

General Strategies for Planning the Return to School for Complex Learners

Planning the School Day

- Remember that like all students, complex learners are presumed to be healthy if they are attending school. If they are in school, they should be treated like all other healthy students in attendance.
- Plan for inclusion and universal design from the outset so that planning for students with complex needs is not an afterthought
 - This includes thinking about where their desk/space could be safely located and how they will navigate in the classroom
 - Ensure safety strategies are for ALL students, not just those with complex needs.
 - square tape markings around all student desks
 - Consider students with complex needs when building safety strategies. For example:
 - physical distancing markers consider space for wheelchair and adult assistant
 - Use two marked spaces for students who use mobility equipment and their assistant (i.e. 12 feet)
 - Whenever possible, student goes at front of the line
 - Consider students' mobility needs if making 1 way directional walkways throughout school that involve using stairs (i.e. is there an alternative access such as ramp, stair lift or elevator?)
- Review the student's IEP goals and consider one or two that are highest priority to address
 - Consider John O'Brien's 5 quality of life indicators (Presence, Choice, Respect, Competence, Inclusion) when selecting goals
- Start with preferred activities to support a positive transition back to school and reduce fear/anxiety
- Incorporate choices throughout the student's day to provide them a sense of control
- Have some calming strategies on hand that can be easily accessed if stress starts to increase. Strategies and tools will be individualized to each student but may include a movement break, outside time, sensory tools etc.
- Create quiet and calming spaces close by that students can use (could be as simple as a tent in the back of the class, or the unused coat room)
- Use familiar materials and set-up (their typical desk/chair, position in classroom)
- Use a consistent start and end place each school day for the student's materials and belongings.
- Familiar and consistent support staff whenever possible, with back-up plans in place to accommodate staffing changes

Visual Supports for All

- Create a custom video model of your school and protocols for families and students to learn what to expect when they arrive back to school
 - E.g. drop-off protocol, entering school, leaving school, what room/classes available (music, gym, library, computers), recess activities and routines, classroom set-up
 - Ensure video model (or social story) uses simple language that is accessible for all
 - See this Inclusion Outreach blogpost for video ideas:
<https://www.inclusionoutreach.ca/return-to-school-video-model-and-language-recommendations/>
- Consider reviewing most current safety protocols/recommendations (i.e. Physical Distancing and Handwashing) with visual supports (social story, video, etc.) with entire class to emphasize these concepts to keep each other safe and healthy
 - Presume competence of all learners - they understand best with simple, clear language
 - Consider any accommodations to protocols your students will need (e.g. wheelchair accessible sink, basin on wheelchair tray, hand sanitizer instead of hand washing while plan sink renovation)
 - Practice these accommodations in advance
 - Follow your district requirements for PPE for students requiring physical or behavioral supports
- Some students may need social stories/narratives or more simplified visuals to help them understand and remember
- Use visuals (e.g. bright arrowed tapes and lines) on the floor to demonstrate 6ft physical distancing and where to go
- Use a visual schedule (e.g. Choice Works App) to support them to predict their day



Considerations for Students with Safety Plans in Place

- Be proactive:
 - Incorporate calming strategies and preferred activities throughout day (as above) to reduce frustration and risk of bolting
 - Be aware of your own regulated state and stressors
 - Have an increased awareness of possible stressors and heightened state of student to try and mitigate escalation
 - Model your regulation strategies (i.e. self talk “Oh someone came too close, that makes me nervous. I’m going to step back”) to encourage a calm state
 - Child safety covers on door handles if appropriate
- De-escalation safety plans and behaviour support plans may need to be reviewed. Consider non-contact ways to carry out supports, such as:
 - Consider including de-escalation ‘short cuts’ or alternative routes when building school directional walkways
 - Consider how to move other students in the class out, where to move other students, etc. when de-escalation is needed
 - Adults need to model co-regulation and calm state as much as possible



Students who need assistance with meals, washrooms, and personal health routines:

- Your District Nursing Support or Occupational Therapy services may need to be consulted to specifically address student needs.
- Remember that time is required to practice all the routines and activities that happen at school so students can participate in a full school day moving forwards. Try not to avoid any routines - practice them all so you can implement safe, functional routines for everyone. Routines may include:
 - Meals and tube feeding
 - Using the washroom
 - Transfers
 - Use of mobility equipment
 - Dressing/changing
 - Medical procedures and medication administration
- Establish clear health and safety protocols for these kinds of routines with students who need assistance
- Have a plan for use and cleaning of adapted equipment, especially if it is shared between students (tricycle, change tables, gym mats, AAC devices, FM equipment).

Considerations for Home Learners

Not all students with complex needs may be returning to school immediately. However, planning needs to be ongoing for these students with the presumption that they will be back in their classrooms in the future.

In the interim period we do not want these students to disengage from school and the social and educational connections that exist there.

Continue to involve home learners in the school environment by using strategies like:

- Run video conferencing during classroom sharing moments (morning meetings, etc.) so home learners can participate
- Small reading groups, partner work, social connection (playing games, etc.) can also incorporate video conferencing
- Record a peer reading a book (or other activity) that the student can view at home
- Record the student doing an activity at home and send it to the class to watch
- Keep connections with peers as well as the adults in their lives
- Consider peer pairing to reduce sensory overload for students who need this (e.g. calm, quiet peer engaged in a quiet environment, not with all other students in the background)
- Think about how to incorporate 1-2 IEP goals into the home environment and how these will be evaluated/monitored/assessed

Utilize a collaborative team approach with your School Based Team.

Reach out to your District Supports and/or Inclusion Outreach Distance Case Manager, for further ideas and support.