

Concussion Protocol – Return to Learning (RTL)

The following protocol will assist in the care of our students who suffer a concussion. Careful coordination between the school, home and medical professionals is critical to ensure the smoothest possible transition as the student returns to the learning environment.

While it is true that an athlete must be 100% symptom-free before returning to play (RTP), they don't need to be 100% symptom-free to return to learning (RTL). The student may return to school when symptoms are tolerable and manageable, as long as appropriate adjustments are made at school. The school nurse and school psychologist will coordinate between school personnel and the healthcare provider. Therefore, following a concussion the parent must provide a signed release of information allowing for two-way communication between the school designee and the healthcare provider, as well as a statement verifying the injury and any physical and academic restrictions. This information will be shared with the school psychologist and school nurse. At that time, the school psychologist will notify the student's teachers of the injury and recommendations by the physician.

As each concussed student will have a different combination of symptoms, a different level of severity, and a different rate of recovery, each student will have an individualized academic adjustment plan developed by the school psychologist. The term academic adjustment is used intentionally to reflect classroom changes that are more flexible and temporary than accommodations or modifications reserved for students with long-term learning difficulties.

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for these academic adjustments; rather, the interventions should be logical, reasonable, and flexible. The common mental and functional areas impacted by a concussion are mental fatigue, slowed processing speed, and difficulty with new learning. Possible adjustments to address symptoms of a concussion include, but are not limited to:

- A shortened day. This may mean a later start or an early dismissal. When given the choice between increasing academic adjustments or decreasing time at school, there will be an increase in adjustments. This keeps the student at school and on the appropriate developmental, social, and academic track during the recovery from the concussion.
- Rest periods throughout the day as needed.
- Reduction in the amount of in-class work and homework. This may mean reducing the number of problems to be completed or allowing a student to audit a particular lecture. The school psychologist will work with the teachers regarding appropriate reduction in the amount of work.
- Sunglasses for light sensitivity and/or earphones for sound sensitivity. This may require early dismissal from class to avoid the noise of the passing period.
- Extra time on projects and tests, adjusted due dates, and, in some cases, the removal or exemption from tests or large projects.
- Delay in taking tests, even if the material has been learned.
- Copies of teacher's notes.
- Use of technology to make output easier and more efficient.

Under Indiana Law (I.C. 20-34-7) an athlete must receive written clearance from a licensed health care provider to return to play. Given that a student must be symptom-free in order to return to play, if the student is still receiving academic adjustments of any kind due to the presence of any symptoms, the student cannot be considered symptom-free. Therefore, a successful RTL is necessary before approval for RTP. The school psychologist and school nurse can collect data to be used in the decision to return an athlete to play. McAvoy, K. (2012). *Communique*, 40 (6). A student with a concussion or head injury will not be permitted to participate in physical education classes at any level until the student has been fully released by his physician to participate in contact sports.