

COLUMBUS COUNTY SCHOOLS RETURN TO LEARN PROCEDURES

(a) Columbus County Schools' plan for addressing the needs of students, preschool through twelfth grade, suffering concussions. This plan includes:

1) Guidelines for removal of a student from physical and mental activity when there is suspicion of concussion;

Explanation: Any teacher, coach, school administrator, school counselor, school psychologist, school drug counselor, school nurse, attendance officer, or other school professional who suspects that any student has suffered a concussion or other head injury shall immediately remove the student from any activities that may result in a further risk of head injury (e.g., physical education, recess, athletic competition, etc.)

Implementation:

Any school employee who suspects that a student has suffered a concussion, or otherwise seriously injured their head, neck or back, will immediately remove the student from the physical activity in order to reduce the risk of further injury. In some instances, the student should not be moved. Signs and symptoms of a possible head, neck, and/or back injuries are listed below. If you observe a student experiencing even one of these symptoms, the student MUST immediately be removed from all participation. Contact the school's First Responder and/or the School Nurse immediately so an evaluation can be performed. Please note that if the student is unconscious or has an altered level of consciousness, 911 should be called immediately.

Signs of Head, Neck, and Back Injuries include:

- *Change in consciousness*
- *Severe pain or pressure in the head, neck, or back*
- *Tingling or loss of sensation in the hands, fingers, feet, or toes*
- *Partial or complete loss of movement of any body part*
- *Unusual bumps or depressions on the head or over the spine*
- *Blood or other fluids in the ears or nose*
- *Heavy external bleeding of the head, neck, or back*
- *Seizures*
- *Impaired breathing as a result of injury*
- *Impaired vision (e.g., double vision) as a result of the injury*
- *Nausea or vomiting*
- *Persistent headache*
- *Loss of balance*
- *Bruising of the head, especially around the eyes or behind the ears*

2) Notification procedure to education staff regarding removal from learn(ing) or play;

Explanation: If a student has a diagnosed concussion, then all stakeholders in the student's education must be notified (e.g., teachers, coaches, administrators, etc.). This procedure should be in written form and accessible by all staff.

Implementation:

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Each school will designate a professional to be the **concussion contact** for the school. This person facilitates the return to learn procedures. This can be any professional in the school setting and they should be clearly identified by the school administration.

A **case manager** may also be another useful role to designate. Potential duties of a case manager may be as follows:

- Follow up with parent as needed to ensure student's needs are being addressed
- Coordinate the development and follow-up of an Educational Plan of Care

Whomever receives the initial notification of a student's diagnosed concussion should inform the designated concussion contact (e.g., parent provides initial documentation to school receptionist, who then immediately alerts the designated concussion contact at the school)

Upon notification of a diagnosed concussion, the concussion contact immediately notifies the parent(s), teacher(s), and school nurse. Others should be notified (i.e., psychologist, coach, etc.) as needed. This written notification serves the following purposes:

- Assignment of case manager
- Informs others of concussion
- Includes symptoms for parent(s) and teachers to watch for
- Asks teachers to note needed accommodations/modifications
- Lists recommendations from physician (if available)
- Gives directions to contact concussion contact with questions/concerns

3) Expectations regarding annual medical care update from parents, medical care plan/school accommodations in the event of concussion;

Explanation: Annual medical care update: this is explained more fully in component (d) below.

Medical Care Plan/ Educational Care Plan -

The Return-to-School plan may represent different levels and duration of care including, but not limited to:

- monitoring of learning, emotional functioning and behavior across all school settings
- targeted strategies to support learning and behavior – including reasonable periods of cognitive rest and physical restrictions (as guided by the medical professional involved)
- A Medical Care Plan, or
- Other interventions, as deemed necessary for the student by the designated school-based team

Implementation:

If the student is experiencing difficulties due to the concussion, development of an Educational and/or Medical Care Plan would occur. It is recommended that this occur via a face-to-face meeting.

- Initiation and coordination of this meeting would involve the concussion contact and (if applicable) the case manager.
- Suggested participants (if not already included as concussion contact and case manager) include: teacher(s), parent(s), school counselor, school nurse.
- Others could include the student, school psychologist, coach, etc., as needed and appropriate.

Medical Care Plan: A document outlining the accommodations and modifications a student may need to address medical symptoms while recovering from a concussion. This plan is reviewed as often as necessary, (recommended - weekly).

- The Medical Care Plan is led by the School Nurse.

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- *The Medical Care Plan may also be referred to as the Individual Health Care Plan.*

Educational Care Plan: *A document outlining the supports that a student may need to address academic, emotional, and behavioral difficulties while recovering from a concussion. This plan is reviewed as often as necessary (recommended as frequently as the Medical Care Plan).*

- *The Educational Care Plan is led by the designated school professional (may be the concussion contact or case manager designated at the school).*

4) Delineation of requirements for safe return-to-learn or play following concussion.

Explanation: If a concussion is diagnosed by a medical care provider, then appropriate steps should be taken to address that student's learning, emotional, and behavioral needs throughout the course of recovery. The continuum of support provided could include appropriate monitoring of recovery, academic and/or functional accommodations, or temporary removal from the formal classroom environment. Prolonged symptoms must be addressed in a manner that matches the student's needs to the level of intervention. If the Return-to-Learn Plan (Medical Care Plan, Educational Care Plan) is found to be insufficient in meeting the needs of a student at any point during the monitoring process, the *schoolbased problem solving team* should become involved in order to identify appropriate targeted interventions for the student.

- *When possible, a School Psychologist who is certified as an approved provider for assessment of TBI, should be part of this decision-making process.*

Please see Appendix A for a review of the current literature that guides return to learn timelines and decision making.

Implementation:

- *The Educational Care Plan is reviewed as often as necessary, (recommended as often as the Medical Care Plan).*
- *As a student progresses in recovery, decrease the intensity of the accommodations and modifications until the student has been symptom free without accommodations/modifications for two or more weeks. The plan can then be discontinued.*
- *If an Educational Care Plan has been in place and proven insufficient in improving the educational (academic and/or functional) performance of the student, then the student should be referred to the school-based problem solving team for direct support specific to academic and/or functional needs.*
- *For students with existing 504 plans/IEPs, these plans are not amended unless a student demonstrates a significant need in direct relation to their concussion.*
- *If state testing accommodations are needed, the use of the transitory impairment procedure may be appropriate.*

(b) In accordance with Columbus County Schools' school plan, each school must appoint a team of people responsible for identifying the return-to-learn or play needs of a student who has suffered a concussion. This team may include the student, student's parent, the principal, school nurse, school counselor, school psychologist, or other appropriate designated professional.

Explanation: If an Educational or Medical Care Plan is deemed necessary, this should be developed by a designated team of school-based professionals, the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) and medical care providers in order to address the needs of that student as they progress through recovery.

Implementation:

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- *The parent/guardian and designated Concussion Contact (or other designated school professional) are present in the development of the plan of care.*
- *The student should be invited at the team's discretion.*
- *If the student's teacher(s) cannot be present when the plan is developed, input should be gathered prior to development.*
- *Individuals that may also be consulted, but are not required members of the team, may include the school nurse, school counselor, school psychologist and/or a coach/athletic director.*

(c) Columbus County Schools will provide information and staff development on an annual basis to all teachers and other school personnel in order to support and assist students who have sustained a concussion in accordance with their learning and behavioral needs. This annual training should include information on concussion and other brain injuries, with a particular focus on return to learn issues and concerns.

Explanation: This annual updating will remind all school personnel of concussions and their impact on students' school functioning, the concussion policy, and the specific procedures developed by the school to implement the state concussion policy. This also will permit discussion of any needed changes to the district level procedures for assisting students who have sustained a concussion.

Implementation:

- *Presentation contains information regarding:*
 - *What a concussion is and how it might manifest within the classroom*
 - *Roles and responsibilities of designated staff members*
 - *School procedures for return-to-learn*
- *Presentation may be provided by student services at the beginning of each school year*
- *Presentation might be delivered as schools are doing annual diabetes education or other annual education*
- *Presentation may be delivered as an on-line tutorial for staff to watch at their convenience*
- *Presentation of information as per the GWCA might also be included*

(d) Columbus County Schools will include in its annual student health history and emergency medical information update a question related to any head injury/concussion a student may have incurred during the past year.

Explanation: Information will be collected annually on the 'Student Profile Sheet' and will be housed in the main office of each school. If the 'Student Profile Sheet' indicates a previously unknown head injury, this should initiate the notification process of return-to-learn procedures.

Implementation:

- *Student Profile Sheets are to be updated annually by the parent/guardian in order to provide updated contact and emergency information.*
- *On the annual updated Student Profile Sheet, the following question regarding current medical needs or past history of concussion will be included: Has your child had any head injury*

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or concussion within the last year? ____Yes ____No; If so: have they been released from their doctor to resume a normal routine? ____Yes ____No; Please explain:_____

- *The medical information page in PowerSchool will also be used for documentation.*