

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



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## Background

- Each year thousands of children in the United States sustain concussions<sup>1</sup>.
- Formalized legislation for the Return to Play process is enacted in all 50 states<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> 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	Speech and language pathology
Public policy and administration	Occupational therapy
Vocational rehabilitation	Physical therapy
Juvenile justice	School nursing
Sports management	School counseling

- Results of online literature reviews were reported during bi-weekly 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
- 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.

- 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.

## 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<sup>4</sup> 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 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

## Determining Strategy - Introduction of Legislation February - April 2017

## Engaging Stakeholders (See Table 2.) January 2017

**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

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

## Formation of Work Group (See Table 1.) September 2016

## References

<sup>1</sup>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](https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/pdfs/schools/tbi_returning_to_school-a.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup> CDC. *Implementing Return to Play: Learning from the Experiences of Early Implementers*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/policy/index.html>  
<sup>3</sup> BIA of America. *Return to Learn*  
<http://www.biausa.org/concussion/returntolearning>  
<sup>4</sup> REAP Concussion Treatment Guidelines  
<https://rockymountainhospitalforchildren.com/service/concussion-management-reap-guidelines>

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