

Transcript Transitioning Students with LD's from Grade 8 to Grade 9

- [Narrator] The transition from grade eight to grade nine is a daunting time for many students. But for students with LDs, it can be a particularly challenging experience.

- When I taught grade eight, it became quite evident that the grade eight students were so very nervous about what high school was going to look like, as were their parents. The data and the research shows that a successful transition from grade eight to grade nine is a key determiner of success overall for these students, specifically students with special education needs.

- To be honest, I was kind of scared, 'cause I didn't know how high school was gonna be.

- Honestly the thing that's most on my mind is getting lost in the school 'cause it's so big and I have kind of trouble with direction. And maybe like new people and being the smallest grade 'cause some upper grades always kinda look down on the lower grades, so that's always kind of on the back of my mind. And biggest fear is probably just math, I'd say.

- I'm worried about not being able to work properly.

- [Narrator] In the Peel District School Board, Erindale Secondary School and Homelands Senior Public School have created a unique relationship to support the transition of all students, especially students with LDs. Both schools recognize when it comes to transitions, the earlier you start the better.

- When they come into us in grade six, we help them with that transition from elementary into middle school. So we learn a lot about their anxieties at that point in time and some of their concerns and worries, and try to keep that in mind when we look at transitioning even from year to year for them. But when we look at the bigger picture of transitioning into high school, what do they need that will make them

successful? We work with their teacher, we work with them, and we try to make sure that we put everything in place that they need to help with that transition into high school.

- We always start with an IPRC, which is a Identification Placement and Review Committee and that's the formal process where a student would be officially identified in secondary school and offered a placement.

- We host what we call transition support meetings. We invite staff in and we share what we call a transition profile. We share with them sort of the look fors. What it is that we're looking for because we want to proactively put some supports in place.

- And we'll talk about successful teaching strategies, assessment strategies and just really how the kids learn best and how to best support them within the school. And that can be socially, that can be behaviorally or academically.

- [Narrator] Early engagement with parents is also vital for the smooth transition of students.

- What we feel is very important is relationships. We go to the open houses at our middle schools or our feeder schools, and we specifically seek to have conversations with parents whose children have individual education plans or who have special education needs. It's hard as a parent to know what to ask or what to expect from the secondary school, teachers or even the school itself when you don't know. When you have that face-to-face connection with the families, then they're more likely to reach out and ask you questions.

[Narrator] A key part of the transition process is providing students with positive and informal experiences within the secondary school environment.

- The best practices if you're having students with learning disabilities be successful in high school I think is to kinda de-institutionalize the high school to make it really

feel like a home. So when they're comfortable here and they have someone that they know that cares about them here and they have a safe space here, they're gonna wanna be here and they're gonna want to do well and they're gonna have those relationships that will help bring them into the building, maybe when academics don't. We encourage students to feel at home here by having them come in and do fun activities. Having an ice cream social and getting to talk with their teachers one-on-one. Having a carnival or a BBQ where they can come here and see the teachers and interact with them on a more personal level.

- Meeting teachers earlier it was really good because for instance at the ice cream social, they set up in the cafeteria, projects and stuff and how the class works and when you interact with the teacher, they get to know you. Instead of just like going straight into it when you come, you get a feel of how everything goes. So that really helps you so you know what to do and how to ask and things to look for.

- Moving from their middle school to Erindale, our goal is really to increase their familiarity with the building and with the people in it, so that they feel more comfortable coming into the school and all that it has to offer. And we start this process actually earlier than just grade eight.

- Well we've started at Homelands to support many of our students is that we start the visits in grade six. So by the end of grade six they've been over to the high school just as a visit. By grade seven we make sure that they go over at least one or two other times. And for some of our students who have some specific learning needs, we make sure that we show them the programs that are available that fit their interests and fit their abilities in that school.

- We often set up a smaller tour with maybe three or four kids and take them over, just on a walking tour over here, where they'll be able to meet the guidance counselors that would be assigned to them for the following year. They'll be able to see the contact room, they'll be able to see the resource center. They'll find where

the library is and they'll just kinda again put them at ease so they know where they can walk around.

- We find that students need some time to become familiar and as they mature as well, they look and see different things when they come into the building because they have a different lens when they're in grade six, which is when we try to start that, to grade seven and then to grade eight when it becomes quite real for them.

- It just gives them multiple opportunities to lessen that anxiety and we also have lots of conversation around what are their concerns? What are their fears?

- Students in grade eight need to be self-advocates. They know what they need and they know how they best learn. They need to be able to say, "I need this in order to be successful."

- Well I hope that I'll be able to talk to people, to tell them about how I learn.

- At secondary, we have a grade nine students go take your kid to work day. So on that particular day, the grade nines are not in our school building. So what we do is we create a timetable for the grade eights to come in and it's a shortened day, but it is still reflective of what a high school day would look like. So they come in and students with individual education plans are strongly encouraged to have a little conversation, or to say, "Oh, I have an IEP." Or the teacher will say: This is a learning strategies class. We know that most of the students in here have an individual education plan. Why don't you sit next to me? Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself?" If you could help us co-create your learner profile, what would you want your teachers to know about you? So we've already started collecting some information and gathering data from the students themselves.

- So at Homelands we purposefully chose to have the graduation here at Erindale. We think it's a really, really nice way to end our year on a high note. They can say, "See ya later," to their middle school, but also have really positive associations with

the high school. The high school, the graduation ceremony's in the auditorium, the dance is in the gym. They have pizza and streamers and ice cream and cake and they leave feeling really good. This is a really positive experience, so when they walk in in September, and they see the cafeteria and the atrium and the gym, they associate those positive feelings and they come back feeling great in September.

- [Narrator] While informal gatherings such as ice cream socials are a great way for students to get comfortable in their new environment, structured activities such as Erindale's Emerging Leaders Program offers incoming students opportunities to get involved in the high school community.

- Grade nine students are invited to be part of what we call the Emerging Leaders Club. So these are students who have shown either of their own initiative that they want to be leaders in secondary school, or for example at one of the transition profile meetings, a grade eight staff member may have said, "You know this student has some really great "leadership potential, but maybe needs a little guidance, "or maybe needs a little support in navigating "or pulling out their own potential." Because they are grade nine students, they are the most familiar with what it's like to come from grade eight to grade nine, so they are the perfect ambassadors for Erindale.

- They would always ask me stuff like, "So how's high school gonna be? "What should I do?" All that stuff that like a normal grade eight would ask. The combined approach of student visits, parent one-to-ones and ongoing relationship building between the staff at both schools, has enabled Erindale and Homelands to create a transition process that is minimally stressful for students with LDs.

- I think it's important that we work together collaboratively as a team, looking at the needs of our students, making sure that we have documented information that states exactly the strengths and the needs of the student. It needs to start as early in grade six and seven. And then as we learn what our students are strong at and where their anxieties or their needs lie, I think it's important then we start sharing that with the high school so that we ensure a smooth transition.

- I definitely say my school has helped me feel prepared in the sense I find some Erindale students here have come to Homelands and talked about it as well and I find it's really helped me feel a lot less stressed. I remember even in grade six I was so stressed about transitioning to high school 'cause of my needs and how difficult it's gonna be, but now that I've seen the place and I've talked to people and teachers, I feel like that stress has shrunk down to something much smaller.