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

Formation of Work Group (Table1) September 2016
Engaging Stakeholders (Table 2) January 2017
Determining Strategy-Introduction of Legislation February – April 2017
Regrouping After Bill did not Advance May 2017
Collaboration with WVDE June 2017-Present

Background

- Each year thousands of children in the United States sustain concussions\(^1\).
- Formalized legislation for the Return to Play process is enacted in all 50 states\(^2\) 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\(^3\) 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 Lean Work Group Members' Areas of Expertise

- Pediatric psychology
Results of online literature reviews were reported during biweekly meetings. Return to Learn programs from 10 states were reviewed for:
- Existence of legislative policy
- Duration of classroom modifications
- Roles of team members
- Targeted age groups

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.

Next Steps - Collaboration with WVDE
- 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.
References
1 CDC. Returning to School After Concussion: A Fact Sheet for School Professionals
   https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/pdfs/schools/tbi_returning_to_school-a.pdf

2 CDC. Implementing Return to Play: Learning from the Experiences of Early Implementers
   https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/policy/index.html

3 BIA of America. Return to Learn
   http://www.biausa.org/concussion/returntolearning

4 REAP Concussion Treatment Guidelines
   https://rockymountainhospitalforchildren.com/service/concussionmanagement-reap-guidelines

Acknowledgements
The authors express appreciation to the following dedicated parties for their involvement in this project - Josh Phillips, Dr. Lesley Cottrell, Dr. Carrie Childers, Tracy Rice, Amanda Accord-Vira, Richard Tench, Brenda Isaac, Valerie Frey-McClung, Bonnie Hicks, 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.

Table 2. Stakeholder Group
- 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 Community and Technical College System
- American Federation of Teachers
- WV Educators Association
- WV Developmental Disabilities Council
- WV Statewide Independent Living Council
- 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