Returning to the Classroom After Concussion: West Virginia's Road to Return to Learn

Angela Morales, MSSA, CRC, CBIS; Brandi Robinson, MSW, LICSW; Nick Davidson, BSM
West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities

Background

• Each year thousands of children in the United States sustain concussions.
• Formalized legislation for the Return to Play process is enacted in all 50 states but few states have Return to Learn programs.
• Return to Learn is the process of applying short-term accommodations or adjustments within the learning environment while students recover from a concussion by any means, not just sports.
• In August 2016, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Services, within the West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities (CED), began a project to increase concussion education, resource availability, advocacy and awareness after discovering a lack of educational supports for students in West Virginia (WV).

Objectives

• The purpose of this poster is to describe the steps taken by the CED TBI Services program to promote Return to Learn standards in the state to include: Researching and reviewing existing Return to Learn program information available online. Engaging with experts in the field and stakeholders. Promoting a legislative mandate to create customized programming for pre-kindergarten through secondary education. Working with the Department of Education to inform educators of recommendations through guidance documents. The Return to Learn project goals are to create a customized protocol for WV and assist with implementing these protocols throughout the state.

Description of Return to Learn Development

• Project staff determined that development of Return to Learn protocols for the WV educational system required research to analyze implemented programs in other states.
• CED TBI Services staff identified educational specialties with experience working with students through recovery after concussion.
• A 10-member work group (see Table 1.) was convened to recommend Return to Learn protocols for WV.

Table 1. Return to Learn Work Group Members’ Areas of Expertise

- Pediatric psychology
- Public policy and administration
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Juvenile justice
- Sports management

- Speech and language pathology
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- School nursing
- School counseling

- An envisioned model for Return to Learn programming in WV was created to include 28 days of academic adjustments for students from kindergarten through post-secondary education.
- A conclusive stakeholder meeting convened with invitees from agencies impacted by a Return to Learn program (See Table 2.). Final recommendations for Return to Learn protocols were modified with pre-kindergarten added to target age group.
- Stakeholder group supported seeking a legislative sponsor.
- Presentation of Return to Learn recommendations occurred with a state senator who was in support of the legislative action.

Results

• Proposed Return to Learn recommendations were written into a legislative bill, presented and sent to Education Committee.
• Legislative session ended before bill progressed, but sponsor recommended it for bipartisan study for the upcoming year.
• Population was adjusted to pre-kindergarten through secondary education, as post-secondary Return to Learn currently has no precedent for a model program.
• CED TBI Services staff initiated contact with the author of a community-based Return to Learn program who agreed to aid with the development of a WV state-specific model.
• A guidance document including Return to Learn protocols is in development cooperatively with WV Department of Education staff.

Determining Strategy - Introduction of Legislation
February - April 2017

Next Steps - Collaboration with WVDE
June 2017 - Present

• Collaboration between CED TBI Services staff with Department of Education and other stakeholders to refine concussion protocols for WV students.
• Outreach presentations targeting education on concussion symptoms and management to key stakeholders.
• Goal is to implement Return to Learn programs through collaboration with WV Department of Education without the need for mandated legislation.

Regrouping After Bill did not Advance
May 2017

Literature Review/Best Practices - Protocol Development
October - December 2016

- WVU CED: Director, Assistant Director, TBI Services program staff.
- WVU Medicine: Pediatrics, Sports Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy.
- Marshall University: Communication Disorders.
- WVU College of Education and Human Services.
- WVU Office of Accessibility Services.
- WV Department of Education: Office of Special Education, Student and School Support.
- WV Secondary School Activities Commission.
- Disability Rights of WV.
- Higher Education Policy Commission.
- WV Continuity and Technical College System.

Table 2. Stakeholder Group.

- American Federation of Teachers.
- WV Educators Association.
- WV Statewide Independent Living Council.
- WV Traumatic Brain Spinal Cord Injury Board.
- WV Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Medical Services.
- WV Parent Training and Information.
- WV Association of School Nurses.
- WV School Counselor Association.
- Rural Medical Doctors.
- Consumers.

Acknowledgements

The authors express appreciation to the following dedicated parties for their involvement in this project: Josh Phillips, Dr. Lesley Cotrell, Dr. Gaar Cichon, Tracy Rice, Amanda Aycock-Viñes, Richard Torchi, Brenda Isaac, Valerie McGlau, Bonnie Hidic, Ann Richards, Steve Wheeler, Dr. Ron Stollings, and all the others who believe in the importance of accommodating our West Virginia children following a concussion.

References

2 CDC. Implementing Return to Play: Learning from the Experiences of Early Implementers
3 CDC. Returning to School After Concussion: A Fact Sheet for School Professionals
http://www.biausa.org/concussion/returntolearning
4 “Returning to School After Concussion: A Fact Sheet for School Professionals” by the American Federation of Teachers
http://www.amfed.org/content/2012-08-return-to-school-after-concussion/factsheet.pdf

WVU CED: Director, Assistant Director, TBI Services program staff.
WVU Medicine: Pediatrics, Sports Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy.
Marshall University: Communication Disorders.
WVU College of Education and Human Services.
WVU Office of Accessibility Services.
WV Department of Education: Office of Special Education, Student and School Support.
WV Secondary School Activities Commission.
Disability Rights of WV.
Higher Education Policy Commission.
WV Continuity and Technical College System.

Engaging Stakeholders (See Table 2.)
January 2017

American Federation of Teachers
WV Educators Association
WV Developmental Disabilities Council
WV Statewide Independent Living Council
WV Traumatic Brain Spinal Cord Injury Board
WV Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Medical Services
WV Parent Training and Information
WV Association of School Nurses
WV School Counselor Association
Rural Medical Doctors
Consumers.