

Creating an ON-Ramp to Learning

Moving to a new school can be challenging for students, their families, and educators. For students, there are the challenges of making new friends, adapting to new teachers with new rules, and differences between curricula and pedagogy. A 2014 report by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in Georgia identified that schools with higher concentrations of mobile students had higher percentages of students with disabilities. In a longitudinal student from 1998 through 2007, 13 percent of mobile students were disproportionately more likely to be poor or black than students who changed schools twice or fewer times. Families who do not own their own homes make up 39 percent of the most highly mobile students. Multiple moves are associated with lower school engagement, poorer grades in reading and math, and a higher risk of dropping out of school.

What are some strategies schools can use to create an On-Ramp to Learning for mobile students?

- 1. Fast information about the student is critical.** A quick turnaround of student records enables the receiving school to understand the student's academic history to begin immediate placement and planning activities for academic, behavioral, social, and advancement purposes.
- 2. Consider flexible enrollments that allow students to complete a school year if they move mid-year.** Families may be forced to move due to housing and employment challenges. When students are allowed to complete the school year, they benefit academically and emotionally from the stability of a consistent school program.
- 3. Connect with agencies.** Some communities are connecting with agencies to provide broader and multi-pronged supports to student and their families.
- 4. Peer-to-Peer Mentoring.** A peer mentor provides the new student with support while learning the rules of the school and adjusting to the new social networks.
- 5. Formal Orientation Practices.** Develop and use formal orientation practices. Examples of good practices include:
 - Interview with the principal to discuss student preferences and school expectations

- School tour
 - Daily check in with a mentoring teacher or counselor for the first 10 days of school
 - Invitations to school extracurricular activities
 - Assistance with locating homework supports
 - Assistance and practice with using school web resources
6. **Academic screening and support.** Use a screening assessment to obtain an indication of the student's academic strengths and weaknesses. Many schools use tests such as the NWEA or Aimsweb. Other assessment options may include a teacher assessment of requisite skills for grade level and content area.
7. **Provide immediate academic supports.** Based on the screening data, provide interventions to support the student in adapting to the curricula and pedagogy for your learning environment. Possible delivery models may include:
- Immediate placement into an existing intervention grouping
 - Provide pre-requisite courses to support core instruction. For example, provide a math skills class that reviews foundational skills and practice problems/concepts for core higher level math course.
 - In classroom supports that include, pre-filled notes, supplemental resources, differentiated materials.
8. **Provide immediate behavioral supports.** Familiarize the student with not only the student code of conduct but school-wide rules for behavior. Take the time to review expectations and provide the student opportunities to practice pro-social behaviors with key adults. If students are showing signs of difficulty following rules, take the time to talk to the student about behavior and assist with problem-solving.
9. **Train staff on Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** The basic idea to UDL is that students need options with how material is presented, options with how they may respond to demonstrate their learning, and they need motivating opportunities. More learners are reached when learning opportunities are expanded with the simple strategies of UDL.
10. **Train staff on Formative Assessment.** Research has demonstrated that struggling students are more successful when teachers apply formative assessment practices that include clear learning targets, student clarity of instructional goals, descriptive feedback, and opportunities to master material.

- 11. Parent Orientation.** Provide parents with orientation information. This may be in the form of a packet of information that introduces the parent to such details as school contact information, school hours, school calendar, school day schedule, policies for attendance, grading and conduct, extracurricular activities, after school events for families, and connections to parent groups associated with the school. Provide training on the use of on-line resources.
- 12. Home Communication.** Train parents on the methods available to communicate with the school regarding the student's performance in the new school. Take the time to meet with the parent at enrollment to discuss their concerns and establish lines of communication. Be welcoming.
- 13. Community Resources.** Support families to identify community resources that will support success in school. Families may need assistance with finding transportation to school meetings, locating food banks, and identifying local medical and mental health agencies.