

Transitioning Back

Neenah program helps students get back on track after extended absence

SESSION *Transitional Learning Center (TLC): School Re-engagement for Students*

Presenters Neenah Joint: Mary Pfeiffer, district administrator; Tracy McClowry, TLC coordinator; Ann Hatch, school psychologist; Kristin Mahoney, school counselor

Students miss extended periods of school for a variety of reasons — health issues, mental health challenges, concussions, car accidents, etc. Transitioning back into the classroom can be difficult. For the past two years, the Neenah Joint School District has run a Transitional Learning Center (TLC) at its high school to help students get caught up and re-integrated into the school community.

Kristin Mahoney, school counselor, said the first few days back from an extended absence can be stressful for a student.

“If you can imagine, as a student, it can be very overwhelming to be handed three weeks of school work,” she said. “We can help work with those students and prioritize what is most important.”

It’s not just about getting caught up with school work. A lot of classroom work at Neenah High School includes collaborative projects. Missing school can leave students feeling like they’ve lost their place in the school.

“We have found that the students that we’ve worked with not only are struggling with missing school work but also with comradery,” Mahoney said.

Tracy McClowry, TLC coordinator, works with students who have missed school and their parents

to help support those students, make sure they regain their footing in the school and, ultimately, graduate on time.

In a typical case, when students first come back to school they might spend their entire first day or two in the TLC. After that, students come to the TLC during a study hall or release period.

“After they get reengaged, they can transition back in and leave the TLC,” McClowry said. “It really looks different for each student, we create a customized plan for each student.”

“Typically, students are there for a week,” Mahoney said. “Some students do need longer. The door is never closed on them even when they transition back into the school.”

The program has proven to be a big help to parents with children who have missed a large amount of school or who are struggling with mental health issues. It allows the parent to not worry about their child’s academics and instead focus on helping their child get better. It has also helped support those students with truancy issues. While the initial plan wasn’t to focus on those students, staff has found that the TLC has been very effective in helping truant students.

The presenters shared some positive data from the first two years the



“If you can imagine, as a student, being handed three weeks of school work, it can be very overwhelming. We can help work with those students and prioritize what is most important.”

—Kristin Mahoney,
Neenah Joint School District

TLC has been in operation. For instance, 93 percent of students who used the TLC improved their grades in half of their classes and 38 percent improved grades in all classes. Of the 19 seniors the TLC has supported, 18 have graduated on time.

Student testimony has been positive as well. The presenters shared videos of students they have helped transition back into the classroom. One student had been in a severe car accident and needed a series of surgeries to recover. For her, the idea of getting back to school and graduating on time seemed unlikely, “It helped me to achieve something that I didn’t think was possible.” ■