

## SUPPORTING STUDENTS DURING THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

### OVERVIEW

This professional practice note for school leaders and teachers provides accessible resources and practical examples for supporting students through the transition period from primary to secondary school.

While the practice examples focus on primary-secondary school partnerships and student wellbeing, this note also provides summaries of, and links to, a variety of DET resources addressing student resilience, quality learning relationships with students and positive school climate. All of these school factors contribute to engaged and supported continuous student learning across the transition period.

### STUDENTS GROW THROUGH TRANSITIONS

*'If it's hard and you get mastery, you feel accomplished'* - Year 6 Student

In an educational journey, beginning secondary school is one of the most significant growth experiences for a young learner. A good primary to secondary school transition experience can make a difference for life.

Positive learning experiences motivate students to commit their attention and energy to learning. Times of change and transition provide students with opportunities to adapt, grow, build resilience, celebrate achievement and deepen their identities as learners.

Parents, carers, peers, community members and teachers all have their role in supporting educational transitions. When adolescents are supported, they understand that by learning they can grow, and they know who they can seek out for support through transition experiences.

### BUILD QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

*'There's something more to teaching than theory, and planning, and pedagogy, and assessment. And that something is hidden in the relationship between the learner and their teacher.'* - Professor Nan Bahr, Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) and Dean of Education at Southern Cross University

Quality relationships with others are central to young peoples' feelings of value, connection and belonging. In school, positive relationships with teachers and peers are

central to students' experiences of transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7.

It is the relationships that are built in and outside of classrooms that will support the student to feel that they are a valued community member and learner. It is also essential for students to connect with at least one teacher. Every student needs an adult to relate to at school, particularly students who struggle to engage.

Important and sustainable teacher-student learning partnerships happen when teachers demonstrate genuine interest in all students and co-design learning experiences with the needs and interests of their students in mind. These relationships support the development of a learner identity for students.

*'Small tasks and rich tasks allow them to share knowledge despite whether they think they're good or bad. In mixed ability groups – all contribute their strengths and apply more creatively too.'* - Maths Leader

Quality learning relationships are fostered when teachers enable students to be active participants in their own learning, and to be part of flexible and collaborative learning groups working on meaningful tasks. Collaborative learning strategies can be used to facilitate peer relationships. The learning relies on students actively participating in establishing and negotiating roles, responsibilities and outcomes.

*'Group work is socialising – helping each other – in the end it produces better work as more than one person is doing it. We can work together. It makes you want to work.'* - Year 7 student

Quality relationships with teachers and peers enhance student engagement, self-confidence and growth as a learner. Teachers can build school pride and connectedness through co-designing opportunities with students to exercise authentic agency in their own learning.

During the transition to secondary school, a student's identity may change or be challenged. Parents and teachers can in turn be challenged by the adolescents in their lives. Parents and teachers can help students to adapt to the challenges of this growth period by highlighting their positive attributes.

For example, students can develop a positive identity as a learner through meaningful experiences of achievement in their own studies. When their learning is made explicit and visible, students believe in themselves and increase their confidence as learners.

The gradual transfer of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student can occur through simple and authentic conversations with students about:

- What students learn
- How they learn
- How learning is assessed
- How students contribute to the evaluation of broader school improvement efforts.

Students also take on a collective identity as a student and a valued member of the school community. Opportunities to offer their own ideas, opinions, knowledge and experience builds student agency and school connectedness. Schools can engage students in their reviews of transition programs, including surveying previous Year 7 students and seeking their involvement in the development of transition programs.

### Practice Principle actions that support quality relationships with students

- 1.1 Teachers convey high expectations of learning, effort and engagement for all students
- 3.2 Teachers co-design opportunities for students to exercise authentic agency in their own learning
- 2.3 Teachers develop student capacity to collaborate
- 6.3 Teachers provide regular feedback to students on their progress against individual learning goals and curriculum standards
- 8.4 Teachers and students collaborate in learning partnerships in and beyond the school

### Resources to support quality relationships with students

- [Amplify: Student voice practice guide](#)
- [High Impact Teaching Strategy 5: Collaborative Learning](#)
- [A collaborative learning space](#) (AITSL)
- [Nan Bahr, 'Lessons from things adolescents almost never say'](#)

### CREATE A POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

*'We know that schooling is more than just preparing students academically, it's about preparing students who can go out into the community and make a contribution and feel positive and have a strong sense of wellbeing.'* - Dr Shiralee Poed, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, and Co-Chair, Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports, Australia

Research and our own teaching and learning experiences tell us that when the teacher maintains a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment, students will be motivated to learn collaboratively and productively. A positive, supportive and productive learning environment is one of the most important factors in the successful transitioning of students from Year 6 to Year 7.

To create and maintain an energised and focused learning environment, teachers proactively share clear learning intentions and success criteria, use engaging resources and maximise learning time. Some schools have found that keeping Year 7 students in the same geographical location helps them to build confidence within their new environment. Schools often try to limit the number of teachers or room-changes for Year 7 students. Some Year 7 teachers co-teach in local Year 6 and/or Year 5 primary school classes.

Whole year level activities also assist students to connect with each other and build student-teacher relationships. These activities help students to feel part of the broader school community. For example, some schools provide educational opportunities for all year level students to work collaboratively and across subjects to complete a year-end Expo. Other examples include family and community events for new Year 7 students, and whole year-level camps and assemblies.

Teachers enhance student engagement when they involve students in creating and choosing learning spaces. Early student engagement can be encouraged through the development of behavioural norms and protocols for each classroom or subject. Students can then learn to take ownership and responsibility for their learning environment and climate.

*'I have a strong belief that a heightened sense of ownership results when teachers and students co-construct the learning environment, agreeing on displays of visual prompts to track learning.'* - Lyn Sharratt (*CLARITY, what matters most in learning, teaching and leading*. 2019, p.9)

Co-design and collaboration practices situate the students within their school and their learning communities. Sharing regular feedback with students and strategies about how to build on current learning is also an important action for transition years' teachers. For example, passion projects can accompany students from Year 6 to Year 7, where they may continue their academic engagement.

*'We need to move away from "copy down and regurgitate" and get kids thinking critically, working in teams and communicating. We're trying to get kids as hands on and focused as they can be. My goal is for students to never ask "when are we going to use this?"'* - Tony Vallance, Lilydale High School teacher (See: [Full STEAM ahead at Lilydale High School](#))

Student resilience can be fostered with active reflections on personal development, learning growth, learning goals and opportunities to relate learning to real life. Some of the activities in the Student Transition and Resilience Training (START) resource enable students to actively reflect on their personal development throughout their transition to secondary school. The activities can be undertaken in Year

6 and Year 7. Depending on the student level, teachers can raise questions such as:

- How do you think being a learner is different from the way you saw it last year?
- How might you see things differently next year?
- If you have done this activity before, let's do it again and see what changes have happened.

Using the FISO improvement cycle, teachers can also reflect on the current status of student voice, agency and leadership in their classrooms. Questions like those below may also assist teachers to identify where to take action and provide guidance on how to evaluate the outcomes of action.

Evaluate and diagnose:

- Am I ready to learn from my students?
- What structures and processes are in place to support student voice, agency and leadership in the classroom?
- Who am I listening to? Who am I missing?
- Are students acting more as leaders or followers?

Prioritise and set goals:

- What skills do students need in order to express themselves?
- How do I let students know they are being heard?
- How do I gather student's input and ideas?
- How do I meaningfully involve students in actions?

Develop and plan:

- What can I do to improve student voice, agency and leadership in the classroom?
- What steps will I take to implement change?

Implement and monitor:

- How will I monitor impact on student engagement and outcomes?
- What can/did I learn about myself in the process?

### Practice Principle actions that create a positive climate for learning

- 2.1 Teachers build quality relationships that enhance student engagement, self-confidence and growth as a learner
- 2.2 Teachers ensure all students' cultural backgrounds, needs and abilities are recognised and addressed in the learning program
- 2.4 Teachers maintain an energised and focused learning environment
- 3.2 Teachers co-design opportunities for students to exercise authentic agency in their own learning
- 6.3 Teachers provide regular feedback to students on their progress against individual learning goals and curriculum standards

- 8.1 Teachers support students to explore their role as global citizens

### Resources to create a positive climate for learning

- [Amplify: Student voice practice guide](#)
- [Student Transition and Resilience Training \(START\) resource](#)
- [Victorian Curriculum F-10, Personal and Social Capability](#)
- [School-wide positive behaviour support](#)
- [Positive School communities \(MindMatters\)](#)

### DEVELOP PRIMARY-SECONDARY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships between primary and secondary schools in the same catchment areas or geographical locations support students and their parents or carers with the changes that happen throughout the primary to secondary school transition period. A partnering or cluster approach can also help address any professional barriers between primary and secondary schools that may impact on the continuity of learning and the achievement of students.

The sharing of student data supports teachers to understand their students. Sharing data as early as possible, and in turn, taking time to understand the student data, can provide a steady foundation for continual learning. Secondary teachers who can reference primary school data when sharing student growth with parents and carers provide a positive framework for continual and supported learning.

### Resources for primary-secondary school partnerships

- [Student Transition and Resilience Training \(START\) resource](#)
- [Transitions framework](#) for primary-secondary school collaboration
- [A Toolkit for Transition Clusters: Primary to Secondary](#)
- [Student Data Transfer](#)
- [Panorama dashboard reports](#)

### SUCCESS CONDITIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT YEAR 6 TO 7 TRANSITIONS

- ✓ A supportive learning environment in both schools (e.g. displaying student work, use of concrete materials at secondary level)
- ✓ Alignment of timetables for participating teachers to ensure they have time to meet and plan.

In addition to developing consistency in teaching practices across classes and year levels, primary-secondary school partnerships highlight some simple ways to create an

environment of continual learning and establish positive learning relationships with students.

### Our Top 10 actions for school networks, school leaders and teachers

- Consider developing primary-secondary teaching teams
- Implement the Student Transition and Resilience Training (START) program
- Develop student portfolios in Year 6 for students to take to Year 7
- Host school walks and talks for Year 6 and Year 7 students and their parents or carers
- Design rich learning projects with students, including moderated assessment frameworks
- Build teacher-student rapport through focused one-on-one learning conversations with all students
- Support positive peer relationships for students with structured mixed ability group work and collaborative learning exercises, whole year-level assemblies and activities
- Connect students to clubs (homework, literacy, numeracy, STEM, sports etc.), buddy programs, co-curricular programs and other available school supports
- Involve the whole school community in transitions where possible
- Voice high expectations and high regard for students who are transitioning across learning environments while rewarding student effort and acknowledging increases in self-efficacy.

### ILLUSTRATIONS OF PRACTICE

#### 1. [STARTing with the DATA: Student wellbeing during the transition from primary to secondary school](#)

How using the START Survey for Schools at Lilydale Heights College connects students with wellbeing supports.

#### 2. [The 6 to 7 Transition project: Primary-secondary partnerships](#)

Partner schools co-design literacy and numeracy learning programs to support continuous student learning across primary to secondary transitions.

### START A CONVERSATION

The questions below offer conversation starters for group discussions in Professional Learning Communities, Communities of Practice, teaching teams, transition clusters or individual conversations with learning specialists and other teachers:

- What is the student data telling us?
- Which students will we need comprehensive handovers for? (i.e. Those with identified developmental vulnerabilities or high achievers)

- What learning are you ready to share with these new members of our school community?
- What learning will they share with you?
- What kind of presence do you bring to your classroom?
- How are you planning to encourage and embed student voice in your classroom?

### MORE TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [Using Evidence for Impact](#)
- [Teaching frameworks](#)
- [Primary to secondary transitions](#)
- [Amplify: Student voice practice guide](#)
- [Practice principles for excellence in teaching and learning](#)
- [High Impact Teaching Strategies](#)
- [Student wellbeing hub](#)
- [Student Transition and Resilience Training \(START\)](#)
- [How to increase appropriate behaviour](#)

### CONTACT US

For more information or to share your feedback, please email: [professional.practice@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:professional.practice@edumail.vic.gov.au)

### This professional practice note has been informed by

- DET project: Key Transitions in Secondary Mathematics Learning
- DET project: Outer-East Transitions
- DET project: Student Transition and Resilience Training (START)
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Centre for Adolescent Health, December 2017, 'The Effects on Schooling Outcomes of Early Developmental Vulnerabilities in Children': <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/effects-schooling-outcomes-early-developmental-vulnerabilities-children>
- Bahr, Nan, 'High impact teaching – the noble piglet effect', Teacher Magazine, published 21 January 2019 <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/high-impact-teaching-the-noble-piglet-effect>
- Bahr, Nan, 'Lessons from things adolescents (almost) never say', Teacher Magazine, published 22 May 2018 <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/lessons-from-things-adolescents-almost-never-say>
- Johnson, Bruce (2008), Teacher–student relationships which promote resilience at school: a micro-level analysis of students' views, British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 36:4,385-398, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880802364528>