## Vermilion Association for Special Education

**Middlefork School**

**Regional Safe Schools Program**

**Monica Campbell, Principal**



15009 Catlin-Tilton Road, Suite B Telephone: (217) 443-8273

Danville, IL 61834 Fax: (217) 443-0217

**Return-to-Learn (RTL) Step Progression**

With the increasing prevalence of concussions, protocols for returning a student to learning after a head injury is essential. The lack of outward physical symptoms of illness make it sometimes difficult for school staff to recognize the need for accommodations for a student with a concussion. Although a concussion may seem to be an “invisible injury,” a concussion can affect a student in many different ways: physically, cognitively, emotionally, and with sleep.

These symptoms can impact learning and schoolwork. Physical symptoms such as headache, dizziness, and visual changes, may interfere with the student’s ability to focus and concentrate. Cognitive symptoms may impact the ability of the student to learn, memorize and process information as well as keep track of assignments and tests. Struggling with schoolwork may cause symptoms to increase. Students may experience feelings of frustration, nervousness and/or irritability both as a direct result of concussion and due to resulting academic difficulties. Disturbances in sleep patterns often result in fatigue and drowsiness during the day.

Recovery from a concussion is an individualized process. Caution must be taken not to compare students suffering from concussions. Every brain and every student are different; every concussion is different. Assessing problems with learning and school performance, and then making appropriate and necessary changes to a student’s learning plan is collaborative effort between physician and school staff. Some students may not miss any school and need few accommodations. Others may endure months of symptoms that can significantly impact academic performance and require extensive accommodations such as 504 or IEP plans.

A student’s best chance for a full recovery from a concussion depends on timely implementation of two critical components: cognitive rest and physical rest. There is increasing evidence that using a concussed brain to learn may worsen concussion symptoms and prolong recovery.

**Phase 1: No School/complete cognitive rest:**

* Student is experiencing high level of symptoms that will keep the student out of the school.
* Provide students with copies of class notes.
* NO homework, quizzes or test during this time.

**Phase 2: Part-Time School Attendance with Accommodations:**

* Re-introduce student to school.
* The goal of first few days of returning to school is to simply make sure the student can tolerate the school environment without worsening of symptoms.
* Part time school attendance, with focus on prioritizing what classes should be attended and how often.
* Eliminate busy work or non-essential assignments or classes.
* Limit screen time on computers, reading and other visual stimuli based on the student’s symptoms.
* NO TESTS OR QUIZZES.
* Homework load based on symptoms.
* No due dates on homework assignments.
* No physical activity including PE or recess.

**Phase 3: Full-Day Attendance with Accommodations:**

* As the student improves, gradually increase demands on the brain by increasing the amount, length of time, and difficulty of academic requirements, as long as this does not worsen symptoms.
* Continue to prioritize assignments, tests and projects: limit students to one test per day with extra time to complete and breaks as needed.
* Gradually increase homework.
* No physical activity.

**Phase 4: Full-Day Attendance without Accommodations:**

* Accommodations are removed when student can participate fully in academic work at home and school without triggering symptoms.
* Physical activities allowed if specified by physician.

**Phase 5: Full School and Extracurricular Involvement:**

* Student is symptom free, consistently tolerating full school days without triggering any symptoms.
* Student must receive written clearance and complete the RTP progression before returning to physical education and/or sports.

The RTL team (social worker, school nurse, teacher, principal and student’s physician) should recognize that communication is the key to success of the management plan. Students are encouraged to meet with teachers regularly to discuss progress, grades and make up work.

References:

[www.cdc.gov/concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion)

[www.luriechildrens.org/sports](http://www.luriechildrens.org/sports)