

Telos Academy – Academic Recommendations

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to review the response to academic interventions and remind on the best practices in working with the student as observed through his time at Telos Academy.

Student: Daniel R.

Adviser: Brian Walker

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Student Response to Academic Supports Offered by Telos Academy:

Strategy, Intervention Accommodation or Modification	Observed Student Response
Regular meetings with adviser/counselor (bi-weekly when possible) to review goals, grades, and make plans for follow-through.	Moderately effective. Daniel did not resist these meetings when they were held, but he only sought them out on his own when they were tied to earning privileges. Receiving concrete feedback and having someone gauge his process and where he needs to improve to reach his goals is essential to his progress.
Extra time and teacher support to complete assignments	Positive. Daniel needed this accommodation about 1-2 times weekly in various classes.
Executive Function Supports Breaking down large assignments – Teachers assist in helping break down large multi-step tasks into smaller chunks that are more manageable Organization – Provide consistent method and position for storing and submitting work/assignments	Positive. Daniel may discount these at first, but responds to these supports.
Student has an opportunity to take breaks in a low stimulus environment when overwhelmed.	Highly effective but not needed consistently. These moments were almost entirely driven by fixation or rigidity.
Decreasing distractions and overall stimuli of the environment.	While Daniel is not impacted acutely by the stimulus of his environment, we saw a correlation between the time he spent communicating (positively) with his instructors and the amount of students in the class that competed for their time.
Teacher confirms understanding before giving him independent work and follows up during the class to see progress on assignments	Done best in a Flex Hour or after-school setting.
Adjust the volume of expectations that are required at once. -Compartmentalize the expectations and help him address them just a few at a time	Very important. Daniel is a capable student, but is volume/pace sensitive. He is generally not able to balance more than a few long-term academic demands at once without the quality of 1+ of them slipping.
Concrete directions and clear instructions	Extremely important. Daniel struggles with the abstract and may not meet the expectations unless given in a clear method. Explaining in both visual and audible format is helpful at times.
Therapeutic support and regular counseling sessions.	Beneficial. Having this integrated into the scholastic model was helpful in promoting the use of supports and structure for Daniel.

Key Elements of Student Academic Profile:

Daniel is 17 years old and working on completing his Junior year of High School. Teachers describe Daniel as capable and reserved in class. He enjoys creative work such as music and art. Daniel interacts with other students in a social context, but is generally not the leader of large group interactions. He has a few specific individuals who he gravitates toward in each class or group setting. Daniel has a very keen memory.

Daniel can be quiet and reticent in new situations, but will respond to coaching in such moments. He prefers independent initiatives rather than group learning activities but plays his role well when it is explicitly understood. He is a concrete thinker and has some difficulty thinking beyond the obvious to the abstract. Identifying themes and meaningful symbols in literature has been difficult for him. He is very organized with his class materials and will begin work immediately when appropriate. Daniel will actively engage in about 50% of the class discussions, and can become preoccupied at times. He is somewhat resistant to being drawn out in these situations.

Daniel manifests some qualities of a student on the Autism Spectrum:

- Struggles with some social cues, he goes quickly to the perception that people are judging him.
- Extreme cognitive rigidity at times
- Responds well to concrete and explicit information and direction; abstract concepts can be challenging for him

Daniel's affect can be flat and he will occasionally complain of fatigue. However, he is generally alert and engaged in his classes (except in moments of cognitive rigidity as explained below). Daniel enjoys and responds to playful humor. He is strongly motivated by external goals and exchanges, but his motivation to complete can wane after the objective is completed.

He has a good reading ability and can read aloud well. He extracts a moderate amount of detail from his reading, but can miss some of the tone and theme without support. Daniel's overall comprehension can vary from passage to passage.

Most Effective Approaches and Academic Supports:

-Forecasting and frontloading Daniel with what will occur has a huge benefit. This helps to promote successful completion of his task and a good rapport with those who offer support. Daniel was able to prep for large changes and transitions when this was consistently occurring.

-Daniel struggles when he perceives he is not meeting expectations. Helping him be clear of the expectations and where he stands in relation to them is helpful. This should be done even when he is doing well. If it is not, then he may have difficulty receiving this feedback when he is missing the mark in a critical way.

-Praise Daniel when he does something well and give concrete feedback in deliberate pace then allow him to integrate it into practice. Expectations should be stated in concrete terms as well as often as possible.

-Daniel's motivation needs to be fueled in short time horizons. Anything that is longer than 1-2 months out, seems to not take hold in his determination to pursue. Daniel's efforts can be tied to clear goals and benefits. He may resist expectations that he cannot establish a clear tie to the rationale. In these moments, it is important to use the following scripts:

- "I need you to practice this habit now, so that you can use it when it matters the most."
- "If you want to reach your goal you need to... How can I best help you?"
- "Are there any elements of the plan going forward that you aren't clear about?"

-Daniel responds best when he perceives the more immediate results to his action. For example, when he completes an assignment, it is helpful to show him how that grade affected his total class score. Give him clear directions with step by step follow up framed in a cooperative way.

- A 1-1 relational approach is very important. He will try and push through some of his malaise at times with this

- In English, Daniel has responded well to sequencing questions and check frequently for understanding when exploring abstract concepts.

-Help remind him that the rules and expectations are not for teachers benefits but for his.

When moments of distress impact Daniel from engaging in school what does this look like?

Daniel can become distressed and get mentally/emotionally overwhelmed for a number of reasons:

- He may have an upcoming event he is nervous about. He can get behind in a class and feel overwhelmed. He may not receive something he feels he deserves. He may feel unjustly judged by a teacher or peer.
- Whatever the triggering event or thought, Daniel will ruminate and get stuck on what is causing his distress and then eventually he will reach a point where he can no longer engage in school.

When Daniel becomes overly preoccupied or distressed he will disengage in school on his own volition. This takes many forms which can have one or more of the following components:

- Avoiding class or classwork; walking out of class.
- Wanting to talk (which will sound more like complaining) about what is making him frustrated
- Shutting down or using the Break Room
- Becoming very disrespectful and walk away from staff.
- He wants to talk but not willing to resolve. He is very capable to resolve this intellectually but mentally stays rigid and stuck.
- Claiming he is tired and asking to see the nurse

When Daniel is having a moment of distress, how can I best assist him to reengage in school?

1) *The first objective is to help Daniel express what he is frustrated about and then validate his concerns.*

- a. Find someone he is willing to talk to. He can be very selective on who he chooses to reflect upon his feelings with. At times he has only consented to talk with his therapist or a staff he has worked with in the past.
- b. Daniel will often have a lot of vitriol and take the victim stance when he is expressing himself in the moment, and even direct his feelings in anger
 - i. IE “School is impossible.” “My parents just think I am an object that they can control.” “Life is horrible.” “This is stupid.” “My therapist and staff hate me...”
- c. Daniel will often catastrophize and blame his troubles on others.
- d. The person processing with Daniel needs to keep a level head and Teflon demeanor. It is counter-productive to call out Daniel in these moments and tell him that he is just digging himself in a bigger hole. Rather, it is important to hear him out (including the swearing, complaining and negative) and then as he finishes validate his feelings. This can look like:
 - i. “I have listened really closely to what you have said. It sounds like you are really feeling (emotion) because of (this source of distress). Am I understanding your and your situation correctly?”
 - ii. “Where I feel you are coming from is...”
 - iii. Daniel will often target the person trying to help him. “You are only doing this because it is your job...” Keep in mind that he is just frustrated at the situation rather than you. His rigidity comes from being on the Autism Spectrum

*This process can take anywhere from a half and hour to over three hours. It is not uncommon for Daniel to stay emotionally stuck for 3-4 class periods. Currently, Daniel averages about 2-3 class periods a week where he does not engage when he gets emotionally/cognitively stuck.

2) *Once you have gotten Daniel to a point where he can acknowledge the source of his distress, trying to help him problem solve can be challenging. He will often want to wallow in his distress. Try and help him see the options he can take at the moment to work through his problem, and remind him that he is in control.*

- a. Laying out his options in a concrete way is helpful. Daniel needs to know the boundaries and consequences of his actions.
 - i. “Daniel, I have taken time to listen to you and I think I have a pretty good understanding of where you are coming from. I can help you come up with solutions but only for a few minutes.
 - ii. “Daniel, you are working through some difficulty. You can continue to refuse class or avoid classwork right now. It is your choice, but this will be the result if you choose to do so. You have control here to make the choice you see best.”
 1. Daniel may elect to take an eventual consequence rather than re-engage. It is fruitless to try and bargain with him in these moments. Rather, calmly let the consequences play out and note them for the future when he tries to complain about them.

- b. Offer to help him make a concrete plan to work through his distress. Write it down with him if needed, but Daniel's memory is pretty sharp. He will often recall a verbal plan just as easily.

3) Clearly forecast the needed boundaries and consequences of his actions. Daniel needs this information in order to make an insightful choice.

- a. Regarding you helping him in the moment...
 - i. Let Daniel know that you have taken enough time to listen to him and offer to help. If he elects to continue to disengage, you cannot allow his actions to continue to impact the rest of your time.
 - 1. Example script: "Daniel, we have taken enough time together to listen to each other and try and work through this issue. You can elect to move forward on your plan and return to class, but I cannot continue to engage you when you are stuck. Thanks for sharing your frustrations with me. I need to get back to work and you have to make your choice about what you are going to choose to do.
 - 2. Then disengage him and do not allow him to restart the conversation or pull other staff into the same pattern. Once Daniel has said his piece, he need not consume the time and resources of others until he chooses to work through a concrete plan of action.
 - ii. Let Daniel know the boundaries of his continued disengagement from schoolwork. This will hopefully give him some impetus to shorten the time he refuses, and at least help him know the limits of what he can expect from his actions.
 - 1. "Daniel, it doesn't look like you are willing to get back to work at the moment. I totally understand your situation. I do need to remind you though that I cannot change the natural result of when you decide to refuse. You will get no participation points and that will drop your daily score. You will not be able to make this up. Please understand this as you make your choice."
 - 2. "Daniel, if you refuse class today, your privileges will be restricted. You are free to choose what you will, but know that refusing to reengage in your school will result in..."

**Keep in mind that while going through this process Daniel is very selective about the people he opens up with. Even with these friends can be strained in the moment. He will view them as 'just obligated to talk with him' and may even insult those he works through this process with. Once you sense any amount of manipulation or gamey mentality, move straight to forecasting the consequences of his behavior. Daniel needs assistance in a very acute way, but should not be allowed to exploit this and overly consume the attention of those teachers/staff who supervise him.

***Allowing the consequence to be administered is important. Sometimes this is the way Daniel feels most in control is when he elects to endure the consequences. This should be seen as effective management, rather than a failure to reengage him quickly.

Academic Recommendations for Future Setting:

- A. Socially non-competitive environment that encourages Daniel to form healthy cooperative relationships with adults/peers
- B. Environment where Daniel has predictable input and consistent routines will enhance his security and academic routines
- C. Daniel may need a moderate amount of academic support, and it should be clear and consistently available. Connections to teachers is preferred to paraprofessionals as they can provide immediate decisions and feedback regarding his work.
- D. Variety in curriculum and class offerings. Music and Art offerings are highly recommended.
- E. Continue: Regular check-ins with Academic Staff, extended time when needed, helping Daniel get feedback on his efforts. Continue to track his response to set-backs and monitor his academic momentum in concrete ways with positive reinforcement if possible. Corrective feedback should be given in a soft and educational way, and not in an authoritarian demeanor
- F. Small/Medium Size (10-15 students per class)
- G. Opportunities for guided socialization with other peers and adults
 - a. For example, Daniel was elected to Student Government and this was a very positive way to allow him to integrate with others. Daniel had the mix of a steady peer group (other student body officers) but also the responsibility to mix with other peers and integrate with the rest of the students in the school