What am I about to share? An A-Z on transition
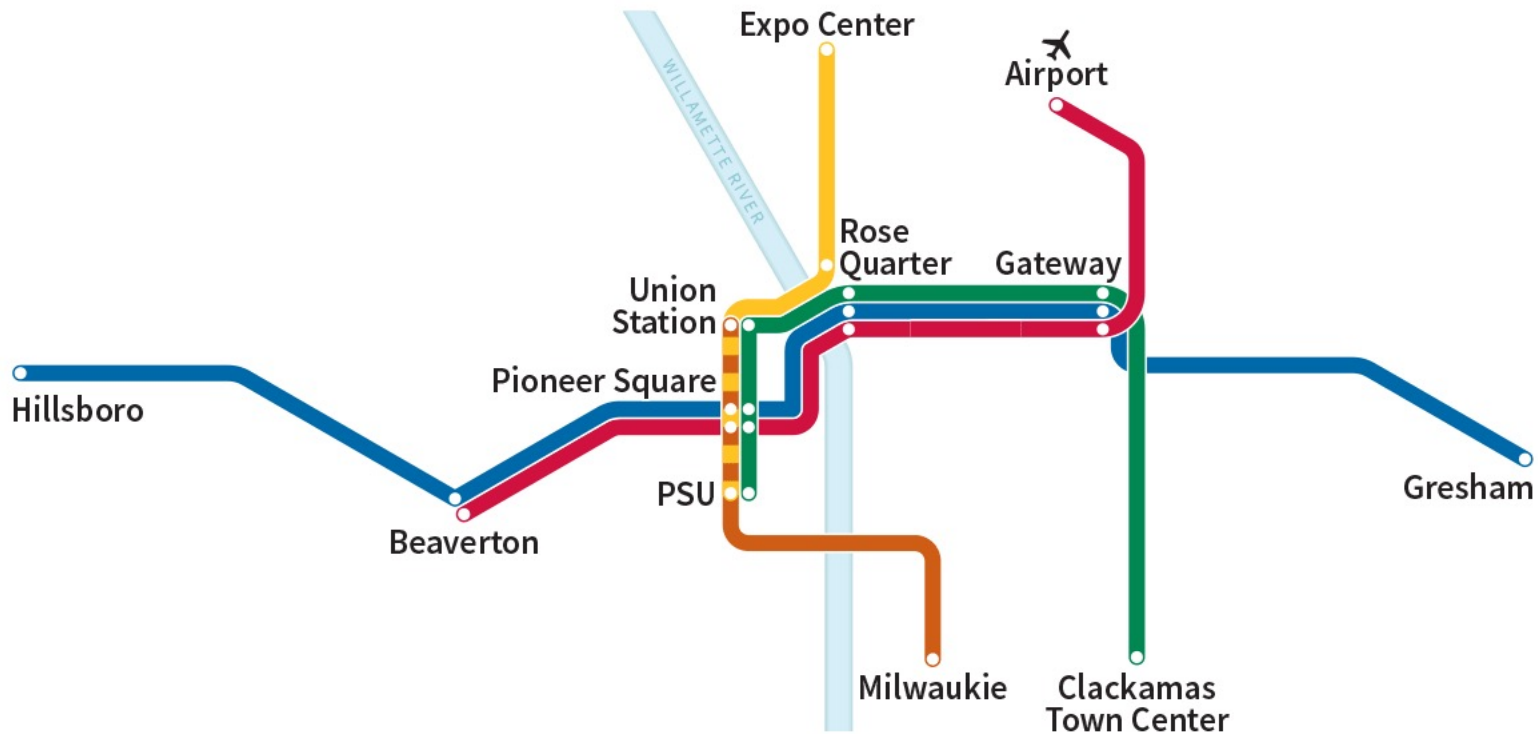

Self-Actualisation
Morality, Creativity, Spontaneity, Acceptance. Experience purpose, meaning and inner potential

Self-Esteem Needs
Confidence, achievements, respect of others, connections, need for individuality

Love and Belongingness Needs
Friendship, family, intimacy, connections

Safety and Security Needs
Health, employment, property, family, stability

Physiological Needs
Air, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

https://lifetranstions.weebly.com/maslow-hierarchy.html

By Leo Thompson MA, MEd

# A metaphor for the challenge students face

Picture yourself on a train going from one station to another (in the same region and in the same country). The route is predictable, planned and straightforward. The stops and junctions are known and mapped out. You recognise many of the passengers on the train because they have been with you since you began the journey. They speak the same language as you so you can easily connect with and understand each other, and you have plenty of time to meet the new passengers and say goodbye to the passengers getting off the train. These moves and stops are largely predictable and communicated by others so you know your route and connections in your journey. This largely reflects a child's experience in a *national* education system.

Expo Center

✈ Airport

Rose Quarter   Gateway

Union Station

Pioneer Square

Hillsboro

PSU

Beaverton

Milwaukie

Clackamas Town Center

Gresham

WILLAMETTE RIVER

Now, sticking with the same metaphor, imagine you are now boarding a train in another country in an unfamiliar landscape with unfamiliar passengers and they are speaking a different language. One or two years later you will board another train in another country and not know anyone...and the conductor and ticket inspector are speaking a different language to you. The landscape you are seeing has changed completely and though you can feel excited, you also feel a deep sense of loss and significant disconnection. You were not prepared for this and do not know how to cope. You have no control over the route and did not select the train you are on...

The truth is that many students in *international schools* are lucky if they manage to travel two or three stops together on the same track: they may only be there for a few grades - a few years of their school life and childhood. They are global nomads not yet in control of their destinies. *How can we help them?*
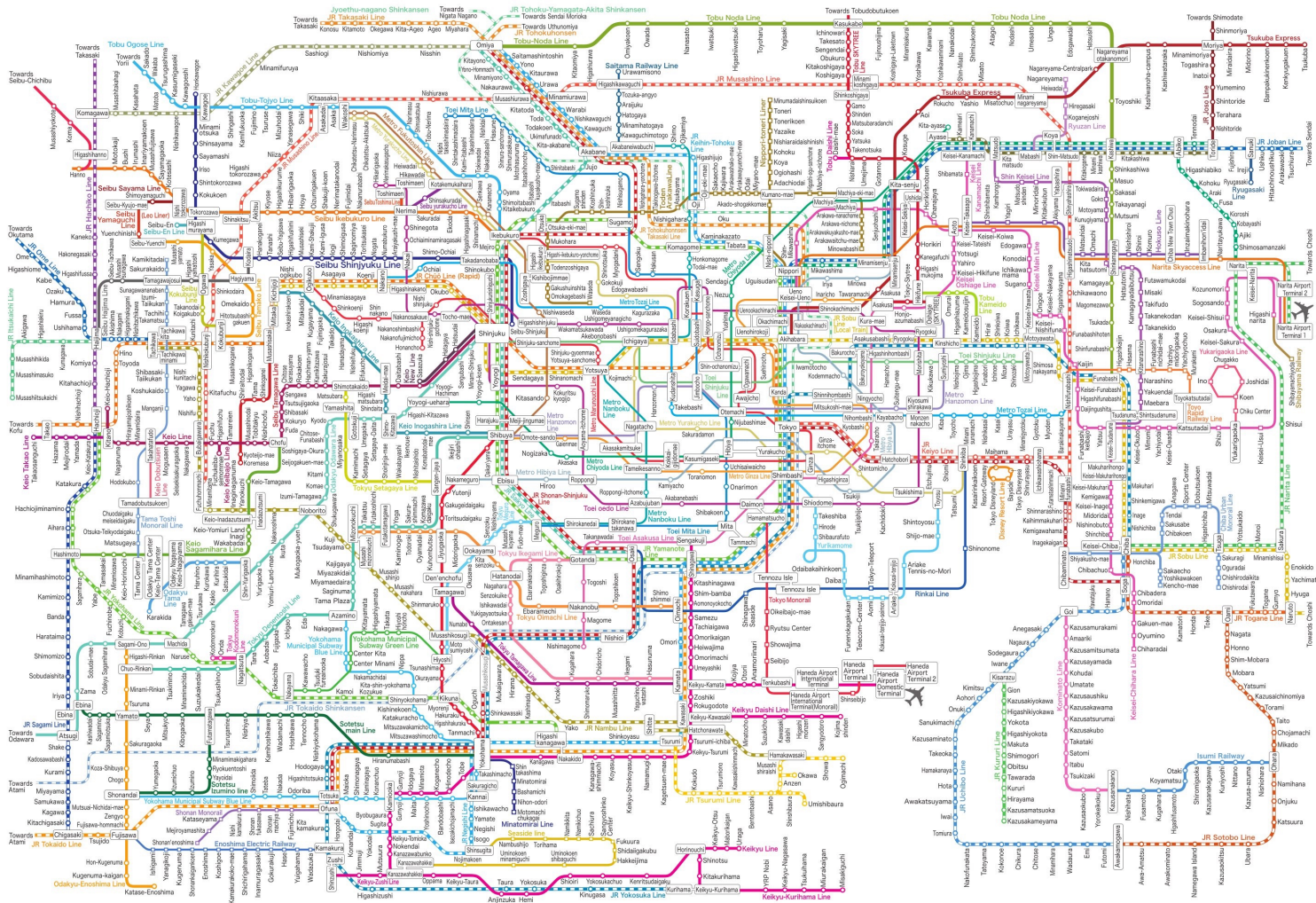
An A-Z on transition

All help philosophy – this should be anchored in a caring mission that values well-being.

Alumni networks facilitated and in place to help leavers and stayers feel connected and rooted. Some schools use alumni as guest speakers to advise, inspire and motivate younger students. Also survey them to improve their programmes.

Assemblies – focused and thematic on the topic of transition and socio/emotional aspects of moving, change and loss, as well as friends moving on. Helping students prepare and accept it.

Assessment of needs made at admission as students enter – includes language support, socio/emotional, neurodiversity & trauma as a way of informing support and intervention.

Buddies and ambassadors guide students and families. The process should start before they arrive and the student buddy system continues after they arrive. Language and interests are factored into selection.

Celebrations of stages and phases to bring them to a formal closure and recognise their role including graduations. Awards and accomplishments can be part of this as milestone achievements - not just and academic can cover sports and other areas to value the whole person.

Communications Parents: need to know information, guidance packs, information evenings, presentations, parent days, important aspects of child education, orientation website. Staff: need to know information in meetings and in student information management systems.

Curriculum – grade 12 transition curriculum, what you need to know, how you can prepare for college/uni. Students getting ready by grade check lists, SEL and pastoral cover relevant topics in focused lessons and sharing resources. Accelerated language and bridging programmes to ensure their success, in some cases.

Check ins - informal cyclical chats with caring adults and professionals. "How are you doing? Can I help?"

Culture - open door, reach out to any adult. Relational approach that shows concern for students and their general welfare and identity – making them feel like they belong in a community. Flows from the mission and school values (see A).

Database and MIS - centralised database of information shared for educators of students needs and how to support, includes academic and socio emotional. Access privilege controlled for sensitive data.

Exit forms from students and families contain related questions to refine school transition process.

Families - to be inclusive of all family structures, and to talk about support for the whole family on transition. Also helping to induct newly arriving families with guides to help them settle in.

Field trips and bonding activities - great way to get to know each other, especially at start of school year and often at the end of the school year.

Handbooks and guides to share important *need to know* information to get familiar and settle in.

Induction programme - focused activities and games such as getting to know the class, welcome cards from an older year group to new students.

Identity and belonging- growing attention to languages, culture and student identities before and during school life. These areas are often supported by translation/interpreters and celebration of cultural days, etc, to value their identity during their time in school.

Last day celebration – cheers, clap outs, fanfare, time for goodbyes to leave strong and positive memory. An important moment for both leavers and stayers where contact details can be shared.

Leaving gift or memento to celebrate their journey with a card or souvenir that they can keep and look back on.

Matrix - a plan of key transition points or key moments by a dedicated team to inform planning

Mentoring by responsible, older students as a way of showing connection and leveraging their experience

PTA involvement- parents association involvement, reach out and support, helping to induct new families and stay connected.

Policy - admission and transition policies to cover the essential principles and guide practice.

Professionals and people - admission team, counsellors, psychologists, outreach initiatives and access, leadership, homeroom, advisor, and pastoral team, learning support, reach out and support.

Reports and portfolios for handover, especially in primary. One page settling in reports shared with parents so they can see how transition is fairing, including detailed leavers reports for new school, as well as openness to sharing 'other needs' information in support.

Reflection and impact monitoring is cyclical in some schools. Using feedback data from students, parents and alumni is most effective in *measuring* if their programmes are working and whether their intent equals their impact.

Student well-being survey and interviews and other forms of cyclical feedback.

Taskforce and working parties dedicated to transition phases such as arrival, between grades, leaving school and preparing to move on.

Team building activities for grades to encourage identity and connection, thoughtfully placed in the calendar

Tours of new school, classrooms, learning areas and campus at various stages to build a sense of familiarity

Trial days to get to know people, experience school culture, start to make friends and ease fear

Transition planning involving student panel/representatives to hear their opinion and ideas. "What worked?" "Even better if?"

Transition activities and shadow days and weeks for students to meet new teachers and classmates – Q and A, how this will look like, what you need to know to succeed, getting ready by grade check lists, even podcasts

University and career counselling – handbooks and guides, assemblies, videos, activities, getting ready pastoral programmes and after school activities, exploring interests, needs and helping connect to possibilities, access to networks and databases. 1-1, tailored and personalised works most effectively, support with entrance tests, etc.

Five conclusions: *what did the E5 responses from 35 accredited schools show?*

1. **Room for improvement:** Despite some excellent initiatives many transition programs could be strengthened as most school E5 reports are just 'met' at the team (accreditation) stage and very few exceed. Can SPAN services, training and guidance help improve this gap so that schools take it to the next level? Will this list be helpful? What do we do for those who stay?

2. **Timing:** Often the greatest challenge 'or threat' for a student is when an inbound or outbound transition takes place mid-year or mid programme. How can school contend with this?

3. **Pandemic:** Most schools and their transition practices have been heavily impacted by the pandemic and managing transition online was probably less effective than the collaborative approaches taken in person and onsite, though schools have become more effective in virtual formats with this work.

4. **Mobility** The more stable schools with less student turnover have it easier in managing transition as they have access to information and have cultivated personal relationship with adult to student and student to student.

5. **School community:** The best approaches appear to be holistic in nature, planned intentionally, and are often organised by a task force or working group dedicated to transition in sections or phases or as a whole. They are fully supported by governors and senior leadership.

THANK YOU

By Leo Thompson MA, MEd