



## **Changing Schools: Transition Planning for Students with Special Needs**

### **Goals of this document:**

It is our hope that this document will serve as a reference tool for school personnel, students and their parents; bringing light to some of the considerations to be made when a child with special needs is required to change schools.

### **Why is Transition Planning Important?**

- Transitions plans can be utilized to help students with special needs cope with upcoming change. They can also help secure a continuity of services for students for whom they are developed.
- Proper planning can facilitate a smoother transition from one school to another and should support both the student, as well as, the new school.
- Collaboration and sharing of information between schools may eliminate foreseeable challenges a student may have; and as a result positively influence their academic and social development.
- Effective transition plans are individualized to meet the needs and the challenges related to the individual student's success. Some plans may need to be complex; while others may be very simple.

## **Examples of Areas for Consideration for Students Transitioning to a New School:**

### **★ Child Safety and Security:**

Special attention should be made to ensure that students feel secure and safe at their new school. Some students with special needs may have challenges related to social skills and/or other traits that make them feel insecure or make them “stand out” from their neurotypical peers. Special attention should be given to students who may be at risk of being bullied, or being isolated from their peers as a result of their exceptionality. Some examples of ways that may aid in the making students feel safe and secure are to set up a “buddy system” or a “mentoring system” in the new school. What these systems would look like would greatly depend on the needs of the student and their specific situation.

### **★ New Environment / Surroundings:**

All efforts should be made to give those who may require it, as many opportunities as possible to visit their new school. This may include several tours of the school and an introduction to the principal, Resource Teacher, classroom teacher, integration aide, lunch staff and anyone who may be part of the student’s school life. Tours can be used to ensure that the student is familiar with the location of some key areas in the school; such as where the washrooms and lunch facilities are, as well as where they should go if they need help during their day. In addition, activities planned in advance between two merging schools will help to foster a sense of community, compassion and acceptance between school populations. This may not only reduce a student’s level of anxiety, but could also contribute to their feeling of acceptance.

### **★ Transportation:**

Consideration should be made regarding special busing arrangements and transportation requirements; keeping in mind any supports a child may need as a result of attending a new school. Special requirements may include the need for a smaller bus or wheelchair accessible bus. In addition, it should be kept in mind that many students with special needs may have difficulty remaining on the bus for extended periods of time. All efforts should be made to ensure that if a student with special needs, for example, gets on the bus first in the morning, it should be taken into consideration that whenever possible, they should not be the last off of the bus.

**★ Support Team:**

In the event of a school and/or program change, it may be necessary to provide additional support services to a student with special needs, to help that student deal with new challenges. For example, a student may require additional support time from a Resource Teacher if he is moved into an Immersion program from a Bilingual program.

**★ Continuity of Supports:**

Sharing of information between schools, as well as between parents and the school, is an important part of ensuring a continuity of services. In addition to providing the usual documents relating to a student's file, there may be other information pertinent to a student's situation, that are not listed in the IEP or individual file. For example, a child may use a visual schedule, but only a particular one, presented in a particular manner. To help this student, this could be listed on the transition plan, and it should be noted that the information be shared with the new school.

**Successful Transition Planning Checklist:**

- All aspects of student's school life have been considered; including transportation to and from school, recess and lunch.
- All parties concerned have been consulted and information gathered; including the student's parents, and where appropriate, the student.
- Foreseeable social development needs have been identified and addressed.
- Tools that the student currently uses that can accompany them to new school (i.e., iPad, schedule board, memory aid) have been identified.
- Once completed, the specific transition plan has been attached to the students most recent IEP.
- A copy of the plan, as well as the most recent IEP have been provided to the students' parents.
- Student's parents have been given contact information for their child's new school; including the names and email addresses of the school's resource team, if possible.

**Tips for Parents:**

1. Get to know your child's new school. Share information that may not be included in your child's confidential file. If possible, meet with new teachers as soon as possible. Ensure that you know who to contact at the new school if you should have any questions or concerns.
2. Talk to your child about their new school. Focus on the positive and empower your child with information. Talk about their new school, new teacher, new bus, etc. Be positive and be honest. Keep the lines of communication open. Understanding your child's fears can help to address their needs.
3. Help your child become familiar with their new school and surroundings. Whenever possible, visit the new school. Let them see their new school, the halls, and teachers if possible. Get to know the bus route, where they will be picked up and dropped off.

**SAMPLE TRANSITION PLAN TEMPLATE**  
**(can be attached to student's IEP)**

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student's Current Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Specific needs and challenges tied to student's success:**

Need/Challenge	Strategy/Plan of Action

**Specific tools and supports to be transitioned to new school:**

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**Other notes and or relevant information:**

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