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Disclaimer Language

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** 1

  - **Methodology** 1
  - **Organization of the Document** 1

**Recommended School-Level Strategies** 2

  - **Preparation Before a Student Arrives at a School** 2
  - **When a Student Arrives at a School** 4
  - **When a Student is Enrolled and Attending a School** 5
  - **When a Student Departs from a School** 10

**Recommended District-Level Strategies for Transient/Mobile Students** 11

**References** 15
**Introduction**

In November, 2014, the Lead Academic Recovery Liaison with the Pennsylvania Department of Education requested that MACC@WestEd identify resources on how districts and schools, identified in improvement, can address the needs of transient/mobile students. The resources would be available to the Pennsylvania Academic Recovery Liaisons (ARLs) and district/school leadership teams of schools identified as priority schools. The request is related to the MACC@WestEd Year 3 Workplan, Priority Area: School Turnaround, Objective 1. Assistance to Academic Recovery Liaisons (ARLs).

**Methodology**

To address this request for information, the staff of MACC@WestEd conducted a review of: federally-funded resources; research literature; and educational journals. An accompanying document, Resources on Transient/Mobile Students, presents an annotated bibliography that describes the resources identified by MACC@WestEd. This summary is drawn from the material in the complete bibliography.

**Organization of the Document**

The first section presents recommended school-level strategies for transient/mobile students. These strategies are organized by the following occurrences: preparation before a student arrives at a school, when a student arrives at a school, while a student is enrolled and attending a school, and when a student departs from a school. The second section presents recommended district-level strategies for transient/mobile students. The final section includes references.
Recommended School-Level Strategies

Preparation Before a Student Arrives at a School

1. **Prepare in advance for incoming and departing transfers.**
   
   By establishing routines that have been communicated to faculty and staff, transfers can become less disruptive. Involve faculty and staff in developing or revising procedures, and provide opportunities for training (Popp, 2004).

2. **Have teachers plan in advance.**
   
   a. Develop learning packets containing background information that students can use as catch-up tools (Popp, 2004, 2014);
   
   b. Develop easily and readily available brief student assessments for subject matter (e.g., curriculum-based tasks, reading inventories, current unit pre-tests), reading comprehension, writing, and personal characteristics (e.g., interests, affective and non-cognitive abilities, motivation, social adaptability, academic resilience) (Popp, 2004, 2014);
   
   c. Identify personal information assessments or journal assignments which will give a teacher a writing sample as well as get to know a student;
   
   d. Develop a short list of school/class rules and procedures (Moore, 2013, Popp, 2004);
   
   e. Identify resources on a variety of reading levels available that address the same content and topics (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008);
   
   f. Plan mini-units based on state expectations but also ensure that learning objectives and performance standards prepare students for transitioning from high school to college and/or career. The secondary teachers in their study focused not only on what students needed to know for state tests, but what they needed to know to be successful beyond high school (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).

3. **Develop short-term self-study courses for credit.**
   
   The courses would cover curricular requirements that students miss during transitions and accept comparable coursework from prior schools (e.g., state history from another state) (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).
4. **Plan extra sections for required courses.**

   These sections would accommodate anticipated transfers during the year (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).

5. **Consider options for high school students that enroll late in the year.**

   Consider options for high school students that enroll late in the year. The options may include allowing students to enroll without credit and retaking the course next semester, or assigning an independent study for students who arrive very late in the year (Popp, 2004, 2014).

6. **Create an orientation video for your school.**

   Develop a video for new parents and students to preview when they enroll. Taking a virtual tour of the building, reviewing important policies, and introducing families to the faculty, staff, and student body can be an entertaining way to welcome newcomers. Students could participate in the video production, incorporating language arts and technology standards in the process. Consider filming in multiple languages if many of your families are non-English speaking. Have a comfortable location in the school for the video to be viewed and consider providing a copy that could be viewed at home (Popp, 2004, 2014).

7. **Prepare a new student box.**

   A student box could include: a) Name tags, b) Precut contact paper or roll of tape to affix names to desk or locker, c) Marking pens - to label possessions, and d) Extra labels for classroom charts (job charts, student of week projects, birthday charts, reading club, etc.) (Popp, 2004, 2014).

8. **Prepare “new student files.”**

   The files would include:

   a. Things to go home to parents: Classroom and school rules, Supply list, Extra sets of supplies for those who can’t afford them, Copies of general letters to parents, Class schedule and special classes (art, music, library, P. E.), and activity ideas for home.

   b. Things for a student to use at school: Welcoming gift (school pencil, writing paper, trade book, etc.), quick interest survey for an older child to complete; Primary level – “All About Me” drawing paper; Get acquainted form or project; Classroom and school rules; and Classroom procedures (Popp, 2004, 2014).
9. **Maintain school supply kits.**

   A school or community organizations can collect items. The preparation of the kits could be a service learning project for other students (Popp, 2004, 2014).

10. **Create and train student volunteer coaches to orient new students.**

    Volunteers can be helpful in building school community and can be part of a buddy system at the classroom or school level (Popp, 2004, 2014).

11. **Create a welcome packet for families.**

    Establish relationships with community organizations and prepare a community resource guide. The guide could list neighborhoods, shelters, apartments, key businesses, social services, community organizations. Identify families that will serve as mentors to new families (Ferguson, n.d.).

**When a Student Arrives at a School**

1. **Welcome the student and family upon enrollment.**

   From the secretary to the teacher and her/his students, the initial tone of social interactions is powerful in affirming the value of students and their families (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).

2. **Have counselors meet with parents and student when registering.**

   The personal contact provides a welcome to a family and an opportunity to start identifying needs through an informal conversation (Popp, 2004, 2014).

3. **Implement an enrollment plan.**

   Assign a staff member as soon as a new student enrolls to gather information from the student’s previous school. Develop a brief interview form that includes the following questions:
   
   a. What are the student’s academic strengths?
   b. Was the student in any special program at your school (e.g., special education, before/after school programs, speech services, academic support, etc.)?
   c. What was the student’s reading and math instruction like at the school? (Specific programs, amount of time, instructional approaches, etc.)
   d. Did the student have any attendance problems while at the school?
   e. Do you have any academic concerns about this student? (Smith, Fien, & Payne, 2008).
4. **Review student records.**

An early review of student records may provide an indication of previous learning. Examine student records to determine the student’s risk of dropping out of school. These include: high absenteeism, previous course failures, and past grade retention (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).

5. **Implement assessments quickly**

Assessments, such as curriculum-based measures (CBM), may be used to determine a student’s current skill levels quickly. Assess student interests to hook them into learning. One teacher found that having a student read *Friday Night Lights* rather than *Hamlet* accomplished the same learning objectives: to read critically and to write persuasively. The student read the assignment because he was interested in the subject (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).

6. **Conduct school-wide acquaintanceship activities and contests.**

Principals and counselors may have “New Kids on the Block” lunches as an optional activity for new students. Have information booths at lunch staffed by students to explain extracurricular activities. Have a “welcome party” for new students and a “good-bye party” for those who are leaving. Assign buddies for lunch, etc. (Popp, 2004, 2014).

7. **Prepare for departures.**

Because highly mobile students may leave, despite efforts to stabilize families, the establishment of procedures that streamline departures and, when possible, provide students with opportunities for closure should be formalized (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).

When a Student is Enrolled and Attending a School

1. **Arrange a parent follow-up with a counselor 2-3 weeks after enrollment.**

A positive contact with parents a few weeks after enrolling can open the door to clarify questions that often arise after the student has started attending school. Some parents may be reluctant to contact the school with questions, so making contact from the school is a good way of removing those barriers. Provide parent education programs to inform parents about the effects of moving on their children (Popp, 2004, 2014).
2. Establish an attendance incentive program (Smith, Fien, & Payne, 2008).

3. Include students in a process to set goals.

   Have students analyze their assessment data; chart their own goal progress; and determine goal attainment through analyzing assessment data. (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).

4. Implement a Schoolwide Multi-tiered Intervention Plan.

   If a student is significantly behind, then an intervention team may need to be convened to identify interventions and supports (Smith, Fien, & Payne, 2008). An intervention plan may include: increases in the amount of instructional time, reduced class size, or membership in flexible instructional groups. Use research-based instructional programs and strategies that are designed to help students catch up to grade level expectations (Smith, Fien, & Payne, 2008).

5. Lessons.

   Be flexible with lesson plans, allowing for the give and take of student learning. Some students may need more time with a concept while others may be ready to move on to the next concept; thus, plan for differentiation (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008). Open and close lessons on the same days (Moore, 2013).

6. Use a variety of teaching strategies and change strategies when one is not working.

   One study of effective teachers found teachers used eight instructional activities per hour of instruction, meaning that students were engaged with different activities and at different times. The changes in activities among the teachers was not simply for the sake of change; rather, the teachers had a clear agenda and vision regarding what activities they wanted to use, when, and under what circumstances (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).
7. **Use effective techniques to increase student achievement.**

Techniques that have been found to increase achievement for at-risk students include: direct instruction, simulated instruction, and integrated instruction. Integrating technology has also been associated with better academic achievement of at-risk students. Based on the perceptions of teachers, parents, administrators, and students, at-risk students, who received instruction in a technology lab performed better than at-risk students who did not. Instruction that includes hands-on activities and cooperative groups has also been associated with increased academic performance. In addition, throughout instruction, effective teachers model and provide scaffolding to support student achievement (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008).

8. **Be flexible with assignments.**

Allow a variety of method and topic options for assignments. Some tasks, such as projects requiring materials that students cannot afford, might be difficult or impossible for mobile students to complete. Offer alternatives from which students can choose. Break down assignments into discrete pieces of work. Allow students to finish assignments independently or give them the opportunity to complete tasks at their own pace (Moore, 2013).

9. **Assign homework that is practice, rather than grappling with new concepts.**

Allow students to complete homework at school, focusing only on critical homework assignments. Remember that some of the students may not have the resources to complete homework at home. For example, if students leave a class not knowing how to write a thesis statement, they will certainly not be able to write one by themselves (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).
10. **Implement a Coordinated Assessment Plan.**

Assessments should regularly be used to monitor student progress while being integrated with an intervention plan. Identify what reliable and valid assessments the school is currently using and their purposes. Ensure the current assessments address a variety of purposes: screening, progress monitoring, tracking outcomes, etc.). Identify the most efficient and effective ways to manage, disseminate, and use the assessment data (Smith, Fein, & Payne, 2008). Assess in small increments, providing feedback for improvement. Use ongoing assessments to inform instruction continuously, both planning for tomorrow and adjusting during lessons (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).

11. **Keep student work samples and CBM records to document progress in a portfolio.**

Create a portfolio to document the student’s work, personal characteristics, and preferred learning style (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008). The portfolio can offer the next teacher a quick way to pick up where the former teacher left off (Moore, 2013). The portfolio can travel with the departing student and introduce their highest quality work to new teachers and classes (Ferguson, n.d.).

12. **Provide flexible ways to obtain academic credits (e.g., partial credit programs, credit recovery programs).**

Review and monitor teachers’ grading processes for transient students (Moore, 2003).

13. **Offer tutoring.**

Provide opportunities for one-on-one or small group tutoring as this has been shown to increase student achievement and reduce dropout rates (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008). Thirty or forty minutes a week can dramatically increase a child’s achievement level (Moore, 2013).

14. **Consider establishing individualized contracts for short durations (Moore, 2013).**

Give credit for work the student has completed, even if the work is partially done. Recognize the knowledge and skills that students have attained, while continuing to work on the knowledge and skills not yet attained (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2008).
15. **Arrange for volunteer mentors to provide 1-1- support.**

Arrange for volunteer mentors to provide support (Popp, 2004). Offer older youth the option of choosing their mentor (Moore, 2013).

16. **Monitor and support, as needed throughout the student’s stay at the school.**

Some students may just need a caring welcome when they arrive. Others may require significant support to build academic achievement. Some families may need to be connected with other community services. Counselors and social workers may be especially valuable in filling a monitoring role to ensure that the whole child or youth is considered (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).

17. **School counselors can help students with the transition through the implementation of group counseling.**

A “New to School” group can provide a safe environment where new students can meet and discuss the difficulties associated with moving (Stahl Ladbury, Hall, & Benz, 2010).

18. **Consider an incentive system to ensure textbooks are returned.**

When families have to move unexpectedly, returning school textbooks is not usually a top priority. Offering items that are donated by businesses (e.g., coupons for restaurants or goods) in exchange for returned texts is a positive approach to alleviating the conflicts that arise from records being held or other punishments (Popp, 2004, 2014).

19. **Establish ongoing, effective communication with families.**

Effective communication with families of students, who frequently move between schools within a district, may be established through family resource centers in schools, parent liaisons, and/or frequent parent conferences (Smith, Fien, & Payne, 2008).

20. **Identify or establish programs in collaboration with community partners.**

Consider establishing partnerships with community organizations and programs. The community programs may be geared towards addressing basic family needs such as providing before and after school programs, personal/family counseling, or food and clothing banks (Ferguson, n.d.).
When a Student Departs from a School

1. **Maintain a student portfolio or departure file with sample work that the student can take to the new school.**

   Send the student departure file with the student (or place in office file). Consider including the following in the file: Exemplary work (laminate, if possible); journal recalling events from classmates (“Goodbye Book”); individual and class photos; self-addressed stamped envelopes to your school and class and stationery for the departing student to write back; a letter from the teacher introducing the student to his/her new teacher; trade books the student has read; and a note listing the similarities shared by schools to lessen anxiety of the unknown (Popp, 2004, 2014).

2. **Have classmates write letters to their departing peer.**

   Have classmates prepare letters for the student who has left. They can be kept in the office file until records are requested, if the move is unexpected or a forwarding address is not known when the child leaves (Popp, 2004, 2014).

3. **Prepare a “Goodbye Book.”**

   A ‘goodbye book” can be as simple as paper stapled or tied together or as elaborate as laminated and spiral bound. Students may be given time to autograph the book and brainstorm with the departing student about special memories. Younger students can draw pictures with language experience sentences. Decorate with a Polaroid or digital camera (Popp, 2004, 2014).

4. **Offer a Parent Departure folder to maintain records needed for future enrollments.**

   The National Center for Homeless Education has created one that could be a model (Popp, 2004). Help parents collect important materials (e.g., health records, report cards, copy of birth certificate, work samples) to facilitate a move (Ferguson, n.d.).

5. **Use technology to keep in touch.**

   Explore e-mail correspondence between a departing student and a class. Another option may be to provide the departing student with a phone card to call you once the family is settled (Popp, 2004, 2014).

6. **Hold an exit conference with every parent who requests a transfer from the school.**
Recommended District-Level Strategies for Transient/Mobile Students

1. **Provide general awareness training on highly mobile students.**

   All school staff should receive general awareness training regarding the needs and circumstances of children who are highly mobile. If specific categories of mobile students are present, such as migrant or homeless students, additional professional development should be provided in order to increase staff's sensitivity to and understanding of children's circumstances and needs. This is particularly important for staff members who are responsible for enrolling, assessing, and placing newcomer students (Paik & Phillips, 2012).

2. **Review and amend local enrollment and attendance policies as needed.**

   Enrollment policies may appear fair and reasonable. However, such policies may create barriers that prevent some highly mobile students from enrolling in a timely fashion. (Federal legislation for homeless students requires that all districts review and amend policies that create barriers for this population.) Allowing a student to remain in the school of origin following a move can provide valuable academic stability (Popp, 2004, 2014).

   Develop a supportive attendance policy. Since high mobility is strongly correlated with attendance and behavioral problems, punitive attendance and disciplinary policies can increase the chances of school failure. After a certain number of absences (altogether or per academic period), a supportive attendance policy may include: 1) the initiation of certain types of academic and/or social support; or 2) encouraging a meeting with a student and family at a mutually convenient time to review reasons for absences and create a plan for improving attendance. Similarly, a supportive disciplinary policy might initiate an evaluation to determine whether academic and/or social support is needed, as well as begin to provide academic and/or social support during the disciplinary period (Paik & Phillips, 2012).
3. **Develop welcoming programs for new students and their families.**

   The welcoming programs can facilitate a smoother transition for a student and provide an opportunity for preliminary academic assessment and placement. The programs can foster positive interactions among students, families, and school staff, and help parents understand school policies and goals. Third, the programs can be part of home support systems for learning; encouraging family involvement with the school and decision making; and providing families and students with access to useful information about the school and community (Paik & Phillips, 2012).

4. **Create a parent booklet with transfer suggestions.**

   Providing parents with information regarding appropriate withdrawal and enrollment procedures can shorten delays when moves occur. Checklists of important steps to complete at the old and new school can keep parents on track. The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) has developed a “Parent Pack” folder for maintaining an important school record that includes checklists of items that should be included (Popp, 2004, 2014).

5. **Provide guidance to parents about the effects of school transfers.**

   Develop brochures and public service announcements to alert parents to the academic challenges children face when multiple school transfers occur. An example is Chicago’s Staying Put Campaign that encourages greater stability for students. Procedures to reconcile disputes that lead to school transfers within the district also may be reviewed or developed (Popp, 2004, 2014).

   Schools can facilitate efficient and effective records transfers by educating parents on moving and records-transfer requirements. Since moves can be either sudden or planned, school districts should implement policies that facilitate sending records, requesting records, and following up on records requests (Paik & Phillips, 2012).

6. **Establish procedures that ensure transmittal of school records in a timely fashion.**

   Delays in the receipt of school records lead to delays in enrollment and loss of instructional time. Use technology to relay information quickly (Popp, 2004, 2014).

7. **Identify clusters of schools that exchange students frequently.**

   Once schools are identified, the particular schools can form collaborative responses to mobile students (e.g., Chicago Stay Put program) (Popp, 2004, 2014).
8. **Develop outreach programs.**

Outreach programs, including home visitation programs, can help parents and families understand school programs and policies as well as community services that might be useful for the family. Again, partnerships with social service agencies help both agencies and schools share and provide helpful information to families (Paik & Phillips, 2012).

9. **Allocate additional resources.**

Needy students can achieve with the increased academic support provided by: smaller class sizes and additional teachers; free summer school to students not on grade level; and community homework centers (Popp, 2004, 2014).

10. **Become involved with interagency efforts to provide families with resources needed to reduce mobility, when possible.**

Student mobility may be symptomatic of larger problems. Affordable housing, local jobs, and accessible transportation can be critical factors that affect mobility. Schools can educate policy makers and other community leaders about the impact of student mobility so that it becomes a consideration in the allocation of resources and planning (Popp, 2004, 2014).

Frequent moves or absences may alert school staff to a family crisis, presenting the school with an opportunity to intervene through outreach programs or by providing referrals that can prevent or lower the rate of student mobility and its negative effects. Partnerships with social service agencies can provide school staff with the necessary information and training to identify families in need as well as to develop programs to support students (Paik & Phillips, 2012).

11. **Districts hire Transitional Specialists who would have the following responsibilities:**

- Help new transfer families register with the necessary paperwork upon the student(s) arrival at school.
- Bring parents and new students on a tour of the facilities to assist with their assimilation and help them feel welcomed in their new environment.
- Be a faculty contact for parents by being accessible both in person and through the telephone and email.
- Conduct welcome workshops for newcomers to learn the school rules, routines, desired behaviors and have an opportunity to meet fellow newcomers, as well.
- Conduct monthly grade level screenings to help detect gaps in background knowledge. This critical information could then be relayed to the classroom teacher and parents in a timely fashion. The transitional specialist could then be responsible for gathering ideas,
learning packets and activities for parents to work on with their children at home, plus offer tutorial classes during the week to small groups of students who have similar weaknesses or gaps.

- Make weekly and/or monthly contact with new parents in regards to school functions, i.e. conferences, home and school meetings, parent or district workshops, etc. Contact could be made via the telephone, through newsletters, or occasionally through home visits.

- Conduct monthly “New Parent” workshops so as to build a support system so parents can take ownership of or begin to feel invested in their child’s new school and the surrounding community (Sanderson, 2003).
References


Popp, P., Grant, L., & Stronge, J. (2008). Classrooms with revolving doors: Recommended practices for middle level and high school


The U.S. Department of Education has selected WestEd as the agency to operate the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC@WestEd) beginning in October 2012. The MACC@WestEd works collaboratively with the Mid-Atlantic States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania as well as with the District of Columbia to help SEAs implement, support, scale up, and sustain statewide education reforms. It is part of a federal technical assistance network of 15 Regional Comprehensive Centers and seven supporting Content Centers. The network of centers also works closely with the Regional Educational Laboratories and other technical assistance providers to ensure effective coordination of services.

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