closely together. However, common professional development for elementary and middle priority schools is planned for this coming December and January.

From a City School District IN GA
(response from the director of learning supports)

Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition – At the start of the second semester, the class curriculum and structure changes to mirror what it will be like in kindergarten (e.g. shorter naps). Teachers also begin to talk to the children about going to kindergarten. Also, each school holds a parent night for parents of upcoming kinder students.

Fifth to sixth grade Transition – We have 5 elementary schools and 1 feeder middle school. Our elementary and middle school counselor communicate regularly to facilitate transition activities between the schools in the feeder pattern. These are support for transitions currently being utilized:

- Academic Fair Night – In February, an Academic Fair Night is held where fifth and sixth graders and their parents have the opportunity to come to the middle school and meet with teachers and counselors in their upcoming grade. It is also a good opportunity for fifth graders to interact with students who were former fifth graders when they were in fourth grade. Teachers also have examples of exemplary work on display so parents and students can get an idea of the level of expectations where work is concerned at the middle school.
- Fifth Grade Orientation Day – Before the end of the school year, fifth graders from our 5 elementary schools visit our middle school to get oriented on the particulars of middle school life. They have a chance to ask questions and get any concerns addressed that they may have.
- Teacher Transition Forms – We use a transition form that was created as a means for fifth grade teachers to communicate pertinent information about students to their sixth grade teachers. The form alerts sixth grade teachers and counselors as to concerns, interventions and learning supports in place for a student. Our goal in creating the form was to quickly communicate to the middle school so that supports/interventions could be put in place at the beginning of the school year. We believe it will expedite the services and aid in the transition process. The future plan is for the form to be utilized during all grade transitions.
- Teacher Transition Info Meeting – Each year, the sixth grade academy principal meets with all fifth grade teachers to orient them to the expectations, procedures, and the registration process at the middle school. It provides an opportunity for teachers to ask questions or get any concerns addressed. The middle school administrator can also bring any concerns from his sixth grade teachers that need to be discussed.

Eighth grade to Ninth grade Transition – The eighth to ninth grade transition is a year long process. In October 2010 the eighth grade counselor and one of the High school counselors attended a workshop on the New BRIDGE Legislation. The BRIDGE legislation involves the 6-12 grade transitions from grade to grade. It is now required for each eighth grade student, along with the counselor to compose a high school plan for ninth to twelfth grade. The high school plan is an outline of courses that students must take in order to graduate in four years. All eighth grade students compose their High school Plan using the Gacollege411.org website.

(cont.)

Calendar

January:

- The eighth grade counselor meets with all students to set up GAcollge411.org accounts
- Eighth grade teachers meet with High school counselors and Registrar to fill out class recommendations sheets
- The Transition team comprised of eighth grade and ninth grade department heads meet to discuss strategies to help incoming ninth graders be productive in ninth grade.

February:

- The eighth grade Counselor meets with all 8th grade students to make high school plans using GAcollge411.org
- Eighth grade parent night at the high school. Department heads and the ninth grade
- Principal meet with eighth grade parents to discuss the upcoming ninth grade year for their students. Parents are able to learn about the different programs and classes that are offered at the high school. Parents also have the opportunity to sit down with their children to map out elective choices for high school.
- Eighth grade teachers make class recommendations for each student.

March:

- Eighth grade counselor meets with any individual student who has not completed their high school plan.
- High school students from the Drug free coalition at GHS came to talk to students about different social temptations that may appear once in high school. They discussed with the students the importance of staying involved and making the right choices.

April:

- Ninth grade shadowing: Several outstanding students from each eighth grade team are selected to spend a day over at the High school shadowing a ninth grade student.

May:

- All eighth graders take a trip over to the high school to take a tour of the campus and to learn about all the great things they can do once they get to the high school.

The Transition team meets monthly to discuss plans for the eighth grade students. The ninth grade teachers tell the eighth grade teachers what they feel the students will need to be successful.

From a Parish School District in LA Serving Rural Schools
(Response from Learning Supports Leader)

Below are the transition plans that have been developed so far for a feeder pattern:

Pre-K to Elementary

Third grade students and teachers visit the junior high school in May. The elementary principal attends a parent meeting at the preschool center welcoming parents and their children. The principal also visits preschool center classrooms. The elementary school has a PreK and K registration day. The principal welcomes the students and parents as they register for the new school year. In addition, Learning Support staff (social worker and Behavioral Health Technician) meet parents at the registration dates as well. The preschool center also tours in order to provide a smooth transition to the students.

To and From Jr High School

The students from the elementary come to the junior high near the end of the year for a morning visit. Their parents are invited to attend as well. During the visit students are given a tour of the school, meet the principal, teachers, and librarian. The teachers usually plan something special to show the upcoming students based on a theme. (In the past they had a Dr. Seuss theme which was a big hit with the students and parents.)

The junior high's high school counselor comes to the high school to work on academic plans in April. A panel of high school seniors comes to discuss what it is like to be in high school and answers questions from 8th grade students. The high school panel was started last year and was successful in getting the students ready for the demands of high school. The 8th grade students were more interested in what the seniors had to say about high school than they had been in the past when this discussion was held by the counselor. The staff often communicate by email or phone to discuss dates for the orientation. The high school campus is located next door so we can easily have an impromptu meeting if needed.

The junior high has various support staff on campus who assist in reducing barriers to learning. However, the support staff does not currently participate in the transition activities for our incoming 4th graders or our students moving over to the high school.

At another elementary there is discussion of (1) "hooking new kids up with a good buddy" to show them the ropes of the new school setting and hopefully keep them from getting in with the wrong crowd and (2) hooking parents up with quality parents who are able to help them in the community and get them involved in the school.

At a PreK-12 school: School has a web page for parents and students to view with individual teachers. Student support staff members are actively involved in preparing items for the orientation nights of all grades. Support staff also attends orientation nights to help with activities planned. Preparation for 8th grade testing is a focus. Ninth grade teachers discuss schedules and pathways individual students will select for high school years 9-12. Senior orientation night is a time that parents/students meet to discuss final schedules, TOPS and other scholarships. A final review of needed units are viewed and discussed and any scheduling problems are addressed. Supply list and permission forms for all grades attending can be signed during orientation.

Specific School Examples from a Large City School District in OH

(personal responses from multiple student support staff)

(1) As part of our transition I do several things. Key to our success is WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) and The Boomerang Project, a mentoring program between our eighth graders and the entire sixth grade class.

A huge fifth grade orientation is planned with all feeder schools coming to our school during the same time frame, during which time the students see and hear from our drama, strings, band, choir, PE, ASL and art departments. Our students perform for the incoming newbies, allowing them to help determine which program would best suit him/her. The morning is culminated in a school-wide tour. I have on occasion, met with fifth grade counselors to speak to issues, fears, anxieties of the incoming students.

We take our eighth grade WEB Leaders to the elementary schools for a Q&A before the end of the year.

In August our school has an all-day orientation with WEB activities/ice-breakers in the morning. My co-advisor and I lead approx. 150 students through a multitude of fun activities, then turn the 6th graders over to our eighth grade WEB Leaders. The students are broken into small groups (6-8/group with 2-3 WEB Leaders) and they continue with activities that help learn names, learning to step outside their safety zone/box, strategies for becoming successful in school, becoming more comfortable with their surroundings, and go on a tour of the building. The students have lunch, then spend approx. 2 hours with their new teachers in their new HRs, do the locker thing, get their schedules. When parents come to pick them up (unless they ride the bus home) the kids are welcome to take ownership and take parents on a tour themselves. After our first year of WEB, 6th grade teachers were affirming by saying that the 6th graders came in with a sense of calm and ownership, vs. fear and anxiety as in years' past. It works for us!

(2) For students transitioning into our school: We had an evening dedicated to our fifth grade feeder pattern families in February. This was an opportunity for families to meet our teachers and see work samples from current students. This was also an opportunity for parents to hear directly from the teachers what will be covered in the curriculum, how we support students and how to ease the transition process. We also met with staff at the feeder elementary schools to share ideas, and collaborate. We offered to come to the elementary school and offered a trip for the fifth graders to come to our school. In August we will have a formal orientation about a week before school to make the transition a smooth one. We also have a program called WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) where our eighth grade students, mentor the 6th graders. We also have a house concept in the sixth grade where all students are a member of a house community.

For students transitioning out of our school, the school counselor coordinated with the various high schools to create opportunities to ease the transition. This year there were opportunities for 8th grade students to go to high school sporting events, participate in the band, and school play. Also, former students were invited to speak to our 8th graders about moving on to high school and to offer tips.

All of the transition activities are coordinated by the school counselor.

I keep in regular contact with schools in our feeder pattern, usually through email. In October we had a feeder pattern meeting where some of the staff at each school in the feeder pattern met. My particular school has three feeder elementary school, however, our 6th grade has more than 40 different elementary schools represented in it.

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(3) I work in a STEM school feeder pattern. The two transitions are grade 6-7 and graduation. The middle and high schools are to be separated but in one building. Currently, they are in a swing space while the building is renovated. The entire sixth grade year here in elementary is a transition. They have lockers and switch for classes between 2 and 3 teachers. Their learning is project based. Next month, they'll make visits to middle schools. The hope is they'll transition to the STEM high school but several alternative options are also available (single gender, arts, K-8 buildings). To help students transitioning to a new school next year we have school visits, year of transition. The counselor helps plan the visits. Each June, we give parents the paperwork they'll need to transition to a new school year no matter where they are. Nurses pass on info to new nurses. (Our health records are private to nurses but open to any nurse in the system so when a child arrives at a new school, they are available to the new nurse. Kids stay in the system so if they leave ours but return later, the records are still readily available. At graduation year, we give kids copies of their shot records and any other paperwork they need.) With regard to a regular way to keep in touch with the other schools in the feeder pattern or neighborhood to make transition plans together, my understanding is it's part of the STEM system.

(4) As a school counselor of an elementary school, I am fortunate to not just be able to take my fifth graders to visit middle school, but I spend a lot of time talking with fifth graders about change and transition through a series of guidance activities. This discussion is started by having them brainstorm a list of school supplies they believe will be needed in middle school. Some mention a combination lock, some do not. This is my opportunity to help them understand the control they have over their feelings and anxiety by simply becoming familiar with opening a combination lock. I have spoken with 6th grade teachers who have stressed the high levels of anxiety that accompany something we take for granted. We have locker relays, etc. to ease anxiety. As the purpose of these locker activities are connected to responsible choices and behaviors, we also share ideas for successful work habits in middle school - organization, involvement in activities, etc. When I have not been able to take fifth graders to the middle school, I have also had a panel of middle school experts come to my elementary for a question/answer session.

(5) Our elementaries have fifth grade visits to the Middle schools or visits from the middle school students or both. We have been having follow-up questions to answer for our fifth grade students. The Middle schools have their own day or days of orientation for these new arrivals.

Specific School Examples from a Large Unified City School District in AZ
(responses from Learning Supports Coordinators and Principals)

(1) Because our kids will go all over the district because we have open enrollment, it is difficult to touch base with all of the middle schools they might go to. Many will be on a wait list and we won't know where they will be next year. We are doing [restorative justice] circles where students voice their concerns about middle school. There are a lot of worries. The students then give advice and offer to help each other. I'm checking out rumors to see if they are true (so far they are not). The fifth grade teachers at one elementary school voted not to do a field trip to the middle school because they did not like what they saw on last years. At another school, we are doing a field trip to our middle school. The counselors at both of those schools (the middle school and the elem) are organizing that. The counselor from the middle school is coming to both elementaries to talk to fifth graders and answer questions. There are some kids that seem at risk; I have begun to re-engage them in learning and want to find out as much as I can before they leave in May and talk to the Learning Supports Coordinator wherever they go, so they can follow through.

(2) I organized a visit for both of my schools to the feeder middle school. Students visited classrooms, spoke to teachers, met the principal and were able to have a question and answer session with the counselors as well as students. Parents also attended. The support staff: (teachers) got out permission forms, got them returned and attended the visit. I have great communication with the feeder middle school counselors and have been able to keep in contact with them through email and phone. I will be contacting my Learning Supports Coordinator counter parts in middle and high school to see how we can support each other for next year in this transitioning process for students.

As for incoming students to my elementary schools, this is something that has been difficult for both schools to organize. One of my schools does not have funds for summer school programs, however a possible "Beat the Heat, meet and greet" your teachers the week prior to school may happen.

(3) I have organized middle school trips for each of my schools. In both instances, middle school folks will visit us and present information to our students, then we will follow up with a trip to their schools. I have set up scheduling, transportation and guidance. At one school (principal request), I organized and facilitated a middle school meet and greet in which 3 local middle schools set up booths in our library for parents to visit. This gave parents and students an opportunity to gather information on what each school can offer and also allowed parents to present questions to administration. I also plan on asking teachers to set aside some time to allow students to communicate with each other about their expectations, concerns and goals. I have been in communication with other coordinators and district staff...this includes members of the school resource team in order to transition students with IEP's.

(4) Here are a few things I have going on to prepare students for transition. I have been in contact with one of our feeder schools. My contact person and I are planning to get together soon and develop a plan for transitioning the fifth graders to our school.

High school counselors were on campus a few weeks ago registering our eighth graders for high school. I was able to be a part of the process where the students completed their schedules on line. I followed up with Restorative Circles in the eighth grade social studies classes on state assessment tests, goal setting and preparing for high school.

The counselor and I will take a group of students to one of our feeder schools for a presentation to their fifth graders. We are reaching out to our feeders schools to assist with that process. We can keep in touch with others at our feeder schools via e-mail.

(cont.)

(5) The following is what we do to help students transitioning to middle and high school:

For middle school (note – the middle school does not have a feeder pattern. It is a magnet school for students across the district):

- We have two evening events for incoming sixth graders. The families come to the evening event to hear about expectations and learn about the ins and outs of middle school.
- We offer a summer school experience for incoming sixth graders that includes Middle School 101 which helps them adjust to the rigors of middle school expectations and the change from an elementary style to a middle school style. Further, it helps the students to develop friends in a relaxed learning environment so that when they come in the fall, there is less stress on the personal/emotional aspects.
- We have had a weekly newsletter that is sent home with current students and is published on the website.
- We also have a list serve that is used to relay information to our parents that are active on the internet.

For high school:

- High school counselors come to middle school to share information with students
- High schools provide evening events for incoming ninth graders including: meet and greet other students; auditions for performance groups; assessments needed for placement in special programs; informational forums about clubs and activities.
- Registration for high school classes with focus on career information and current expectations.
- Evening for parents to inform them about high schools, course information, college requirements; allow for networking of parents going to various schools; and question and answer period.
- As the Learning Supports Coordinator, I created the venue for the parent evening and developed the agenda
- Teachers and students were invited to all activities (teachers provide support when the counselor comes to the middle school)
- Technology support during the registration process with district personnel also in attendance along with high school counselor support

(6) During first semester, our eighth grade students are made aware (through guidance lessons) about HS opportunities our district provides - magnet schools, open enrollment, Gifted & Talented classes, and University High School. Students are given details on how to apply for these schools/programs.

We prepare our eighth graders with a 4-year HS plan. This is done through guidance lessons in the classroom. All eighth grade students know what classes they need to take to graduate on time. They also know what courses are needed for state university admissions.

Our eighth grade students attend an assembly facilitated by the district's Dropout Prevention Department. The assembly reiterates the 4-Year plan, explains the credit system, and stresses the importance of daily attendance. The main theme of the assembly is "On time, everyday."

During HS registration, counselors/advisors from the high schools come to help our eighth graders choose the right classes for freshmen year.

Any visits to the high school during the school day depend upon an invitation and transportation provided by the high schools.

Because of budget issues, there may not be an eighth grade tour of the local feeder high school. Also our middle school cannot afford to transport the fifth grade students to visit our school during the day. Instead, we offer an Open House that fifth grade students and their parents can attend one evening. All teachers and staff are present on this evening and answer any questions. The students and parents are given a tour of the campus. To entice families to come, we also have a cookout that evening.

(cont.)

Student support staff play a key role in all this:

- The school counselor is the contact person for our school. She sets the dates and meeting times for all our eighth grade transition activities.
- The school counselor and Learning Supports Coordinator teach guidance lessons in the eighth grade classrooms.
- The school counselor and Learning Supports Coordinator have been visiting the four local feeder elementary schools to present to the incoming fifth grade students. They show a PowerPoint presentation that outlines the expectations at our middle school. They also show a video that highlights student experiences at our middle school. We also have a question and answer session for the fifth graders.

The school counselor and/or Learning Supports Coordinator usually keep in contact with their counterparts from the feeder elementary schools through email. We arrange meeting and presentation dates/times over email. In addition to this, the Learning Supports Coordinators in our local feeder schools - Primary, Intermediate, Elementary, Middle, and High School - have started meeting monthly. We are hoping to share ideas and coordinate activities that will help our students and the community.

(7) Our transitional support consists of two efforts, one group, one individualized. For the group of fifth graders, we always have a feeder school visitation. On the individualized level, we try to identify any student who needs special help or qualifies for special services, such as an IEP, and work with the receiving school to support their transition.

(8) With respect to these transitions, I find myself in a truly unique position. Both schools I work with are being considered for expansion to k - 8. That means that this upcoming year they will be growing their sixth grade from the current fifth graders. So, much of the attention is focused on retention of the students. Within the school the collaboration amongst the teachers is very solid and I believe a few of the fifth grade teachers will become the sixth grade teachers. So, the transition look to be well handled in those cases. We have also focused on the Child study being a method that looks at the child's issues, the interventions that are applied, developmental assets and teacher feedback about growth, as documentation that will follow the student and give a new set of professionals insight into the child.

As a group Learning Supports Coordinators from the eastside feeder pattern we have been meeting to develop a working relationship, and transitions were one of the first ideas expressed. We have thought of a process in which a form would be filled out for or by each child and this form would follow the child. The form would then act as the advocate for the child and list the needs, wants, goals, areas of needed attention, etc. We are hoping to further develop this.

(9) All Learning Support Coordinators from our feeder schools up through high school meet once a month to talk specifically about transitions. For incoming sixth graders, we had a parent night. In addition, the feeder school students come to our school for a day in the life of a middle schooler. They get a buddy and transition from class to class. For eighth graders, teachers pretty much handle this.

From a County School District in FL Serving Both Urban and Rural Schools

From student support specialist

Our guidance counselors work very closely with our feeder school counselors in planning for this transition. The middle school provides valuable information about incoming students so that we are aware of any extenuating circumstances that may exist.

- In mid April, we held a 8th grade parent night - parents and students are invited to come to the high school campus
- Guidance counselors then visit the high school feeder middle schools the following week to meet with students and allow them to pick their top 3 choices for electives (core classes are a given so they do not pick those).
 - >We cover the registration process that will be occurring the next week
 - > We cover academies at SRHS and what they are all about.
 - >Presentations are given by the athletic director and students are given a chance to sign up to speak with the coach of any athletic team they may be interested in.
 - >There is a presentation from ROTC and what that program is about.
 - >School contact information is provided to parents so they are able to contact anyone at the high school they may need.
- The high school conducts schedule pickup/orientation 2 weeks prior to the first day of school. At that time, students are free to walk around campus to familiarize themselves with the layout. Guidance counselors are available to meet with students to answer any questions and handle any scheduling issues so that student schedules are correct the first day of school.

Transition of special education students from multiple staff

(1) As Resource Specialist, I manage Special Programs (ESE). As for my department, each May we invite a corresponding feeder middle or high school to the end of the year transition meeting(s). I also like to invite the parent and all staff members from both locations (i.e. - Elementary to Middle). At the meeting, the team will discuss current & future programming. Since each student has an Individualized Education Plan, we attempt to meet his or her needs at their new school location. Along with this process, a middle or high school guidance department will also supplies each student with information regarding possible course options beyond placement (Due to assessment data - FCAT Scores may indicate that a student needs an Intensive Reading course).

Support staff play a vital role in the entire process. Throughout the course of the year, each member is critically needed in order to assist all students. There are many different areas of need such as Academic, Social Skill Training & Support, Emotional & Behavior assessment, Independent Functioning, & Communication. The participation of each Support Staff Member "depends" on the situation. We take a comprehensive analysis of what a student currently needs and plan accordingly. For example, a Student Support Specialist (Behavior) may need to join the team due to behavioral concerns. Each meeting will be developed and scheduled based on each student's specific need.

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(2) Across the district, the ESE Resource Specialists meet bi-monthly. We have discussion about students transition from one setting to the next. Without this communication, through team meetings, the communication would falter. Beyond that, at the school-based level, the PS/RtI (Problem Solving Support Staff team meets "weekly" in order to discuss students. The RTI Process helps us all stay on the same page & problem solve with one goal in mind = A student centered approach & focus.

(3) We meet on every transition student from ESE Pre-K to K in the last month of school at prospective new school and ESE resource specialist meets with incoming 6th grade resource specialist, classroom teacher, and ESE teacher in April to review needs and IEP's for transferring 5th graders.

Again, the hope is that this set of examples will be useful to others.

Please send additional examples for sharing to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

We will include what we receive in the next draft of this continuously developing information resource.

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TWO RELATED INQUIRIES FROM RESPONDENTS

Inquiry 1. *In our district, elementary schools use the numbered grading system, while the middle and high schools use letter grades. There is typically a problem with sixth graders understanding that every assignment counts, and how percentages determine their grades, etc. I've been discussing with my colleagues the need for fifth grade to switch to letter grades for perhaps the last semester of 5th grade. We feel it needs to be a district wide policy for it to be effective. Do you know of other districts that have done this and what affect it has had?*

We sent this as a transition-related question to a colleague; here is the response we received:

“No easy answers to this one. There are big advantages, and big drawbacks, to both forms of grading. For example, most numerical grading scales based on 100 points give a student 70 points in which to fail, and only 30 points that represent all possible passing scores. On the other hand, it is incredibly difficult to justify the numerical difference between a 92 (B) and a 93 (A) on an essay - which makes letter grading more easily justified there..... so it is not a case of one being superior to the other. As you noted, there is also the difficulty in transition for rising 6 graders who have been used to number grades moving to letter grades. Fifth graders who may have been used to averaging a 90, 78, and 100 often struggle when they have to average a B, C-, and an A.

I have always found that school districts that are intentional in helping students make the transition from elementary to middle school tend to have higher performing, and happier, students. So I would encourage this person’s district to certainly start adopting middle school practices as a transitional strategy at the end of grade 5, just as I would encourage the eighth grade teachers to look into what programs or practices would be good to implement in preparation for high school transition.

I have seen many districts around the country that focus on those 5-6 and 8-9 transitions by implementing homework like they would have at the next level, helping students practice combination locks for lockers, helping teach note-taking skills, allowing students previously walked from one class to another to go on their own (while watched), and by adopting grading practices of the next level. If you’re talking about a small district, typically conversations between administrators at each level can be effective in strengthening transitions; however, in larger districts, policies are often effective in ensuring that all elementary and middle schools make the connections to enable a smooth transition and reduce the likelihood that students will struggle on getting to middle school.”

Inquiry 2: *“One teacher has asked if there are you tube videos available to use as talking points concerning transitions to middle school. Or any other free videos.”*

We responded as follows: “We worked with an elementary school that made its own ‘Welcoming’ video. The local high school technology academy came over and did a brief interview with the principal, AP, office staff, teachers, student support staff. Each person introduced themselves and explained what they did. When a new family arrived the video was available in the front office so they could meet the staff.

Below are two videos that we noted online. For others, just search Teacher Tube videos using the term *transition*:

- *Transition to kindergarten* (10 minutes) –
http://ww1.teachertube.com/viewvideo.php?video_id=34137&title=Transition_to_Kinder_garten
- *Transition to middle school* (8 minutes) –
http://ww1.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=43265&title=Middle_School_Transition

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And for More Resources on Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School, See the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds On:

>Transition programs, Grade articulation, Welcome
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

>Transition to College
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/Transitiontocollege.htm>

(2) Where transition supports to and from elementary, middle, and high school fit with respect to the full range of supports for transitions

Students are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions – changing schools, changing grades, and encountering a range of other minor and major transitory demands. Such transitions are ever present and usually are not a customary focus of institutionalized efforts to support students. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be used as a natural opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools need to build their capacity to address transitions proactively and in the process to be guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning. A comprehensive focus on transitions requires school-wide and classroom-based systems and programs designed to (a) enhance successful transitions, (b) prevent transition problems, and (c) use transition periods to reduce alienation and increase positive attitudes toward school and learning. Examples of programs include school-wide and classroom specific activities for welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff) and rendering ongoing social support; counseling and articulation strategies to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and moves to and from special education, college, and post school living and work; and before and after-school and inter-session activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment.

Anticipated overall outcomes are reduced alienation and enhanced motivation and increased involvement in school and learning activities. Over time, articulation programs can play a major role in reducing school avoidance and dropouts, as well as enhancing the number who make successful transitions to higher education and post school living and work. It is also likely that a caring school climate can play a significant role in reducing student transiency.

Support for Transitions encompasses:

- Welcoming & social support programs for newcomers (e.g., welcoming signs, materials, and initial receptions; peer buddy programs for students, families, staff, volunteers)
- Daily transition programs for (e.g., before school, breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- Articulation programs (e.g., grade to grade, new classrooms, new teachers; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; in and out of special education programs)
- Summer or intersession programs (e.g., catch-up, recreation, and enrichment programs)
- School-to-career/higher education (e.g., counseling, pathway, and mentor programs; broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions; students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions (e.g., students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Capacity building to enhance transition programs and activities

A tool for mapping and planning

Support for Transitions: A Self-study Survey

This type of self-study is best done by teams.

However, it is *NOT* about having another meeting and/or getting through a task!

It is about moving on to better outcomes for students through

- working together to understand what is and what might be
- clarifying gaps, priorities, and next steps

Done right it can

- counter fragmentation and redundancy
- mobilize support and direction
- enhance linkages with other resources
- facilitate effective systemic change
- integrate all facets of systemic change and counter marginalization of the component to address barriers to student learning

A group of school staff (teachers, support staff, administrators) could use the items to discuss how the school currently addresses any or all of the areas of the component to address barriers (an enabling or learning supports component). Members of a team initially might work separately in responding to survey items, but the real payoff comes from group discussions.

The items on a survey help to clarify

- what is currently being done and whether it is being done well and
- what else is desired.

This provides a basis for a discussion that

- analyzes whether certain activities should no longer be pursued (because they are not effective or not as high a priority as some others that are needed).
- decides about what resources can be redeployed to enhance current efforts that need embellishment
- identifies gaps with respect to important areas of need.
- establishes priorities, strategies, and timelines for filling gaps.

The discussion and subsequent analyses also provide a form of quality review.

Support for Transitions (cont.)

	Yes	Yes but more of this is needed	No	If no, is this something you want?
7. academic support in the form of				
>tutors	___	___	___	___
>homework club	___	___	___	___
>study hall	___	___	___	___
>homework phone line	___	___	___	___
>email and web assistance	___	___	___	___
>homework center	___	___	___	___
>other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

III. Articulation Programs

Which of the following transition programs are in use for grade- to-grade and program-to-program articulation?

A. Are orientations to the new situation provided?	___	___	___	___
B. Is transition counseling provided?	___	___	___	___
C. Are students taken on "warm-up" visits	___	___	___	___
D. Is there a "survival" skill training program?	___	___	___	___
E. Is information available from previous teachers?	___	___	___	___
F. Is the new setting primed to accommodate the individual's needs?	___	___	___	___
G. Other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

IV. Vacation and Intersession Programs

Which of the following programs are offered during vacation and/or intersession?

A. recreation	___	___	___	___
B. sports	___	___	___	___
C. student and family assistance	___	___	___	___
D. youth groups	___	___	___	___
E. academic support	___	___	___	___
F. enrichment opportunities (including classes)	___	___	___	___
G. other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

V. Transitions to Higher Education/Career

Which of the following are used to facilitate transition to higher education and post school living?

A. vocational counseling	___	___	___	___
B. college counseling	___	___	___	___
C. a mentoring program	___	___	___	___
D. college prep courses and related activity	___	___	___	___
E. job training	___	___	___	___
F. job opportunities on campus	___	___	___	___
G. a work-study program	___	___	___	___
H. life skills counseling	___	___	___	___
I. Other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

Support for Transitions (cont.)

VI. Capacity Building to Enhance Support for Transitions

	Yes	Yes but more of this is needed	No	If no, is this something you want?
A. Are there programs to enhance broad stakeholder involvement in transition activity?	___	___	___	___
B. With respect to programs used to meet the educational needs of personnel related to support for transitions				
1. Is there ongoing training for learning supports staff with respect to providing supports for transitions?	___	___	___	___
2. Is there ongoing training for others involved in providing supports for transitions? (e.g., teachers, peer buddies, office staff, administrators)?	___	___	___	___
3. Other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
C. 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. how to ensure successful transitions	___	___	___	___
4. the value of and strategies for creating before and after school programs	___	___	___	___
5. Other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

D. Indicate below other things you want the school to do in providing support for transitions.

- Indicate below other ways the school provides supports for transitions.

- Other matters relevant to support for transitions are found in the surveys on
 - >Classroom-based Approaches ...
 - >Home Involvement in Schooling
 - >Community Involvement and Support

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For more on *Supports for Transitions*, see the Center Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds and link to documents from the Center and elsewhere. For example:

Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Student Support
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>

(3) Where Support for Transitions Fit in a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Our center has stressed over the years, that a comprehensive system of student and learning supports involves both a continuum of interventions and a framework that coalesces the laundry list of fragmented programs and services designed to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. In contrast to thinking just in terms of multi-levels or multi-tiers, the continuum needs to be conceptualized as levels of interrelated and overlapping intervention subsystems focused on (1) promoting development and preventing problems, (2) responding to problems as early-after-onset as feasible, and (3) treating severe, pervasive, and chronic problems. Moreover, each subsystem is seen as needing to link school and community interventions in ways that integrate, coordinate, and weave resources together.

A comprehensive system of student and learning supports, however, involves more than a continuum of interventions. There is the pressing matter of coalescing the laundry list of fragmented programs and services designed to promote healthy development and address barriers to learning and teaching. This requires a formulation to guide organizing programs and services into a circumscribed set of arenas reflecting the content purpose of the activity. Our work emphasizes six arenas for interventions with Support for Transitions as one of these. The six focus on:

- Enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning (e.g., improving instruction for students who with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and those have become disengaged from learning at school; includes a focus on prevention, early intervening, and use of strategies such as response to intervention)
- Supporting transitions (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- Increasing home and school connections and engagement
- Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises
- Increasing community involvement and support (outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

Some version of the six basic arenas has held-up over the last decade in a variety of venues across the country. The continuum and six content arenas can be formed into an intervention framework for a comprehensive system of learning supports. Such a framework can guide and unify school improvement planning for developing the system. The matrix provides a unifying framework for mapping what is in place and analyzing gaps. Overtime, this type of mapping and analyses are needed at the school level, for a family of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern of schools), at the district level, community-wide, and at regional, state, and national levels. We have presented all this in detail elsewhere and need not do so here (e.g., see references below).

- Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006a). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006b). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Adelman, H. S. & Taylor, L. (2010). *Mental health in schools: Engaging learners, preventing problems, and improving schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Center for Mental Health in School (2011a). *Moving beyond the three tier intervention pyramid toward a comprehensive framework for student and learning supports*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA.<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>
- Center for Mental Health in School (2011b). *Where's it happening?* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/nind7.htm>

Concluding Comments

The complex set of factors interfering with equity of opportunity for student success at school call for a comprehensive and systemic set of interventions. This is particularly essential in school settings where a large proportion of the student body are not performing well. In such schools, the effectiveness of efforts to facilitate transitions will be dependent on how well the school addresses the full range of barriers to learning and teaching.

As another stand-alone intervention, the focus on transitions to and from Elementary, middle, and high school risks becoming just one more fragmented and marginalized approach to addressing student needs. At the same time, the interest and resources being devoted to the work present an opportunity to catalyze and leverage the type of systemic change that can help transform how schools go about ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

School improvement planners can use the opportunity to embed all stand-alone initiatives, such as the various supports for transitions, response to intervention, positive behavioral interventions, dropout prevention programs, and so forth, into a design for developing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports. This involves some reworking of policy (including accountability) and of existing operational infrastructures, ensuring strong leadership and commitment, and revising leader and staff job descriptions in keeping with the need to develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.* Such systemic changes, of course, will require a multi-year personnel development plan for teachers, student support staff, and all others who make up the school family. And, given sparse resources, accomplishing all this calls for braiding together school and community resources.

Development of a comprehensive system and fully integrating it into school improvement policy and practice enhances a school's focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Such a system is key to promoting the well-being and intrinsic motivation for school success of all students, their families, and the school staff and is a key element in facilitating emergence of a positive school climate.

*For prototype frameworks related to reworking policy and operational infrastructure, see
Frameworks for Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>