

CSHA School-Age Brain Injuries Task Force Update 2023-2024

Impetus for CSHA Task Force on School-Age Brain Injuries

School-age children and adolescents have concussions (mild traumatic brain injuries: mTBI) and moderate to severe traumatic brain injuries (TBI) in sports and accidents. Thirty percent of those concussions/mTBI will not spontaneously recover (multiple studies). Childhood brain injuries of any level of severity can impact brain development (CDC) and can have long term impact on learning/cognition, behavior, communication, psychological function(CDC). Two percent of children in CA have a TBI or Concussion/mTBI (CDC), although many do not even go to the ER or see the physician. Furthermore, many physicians are not aware of current recommendations for concussion/mTBI in kids, and may sign off too early. Additionally, another concussion before the first one has healed can cause Second Impact Syndrome, which can result in many more long term issues and potentially be fatal.

Unfortunately, when kids return to school in CA, there is no system to support them: very disorganized, confusing, with many untrained people. Return to Learn exists in less than 10% of our schools in CA, although many have adopted to Return to Play: what is the priority for our students? Additionally, there is a great deal of pressure to return to sports (coaches, parents, the child, the scholarship or the college), maybe before the child is healed. There is also pressure to return to school and achieve in high school for future academic goals like college (students, parents, teachers). With a concussion or any TBI, children and teens are missing long periods of school, may have new learning issues that are missed, and some are unable to complete their education.

A federal law has been proposed that requires states to have a local team response and plan to accommodate and support the child and family and staff (S.205 *Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act of 2023*; excerpt below):

This Act may be cited as the ``Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act of 2023''.

SEC. 2. MINIMUM STATE REQUIREMENTS.

(a) Minimum Requirements.--Each State that receives funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) and does not meet the requirements described in this section, as of the date of enactment of this Act, shall, not later than the last day of the fifth full fiscal year after the date of enactment of this Act (referred to in this Act as the ``compliance deadline''), enact legislation or issue regulations establishing the following minimum requirements:

(1) Local educational agency concussion safety and management plan.--Each local educational agency in the State, in consultation with members of the community in which such agency is located, shall develop and implement a standard plan for concussion safety and management that--

(A) educates students, parents, and school personnel about concussions, through activities such as--

(i) training school personnel, including coaches, teachers, athletic trainers, related services personnel, and school nurses, on concussion safety and management, including training on the prevention, recognition, and academic consequences of concussions and response to concussions; and

(ii) using, maintaining, and disseminating to students and parents--

(I) release forms and other appropriate forms for reporting and record keeping;

(II) treatment plans; and

(III) prevention and post-injury observation and monitoring fact sheets about concussion;

(B) encourages supports, where feasible, for a student recovering from a concussion (regardless of whether or not the concussion occurred during school-sponsored activities, during school hours, on school property, or during an athletic activity), such as--

(i) guiding the student in resuming participation in athletic activity and academic activities with the help of a multi-disciplinary concussion management team, which may include--

(I) a health care professional, the parents of such student, a school nurse, relevant related services personnel, and other relevant school personnel; and

(II) an individual who is assigned by a public school to oversee and manage the recovery of such student; and

(ii) providing appropriate academic accommodations aimed at progressively reintroducing cognitive demands on the student; and

(C) encourages the use of best practices designed to ensure, with respect to concussions, the uniformity of safety standards, treatment, and management

This task force was convened in early 2023 due to concerns raised in national research and across the state relating to this issue. Members include Felicia Conlan, Nancy Cohick, Brenna Hughes, Benjamin Reece and Chair, Lisa D'Angelo (and open to more participants). The task force created a survey and distributed to school personnel across the state including SLPs, athletic directors, athletic trainers, teachers, sped teachers, school nurses, educational psychologists, administrators, that sought to identify how students with any kind of TBI are supported in the CA school districts across the state. This information will be analyzed and summarized in future publications and assist in developing recommendations for the state and the department of education.

Progress

In October, 2023: Nancy Cohick and Lisa D'Angelo met with Center for Brain Injury Research and Training (CBIRT) in Oregon and their approach to brain injuries in students and return to learn and their programs that they have developed and implemented across multiple states.

Lisa D'Angelo spoke in the state assembly hearing about AB734 relating to preventing tackle football in children under 12 in CA in October, 2023.

Lisa D'Angelo, Marcella McCollum (CSHA Chair), Bob McKinney (CSHA Advocacy Chair) were asked to meet with Assemblyman Kevin McCarty's team in relation to the AB 734 (scheduled January, 2024).

In November, 2023: CA Senator Tom Umberg and his team responded to the proposal below and have taken this topic on and are working on a bill creating the Local Area Teams for school-age students with brain injuries based on the program in Oregon and other states (see details below).

In December, 2023, this Task Force has been charged by the Chair of CSHA with creating a White Paper on this topic for CSHA (timeline, before conference in March, 2024).

Brenna Hughes and Lisa D'Angelo presented on Pediatric TBI: from ER to School at CSHA Convergence 2024 in San Francisco.

CSHA Tracks conversation relating to medical SLP issues including FEES and school-age TBI were convened at CSHA Convergence 2024.

Lisa D'Angelo and other researchers from across the U.S. in attendance at the 4th International Cognitive-Communication Disorders Conference submitted a viewpoint article to the American Journal of Speech Language Pathology relating to childhood TBI and the need for identification in the schools and cohesive services.

CA law Proposal

The current proposal recommended that Local Area Teams are created, comprised of trained individuals (training in TBI, rehabilitation processes, academic needs and supports, resources, Return to Learn procedures, Return to Play procedures). This infrastructure is already in place and may involve the school 504 teams: school nurse, athletic trainer, speech pathologist, psychologist, teacher, counselor/social worker, administrator, etc.. The teams would receive training and implement guidelines and provide support and access to resources for the student, family, and teachers. This includes recommendations from the International Conference on Sports-related concussions (2011-2018) and the CDC outlined the timing of return to school/ academics, breaks/rests, gradual increase in activity both cognitive and physical activity, and accommodations for academic work load with return to academics, as well as further testing and treatment if needed. Similar programs have been developed in many states. There is no need to create something brand new, and it is already being done successfully. There is extensive research in support of and validating these programs: BRAIN STEPS in PA, CO, <https://returntoschool.org/> in OR, AK, TX, WA. In December, 2023, the CA state senate proposal was completed (*"An act to add Section 49475.5 to the Education Code, relating to pupil health"*), and is now being presented to various state agencies that may be impacted: education, health.