the ability
challenge

ROADMAP FOR SCHOOLS

A TOOL FOR PLANNING YOUR STUDENTS' TRANSITION BACK TO SCHOOL DURING THE PANDEMIC

During a May 2020 Town Hall convening sponsored by The Ability Challenge (ABC), education stakeholders came together to think radically about how we design our educational settings to best serve the needs of diverse learners. In that session, participants were asked to imagine what equitable education could look like if we solved some of the biggest equity challenges facing our communities, both directly resulting from the COVID-19 crisis and existing systemic inequities for which COVID-19 has revealed our stark reality. What emerged was a set of "What If" statements that kick started action and enabled participants to spend time processing their own role in designing high quality supports for diverse learners regardless of the format of instruction this fall. We then continued our conversation about #radicalrecovery with a smaller group, to dig into one of our "What If" statements to develop a resource for schools as they plan for remote and hybrid learning.

We selected the question "What if we considered the need for transition support between settings (home learning vs. school learning) in our accommodations or goals?" This is an issue very top of mind for educators, parents, and students and our conversation yielded ideas for working with students to minimize the potential detrimental impact of multiple transitions resulting from the current health crisis. This document represents that thinking.

Recognizing that the world is constantly changing, we hope this document will continue to evolve as educators begin implementing the ideas and sharing what they learn. We welcome feedback by email at info@theabilitychallenge.org or by posting on social media and tagging ABC or using the hashtag #radicalrecovery.

On that note, we want to thank our partners in this work, including everyone who attended our Town Hall, especially:

- Sivan Tuchman, Center on Reinventing Public Education
- Brooke Allen, Diverse Learners Cooperative
- Lindsay Kruse, Independent Consultant
- Sarah Nissim, Learning Specialist
- Meredith Marlier, Shawnee Mission School District
- Sarah Chan, Georgetown University

In it together,

Sarah Sandelius
Founder, The Ability Challenge

HOW TO USE THIS ROADMAP

This roadmap seeks to provide a clear set of principles and ideas for consideration by schools in the planning process for school start regarding the provision of support to diverse learners through multiple transitions and unpredictable setting changes that are inevitable with the COVID-19 health crisis. There are multiple ways to use this guide. Here are a few examples:

1. **Educators planning supporting individual or groups of students in the classroom:** A group of teachers may choose to collaborate by reviewing a section at a time with an eye toward identifying 1-2 strategies that can be implemented at a time;

2. **Administrators planning for schoolwide programming or policies:** A Director of Student Support can review this whole guide prior to convening the Student Support Team to update a policy written for prior school years focusing on how the new policy might impact diverse learners; or

3. **Individual student goal setting:** An IEP team developing goals on a student's distance learning plan may use the Roadmap Organizer to prepare for a meeting with the student's parents.

KEY QUESTION

"What if we considered the need for transition support between settings (home learning vs. school learning) in our accommodations or goals?"

DEFINING TERMS

Diverse Learners
Students with disabilities (with a 504 Plan, IEP, or no formal plan) or students with other learning needs.

Transition
The physical and mental shift between learning at home and learning at school which includes the planned and predictable schedule and the emergency as-needed shifts due to rolling closures and quick systems decisions.
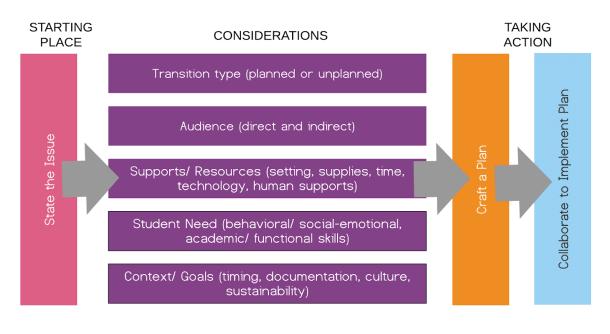
Accommodation
Accommodations include adjustments to instruction or programming to provide a student with a disability access to the same content as other students. Here, the definition has expanded to include policies that promote the growth and potential of students with diverse learning needs (e.g., testing in a separate location or preferential seating, as well as equity-driven attendance policies or curriculum that highlights anti-ableist content).

Targeted Collaboration
ABC's approach to the daily interactions educators have with each other to identify, share, and meet student needs. Targeted collaboration draws from research to elevate the most high-impact strategies for working together to educate students.

Note: Transition in this context differs from the traditional definition of transition in special education which refers to a student's readiness to move from secondary education into postsecondary and career opportunities

ROADMAP OVERVIEW

STARTING PLACE	CONSIDERATIONS	TAKING ACTION

STARTING POINT - THE ISSUE

As with most policy creation, accommodation development, or goal setting, schools should start by defining exactly what is the issue that needs to be addressed and why. Formulating this as a problem question provides an opportunity to get clear about the parameters in which you will be working. This can be refined as you go but is always helpful to set the stage for why you are engaging in this work.

Engaging in planning collectively builds targeted collaboration across school teams and advances consistent, coherent, and aligned planning for all students, especially those with diverse learning needs. Working together in this way, educators are empowered to: (1) bring their unique expertise to the table; (2) better tailor instruction to meet the individualized needs of diverse learners; and (3) reinforce behaviors that embrace high expectations, high standards, and a growth mindset for all.

See the example below:

Main Street Elementary School has always struggled with getting students to focus on learning at the beginning of the week and immediately after vacations because many of the students have very little structure at home. As a result, when they come to school as part of a hybrid learning schedule, teachers meet as a grade level team and describe trends in student behavior as even more disruptive and loud.

How can the 4th grade teachers create video conference classroom norms to accommodate students through multiple planned and unplanned transitions?

CONSIDERATIONS

Schools looking to plan explicitly for what will likely be a year of transitions for students are best served by working through the following five considerations, ideally in collaborative groups. This can be done in the context of schoolwide planning, grade level planning, creating a plan of action for one particular student. These five main considerations (colored purple on the chart above) are important themes that impact how students access educational services and supports. School teams can use this guidance and complete the attached Roadmap Organizer (Appendix A) to begin planning for a particular transition-focused accommodation or goal.

Transition Type

In crafting transition-focused accommodations and goals, a primary consideration is to differentiate between planned and unplanned transitions (though to some extent, due to the uncertainties facing us, we may be able to plan upfront for what would otherwise be unplanned transitions in different times). While the other considerations below generally apply with either transition type, planned vs. unplanned transitions have different implications for how students with disabilities may respond. The chart below provides some examples:

Unplanned	Planned
• Work with students to understand how choice-making impacts consequences to facilitate decisions during unplanned closures • Keep important info and links on the main school website so all stakeholders have immediate access	• Begin discussing upcoming changes in advance of the occurrence (but not too far in advance to cause anxiety) to prepare student(s) and manage expectations • Set up routines that work across in-person and remote contexts so that students have consistency in educational experiences

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Audience

Thinking about the different audiences for your planning will help craft useful guidance - clearly defining both the direct audience, as well as those who might be indirectly impacted, helps teams plan for implementation:

Example Actions	Direct Audience	Indirect Audience
Developing attendance policies that take into account challenges for students with diverse learning needs	Students (whole school) Teachers Clerical	Families Data Managers School Resource Officers
Adding an IEP goal focused on behavioral reactions transitions	Student (individual) Counselor Special Education Teacher	General education Teachers Parents
Creating consistent classroom norms across settings	Students (small group)	Families Other Teachers
Updating grade level expectations to include "look fors" in remote settings	Students (medium group) Teachers	Families

Supports/ Resources Available

As learning transitions between in-person and remote settings, the resources available to students and families will be a critical component to creating a feeling of consistency and safety. Resource categories to consider include:[1]

Setting

Does the student have a calm, quiet environment in which to engage with remote learning? Clean table? A supportive chair? Adequate lighting?

Supplies

Does the student have access to hands-on materials to help engage in learning consistently across settings? Does the student have access to adequate technology (hardware, software, connectivity) and does the student know how to use it well?

Time

When will these activities be completed? Are they built into the master schedule? What should be substituted/ replaced if necessary?

Human supports

Do parents know how to support their child through learning? Is there a sibling helping? Does the student have a trusted adult from the school for guidance or support?

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[1] Examples are drafted for an individual student but are equally applicable to groups of students.

Student Need

Consider the academic, behavioral, and other needs of the child(ren) impacted by the changes and how to tailor responses to directly meet those (and other unanticipated needs):

Behavioral/ Social-Emotional

- Does the student struggle with change? What aspects of change are most unsafe (e.g., the unpredictable nature, lack of routine)?

- Does the student need time to re-acclimate to social settings and peer interactions? Are explicit social skills part of learning for this student?

- What may cause this student anxiety? Is the student's behavior triggered under certain circumstances?

- Is the behavior communicating a need that the child may not otherwise be able to express (e.g., not wanting to wear a mask as a sensory issue, not "defiant behavior")?

Academic/ Functional Skills

- Does the student need to focus on building executive functioning skills to promote smoother transitions?

- Has interrupted classroom instruction created a learning slide or skill deficits that need to be addressed explicitly?

Context/Goals

The final consideration is what you are trying to accomplish - Is there a particular context or goal(s) that guide(s) this work? Examining these contextual factors may help:

Timing
Can any of this be done before school starts? Does it need to be sequenced? Can it wait?

Documentation
Should this work be done formally in the IEP or informally with an objective or goal? Is this a schoolwide policy change or an opportunity to engage stakeholders in a broader discussion?

Culture
How can these practices be integrated into a strengths-based culture that has high expectations for all students? Are there norms for acting with generosity when we "interpret" student behavior (e.g., not assuming the worst in students)?

Sustainability
Are there reasons to maintain these practices (or parts of them) in the short-medium or long-term? How can we keep what works and ensure all students benefit from them?

Student-Centered Focus
How can this accommodation or goal be driven by what works for students? Have students been asked an opinion?

TAKING ACTION

After working through the considerations above, it's time to continue working together by creating an accommodation, goal or plan. Certain themes or trends should stand out the considerations, paving the way forward for an appropriate accommodation or goal. Additionally, as part of implementation, think through, in advance, who the stakeholders are and how to engage them throughout the planning process (developing and implementing). The Roadmap Organizer is a template for these discussions. Below are some ideas to get started:

Social-emotional Support and Wellness

- Assign mentor teachers, paraprofessionals, or other school staff to serve as primary supports for students and check in on a regular basis by phone

- Recognizing how "unsafe" changes in setting can feel to some students - setting of flexible policies can recognize or ease those feelings (e.g., students may need to manipulate their environments to feel safer)

- Assign partner or small group assignments so students who need social supports can feel more comfortable across settings

Academic & Functional Skills

- Pre-teach skills for and set expectations at the beginning around being flexible and having an alternative plan - regularly return to key skills to reinforce

- Consider sharing methods of instruction across settings (e.g., access remote learning resources in school, use classroom materials at home, if possible)

- Offer explicit instruction around classroom expectations (e.g., what work to turn in, how often, etc.)

- Play games and plan for "down time" to get to know your students - use choice in assignments as another way for students to express their interests and strengths

Family Involvement

- Create scripts, bullets or talking points to frame open dialogue with parents - before school starts, prior to planned transitions, after unplanned transitions

- Offer training and support (one-pagers, how to videos, single sign on) for parents on how to use the various technology systems required by your school

- Work with families to craft a home schedule that mirrors school schedules

Professional Development & Operations

- Integrate special education and general education staff in all professional development to promote shared ownership of outcomes for all students

- Draft policies recognizing that mask-wearing and distance protocols may be challenging for diverse learners (as well as training relevant staff members

- Set clear expectations for communication with each stakeholder and holding staff accountable for following through on those plans

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These are trying times for all of us with much uncertainty across the decisions we make every day. This is especially true for our students, especially the students who struggle with transitions and change. It is our role as educators to attune our practice to these needs and keep these considerations front of mind as we formulate policies, practices, and programming.

This is a living document and as such, as you implement these and other accommodations and attempt to turn our "What If" question into a reality, use the #radicalrecovery to tell us what works? What was most challenging? How can we continue to keep diverse learners at the center of our work? We are in this together.

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APPENDIX A: ROADMAP ORGANIZER

WHAT IS THE ISSUE FOR WHICH AN ACCOMMODATION OR GOAL IS NEEDED?		
CONSIDERATIONS	**RESPONSE**	**PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**
Transition Type *(planned/ unplanned)*		
Audience *(direct audience, indirect audience)*		
Resources *(setting, supplies, time, technology, human supports)*		
Student Need *(behavioral/ social-emotional, academic/ functional skills)*		
Context/ Goals *(timing, documentation, culture, sustainability)*		
ACCOMMODATION/ GOAL/ PLAN		
COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION PROTOCOLS		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this accommodation/ goal?	Which stakeholders are responsible for implementing this accommodation/ goal?	Which stakeholders need to be aware of this accommodation/ goal as it is implemented?
NOTES		