A parent’s guide to their child’s residential placement

Session 17
Handout #2 - Residentially Placed Students

Seventh Annual Conference on Best Practices for Nonpublic Special Education Programs - November 7 & 8, 2013
Working Together

This booklet describes the process of placement, activities and responsibilities of IEP members while your child is in placement, as well as the elements of a successful transition back home. By offering your child an opportunity to acquire more effective coping skills to manage their unique stresses, with your support, they can implement these new skills upon their return home and be better prepared for life beyond our classroom walls.

The Hart District has spent considerable time developing and fine-tuning the process by which students are placed into, and subsequently transition out of, a residential setting. Your familiarity with this process, as well as remaining mindful of your responsibilities, will help ensure that the skills your child acquires while in placement do not slip away upon their return. Remember, the overall objective of residential placement is to stabilize the student so they can make better use of the local community resources from their home/community – offering them the least restrictive environment to effectively meet their needs is not only a core principle of the California Department of Education, it is a cornerstone of our special education services.

Particularly noteworthy for our district is the involvement of Licensed Mental Health Professionals (e.g., ERICS Therapists) for every student who is placed residentially. These professionals monitor the student and residential treatment process, assist in the coordination of services, and are available to meet with you and your family to attend to family dynamics as well as provide support during this time. We know of no other school district in California who offers these additional family sessions to every family who has a student in residential care.

Research has clearly shown that students are more likely to benefit from a residential placement with the existence of the following elements:

- **Partnership.** Parents, school districts, and residential placements collaborate on developing and working toward the same goals necessary for a successful transition
- **Clear roles and responsibilities.** Each IEP member clearly understands their role and is committed to work diligently to accomplish these tasks
- **Family-centered approach.** Active and regular family therapy sessions during and after residential placement, both with and without the student present.
- **Early transition planning.** Students who have an actionable transition plan prior to their readiness for discharge are more successful socially and academically (e.g., increased graduation rates, admittance to higher education, and stability in the workforce).

We are pleased to present this booklet and work with you to help your child succeed. Our goal is the same, let’s work together!

The William S. Hart Union High School District
Department of Special Education
Residentially Placed Students:
Process, Roles, and Expectations

The referral and transition process serves to meet your child’s needs in the least restrictive environment possible and is guided by several procedural objectives: preparation, individual attention, progressive and innovative interventions, measureable improvement in academics and personal/social/emotional domains. You can see below the general process, from placement to transition back home.

NOTE: Your ERICS Therapist can assist you with understanding any of the following procedures or your role/responsibilities.

Referral Process to a Residential Placement

1. Once you and the IEP team decide a higher level of care is required, a few residential placements are recommended by Hart staff based on the specifics of the treatment program and facility as well as the unique challenges of your child. The goal is to identify the least restrictive environment that meets the student’s needs.

2. After several have been identified, your child’s packet containing various educational records is sent to a potential placement.

3. A residential placement is chosen and the Hart Program Specialist will collaborate with you, the residential placement, and specific

Parent Tip #1
The time to begin thinking about your child’s discharge from a residential center is at admission. How long a child remains in a residential placement should be determined by each child’s needs and progress in treatment. When your child goes to an residential placement, your child and family adjust to this change over a period of many months. Discharge planning is the process of returning the child home or to another placement or living arrangement, and this change requires gradual adjustment as well.
district personnel to finalize details of the placement.

4. Your child is now in residential placement. It is essential to work closely with your ERICS Therapist as well as the Therapist at the residential facility. They will be able to provide the most guidance during this point. The ERICS Therapist will monitor the student’s progress in placement and work with your family in sessions. The Residential Therapist will discuss the frequency of family therapy sessions with your child. Because communication is key, your ERICS Therapist will regularly consult with the residential clinical team and others with educational interest as appropriate.

Parent Tip #2
Residential treatment centers are required to begin assessing and planning for discharge as soon as the child arrives. This planning becomes much more detailed and specific in the final months before discharge. Most youths return to their home and community after RTC treatment. It might be most helpful to think of the initial discharge plan as the “ideal goal” that the treatment team is working to accomplish. Discuss with your child’s case manager the skills your child needs and how he or she must behave and function in order to leave the RTC and remain safe in your home and community.

5. A 30-day placement and review IEP meeting will be held to discuss goals. This is also a great time for all IEP members to discuss the elements of a Transition Plan (please see the attached document). While your child is in placement the residential clinical team will be providing Hart staff regular progress reports to keep abreast of development. These will be shared with you by either the Hart Program Specialist or your ERICS Therapist. It is vital that your ERICS Therapist conducts regular parent counseling and guidance meetings to explore salient clinical and familial factors related to your child’s educational program.

6. With open communication with you and the residential clinical team we’ll be able to identify when your child will likely be successful in a less restrictive educational environment. At this time, Pre-transition Meetings should begin. These meetings offer the opportunity for increased communication between all members and will begin to guide the team on making a successful transition, including date. It is suggested that the timeline of these meetings (that will be adjusted to the student/family’s specific needs) is: 2 months prior, 1 month prior, 2 weeks prior, and 1 week prior. The pre-transition phase offers you an opportunity to participate in sessions with your child to better process and prepare for the expected change in environment and behavioral expectations.

Parent Tip #3
Parents should play a large role in the discharge plan. Make sure the treatment team knows about your concerns and family limitations as well as strengths and supports that might aid in your child’s transition. You can also ask your child what worries him or her about the transition and return home, and what supports or services might help. When your child is about six months from expected discharge, you should begin to identify community-based providers and other services near your home.

7. Your child transitions home, but the work is not over... You and your child will immediately be offered intensive counseling sessions via our ERICS Department in addition to other elements of the transition plan. The frequency of these meetings is discussed between you and your ERICS Therapist. If agreed and clinically appropriate, a 3-2-1- Program can be implemented. You and
your child will have the opportunity to assist in the design of your 3-2-1 Program during the Pre-transition Meetings. This program has several important components:

- increased therapeutic opportunities (e.g., therapy 3x/week for 3 weeks, 2x/week for 2 weeks, and 1x/week there on, or as determined by you and the ERICS Therapist);
- increased parent counseling and guidance sessions;
- the possibility of conducting sessions at the home to facilitate your involvement;
- via IEP team decision and supported by the Transition Plan, decreased educational demands, which allows your child to more readily internalize successes;
- via IEP team decision and supported by the Transition Plan, more expressive opportunities (e.g., music and art participation along with physical activity)

**Transition Process back home**

The transition program exists to better prepare for, and adapt to, stressors your child will face during a transition from residential placement. It seeks to enhance educational achievement while decreasing out of home placement. Movement from a residential placement is sought to be gradual, focusing on your child’s entire experience beyond behavioral compliance.

In accordance with FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education), the main objective is to provide your child the least restrictive environment necessary to meet their educational needs. Clinical and programmatic infrastructure at the district will be in place to support your child’s success from residential care.

**Transition Criteria**

The transition criteria serves as an initial framework for the IEP team to better identify if your child has gained the necessary skills to be successful in a less restrictive environment. It is to be tailored to your child’s specific needs/situation by the IEP team during the pre-transition meetings. The general Transition Criteria includes progress made in 3 interrelated domains:

1. academic
2. social-emotional
3. adaptive

In order for a transition to a less restrictive environment to be successful, your child will have demonstrated sufficient progress (e.g., behavioral and/or grades) in academic classes and has improved their ability to effectively cope with social and emotional situations (e.g., affect regulation).

**Pre-Transition Meeting Agenda Items**

1. Potential agenda items/questions based on clinical and educational history of your child:
   a. Does the student and family have a sense of what brought them to residential treatment?

**Parent Tip #4**

It is understandable to feel anxious or worried about your child’s discharge. It helps to view this process as a plan that is written and reviewed over time to meet the changing needs of your child and family. As a member of the treatment team, you have an important voice in discharge planning. Other members of the treatment team, including school district officials or other funder, and RTC educational and therapeutic staff, also share decision-making authority.
b. Does the student and family understand what behavioral changes are needed to indicate they're ready to transition to a lower level of care?
c. How has the student and family assessed their own progress while in placement?
d. What does the student and family like or dislike about their current residential program?
e. An account of adaptive coping skills mastered in the residential facility
f. Living arrangement/family readiness for the reintegration of the student (e.g., What is the single most important issue that needs to be addressed with your child?)
g. Student capability to benefit from the educational environment
h. Progress of parent counseling and guidance
i. Relational/attachment dynamics
j. Medication management services/needs
k. Development of IEP service goals upon return/areas of continued clinical importance

1. **Safety and Crisis Plan.** A Safety and Crisis Plan will be developed collaboratively with all participants of the IEP team and tailored to the student’s specific behaviors/needs providing contact information for natural community supports, including telephone numbers.

2. Work with program staff and parents to resolve administrative or treatment issues that arise during transition period.

3. Update the Transition Plan (see attached document), which was initially constructed at the 30-day placement and review IEP meeting. By the end of the pre-transition meetings, an updated specific plan (e.g., family reunification issues, crisis/safety concerns, role expectations, and medication management services, etc.) will be developed to increase the likelihood of a successful transition.

**Aftercare**
After discharge from a residential facility, children with mental illness almost always have a continued need for mental health care. It is important to make appointments for your child and prepare services, so that there will not be a gap in treatment or medication. Without follow-up care, there is a significant risk that your child will regress or lose the gains made while in placement. Aftercare may be paid for through private health insurance, public funding such as Medicaid, or possibly other means.

Working closely with the Hart District will help to ensure all providers are aware of each other’s involvement. For example, while addressing educational concerns, your ERICS Therapist could consult with your private Therapist or Psychiatrist, who would be addressing mental health concerns.

**Parent Tip #5**
One of the things parents report as being most helpful in their child’s transition back home from residential placement is a well-structured daily schedule. Children in residential placement have had daily schedules full of activity. When they return home, many children are at a loss as how to structure their day and meet their needs for social contact and recreation. As part of transition and discharge planning, you, your child, and the IEP team could discuss your child’s social and recreational interests. You can also contact your local park district and special recreation district to find out about available activities. Before your child leaves the residential center, make sure activities are in place. These activities can help your child meet peers who share similar interests. These relationships can be important for your child as they work toward continued health and well-being.
Transition Plan - Initial

Date: _____

(should be approximately the same as the 30-day IEP)

- Preliminary transitional needs (e.g., current functional impairment): _____
- Anticipated living arrangement and related concerns (e.g., upon entrance to RTC): _____
- Preliminary transition criteria (e.g., academic, emotional, behavioral, social, etc.): _____
- Preliminary barriers to transition planning (e.g., social, familial, environmental, etc.): _____
- Student’s reaction/input to initial transition plan: _____

Additional comments: _____

Transition Plan – Updated

Date: _____

(should be completed during the Pre-Transition Meetings)

- Progress with preliminary transitional needs (e.g., updated current functional impairment): _____
- Living arrangement and related concerns (e.g., upon discharge from RTC): _____
- Progress with preliminary transition criteria (e.g., academic, emotional, behavioral, social, etc.): _____
- Progress with preliminary barriers to transition planning (e.g., social, familial, environmental, etc.): _____
- Safety and Crisis Plan (e.g., tailored to the student’s specific behaviors/needs providing contact information for natural community supports, including telephone numbers): _____
- Student’s reaction/input to updated transition plan: _____

Additional comments: _____

Disposition

Actual transition date: _____

Notes: _____

Expected educational placement:

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<th>High School</th>
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OTHER - Explain: _____

NPS - Explain: _____