



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education



Education  
Development  
Center

# Transition to Kindergarten **TOOLKIT**



## Rhode Island Statewide Summit: Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness

**NOVEMBER 22, 2019  
8:30–3:00 PM**

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## SECTION 1

# Summit Agenda and Flyer

# Rhode Island Statewide Summit

## Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness

November 22, 2019, 8:30—3:00 p.m.

Crowne Plaza Hotel  
801 Greenwich Avenue  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

**Sponsor:** Rhode Island Department of Education

**Organizer:** Center for Early Learning Professionals, Education Development Center (EDC)

**Lead Presenter:** David Jacobson, EDC

### Summit Objectives:

- Learn why the transition to kindergarten is important
- Explore the transition strategies that support child success
- Learn about the transition plans Rhode Island communities are implementing
- Examine a toolkit of transition resources
- Discuss the implications for your community



### Schedule

Time	Duration	Activity
8:30—9:00	30 min	Check-in
9:00—9:30	30 min	Welcome and Agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green, RIDE</li><li>• Video greeting: Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director, Office of Head Start and Child Care</li></ul>
9:30—10:30	60 min	School Readiness, Early Transition Experiences, and First 10 Partnerships
10:30—10:45	15 min	Break
10:45—11:00	15 min	Community Presentation #1: Woonsocket
11:00—12:00	60 min	The Nature of the Kindergarten Transition
12:00—1:00	60 min	Lunch (on your own)
1:00—1:15	15 min	Community Presentation #2: West Warwick
1:15—2:00	45 min	A Six Step Transitions Planning Process
2:00—2:15	15 min	Community Presentation #3: Newport
2:15—2:45	30 min	Integrating Attendance into the Transition to Kindergarten
2:45—3:00	15 min	Final Reflections and Next Steps



# Rhode Island Statewide Summit: Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness

**NOVEMBER 22, 2019  
8:30–3:00 PM**

## Rhode Island educators are invited to a day-long Summit on the **Transition to Kindergarten.**

The Summit is sponsored by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and organized by EDC's Center for Early Learning Professionals. EDC's David Jacobson and a team of transition coaches will lead and facilitate the day's activities. The focus of the Summit will be on school readiness, the nature of the transition to kindergarten, and building successful transition experiences. All are welcome, but we encourage participants to come in teams that include administrators and teachers from both elementary schools and community-based preschools.

**Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. The Summit will begin promptly at 9:00 and will conclude by 3:00 p.m. Lunch is on your own.**

### SUMMIT OBJECTIVES

- › Learn why the transition to kindergarten is important
- › Explore the transition strategies that support child success
- › Learn about the transition plans Rhode Island communities are implementing
- › Examine a toolkit of transition resources
- › Discuss the implications for your community



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education



Education  
Development  
Center

**To register for the Summit:**  
[go.edc.org/RITransitions](http://go.edc.org/RITransitions)

### CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL

801 Greenwich Avenue  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

**Sponsor:** Rhode Island Department of Education

**Organizer:** Center for Early Learning Professionals,  
Education Development Center (EDC)

### LEAD PRESENTER INFORMATION

**David Jacobson, PhD**, works with states, districts, and communities to improve early education and care for children and their families. He specializes in supporting school and community partnerships focused on improving outcomes for children ages birth through 10 and their families. Jacobson brings deep experience in early childhood education, school improvement, the transition to kindergarten, and strategic planning to his work. In Rhode Island he has led a team supporting the implementation of a new kindergarten curriculum in 8 communities, and he is currently supporting 6 communities in developing Transition to Kindergarten plans. Jacobson is the author of a 2019 report, *All Children Learn and Thrive: Building First 10 Schools and Communities*, which presents findings on coordinated efforts to improve teaching, learning, and care during the first decade of children's lives.

## SECTION 2

# Six Steps to Transition Planning: A Guide



## SIX STEPS

# to Transition Planning: A Guide

**EDC's Center for Early Learning Professionals recommends that school—community Transition teams draw on the resources in this Toolkit as they follow the six-step process described below. This process is based on the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning's resource, *Planning the Transition to Kindergarten: Collaborations, Connections, and Six Steps to Success* (referred to as *Six Steps to Success* throughout the rest of this Toolkit).**

You can find *Six Steps to Success* in Section 5 of this Toolkit.<sup>1</sup> In addition to outlining the planning process, *Six Steps to Success* explains the four types of transition connections that we recommend as the framework for your transition planning.

Informed by our work with Rhode Island communities and communities in other states, we summarize and elaborate on the six-step process below. This process is aligned to the Planning Template found in Section 7 of this Toolkit. We suggest you use the outline below in conjunction with the *Six Steps to Success* article.

**Important note:** Where *Six Steps to Success* says "Head Start," read, "Head Start, community-based preschools, and family childcare providers."

### STEP 1:

#### **Assess and inform your partners— Identify transition team members and designate leaders**

- ▶ Create a cross-sector transition team that includes at least one Head Start/preschool teacher, one kindergarten teacher, one Head Start/community-based preschool director, and one school or district leader. Consider including community members, such as a library or parent representative, as well.
- ▶ Begin by reading and discussing the following documents as a team:
  - » *Planning for the Transition to Kindergarten: Why It Matters and How to Promote Success* (2 pages, Section 4)
  - » *Six Steps to Success* (Section 5)
  - » *Transition Summit Slide Deck* (Section 3)
- ▶ Discuss whether your team is missing any key stakeholders. Should you invite any additional community-based preschools to join the team at this time? At a later date? Are there key stakeholders who are not able to join the team but who should receive periodic updates as the process develops (e.g., district leaders, principals, preschool directors, PTO members, and/or library representatives)?

<sup>1</sup> This project is supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0027, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## STEP 2:

### Identify initial goals

- › Based on your knowledge of your community and the readings, what are your initial goals? Treat this as a first pass and be very open to revising them after you assess your needs and work currently underway.

## STEP 3:

### Assess what current transition activities are being practiced in your community for each type of connection

- › Review the four types of transition connections as described in the Summit Slide Deck and the *Six Steps to Success* article. **Note that** “School—School” connections means Program—School connections and also Teacher—Teacher connections (e.g., prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in the same school).
- › Draw the Step 3 grid in the Planning Template on a sheet of chart paper. Brainstorm work currently underway on sticky notes and place them in the appropriate cells. Delete redundancies. Where do you see strengths? Gaps?

## STEP 4:

### Identify data or evidence you have that practices are or are not working

- › This is an important step. Be sure to read the guidance on pages 5 and 6 of *Six Steps to Success*.
- › Identify what data you currently have and what data you can collect to inform your work. Should you conduct focus groups or interviews with Head Start, community-based preschool, and kindergarten teachers? Surveys? Other assessment information? **See the West Warwick case study in Section 8** for good examples of using data to inform transition strategies.
- › You may want to spend a few weeks gathering data and then reconvene to analyze it. Then complete the Evaluation column in the grid.

## STEP 5:

### Plan and prioritize: Reevaluate goals or create new ones and plan steps to take

- › Read the **remaining case studies in Section 8** for examples of possible strategies. Discuss the challenges, lessons learned, and advice sections. **What can you learn from the experience of these three communities?**
- › See a starter list of possible transition activities organized by type of connection in the *Transition Ideas by Connection* document in Section 6. Treat these as food for thought to inspire strategies to meet your needs. This is not an exhaustive list.
- › Discuss the family engagement and attendance resources found in Sections 9 and 10. Do they suggest strategies that would meet needs in your communities?
- › **Program—School connections are crucially important but are often overlooked due to our natural focus on Child—School and Family—School connections.** Make sure your plan includes significant collaboration between educators and deepen these relationships and alignment activities over time. Conducting cross-walks of standards, visiting classrooms, and joint professional development are great ways to start.
- › Organize the transition activities you would like to implement by type of connection.

## STEP 6:

### Implement and evaluate the transition plan

- › Meet regularly to improve implementation. What’s working well? What challenges are emerging? How can you address them? What feedback are you hearing from teachers? Families?
- › Plan times to do more formal evaluation activities, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys.
- › Re-assess and update your plan. Make it a living document that you review at every meeting.



## SECTION 3

# 2019 Transitions Summit Slide Deck



# RHODE ISLAND STATEWIDE SUMMIT

Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness

David Jacobson  
November 22, 2019




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## EDC at a Glance

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), is a global nonprofit that advances lasting solutions to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity. Since 1958, we have been a leader in designing, implementing, and evaluating powerful and innovative programs in more than 80 countries around the world.

<b>1958</b> EDC was founded by MIT scholars and researchers.	<b>200+</b> projects managed annually by EDC.	<b>\$169.4</b> million FY19 operating budget
<b>GLOBAL REACH</b> EDC has worked in more than 80 countries and in all 50 states in the U.S.	 EDC has 1,300 employees.	Funders include USAID, NSF, NIH, MasterCard Foundation, DoEd, and SAMHSA
	<b>REGIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Africa</li> <li>» Asia</li> <li>» Europe</li> <li>» Latin America and the Caribbean</li> <li>» Middle East</li> <li>» United States</li> </ul>	

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## Agenda

- The State of School Readiness
- Why Early Transitions Matter
- Case Study #1: Woonsocket
- The Nature of the Kindergarten Transition
- Lunch
- Case Study #2: W. Warwick
- Six Steps to Transition Planning
- Case Study #3: Newport
- Integrating Attendance into the Transition to Kindergarten

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### Introductions

- Take a few minutes to introduce yourself to others at your table.
- Describe the role you play in transition work.
- Share one recent transition you have experienced and how you dealt with that period of change.

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### THE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE OF POVERTY



**45%** of U.S. children under 6 live in low-income families  
The full achievement gap is present when children enter kindergarten

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### What Children NEED

- Consistent quality
- Alignment across the age span
- Coordination at each stage of development



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## Barrier to Improvement: FRAGMENTATION

- Public / Private
- 0-5 / K-12
- Education / Health  
Social Services



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## What Children EXPERIENCE

- Inconsistent quality
- Gaps across the age span
- Lack of coordination at each  
stage of development



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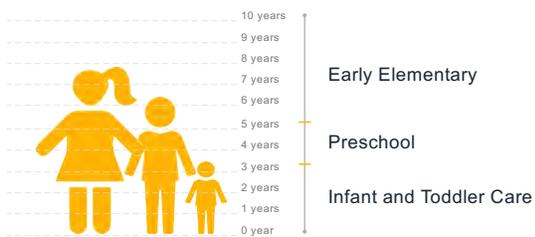
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## The First 10 Years



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## Community schools and comprehensive services



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## First 10 Theory of Action



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**EDC** Education Development Center

## ALL CHILDREN LEARN AND THRIVE

Building First 10 Schools and Communities

Funder: Heising-Simons Foundation  
First10.org



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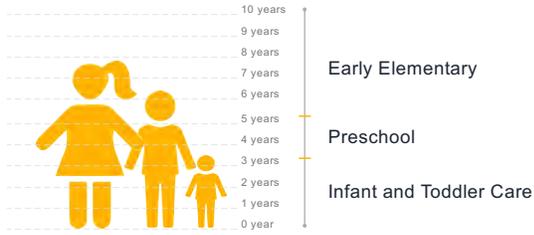
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## The First 10 Years



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How have early childhood and K-12 education collaborated in your community?

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Much of the content in the remaining slides is from, **“Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness,”** a slide deck created by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning and distributed to the public at this link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/slide-deck/effective-transitions-enhance-school-readiness>.

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**What does school readiness mean?**

“The Head Start approach to school readiness means that **children** are ready for school, **families** are ready to support their children’s learning, and **schools** are ready for children.”

Head Start, 2011

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## How Are Young Children Doing?

We are seeing increasing poverty.

- Of American children under age six, about **1 in 4** currently lives in poverty, and the total number has steadily increased over the past decade.
- Of those in poverty, most have **multiple additional risk factors** such as single parent homes, low levels of parental education, or teenage mothers.

National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013

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## How are young children doing?

Low-income children are at risk for entering school significantly behind their more affluent peers:

**4–5 year-old children** from low-income families are 12–14 months below national norms in language development

Klein & Krizan, 2007

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## How Are Young Children Doing?

Of children from low-income families:

- 70% fail to read on grade level at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- 73% will not catch up in later grades.

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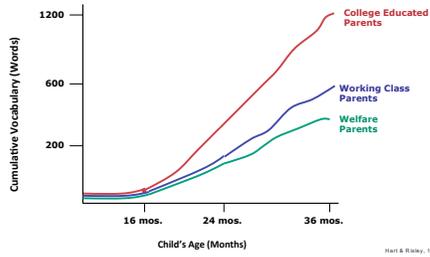
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## Disparities Begin Early



Hart & Risley, 1995

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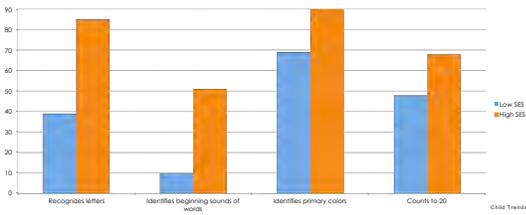
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## Teachers say "half my class or more" exhibit these problems entering kindergarten:

Percent of Kindergarteners Passing Proficiency Levels in Fall



Child Trends, 2010

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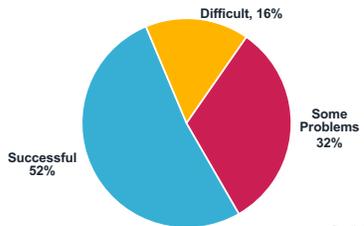
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## How Successfully are Children Starting Kindergarten?



Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000

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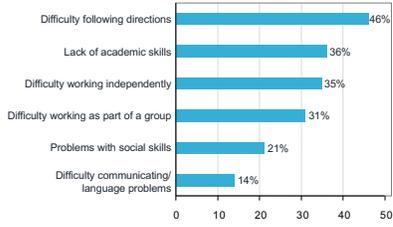
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**Teachers say “half my class or more” exhibit these problems entering kindergarten:**



Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000

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**Brain Hero**

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/brain-hero/>

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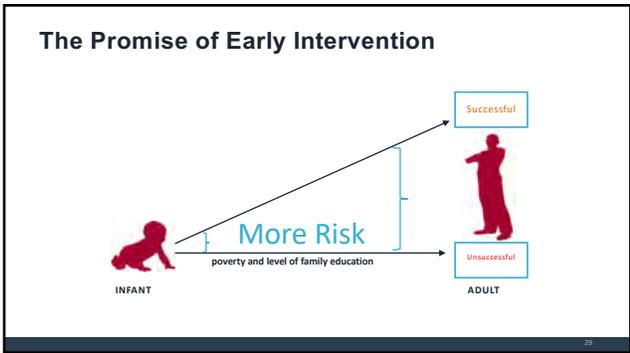
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### Early School Experiences Matter

We know that:

- Effective early school experiences can close achievement gaps.
- Stability and consistency between settings is crucial to children's success.

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## Early School Experiences Matter

Kindergarten teacher–child relationships predict:

- Academic and behavior outcomes through eighth grade, particularly for children with behavior problems in kindergarten.

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## Early School Experiences Matter

Kindergarten family involvement is associated with:

- More cooperative, self-controlled, and socially engaged children.
- Lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and higher grade completed.
- Higher achievement in language and math, and higher ratings on peer interactions.

McWayne, et al., 2004; Barnard, 2004; and Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2003

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## Transition Activities and Positive Outcomes



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At the beginning of kindergarten:

- Greater frustration tolerance
- Better social skills
- Fewer conduct problems
- Fewer learning problems
- More positive approaches to learning

NCEdL, 1,000 children, 250 schools

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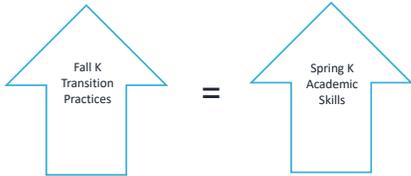
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## Transition Practices and School Success

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study  
17,212 children, 992 schools



Schilling, Meisner, & Dodge, 2009

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## THE NATURE OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

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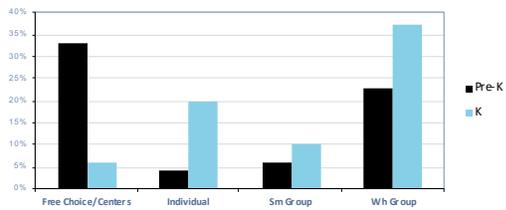
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## Preschool vs. Kindergarten



LoPano et al., 2009

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## Kindergarten Changes

- Changes in academic demands and curricula
- Less family connection with school
- Complexity of social environment (peers and adults)
- Less time with teacher(s)



Parke & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Transition Experiences

His teacher called several days before school started; it was great and really made Nate feel great.

At the beginning I got her excited by talking about starting school six months before it started....It made the transition easy...Before school started I took her to the classroom to get her adjusted to it.

I am pleased...The teacher called after the first two days of school to say how well she was doing.

Parke & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Transition Experiences

On a more personal level, my son spends eight hours a day with his teacher and his best friend. I want to know those people. I don't want it to be a once-every-three-months-for-report-card thing. I want to have more interaction.

The teacher called the first week of school to say he is the biggest clown in the class.

Parke & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Transition Experiences

The teacher called me the first week of school and said she should have been evaluated for Ritalin because she can't teach her.

We weren't sure about sending him, he may be too young. His teacher called to say he's way behind and should go back to preschool.

I'm not happy with it...I sent in notes but got no response from the teacher...The teacher is young and she's not very organized. I'm anxious about this year.

Patno & Krich-Sayre, 2003

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NCQTL



VIDEO: Transition to Kindergarten  
Children's Perspective

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**CONCEPTUALIZING EFFECTIVE  
TRANSITION**

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## Transitions Across the Lifespan

- Becoming a new parent
- Going to (or back to) college
- Moving to a new town
- Starting a new job
- Experiencing an empty nest
- Retiring from a career
- Getting married

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## Fostering Successful Adjustment

- Information
- Relationships
- Alignment



Successful Adjustment

Panitz & Kraft-Seymour, 2003

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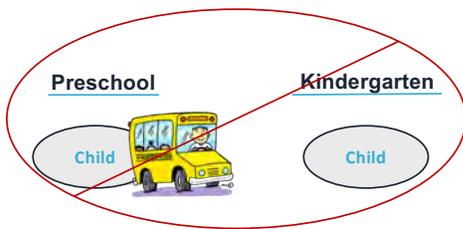
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## School Readiness and Transition



INADEQUATE VIEW

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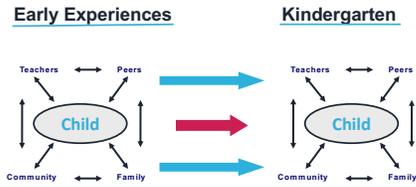
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## When Connections are the Focus



Birn-Kaufman & Pianta, 2009

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## Guiding Principles

For successful transitions, remember that:

- It's a **process**, not a program.
- Supportive and informational relationships are resources for children.
- Connections serve as a bridge for children, families, and schools across time and contexts.

Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Special Populations

Most supports are universally beneficial.

For dual language learners (DLLs):

- Provide information to families in their native languages.
- Communicate about the benefits of maintaining a child's home language while learning English.

For children with other special needs:

- Provide extra attention to communication between teachers, consulting teachers, families, and children.

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**Transition Connections**

**Child-School**  
To foster children's familiarity with the classroom setting and people

**Family-School**  
To foster family collaboration and engagement with the school

**School-School**  
To provide children with stable, high quality classroom experiences

**Community-School**  
To facilitate the transition process within the community

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**Child-School Connections**

**Goal:** To foster children's familiarity with the classroom setting and those people within it. This serves to:

- Increase comfort.
- Decrease anxiety.
- Build teacher-child relationships.

Fleming & Kroll-Sayre, 2003

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**Family–School Connections**

**Goal:** To foster family collaboration and engagement with the school and the transition process. This is the context to:

- Share information about individual children.
- Familiarize parents with school routines.

Planta & Kraft-Sayin, 2003

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**How Families Contribute**

Family well-being is a powerful predictor of school success.

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## The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework




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## Transition Activities for Families

Transition activity	Percent of families who found this activity helpful
Had child visit a kindergarten classroom	99
Met with a kindergarten teacher	89
Met with the principal	95
Took a tour of the school	100
Talked with preschool staff about kindergarten	99
Visited the kindergarten classroom	97
Talked with parents of child's new classmates	97
Participated in elementary school-wide activities	100
Attended a workshop for parents	98
Met with child's anticipated kindergarten teacher	92
Attended an orientation to kindergarten	96

Panitz et al., 1999

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## School-School Connections

**Goal:** To provide children with stable high quality classroom experiences and to increase consistency across contexts through alignment of:

- Routines
- Curricula
- Learning standards
- Assessments

Panitz & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Transition Activities for Teachers

Transition activity	Preschool teachers	Kindergarten teachers
	Percent who found the activity helpful	Percent who found the activity helpful
Preschool children visiting their kindergarten classroom	100	96
Preschool teachers visiting a kindergarten classroom	100	100
Holding an elementary school-wide activity with preschool children	83	100
Having a spring orientation about kindergarten for parents of preschool children	100	100
Having an individual meeting between a teacher and a parent of the preschool child	100	100
Sharing written records	100	100

Parkin, et al., 1999

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## Professionals Working Together

Kindergarten, Head Start, and preschool teachers meet four times a year and focus on aligning experiences for children. The outcomes of this cooperation are:

- Increased participation in transition opportunities such as kindergarten camp.
- Increased consistency between settings related to routines and expectations.
- Increased awareness of the community needs for more spaces for children.

Small, Begonaga, 2011

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## Community-School Connections

**Goal:** To facilitate the transition process within the community by:

- Getting the word out.
- Providing resources where they are needed.

Park & Kuth-Coyne, 2003

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## Community–School Connections

- Clarify community needs and expectations regarding schools and transition.
- Achieve inter-agency connections with key players.
- Communicate information effectively.

Parish & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Community in Action



If your child will be attending kindergarten this fall, mark your calendar for:

**Seventh Annual Kindergarten!...Here I Come!**

**Saturday, August 13, 2011**

**9:00 am – 1:00 pm**

**Children's Museum of Pittsburgh**

**Free Admission for All Children Entering Kindergarten and One Parent**

Children's Museum of Pittsburgh Website

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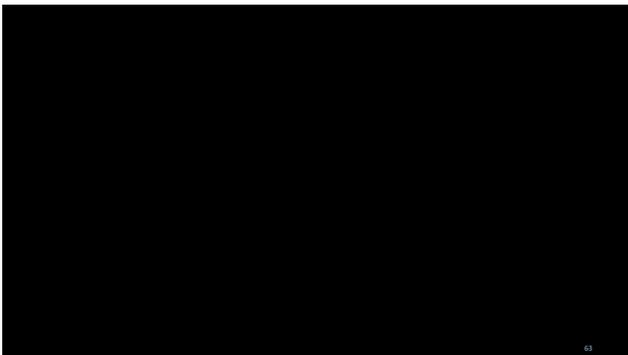
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## Kindergarten Camps

Child, family, school, and community connections support:

- Improved kindergarten social adjustment.
- Improved familiarity with routines.
- Reading skills.

Bolin, Dunning, & Dodge, 2010; Barron, Gotti, & Dowling, 2009

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## Benefits from Connections

- Children become more socially ready and can participate more academically.
- Families become more connected to school, which improves long-term child outcomes.
- Teachers achieve better relationships with children and families that improve child outcomes.

Pianka & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit

1. Flyer and agenda
2. **Six Steps to Transition Planning Guide**
3. **Summit slide deck**
4. *Planning the Transition to Kindergarten: Why It Matters*
5. *Six Steps to Success* article
6. **Transition Ideas by Connection**
7. **Transition plan template**
8. RI Case Studies and Lessons Learned
9. Family Engagement in the Transition to Kindergarten
10. Integrating Attendance into the Transition to Kindergarten

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## Six Steps for Transition Planning

1. Assess your partnerships.
2. Identify the goals of the team around transition and alignment.
3. Assess what is happening now.
4. Identify data to support these practices.
5. Plan and prioritize.
6. Implement and evaluate.

Platts & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## 1. Assessing Your Partnerships

Who is involved?

- Teachers (preschool and kindergarten)
- School leaders (preschool and kindergarten)
- Family representative(s)
- Community leaders

Platts & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## 2. Identifying Team Goals

Choose several goals that fit your program's needs. Some examples are:

- Support children being ready for school
- Help families know more about what they can do at home to help children be ready for school
- Get your community more involved with children

Panis & Kirk-Sayre, 2003

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## 3. Assessing What Is Happening Now

Sort what you are currently doing into categories, for example:

- Fostering child-school connections
- Fostering family-school connections
- Fostering school-school connections
- Fostering community-school connections

Panis & Kirk-Sayre, 2003

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## 3. Assessing What is Happening Now

Take a few minutes to talk at your tables about transition practices that are going on in your programs.

Write these practices down on sticky notes and place them under the connection they best fit into.

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### 3. Assessing What Is Happening Now

Type of Connection	Sharing Information	Building Relational Supports	Fostering Alignment Between Settings	Evaluation (Step 4)
Child-School	Preschool teachers talk and read books about kindergarten	Through home visits, children meet their kindergarten teacher before school starts	Preschool children practice some kindergarten rules and routines toward the end of the preschool year	Children seem less anxious and more excited about going to kindergarten than they have been in previous years as reported by kindergarten teachers
Family-School	Family receives a general letter about kindergarten before school starts Preschool teachers provide families with information about the elementary expectations, procedures	Elementary school holds a parent orientation for incoming students before school starts, so parents can get to know their children's teachers	Parents are given a set of activities to do with children over the summer prior to their kindergarten year	Parents seem more well-informed about kindergarten than in previous years as reported by kindergarten teachers Participant rates at back-to-school nights increased

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### 4. Examining Data You Have

How do you know your current practices are working?

- Are children transitioning better because their preschool teachers read them books about kindergarten?
- Are more families registering early for kindergarten because of community efforts?
- Are kindergarten teachers better informed about students because of school-school collaboration?

Flanis & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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### 5. Planning And Prioritizing

- Determine next steps—Reevaluate goals and formulate new ones.
- Identify who is responsible for tasks—Assign roles within the transition team.
- Decide when tasks should be implemented—Set deadlines and a timeline.
- Anticipate barriers and make plans to overcome them.

Flanis & Kraft-Sayre, 2003

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## 5. Planning And Prioritizing

Revised / refined goals (if necessary):

1. Provide more summer experiences for children 2. Inform families about how to prepare during summer

3. Get community more involved during the summer months 4.

Goal addressed	Type of connection and type of activity	Transition Activity	When does activity occur?	Who needs to be involved?	Potential Barriers	Who is responsible for follow-up?
1, 2, & 3	Family-School (Information sharing) School-Community (Building relational supports) Child-School (Building relational supports)	Organize kindergarten open house to introduce incoming kindergarten teachers and outline what they will see in the new school year. Have family sessions to discuss items of things to do before the start of school.	End of preschool, summer before kindergarten	Office staff for mailings and fundraising Community team, schools	Informing people and getting them to participate Finding funding	Hannah - sending info home to HS families Laura - contacting local needs to get the word Jeff - fundraising (finding local sponsors)
1	School-School (Fostering alignment between settings)	Coordinate between preschool and kindergarten curricula and routines. preschool teachers share information about individual	Ongoing	Preschool and elementary teachers		Sara - organizing teacher meetings

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## Timeline Example



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## 6. Implementing And Evaluating

- Implement the plan you created.
- Evaluate whether what you are doing is working and how you know.
- Examine data on new practices to identify changes.
- Modify practices as needed and define new goals.

Pharis & Kish-Seyne, 2003

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## Strategies to Support School Readiness



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## THANK YOU

David Jacobson  
[ljacobson@edc.org](mailto:ljacobson@edc.org)

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## SECTION 4

# *Planning for the Transition to Kindergarten: Why It Matters and How to Promote Success*



# PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Why it Matters  
and How to  
Promote  
Success



WINTER 2014



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Quality Teaching  
and Learning



# CHILDREN'S KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION EXPERIENCES ARE ESSENTIAL TO THEIR SCHOOL SUCCESS.

The transition to kindergarten is a time that presents changing demands, expectations, and supports for children and their families. When children experience discontinuities between preschool and kindergarten, they may be at greater risk for academic failure and social adjustment problems. Thus, building and implementing a seamless kindergarten transition can make a significant difference for children's early education experience.

## WHY

### IS A QUALITY TRANSITION IMPORTANT?

Multiple large-scale research studies have found that transition activities for children and families are associated with these gains in kindergarten: <sup>i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi,vii</sup>

- Reduced stress and higher ratings of social emotional competence at the beginning of the school year
- Improved academic growth and increased family involvement over the year
- Stronger benefits for children living in poverty



## WHAT

### DOES A QUALITY TRANSITION INVOLVE?

Evidence from research and the field suggests these key elements:

- Positive relationships between children, parents, and schools
- A transition team of Head Start and kindergarten administrators and teachers, parents, and community members
- Assessments, standards, and curriculum that align between preschool and kindergarten
- Joint professional development between preschool and kindergarten personnel
- Information and communication that is shared with parents and the community at large

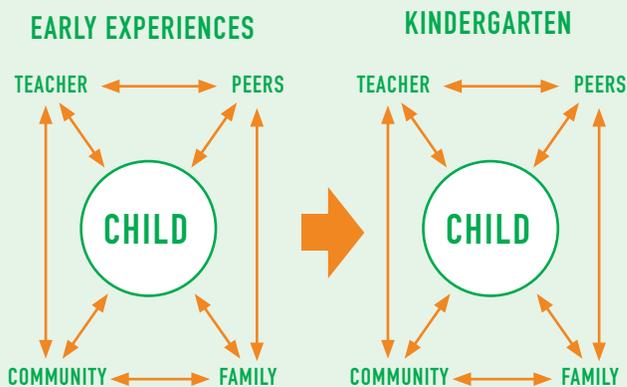
## HOW

### DO WE IMPROVE CHILDREN'S TRANSITION?

Educators can use these key principles: <sup>viii</sup>

- Approach transition collaboratively
- Involve all key stakeholders in the process
- Align children's experiences across systems (i.e., preschool and kindergarten classrooms)

### COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO TRANSITIONS



(Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000)



## USING A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Successful kindergarten transitions are a result of supportive relationships that are focused on children's development—the relationships between schools, families, and preschool and kindergarten teachers and their classrooms.<sup>ix</sup>

The child, family, school, peer, and community factors are interconnected<sup>x</sup> and they are all influential in helping a child prepare for, and be successful in school. Effective transition practices involve reaching out to families and influential community members, with a strong sense of purpose, prior to the time a child actually moves into a new classroom.<sup>xi</sup>

## INVOLVING ALL KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Children benefit most when all parties involved in the process work together to support the transition. For example, improved kindergarten readiness<sup>xii,xiii</sup> is associated with preschool teachers who communicate with kindergarten teachers about curricula, children's development, and children's educational needs. Also, when families participate in more transition experiences, their school involvement is higher over the kindergarten year, and this is a key indicator of children's long-term social and academic success.<sup>xiv,xv,xvi,xvii</sup>

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### ARTICLES

Ferguson, C., & Wood, L. (2005). Easing the transition from preK to kindergarten: What schools and families can do to address child readiness. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. Austin, TX. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb6-readiness.pdf>

Patton, C., & Wang, J. (2012). Ready for success: Creating collaborative and thoughtful transitions into kindergarten. Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Newsletter, 4(1). Retrieved January 17, 2014 from <http://www.hfrp.org/content/download/4287/116636/file/ReadyForSuccess.pdf>

### BOOKS

Pianta, R. C., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, and schools. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

Sullivan-Dudzic, L., Gears, D. K., & Leavell, K. (2010). Making a difference: 10 essential steps to building a preK-3 system. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

“ Making time to sit down with everyone at the table has made all the difference for our kids. They are coming to school ready to learn ... ”

WHY

– Kindergarten Teacher

## ALIGNING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES ACROSS SYSTEMS

Aligned preschool and kindergarten experiences allow children to build on what they have learned and be prepared for what they will be learning next.<sup>xviii</sup> The longer children are involved in a consistent and stable learning environment, including curricula and support services that are aligned, the more they benefit cognitively, academically, and socially.<sup>xix</sup>

### PRACTICAL GUIDES

Bowman, B. T., & Cottone, P. A. (2005). Transition: Change with continuity: A handbook for teachers. Chicago Public Schools Office of Early Childhood Education.

National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement & National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. (2013). *Family engagement in transitions: Transition to kindergarten*. Retrieved January 17, 2014 from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/transitions-kindergarten.pdf>

University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development. (2012). Ready Freddy: Pathways to Kindergarten Success. Retrieved from <http://www.readyfreddy.org/>

### ONLINE VIDEOS

Capistrano Unified School District. From kindergartener to kindergartener: “What’s important for you to know.” Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMf1mveot3I>

Head Start: National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. Transitions from the children's perspective. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/transition>

## RESEARCH REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *26*, 295–302.
- <sup>ii</sup> Cooper, C. E., & Crosnoe, R. (2007). The engagement in schooling of economically disadvantaged parents and children. *Youth & Society*, *38*, 372–291.
- <sup>iii</sup> Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Holbein, M.F.D. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, *17*, 99–123.
- <sup>iv</sup> Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships on lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*, 39–51.
- <sup>v</sup> LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *23*, 124–139.
- <sup>vi</sup> Reynolds, A. J., & Temple, J. A. (1998). Extended early childhood interventions and school achievement: Age thirteen findings from the Chicago Longitudinal Study. *Child Development*, *69*(1), 231–246.
- <sup>vii</sup> Schulting, A. B., Malone, P. S., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, *41*(6), 860–871.
- <sup>viii</sup> LoCasale-Crouch, J., Rudasill, K., Sweeney, B., Chattrabhuti, C., Patton, C., & Pianta, R. (2012). The transition to kindergarten: Fostering collaborations for early school success. In T. Urdan and S. Karabenick (Eds.) *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*. UK: Emerald Group.
- <sup>ix</sup> Pianta, R. (1999). *Enhancing Relationships between Children and Teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- <sup>x</sup> Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *21*(5), 491–511.
- <sup>xi</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xii</sup> LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *23*, 124–139.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *26*, 295–302.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Cooper, C. E., & Crosnoe, R. (2007). The engagement in schooling of economically disadvantaged parents and children. *Youth & Society*, *38*, 372–291.
- <sup>xv</sup> Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships on lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*, 39–51.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Simpkins, S. D., Weiss, H. B., McCartney, K., Kreider, H. M., & Dearing, E. (2006). Mother-child relationship as a moderator of the relation between family educational involvement and child achievement. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, *6*, 49–57.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Holbein, M.F.D. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, *17*, 99–123.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Bogard, K., & Takanishi, R. (2005). PK-3: An aligned and coordinated approach to education for children 3 to 8 years old. *SRCD Social Policy Report*, *29*(3), 3–23.
- <sup>xix</sup> Reynolds, A. J., & Temple, J. A. (1998). Extended early childhood interventions and school achievement: Age thirteen findings from the Chicago Longitudinal Study. *Child Development*, *69*(1), 231–246.

## SECTION 5

# *Six Steps to Success Article*

# Planning the Transition to Kindergarten: Collaborations, Connections, and Six Steps to Success

This document provides a step-by-step approach to build, implement, and evaluate a kindergarten transition plan. Four sections are included that cover:

1. The importance of kindergarten transition, forming a transition team, and fostering four types of connections
2. Six steps to transition planning
3. Successful stories of kindergarten transition
4. Resources

The ideas presented here are largely based on the book *Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools*, by Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, at the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.

## SECTION 1: The importance of kindergarten transition, forming a transition team, and fostering four types of connections

### *Transition Experience Matters*

The transition from Head Start to kindergarten is an important event in children's lives and can be challenging for those who are not prepared for the adjustment. Multiple large-scale research studies have found that more transition activities provided to children and families (e.g., visiting the new setting, or forming a relationship with a new teacher before schools starts) are associated with the following gains in kindergarten (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008):

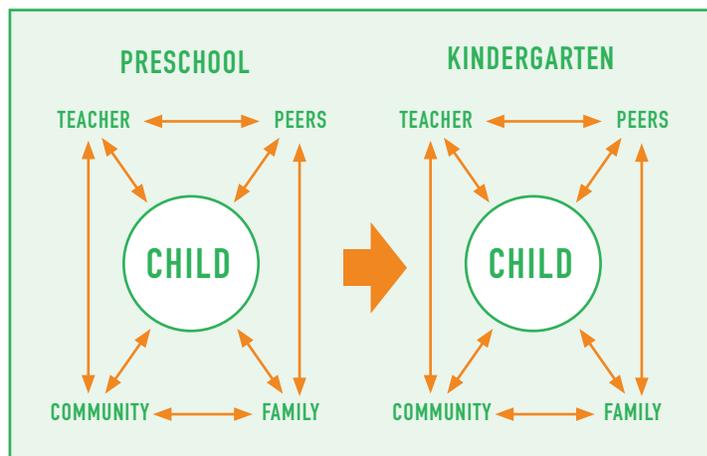
- Higher ratings of social emotional competence and reduced stress at the beginning of the school year.
- Improved academic growth in kindergarten and increased family involvement over the year.
- Stronger benefits for children living in poverty.

Additionally, research suggests that when children experience discontinuities between preschool and kindergarten, they may be at greater risk for academic failure and social adjustment problems

(Conyer, Reynolds, & Ou, 2003). Therefore, building and implementing a plan for seamless transition from preschool to kindergarten can make a significant difference for children's early education experience.

### *A Collaborative Framework*

A collaborative approach to the transition to kindergarten recognizes that children, families, schools, peers, and communities are all interconnected throughout the transition process. A collaborative framework considers the contexts and people that interact as the child transitions from a preschool or home setting to kindergarten. The figure below illustrates this idea of a child being surrounded by a web of relationships that can support him or her during this transition. It shows that positive, high-quality relationships among teachers, peers, and families are especially important during transitions. These relationships can serve both as bridges from Head Start to kindergarten and as resources to help children and their families during the period of adjustment.



Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta (2000)

## *Four Types of Connections that Support the Transition to Kindergarten*

It is important for educators to understand the different types of connections that facilitate effective transitions, and the goals associated with each, to plan successful transition experiences for children. We discuss the four key connections below along with a short explanation of each.

1

### **Child–School Connections**

There are two goals of this connection. The first is to increase children’s familiarity with the kindergarten setting, including the classroom, school environment, and their new teachers. The second is to increase the teachers’ familiarity with individual children. Some of the ways to foster child-school connections are to:

- Establish relationships between Head Start children and kindergarten teachers. This can be done through visits to a kindergarten classroom during the Head Start year or through visits from a kindergarten teacher to the Head Start classroom. The visits will give Head Start children a sense of what a kindergarten teacher and classroom are like.
- Use school-wide activities, such as a spring fair or an informal summer playground time (e.g., a theme event such as “Popsicles in the Park”) where children can meet and visit with their future peers and teachers. Explore other activities, such as allowing Head Start children to experience their first school bus ride, to connect children to their new school.
- Have children practice kindergarten routines in Head Start. For example, Head Start children can sing songs that are typically sung in kindergarten, practice using lunch trays like those that will be used in their new school, and ride a school bus.
- Familiarize Head Start children with kindergarten through conversations and stories. Teachers may read books that talk about kindergarten during

story time (see the Resources section for a list of suggested books). Additionally, teachers can facilitate discussions with children about what they think kindergarten will be like, what kinds of worries they have about the transition, and how they can address those worries.

2

### **Family–School Connections**

The goal of this connection is to increase family collaboration and engagement with the school during the transition process. Having a strong family relationship with the school can yield positive long-term outcomes for children (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2000). This goal can be accomplished by the following suggested practices:

- Have the teacher or transition coordinator contact the family before the start of kindergarten as well as after school begins. Contact before school begins can make families more comfortable with the elementary school, and therefore, more likely to become involved in their children’s education. During this contact, information can be mutually shared. For example, families can share valuable information about their children’s home lives and teachers can provide families with useful information about kindergarten expectations. Home visits are ideal for establishing these initial relationships with families.
- Involve families in the transition process by connecting them to community resources, such as physician’s offices, behavioral consultants, and after-school programs.
- Conduct meetings for families about transition issues during elementary school orientation or an open house. Before the start of kindergarten, a group meeting can be held for families of Head Start children in the scheduled kindergarten classroom. Teachers can address the expectations for kindergarten and provide a tour of the school.

- 
- Provide newsletters and resource materials that have information about the transition to kindergarten in the spring of the Head Start year. These materials can include springtime preparation for the transition, information on parent responsibilities, and summer transition packets. Give special attention to efforts aimed at reaching families who may not have the time or resources to attend open houses or fully understand information sent home about transition. Some ways to address this issue are to provide childcare and transportation for school events, such as open houses, provide information to parents in their native language, or make home visits to those families who are unable to travel to the school.

- 
- Give families of dual-language learners information about their rights to have school documents, registration forms, and other important resources provided to them in their native languages. Direct families to additional resources, such as interpreters, when needed.

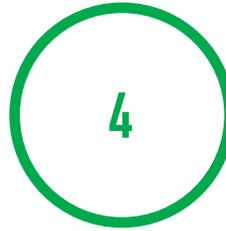


### School-School Connections

The goal of this connection is to support the transition between Head Start and kindergarten classrooms. Head Start and kindergarten may facilitate the school-school connection by:

- 
- Collaborating around placement, screening, and registration practices between Head Start and kindergarten (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2000).
  - Aligning classroom practices by having the Head Start teacher, kindergarten teacher, and transition coordinator meet and discuss their programs and familiarize one another with classroom practices and routines. Some kindergarten routines, such as having lunch in a cafeteria or riding a school bus, may be incorporated into the Head Start day to help children prepare for their upcoming kindergarten experience.

- 
- Encouraging kindergarten programs to identify and communicate clear expectations for children's performance and then work together with Head Start programs to ensure children have the opportunity to be taught the skills required to meet these expectations.



### Community-School Connections

The goal of this connection is to support continuity in the transition process by using resources within the community. These resources may include community organizations, houses of worship,

physicians' offices, and cultural organizations—essentially anyone in the community who works with young children and their families. These organizations can play a vital role in the transition process, especially in certain communities where families are hard to reach or are disconnected from the school environment. Schools can use these organizations to reach out to families and help them prepare their children for kindergarten.

Community linkages help ensure continuity for children and help provide cohesion to the services offered to children during the preschool and kindergarten years. Here are some ways to foster community-school connections:

- 
- Ask community organizations, pediatricians' offices, and libraries to display or distribute brochures, videos, and home activity calendars to children and families. Also work with community agencies that work with families (e.g., housing authority, social service agencies, etc.) to distribute information.
  - Coordinate with local shops and restaurants that provide delivery (e.g., pizza restaurants) to deliver information about kindergarten registration to communities that might be difficult to reach by other methods.

## SECTION 2:

### Six Steps to Transition Planning

In this section we present six steps to successful kindergarten transition planning, along with tools and tips to help facilitate the planning and implementation process.

#### Step 1: Assess your partnerships—Identify transition team members and designate leaders.

Creating connections to facilitate a successful transition to kindergarten requires focused effort and leadership. Transition work is most effective when strong relationships and valuable partnerships linking children, families, school, and early childhood programs are established before kindergarten starts. Successful transition teams typically have these essential elements:

- Leadership and support from school principals
- Commitment to shared goals by all stakeholders
- Active engagement of preschool programs
- Shared understanding of the importance of quality early learning experiences
- Connection with families
- Ready access to community resources and support.

It is also recommended that the transition team include individuals with a strong knowledge of services and procedures for special education and DLL populations. Experts in these areas can provide valuable insights and guidance to ensure these populations' needs are met.

The ultimate goal of this step is to identify the key members and the leader(s) of your transition team. It is important to keep in mind that the leader needs to have the ability to direct resources, to focus attention, and to provide organization in ways that can facilitate the development of effective transition practices for children and families. Leaders should be able to control the allocation of resources and formation of policy that can shape transition planning and make it a priority for the community. Leaders should also have

Creating connections to facilitate a successful transition to kindergarten requires focused effort and leadership.

the ability and power to engage teachers, families, and communities in partnerships that build programs to help children experience a seamless kindergarten transition.

This team has crucial roles and responsibilities in the planning for the transition, including:

- Identifying community-wide transition needs for parents, children, schools, and preschools
- Identifying current transition practices and resources in the community
- Providing support for the development of transition policies and practices
- Facilitating coordination and organization across various agencies
- Identifying key personnel related to transition in your school and including them in transition planning.
- Meeting regularly to communicate about transition planning and carry out the subsequent steps to be covered.

## Step 2: Identify goals.

Once the transition team has been formed, it is essential that all members understand the scope of the work. To do so, the team needs to establish a common vision of what the transition to kindergarten should look like and use this vision to set goals. It is important to identify the goals for your team because without them, your team may have difficulty determining what course of action is best for children and families.

Here are some guidelines for creating transition goals:

- *Set broad goals at first:* Broad goals should be made to create a long-term vision for your transition team (e.g., “To enhance children’s school readiness” or “To foster the child-school connection”). These goals will also help your team decide how you want to focus your resources and spend your time, and they will help to focus your more specific goals later on in the process.
- *Set measurable goals:* When setting up transition goals, your team should set goals that include benchmarks that can be used to measure the degree of success you are achieving to determine whether particular transition practices should be continued.
- *Set attainable goals:* The goals must be realistic and achievable for your transition team.
- *Set time-bound goals:* There should be a deadline for every goal.

## Step 3: Assess what current transition activities are being practiced in your community for each type of connection.

After identifying who will be on your transition team and setting initial goals, team members should come together as a group and identify what current transition activities are being practiced in your community for each of the four types of connections addressed in Section 1. For each connection (e.g., child-school, family-school, etc.), your team should consider what has already been done to foster:

- Sharing of information
- Building of relational support
- Aligning settings

This planning step will allow the transition team to focus on the area that needs the most attention (i.e., connections that are currently either not practiced or are occurring less frequently). In addition to assessing current transition activities, it is important to identify any specific resources that support these connections.

## Step 4: Identify data or evidence you have that practices are or are not working.

The goal of this step is for the team to create a data collection process, or use data you already have, to identify evidence of whether current practices are working. This is a crucial step mainly because your team will use these data to evaluate transition activities and revise future transition plans. Depending on your team’s goals, there are several types of data you could use to obtain evidence. Each of these types of data serves a different purpose, and the type you use should be chosen to fit your program’s needs. These include:

- Informal observation
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Rating scales

If your team does not already have a formal data collection system in place, it is appropriate to use informal observations based on your transition team’s prior experiences. For example, let’s say that you have hosted a kindergarten orientation night at your school for the past four years, but last year you posted fliers in public places, such as libraries and physicians’ offices, in addition to sending information home with children. You may have noticed that last year’s attendance at your orientation was noticeably higher than it

had been in the past. Although these are not formal data, informal observation suggests that perhaps the practice of distributing information out in the community further promoted the school's kindergarten orientation event.

For planning purposes, you may consider more formal data collection, such as using interviews. For example, if one of your goals is to foster the family-school connection, your team may use parent interviews to evaluate the quality of this connection. These interviews serve the dual purpose of engaging families in a relationship with schools and gathering information about family experiences in schools and at home. Interviews could focus on parents' descriptions of their children's school experiences, children's behavior, routines in preparing for school, family relationships with schools, and peer contact outside of school. These interviews provide a window into parents' perceptions about their roles in supporting the transition and other school activities. With these interviews, school staff typically find it helpful to gather the information and then talk to the parents about their responses.

Another example of data collection is to use surveys. If one of your team's goals is to foster the school-school connection, these surveys could be designed to identify team members' experiences with various school-school transition activities. Head Start and kindergarten teachers, principals, and transition coordinators would respond to questions concerning the use of specific school-school transition activities, how helpful those activities are, and barriers to those transition practices. These questionnaires can provide information that will inform transition planning.

### **Step 5: Plan and prioritize: Reevaluate goals or create new ones and plan steps to take.**

This step of transition planning is perhaps the most involved, and therefore, may require the most time in the planning process. One of the reasons behind the complexity of Step 5 is that there are several aspects that should be considered, such as the need to (a) reevaluate goals, (b) anticipate barriers, (c) create a timeline, and (d) assign roles to appropriate individuals.

**For planning purposes, you may consider more formal data collection, such as using interviews.**

*(a) Reevaluate goals*—Based on information gathered in Step 3, you may have found connections that need more attention than others. This information, along with data gathered in Step 4, may prompt you to reevaluate or refine the broad goals you set in Step 2 into more specific goals. When reevaluating your goals, you may consider the individual needs of your region or school system and set those goals accordingly. For example, you may find from Steps 3 and 4 that the area that needs the most attention is the family-school connection. Therefore, your team could then set specific goals, such as, "To increase family engagement during the kindergarten registration period."

*(b) Anticipate barriers*—Once the transition team has come up with its goals and planned the next action steps, the team can turn to identifying potential barriers to implementing effective transition practices. Some commonly reported barriers are: teachers' summer work not being supported by salary; transition plans not being available; home visits being dangerous; and parents not bringing their children for registration or open houses. The transition team should work to identify barriers that are specific to its community and then work to brainstorm ways around those barriers. For example, there could be factors that may bar parents from being active participants in the transition process, such as having a work schedule that interferes with transition activities or a lack of transportation. Or

they may simply just feel uncomfortable at school. By considering such factors during the planning process, the transition team will be better equipped to develop creative solutions that encourage more engagement. One of the ways to get ideas may be to ask some parents, who are involved in their children's schooling, what enables them to participate. Organizers may also consider offering multiple events at different times to accommodate various work schedules, provide transportation to events, or visit families at home where they feel more comfortable.

Other factors may present barriers for teachers. For example, many important and valuable transition activities would ideally be conducted in the evening or during the summer. Staging activities during these times infringes on teachers' vacation and non-salaried time; therefore, most kindergarten teachers identify lack of pay as the most important consideration as to why they are reluctant to participate. The transition team may need to consider alternate ways of funding teachers for this involvement or provide incentives to encourage the involvement of teachers during the transition process.

*(c) Create a timeline*—Once your team has identified barriers and solutions to them, it is important to outline a timeline for implementing the transition activities you have chosen. For example, a transition activity, such as organizing a kindergarten camp, should occur during the summer before kindergarten, whereas an activity, such as coordination between Head Start and kindergarten teachers around curricula and routines, should be an ongoing process throughout the school year.

*(d) Assign roles*—Once you have a transition plan laid out, your team should identify who needs to be involved in each activity and assign roles to them accordingly. For example, it may be necessary for your school to do fundraising to set up a kindergarten camp. This may require the office staff to mail out fliers about a fundraising event, someone else to secure a location, and additional people to handle catering, entertainment, etc.

### **Step 6: Implement and Evaluate the Transition Plan.**

Once transition activities and the timeline for these activities are established, the implementation process can proceed. Transition teams should review the planned activities and timelines, and then implement practices as scheduled. Ongoing and regular meetings of the collaborators may be necessary to ensure smooth and timely implementation.

After the transition activities are implemented, it is important to evaluate their effectiveness to continue support of high-quality transition practices for children and their families and to provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your practices. During an evaluation process, the transition teams will evaluate the activities they used, identify needs that were not met, highlight the strategies that worked well, and revise future transition plans accordingly. Another reason why evaluation is necessary is because some strategies may work well with some families but may be less effective with others; therefore, an analysis of what works and what does not can help improve the transition process.

It is also important to note that transition planning is a dynamic process in which your team will need to constantly re-assess goals, modify plans, and when necessary, re-assess goals again. It is an ongoing process in which there will be times when your team will go back and forth between the steps before it can eventually move forward with implementation.

### **SECTION 3: Successful Stories of Kindergarten Transition**

#### *Northview Elementary (Pennsylvania)*

Northview Elementary is an urban pre-K-5 Pittsburgh public school serving ethnically diverse children from low-income families. In the 2007-08 school year, less than 25 percent of the anticipated kindergarten class was present on the first day of school. After experiencing such low turnout of kindergarteners in the fall of 2007, school and community leaders met early in the 2007-08 school year to propose the formation of a Kindergarten Transition Team to address the problem. The team consisted of:

1. The Northview vice-principal
2. The director of the community Family Support Center
3. Two staff members from the Office of Child Development
4. Head Start, and other early education, health, and social service providers
5. Parents of future kindergarteners

The Northview Kindergarten Transition Team then proceeded to create an action plan to address children's transition to kindergarten. The following is a sample of the team's plan. It set forth to:

1. Review data on enrollment and transitions and develop new goals.
2. Examine and improve the atmosphere and environment of the school to make the school parent-friendly.
3. Review and revise timelines and registration practices.
4. Develop and implement strategies for door-to-door outreach to hundreds of homes to find and engage all potential students and their families.
5. Implement several family transition events prior to the first day of school.

The transition team's many activities clearly yielded positive results. One example of its action plan that was particularly innovative was the use of a pizza shop to help spread information about kindergarten registration. This shop was used to deliver kindergarten registration information, along with their pizzas, to an isolated housing community. As enrollment numbers increased, parents responded that the advertisements on pizza boxes were the main reason they were aware of registration dates. In addition to using community resources, many children participated in breakfasts, a hair-braiding day, and several other transition events that occurred prior to the start of school. These opportunities allowed families and teachers to meet at an informal setting, and therefore, helped to foster the family-school connection.

In August 2008, Northview saw 100 percent of its anticipated new class on the first day of school. This school's success demonstrates the kind of outcomes that are possible when parents, schools, and communities work together to create a smooth transition into kindergarten (Smythe-Leistico, 2012).

### *Smart Beginnings (Virginia)*

In central Virginia, one community was able to make a sizable impact on children's transition experiences with a low-cost investment that fostered collaborations between early education providers. A local coalition called Smart Beginnings, which works to create quality care and educational experiences for young children, brought together teachers from kindergarten, preschool, and Head Start programs. These teachers began to meet four times a year to focus on aligning experiences for children to ease their transition from preschool into kindergarten. The educators talked through academic expectations for kindergarten and how Head Start and preschool teachers could best prepare students for the kindergarten classroom. They addressed such issues as the development of fine motor skills to prepare children for the emphasis on handwriting in kindergarten and even talked about simpler matters that may confuse children, such as how bathroom signs may look different between preschool programs and elementary schools. The teachers also discussed transition practices that might be helpful for children and families who are going through this setting change. These types of conversations helped Head Start teachers prepare children for the transition to kindergarten.

The quarterly meetings produced several positive outcomes. One outcome was increased participation in transition opportunities, such as kindergarten camp, which had children, families, and teachers reporting that they felt more prepared for the upcoming kindergarten year. Head Start teachers also reported being satisfied with their quarterly meetings because they felt that their knowledge of children and families was valued. Additionally, kindergarten teachers felt

that children were entering school more socially and academically prepared. Another outcome of these meetings was an increased awareness of the community need for more physical space for Head Start/preschool children, a proposal that is now being considered by a local elementary school.

This case study is an excellent example of the fiscal payoff of transition planning. With minimal costs to

schools, teachers meeting just four times a year were able to make an impact on children's transitions that likely provided more valuable learning time at the beginning of their kindergarten year. In other words, many more children came to school ready to learn instead of being unduly preoccupied by the shock of adjusting to new and foreign environments.



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## SECTION 6

# Transition Ideas by Connection

## Transition Activity Ideas by Connection

Type of connection	Transition activity
Child–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a connection between preschool children and kindergarten teachers.</li> <li>• Create a connection between children and the kindergarten using school functions.</li> <li>• Have children practice kindergarten rituals in preschool.</li> <li>• Incorporate preschool activities into the kindergarten year.</li> <li>• Encourage preschool teachers to stay in contact with their former students.</li> <li>• Encourage kindergarten support staff to visit preschool children.</li> <li>• Conduct Spring kindergarten orientation for preschool children.</li> <li>• Establish peer connections within the preschool class.</li> <li>• Establish connections among preschool peers who will be in the same kindergarten.</li> <li>• Establish preschool peer connections with kindergarten peers.</li> </ul>
Family–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact families during the first few days of preschool and kindergarten.</li> <li>• Assess family strengths and needs.</li> <li>• Maintain periodic contact with families.</li> <li>• Connect families to community resources.</li> <li>• Encourage family participation in home learning activities.</li> <li>• Encourage family participation in the classroom and at school events.</li> <li>• Conduct regular family meetings.</li> <li>• Conduct family meetings about transition issues.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for parents to engage in planning activities, offer input and feedback, and lead activities when appropriate.</li> <li>• Share information about individual children with families, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers.</li> <li>• Use newsletters and resource materials.</li> <li>• Send letters home.</li> <li>• Set-up two-way communication.</li> <li>• Conduct Spring orientation about kindergarten for preschool families.</li> <li>• Conduct individual meetings between teachers and families.</li> <li>• Conduct parent orientation at the beginning of the year at preschools and kindergartens.</li> </ul>
School–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster inter-school collaboration about programs and classroom practices.</li> <li>• Conduct visits: Preschool teachers visit kindergarten classrooms and kindergarten teachers visit preschool classrooms.</li> <li>• Communicate about curriculum (preschool and kindergarten personnel).</li> <li>• Connect about a specific child (preschool and kindergarten teachers).</li> <li>• Share written records.</li> <li>• Align curriculum.</li> <li>• Align early learning standards.</li> </ul>
School–Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build useful policies related to the kindergarten transition.</li> <li>• Identify and communicate community expectations for children.</li> <li>• Establish policy coordination through inter-agency connections.</li> </ul>

## SECTION 7

# Transition Plan Template and Example

# Transition Plan

**Step 1: Assess your partnership**—Identify committee team members and their affiliations. Designate a leader.

**Committee Members**

**Affiliation**

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Designated Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2: Identify goals**—Fill in goals for your transition team below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3: Assess what's happening now**—On the next page, complete the matrix with current transition activities practiced in your community, deciding what type of connection it fosters and the focus of the activity. You may have some blank boxes. You may want to draw this on chart paper and fill in with stickies with your team.

**Step 4: Identify data on current practices**—On the next page, complete the last column of the matrix with evidence you have that practices are or are not working.

Type of Connection	Sharing Information	Building Relational Supports	Fostering Alignment Between Settings	Evaluation (Step 4)
Child–School				
Family–School				
School–School				
School–Community				

**Step 5: Plan and prioritize**—Reevaluate your goals, create new ones if necessary, and plan steps to take. Brainstorm at least two activities for each type of connection to either address areas of need or intensify areas already focused on. **To the extent possible, group activities by type of connection (e.g., list child—school activities in adjacent rows).**

Revised/refined goals (if necessary):

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Goal addressed	Type of connection and activity	Transition activity	When does activity occur?	Who is responsible for follow-up?	Evidence of Impact

Goal addressed	Type of connection and activity	Transition activity	When does activity occur?	Who is responsible for follow-up?	Evidence of Impact

## Transition Plan Example

**Step 1: Assess your partnership—Identify committee team members and their affiliations. Designate a leader.**

### Committee Members

### Affiliation

<u>Sara Rudolph</u>	<u>schools - principal</u>
<u>Jeffrey Smith</u>	<u>schools - kindergarten teacher</u>
<u>David Lewis</u>	<u>parent - volunteer coach</u>
<u>Laura Bowden</u>	<u>preschool teacher</u>
<u>Hannah Justice</u>	<u>Head Start - early childhood education specialist</u>

Designated Leader: Hannah Justice

**Step 2: Identify goals—Fill in goals for your transition team below.**

1. Support children being ready for kindergarten
2. Help families know more about what they can do at home to help children be ready for school
3. Get community more involved with children
4.

**Step 3: Assess what's happening now—On the next page, complete the matrix with current transition activities practiced in your community, deciding what type of connection it fosters and the focus of the activity. You may have some blank boxes.**

**Step 4: Identify data on current practices—**On the next page, complete the last column of the matrix with evidence you have that practices are or are not working.

Type of Connection	Sharing Information	Building Relational Supports	Fostering Alignment Between Settings	Evaluation (Step 4)
Child–School	Preschool teachers talk and read books about kindergarten.	Through home visits, children meet their kindergarten teacher before school starts.	Preschool children practice some kindergarten rules and routines toward the end of the preschool year.	Children seem less anxious and more excited about going to kindergarten than they have been in previous years, as reported by
Family–School	Family receives a general letter about kindergarten before school starts.  Preschool teachers provide families with information about the expectations and procedures to register for kindergarten.	Elementary school holds a parent orientation for incoming students before kindergarten starts, so parents can get to know their children’s teachers.	Parents are given a set of activities to do with children over the summer prior to their kindergarten year.	Parents seem more well-informed about kindergarten than in previous years, as reported by kindergarten teachers.  Participant rates at back-to-school nights increase.
School–School	Preschool teachers discuss children’s strengths and challenges with kindergarten teachers.	Preschool directors meet to discuss common ways to support children.  Preschool and elementary personnel develop early learning standards together.	Preschool directors meet to discuss common ways to support children.  Preschool and elementary personnel develop early learning standards together.	Kindergarten teachers report feeling more well-informed about where children are and what individual children’s needs are when they enter school.
School–Community	School makes kindergarten registration announcement in the local newspaper and via flyers posted at community centers.			Kindergarten registration before the first day of school increases.

**Step 5: Plan and prioritize—**Reevaluate your goals, create new ones if necessary, and plan steps to take. Brainstorm up to four activities that could either address areas in need or intensify areas already focused on. Consider the type of connection, type of activity, when in the year it would occur, who needs to be involved to make it happen, possible barriers, and who is responsible for follow-up.

Revised/refined goals (if necessary):

1. Provide more summer experiences for children \_\_\_\_\_
2. Help families prepare during summer. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Get community more involved during the summer months. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Goal addressed	Type of connection and activity	Transition activity	When does activity occur?	Who needs to be involved?	Potential barriers	Who is responsible for follow-up?
1, 2, 3	Family–School (information sharing)	Organize kindergarten camp to introduce incoming kindergarteners to teachers and routines that they will see in the new school year; hold family sessions to inform them of things to do before the start of school	End of preschool, summer before kindergarten	Office staff for mailings and fundraising  Community team, schools	Informing people and getting them to participate  Finding funding	Hannah—sending info home to Head Start families
	School–Community (building relational supports)					Laura—contacting local media to get the word out
	Child–School (building relational supports)					Jeff—fundraising (finding local sponsors)
1	School-School (fostering alignment between settings)	Coordinate between preschool and kindergarten curricula and routines; preschool teachers share information about individual children	Ongoing	Preschool and elementary teachers		Sara—organizing teacher meetings

## **SECTION 8**

# **Three Rhode Island Communities: Lessons Learned and Case Studies**

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# REPORT

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## Planning the Transition to Kindergarten in Three Rhode Island Communities: Findings and Case Studies

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**Education Development Center**

**DECEMBER 2019**



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# Introduction

This report presents findings from a study of kindergarten transition initiatives in three Rhode Island communities: West Warwick, Woonsocket, and Newport (see inset on *Overview of Communities' Transition Plans*). Education Development Center's (EDC's) Center for Early Learning Professionals led a professional learning series—comprising summits on transition practices and coaching provided to each community—during the 2018–19 school year and in the fall of 2019. We begin by briefly reviewing the significance of transition practices and the role that both prekindergarten and kindergarten entities can play in supporting best practices. We then summarize the key findings, challenges, and lessons learned and present case studies for each community.

## Transitions Matter

The transition from a prekindergarten program to kindergarten is an important event for children and can be challenging for those who are unprepared for the adjustment. Providing multiple transition activities is important to improve kindergarten experiences and build an aligned and seamless First 10 system (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Jacobson, 2019). Research studies have found several benefits for children and families who experience multiple transition practices, such as:

- » Positive effects on academic achievement during the kindergarten year (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005)
- » Kindergartners receiving more favorable ratings from teachers on social competencies (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008)
- » Faster skill development from prekindergarten to kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011)
- » Increased family involvement over the kindergarten year (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008)

These outcomes are all magnified for students from low-income families. Therefore, creating and implementing high-quality plans for a seamless transition from prekindergarten into kindergarten can positively influence children's early education experience.

### OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES' TRANSITION PLANS

**West Warwick** implemented a variety of transition practices that emphasized aligning curriculum, information-sharing across teachers, and facilitating a smooth registration and transition process.

**Woonsocket** implemented transition practices to support children and families in preparing for kindergarten, building a strong partnership across early education entities.

**Newport** implemented transition practices focused primarily on increasing on-time kindergarten registration and sharing information across prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

## Transition Planning: EDC's Professional Learning Series with Coaching Support

The goal of the professional learning series was to improve child outcomes by supporting participating communities in developing and implementing research-based kindergarten transition plans. The professional learning series consisted of six one-day events—called summits—plus individual coaching support for transition teams (see inset on *Transition Team Members*). The first five summits occurred during the 2018–19 school year, and the final summit took place in the fall of 2019.

The summits addressed transition and school readiness research, building successful transition experiences, developing transition plans, aligning standards and expectations across grades, planning events to engage the community, addressing chronic absenteeism, and incorporating social-emotional learning strategies. In addition to participating in the summits, each community was required to meet regularly with their teams (supported by a transition coach), create a transition plan, and host two community events.

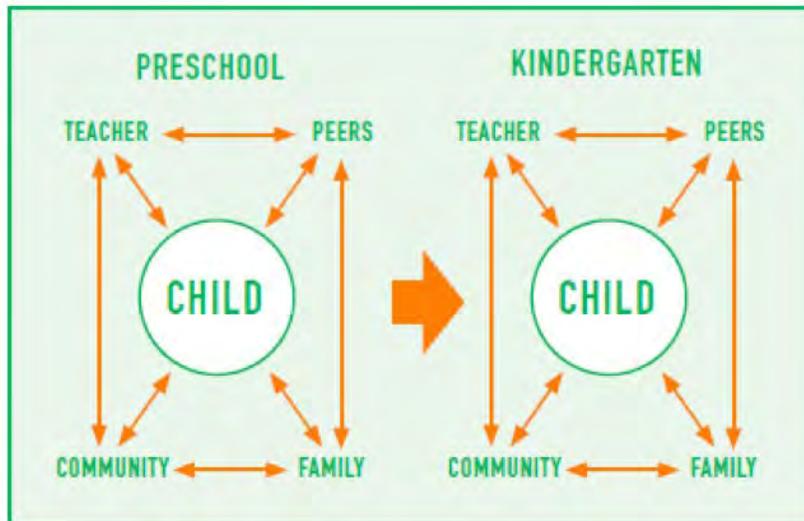
### *A Collaborative Approach*

Transition teams used a collaborative approach to their transition planning and implementation. As outlined by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (2014), a collaborative approach to the transition to kindergarten recognizes that children, families, schools, peers, and communities are all interconnected throughout the transition process. A collaborative framework considers the interactions among contexts and people as a child transitions from prekindergarten (or a home setting) to kindergarten. In the collaborative framework illustrated in Figure 1, children are surrounded by webs of relationships that can support them during this transition and period of adjustment.

### TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS

Each community's transition team included educators and/or administrators from the public school district, Head Start leaders and teachers, state-funded prekindergarten program staff, kindergarten teachers, and other educators, such as special education coordinators. The teams averaged approximately nine participants, who met on a regular basis throughout the year.

FIGURE 1. A Collaborative Framework



Source: Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta (2000).

Building on this collaborative framework, the teams organized their transition plans and goals by four types of connections that facilitate effective transitions (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning [NCQTL], 2014):

The teams set goals that individually addressed one or more connections and collectively addressed all four connections. Each team set between three and four goals for the 2018–19 school year, which they intended to continue to build on into the next school year and thereafter.

## TYPES OF CONNECTIONS

- **Child-School Connections:** The goals of this connection include increasing children's familiarity with the kindergarten setting and increasing the teachers' familiarity with individual children.
- **Family-School Connections:** This connection aims to increase family collaboration and engagement with the school during the transition process.
- **School (or Program)-School Connections:** This connection supports the transition between prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms.
- **Community-School Connections:** This connection strives to support continuity in the transition process by using resources within the community, such as community organizations, houses of worship, physicians' offices, and cultural organizations. Schools can work with these organizations to reach out to families and help them prepare their children for kindergarten.

Source: National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (2014). Planning the transition to kindergarten: Collaboration, connections, and six steps to success. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <https://first10.org/2019/12/17/improving-the-transition-to-kindergarten-in-rhode-island-and-a-great-transitions-resource/>.

Throughout the professional learning series, the community teams followed the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's step-by-step approach to building, implementing, and evaluating kindergarten transition plans. This approach is outlined in *Planning the Transition to Kindergarten: Collaboration, Connections, and Six Steps to Success* (NCQTL, 2014), referred to as Six Steps to Success for the remainder of this report. The Six Steps to Success are as follows:

1. Assess your partnership—Identify transition team members and designate leaders
2. Identify goals
3. Assess what current transition activities are being practiced in your community for each type of connection
4. Identify data or evidence you have that practices are or are not working
5. Plan and prioritize—Reevaluate goals or create new ones and plan steps to take
6. Implement and evaluate the transition plan

Transition teams used the *Six Steps to Success* process (including a transition plan template aligned to the six steps) and many additional resources to create and implement their transition plans. By the fall of 2019, each community had completed the six steps and had begun setting new transition goals based on their progress and evolving community needs.

## Findings

During the implementation of the EDC Transition to Kindergarten Professional Learning Series, the three communities experienced common challenges and learned similar lessons related to effective transition activities and best practices for transition teams. The evaluation findings presented in this section reflect the collective experiences of the communities; community-specific findings are included under [Case Studies](#).

### Key Findings

The key findings from the evaluation relate to the communities' transition plans, transition activities, transition teams, and the professional learning series.

### EVALUATION METHODS

From September 2018 through October 2019, EDC conducted a mixed-methods evaluation to evaluate whether the professional learning series met its goals and objectives and to document the communities' implementation of their kindergarten transition plans. Data sources comprised a survey of transition team members (including kindergarten teachers), focus groups and interviews with transition team members, interviews with EDC coaches, and observations of the summits. One parent of a kindergartener was also interviewed. Results were summarized into case studies for each community (see [Case Studies](#)) and into common themes across communities.

### *Transition Plans*

- » Each team successfully created a comprehensive transition plan.
- » Each team made progress in implementing transition activities to meet their goals.
- » Transition plans laid the foundation for multi-year efforts, and teams are committed to continuing to implement their plans.
- » The transition plans all shared some common goals:
  - Share student information between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.
  - Foster knowledge of and familiarity with classroom settings and expectations between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.
  - Improve the transition experience for children and families.

### *Transition Teams*

- » The most challenging transition team activities, such as making time for transition team collaboration and working across agencies, were also the most significant to the success of the transition activities.
- » Although working as a team was logistically challenging, transition teams fostered deep, collaborative partnerships that they plan to sustain for the long term.
  - For example, the West Warwick team noted that the team not only rekindled a relationship among the partners, they also achieved a unified voice and vision for the transition work.
  - In Woonsocket, prior to this professional learning series, there was little to no collaboration between Head Start and the school department. Now the team is not only collaborating on this initiative, but was also chosen by the Office of Head Start to participate in a select cohort of 12 national communities working on early childhood and K–12 collaboration
- » Collaboration helped to foster knowledge between agencies and between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. In turn, this aided transition teams in achieving many of their goals.
- » Data collection is needed to monitor implementation progress and measure outcomes, but it remains a challenge for the communities.



### *Professional Learning Summit Series*

- » The model of in-person summits and coaching sessions was effective in guiding teams through the creation and implementation of comprehensive transition plans.
- » Participants valued the topics covered in each workshop, especially the crosswalk of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and the Common Core State Standards.
- » The teams benefited from the information exchange across communities during the summits and the strong engagement of the other educators.
- » The professional learning series increased participants' knowledge and understanding of content; strategies for data sharing, assessment, and instructional alignment between prekindergarten and kindergarten; and family engagement strategies related to the transition to kindergarten.
- » The professional learning series greatly helped cultivate important relationships, increased collaboration, and better positioned teams to move the work forward.
- » Transition team members' capacity and commitment to support and sustain well-aligned transitions increased.

### **Common Challenges**

Although each district was successful in meeting their transition plan goals, they experienced several challenges, for example:

- » Making time for transition team collaboration
- » Bringing partners together across multiple agencies (e.g., early childhood and kindergarten teachers)
- » Obtaining substitute teacher coverage for staff to participate in transition team meetings, events, and/or classroom visits
- » Establishing ongoing data collection to monitor implementation progress and outcomes

These challenges were not insurmountable, yet they often slowed the progress of the transition teams. Teams worked to overcome these challenges through a variety of efforts:

- » To find a solution to the substitute teacher coverage challenge, particularly when it came to involving teachers in district transition meetings and events, some teams posted their meeting materials online to keep non-attendees informed.
- » To address the data collection challenge, West Warwick successfully collected implementation and outcome data by integrating data collection into their regular activities and building on their existing data use culture.

Other strategies included prioritizing the transition work within their respective agencies, setting recurring or regular meetings, and communicating through modes other than face-to-face meetings.

## Lessons Learned

Throughout the past year, the communities learned valuable lessons from their efforts, including how to maximize a collaborative approach to transition planning, which transition practices were particularly effective in their communities, and best practices for the transition teams. The common themes gleaned from their experiences and insight are presented below.

### *Effective Transition Activities Implemented by the Communities*

Each community's transition plan included activities to specifically address the four types of connections that support the transition to kindergarten: child-school connections, family-school connections, program-school connections, and community-school connections. As such, the transition teams employed many similar strategies to meet their goals, such as creating a kindergarten video to support child-school connections and organizing cross-site visits to support program-school connections.

Although all transition activities and strategies collectively contributed to the success experienced by the communities, the activities in Table 1 were perceived by the transition team members, teachers, and families as especially effective.



**TABLE 1. Effective Transition Activities by Type of Connection**

Type of Connection	Transition Activity Examples
<p><b>Child-School</b></p>	<p><b>Kindergarten videos and books:</b> Each community created a video and a book “starring” kindergarteners that showed the elementary schools, typical kindergarten activities, and school transportation options. The videos were shown to children at community events and in some cases at early childhood education provider locations. The books were distributed to children at community events and kindergarten registration; some communities also used them in the prekindergarten classrooms. Each community received positive feedback from teachers and families, who reported that students knew what to expect in kindergarten as a result of the video and book. However, transition team members noted that these activities were time-intensive and challenging endeavors to undertake, especially the video, due to obtaining appropriate permissions.</p> <p><b>Materials to prepare children:</b> In each community, rising kindergarteners and their families received materials to help prepare them for kindergarten. One of the most well-received activities was a countdown calendar that counted down the final two weeks of summer to help the children understand when kindergarten was starting; the calendar also provided parents with ideas to try each day to prepare their children.</p> <p><b>Readiness programs:</b> Newport and West Warwick offered kindergarten readiness programs for rising kindergarteners to ease into the kindergarten setting. The Newport “Soft Start” program occurs during the two days prior to the official start of school; West Warwick’s “Jumpstart to Kindergarten” is a two-week summer program. Although neither program is new, the goal of increasing participation in these positive experiences fit neatly into each community’s transition plan.</p> <p><b>Familiar faces:</b> In Woonsocket, the transition team organized Head Start teachers to attend the first three days of kindergarten to provide familiar faces to the children in their new classrooms. The team received very positive feedback from teachers and families about this approach.</p>
<p><b>Family-School</b></p>	<p><b>Kindergarten registration:</b> In an effort to improve on-time kindergarten registration rates, West Warwick revamped their kindergarten registration system, moving it to a mostly online process and running it out of their district central office for the first time. The effort was successful in increasing on-time registration rates, and families reported that the process was easy. In Newport, one strategy used to improve the registration process was to provide translators at registration events; while this was helpful, it proved not to be sufficient, given the large number of non-English-speaking families and the small number of translators.</p>

**TABLE 1. Effective Transition Activities by Type of Connection (continued)**

Type of Connection	Transition Activity Examples
<p><b>Program-School</b></p>	<p><b>Transition forms:</b> Each community created a transition form (or updated an existing one) to be completed by prekindergarten teachers and given to the kindergarten teachers. As part of their transition plan, teams focused on streamlining the process to create a single form that yielded the most useful information with the least amount of burden. This proved to be a very successful practice, helping kindergarten teachers better prepare for their students and make informed decisions when assigning children to classrooms.</p> <p><b>Aligning classroom practices:</b> In West Warwick, the transition team provided multiple opportunities for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to align their classroom practices, including the social and academic expectations for children in both grades. Prekindergarten teachers visited kindergarten classrooms in the fall, and then kindergarten teachers visited prekindergarten classrooms in the late spring. After these visits, teachers adjusted their curricula to better align with the experiences children have in the other setting. The district purchased social-emotional and academic curricula used in the district’s kindergarten classrooms for two preschools. The team also had prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers work together to create a crosswalk of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and the Common Core State Standards. This activity deepened teachers’ understanding of the expectations for children in both grades.</p>
<p><b>Community-School</b></p>	<p><b>Community events:</b> As part of the professional learning series, each community was required to host two community events to further their transition plan goals. Communities offered a variety of events, such as special registration days with family-friendly activities, breakfasts and dinners to bring community members together to learn about the kindergarten transition process, and child-centered activities to help prepare children for kindergarten. The transition teams received positive feedback on their efforts and plan to continue offering similar and more frequent events in the future.</p>

As noted, each community’s transition team members reflected different roles from the collaborative framework and a wide variety of settings, each with different structures and priorities. Such cross-agency teams can make teamwork challenging, given the many perspectives and schedules to accommodate, yet the transition teams were successful. Teams attributed their success to their use of the following practices, which align with the *Six Steps to Success*:

**“The experience of working with such knowledgeable colleagues has been amazing and the collaboration has been very positive.”**

– Woonsocket Transition Team Member

- » **Establishing a strong partnership:** Step 1 of the *Six Steps to Success* (“Assess your partnership—Identify transition team members and designate leaders”) describes the essential elements<sup>1</sup> for successful transition teams. As this step describes, having a strong, collaborative partnership among prekindergarten programs and schools is key to the success of meeting transition plan goals. Through the professional learning series, each community established a collaborative cross-agency partnership that helped foster knowledge between agencies, which, in turn, benefited all aspects of the transition efforts. However, in some instances it was challenging to engage all members of the early childhood education community in the transition efforts. Each community will continue to address this goal through efforts such as more personal communication with private providers.
- » **Setting a shared vision:** Several team members acknowledged the importance of setting a cross-agency shared vision to recognize that they all have a common goal of helping their city’s children. As a Woonsocket team member noted:
 

We got to the point where we had a shared vision that this wasn’t about Woonsocket Head Start, or it wasn’t about the Woonsocket Education Department. This was about what was best for our earliest learners in the state. We care about all of these children in the city. It doesn’t matter what program . . . they’re in.
- » **Distributing leadership:** Each team used a distributed leadership model where, in most cases, multiple team members were responsible for overseeing certain tasks. This not only helped spread the burden of the work, it also ensured that if one team member was not available, another teammate could carry out the effort.
- » **Being responsive and flexible:** Teams knew that the transition planning work was a significant undertaking and realized that their efforts may not proceed exactly as planned. As part of Step 5 of *Six Steps to Success* (“Plan and prioritize—Reevaluate goals or create new ones and plan steps to take”), teams identified potential barriers to implementing effective transition practices and brainstormed ways around those barriers. However, unanticipated barriers did occur, such as a district-wide data breach and Immigration and Customs Authority raids that forced many unanticipated immigrant children into the school system. Despite such setbacks, team members tried their best and were responsive and flexible. These experiences were valuable learning opportunities for the teams, although the challenges may have slowed teams’ progress in meeting some transition goals.
- » **Collecting and using data:** The transition teams varied in their use of data and evidence. As Step 4 (“Identify data or evidence you have that practices are or are not working”) of the *Six Steps to Success* describes, teams should create a data collection process or use existing data to understand whether current transition practices are or are not working. Although each team did

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**“These are all our kids.”**

– Woonsocket Transition Team Member

<sup>1</sup> The essential elements include: (a) leadership and support from principals, (b) commitment to shared goals by all stakeholders, (c) active engagement of preschool programs, (d) shared understanding of the importance of quality early learning experiences, (e) connection with families, and (f) ready access to community resources and support.

use data to inform their transition plan, the types and depths of evidence varied from the use of informal observations to formal interviews and surveys of families and teachers. Similarly, data collection and use varied across communities in their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of their transition plans (Step 6, "Implement and evaluate the transition plan"). The West Warwick team collected both formative data to inform their efforts and summative data to evaluate their progress. The team set indicators of achievement and measurable goals. Collecting and using such data not only enhances a program's implementation, it also can help in justifying and sustaining the work. Moving forward, the Newport team plans to use SMART goals and to incorporate the transition efforts into the school improvement plan to help with sustainability and progress monitoring.

## Transition Teams' Advice

The transition team members offered the following suggestions to communities embarking on kindergarten transition efforts:

- » Look for those who are committed to helping children and families and who understand that all the different providers and schools have one common mission of supporting children.
- » Set specific transition goals that reflect a shared vision.
- » Set just a few goals at first. Strive to be realistic, but also meaningful and impactful. Understand that additional goals can always be added.
- » Establish team norms that include valuing others' opinions.
- » Foster strong relationships among team members, and encourage honest and open communication.
- » Create a shared language so that the same terms have the same meanings across Head Start, community-based preschools, and kindergarten classrooms.
- » Take comprehensive meeting notes and ensure that materials are accessible to the whole team (for example, by using Google Drive), so that everyone is updated on the group's progress even if they weren't able to attend a meeting.

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**"I do think it was very helpful when we saw other communities, what they were doing. Our [first] reaction may have 'That doesn't sound feasible for us because of different resources,' but we were able to take it and make it work for our community."**

– West Warwick Transition Team Member

- » Network with others engaged in similar efforts; this will inspire your own team members but will also inspire others, as well as enable you to share tips and resources, and foster connections locally and nationally.
- » Share expectations and standards between the early grades so that teachers understand the differences and similarities and can better align practices and prepare children.

**“Really truly understanding the differences between preschool and kindergarten and first grade—that was the biggest piece. If people can sit down and have those conversations and work through that, then they’re on the road to success.”**

– Woonsocket Transition Team Member

**“Being on this team has been amazing. RIDE’s offer of this [professional learning series] for our district is above and beyond amazing. So I’m hoping that we can continue this, and we do have plans to continue it and follow-through with it right now. This entire grant has been amazing and should continue to happen and pull other districts in. It really has been an unbelievable opportunity to be on this team and to see all the great things that we’ve done.”**

– West Warwick Transition Team Member

## Case Studies

The following cases provide promising practices of how educators across agencies can collaborate to strengthen prekindergarten-to-kindergarten transition practices. Each case study briefly describes the community's demographic, economic, and educational landscape; their transition plans and outcomes; challenges faced; and lessons learned.

### West Warwick: Using Data to Drive Curriculum Alignment, Teacher Collaboration, and Family Support

West Warwick, Rhode Island, is a small suburban town of approximately 29,000 people. Many of the town's residents are economically disadvantaged (52% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 15% live below the poverty line; the median household income is \$52,000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The town is predominately White (91.1%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (5.4%), and Black or African American (2.9%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The town supports prekindergarten children in one Head Start facility and in 10 licensed preschools, while about 250 kindergarten students attend the town's three elementary schools (RIDE, 2019).

#### Transition Plan

West Warwick's transition plan identified four goals to improve the transition experience for children:

1. Children will experience an aligned curriculum in the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten.
2. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers will learn about each other's respective classroom practices and settings in order to create a common language and common expectations, where appropriate.
3. Kindergarten teachers will increase their knowledge of and familiarity with incoming kindergarteners and their families prior to the beginning of the school year.
4. Prekindergarten children and their families will increase their knowledge of and familiarity with kindergarten in the months preceding kindergarten entrance.

The team chose these goals based on data collected about their past transition practices, including a prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher survey showing that nearly all prekindergarten teachers and all kindergarten teachers had not met with one another about curriculum. After completing the planning process, the team was equipped with a plan that detailed numerous transition activities, such as purchasing curricula for community-based centers; the team also identified potential barriers, such as funding, and assigned responsibilities to team members. The team began implementing the plan in fall 2018 and will use this plan moving forward, refining the goals and strategies as the needs of the community evolve.

## Progress toward Goals

The transition team made significant progress toward each goal, as described in more detail below.

### Children will experience an aligned curriculum in the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

To address this goal, the district purchased curricula for prekindergarten classrooms that were being used in the kindergarten classrooms: a phonemic awareness and reading readiness curriculum called *Foundations*, and a social-emotional learning curriculum called *Second Step*. During the 2019–20 school year, teachers reported that many kindergarten children who experienced *Foundations* in prekindergarten last year recognized the material and content.

The West Warwick Public Schools district also offered professional development for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. As part of the spring 2019 training, teachers created a crosswalk of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and the Common Core State Standards, thus increasing their familiarity with the standards used in each other's settings.

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**“So, things seemed to run smoother for everything this year.”**

– West Warwick Transition Team Member

An additional crosswalk activity for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers took place in November 2019, this time focusing on math and literacy strategies to help ease the transition between prekindergarten and kindergarten. This one-hour training was provided by the district math and English language arts coaches and was open to all prekindergarten programs in West Warwick. Participants learned that the prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms were working on similar standards, and they exchanged lesson plans to further align their classes. A follow-up session occurred in December 2019.

### Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers will learn about each other's respective classroom practices and settings in order to create a common language and common expectations, where appropriate.

The team organized classroom visits between the prekindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers to address this goal. The prekindergarten teachers visited the kindergarten classrooms in fall of 2018 to observe and note routines of practice that could be shared between the classrooms to create a common language and expectations where appropriate. The kindergarten teachers conducted similar visits to the prekindergarten classrooms in the spring of 2019. However, due to the large number of kindergarten teachers and the limited number of preschool classrooms, only grade-level leader teachers participated in the visits. In turn, these teachers shared their observations with other kindergarten teachers. Teacher feedback on the classroom visits was positive, and teachers reported making curricular changes as a result of their visits.

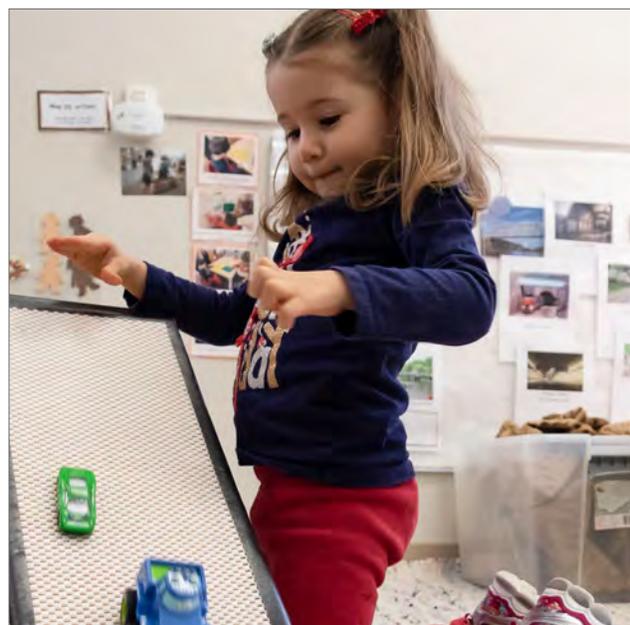
## Kindergarten teachers will increase their knowledge of and familiarity with incoming kindergarteners and their families prior to the beginning of the school year.

This goal was addressed over several phases throughout the course of the 2018–19 school year. The transition team first communicated the idea to kindergarten teachers through a letter in November 2018. They soon followed up with a survey of kindergarten teachers to understand what they would like to know about their incoming students. By February 2019, the team created a “Getting to Know You” document for all public school and community-based prekindergarten teachers and families to complete about each child entering kindergarten. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, the forms were delayed in getting to the kindergarten teachers—as of October 2019, teachers had not received them yet. However, the team plans to distribute the responsibility moving forward and use the forms in future school years.

## Prekindergarten children and their families will increase their knowledge of and familiarity with kindergarten in the months preceding kindergarten entrance.

The team addressed this goal with several transition activities representing family-school, community-school, and program-school connections. The transition team sought to communicate about their transition efforts not only to families, but also to other stakeholders in the community. One strategy was to create a public calendar that included important transition-related events, such as kindergarten registration dates, orientations, and Jumpstart to Kindergarten (the school district’s summer program) dates. The team intentionally communicated information about the transition to kindergarten in a variety of ways, such as by presenting information on the school website, sending notifications by text or email, and making phone calls.

One strategy the transition team used to address this goal was to increase attendance at the Jumpstart program, which comprises 2.5-hour sessions over two weeks in the summer. In past years, approximately two-thirds of eligible incoming kindergarteners attended this program. To increase attendance, the team improved the program’s registration process and increased communication about the program using school-community strategies. For example, one transition team member directly shared program information with a community provider, and this provider then shared the information with its families. These



efforts proved worthwhile: Attendance increased from 155 children in summer 2018 to 181 children in summer 2019.

A major activity undertaken to address this goal was streamlining the kindergarten registration system. The new system was created to provide a more efficient registration process: Families register their children online and schedule an in-person meeting with a registration staff member at the district central office. The district hired a kindergarten registration clerk to help coordinate this effort. The team advertised the new registration process using community and family connections, such as newspaper advertisements, flyers sent to current families, and “robocalls.” These efforts were successful: By the end of June 2019, approximately 87% of incoming kindergarteners were registered, a 17% increase from the previous year. Additionally, over 90% of families surveyed by the transition team were happy with the registration process, and over 90% said that the registration process was easy. Another benefit of the new system is that it allows for easier internal information-sharing.

The team created booklets about the transition process that were specific to each elementary school. These booklets were provided to incoming kindergarteners during kindergarten registration and at other events. The team also developed a six-month calendar for children and their families, provided at kindergarten registration and online. The calendar offered tips on easing the transition to kindergarten and addressed major areas of children’s development, with daily activities to support learning in these areas. This gave families a better understanding of what children should know and be able to do at this age.

The transition team worked with all but two early childhood program providers in the community during the 2018–19 school year. Collaboration with the two other programs is planned so that they will be fully involved in the transition activities in the 2019–20 school year.

To evaluate their progress toward this goal, the team also surveyed kindergarten teachers and families. This informed the team on such topics as the teachers’ perspectives on the value of classroom visits and families’ perspectives on the registration process (see *West Warwick Spotlight* inset).

### **WEST WARWICK SPOTLIGHT: DATA COLLECTION PRACTICES**

The West Warwick transition team relied on many data sources to inform their transition plan. Although they had access to some data, such as their summer program enrollment and on-time kindergarten registration numbers, they realized that they did not have data from some key players identified in the collaborative framework—teachers and families. Therefore, the team created surveys to collect baseline data in the fall and to collect outcome data in the spring. The surveys were administered online; they consisted of fewer than 10 questions for families and fewer than 20 questions for teachers, and could be completed in 10 minutes or less. The team found that the information provided was invaluable in planning and evaluating their transition activities.

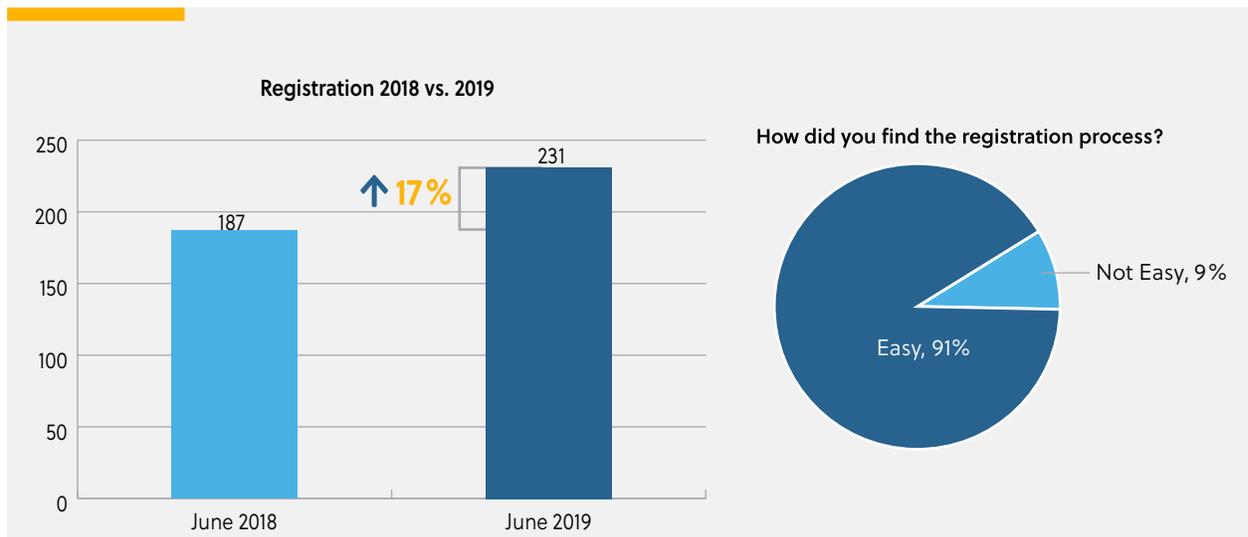
## Challenges & Lessons Learned

The West Warwick transition team experienced three significant challenges to implementing their transition plan:

- » Securing substitute teacher coverage for professional development opportunities, such as the standards crosswalk activity and transition team meetings, was often difficult.
- » The usability of the “Getting to Know You” transition forms from the prekindergarten teachers to the kindergarten teachers was compromised, due to unforeseen circumstances. Moving forward, the team plans to coordinate the process through a centralized system with increased ownership.
- » Obtaining a high survey response rate from both teachers and parents was difficult; teachers are very busy and already over-surveyed.

### Collecting and using data

The West Warwick transition team relied heavily on data to inform their efforts, from goal-setting to monitoring progress. For example, the team surveyed prekindergarten teachers to learn if their students had registered for kindergarten or visited their new elementary school. The team surveyed prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to understand if information-sharing between the two settings had improved. Finally, the team surveyed families about the transition experience and whether the new efforts this year had helped ease the transition experience for them and their children. Although obtaining a high response rate on surveys was challenging, the transition team attempted to address this challenge through frequent in-person communication with the respondents.



## Cross-site classroom visits

The cross-site classroom visits were valuable learning opportunities for both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. The transition team learned that both sets of teachers made changes to their curricula after their the visits so that their expectations were more aligned. As one teacher noted:

We've made it so that it's how they should be learning, so there's less stress . . . we can move them forward in a direction at their own pace. So, that's something I would encourage for kindergarten teachers and preschool teachers: to reach out to each other and meet.

The transition team plans to involve all prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in these visits moving forward.

## Clear, direct, and varied modes of communication

Communication with early education providers, families, and teachers was essential to the success of West Warwick's transition efforts. For example, more clear and direct communication to providers helped increase Jumpstart participation, and 42% of families surveyed by the transition team reported hearing about the kindergarten registration process from their prekindergarten teachers. The transition team used various platforms for communication, such as social media, their public calendar, phone calls, face-to-face discussions, and flyers. Moving forward, the transition team plans to personally connect with the community-based providers who were not part of the transition team in the 2018–19 school year in order to gain their involvement.

## Creating efficient systems and processes

A common theme throughout the West Warwick transition team's efforts is their focus on increasing efficiencies of systems and processes. For example, streamlining the kindergarten registration process was an effort to increase the efficiency of the user experience and the information collected. The team is also looking to increase the efficiency of the transition and Jumpstart forms, because both kindergarten and the summer program use similar yet separate forms that families must complete for each child. Such efforts will likely not only reduce the burden on families and teachers, but also provide more consistent and accurate information.

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**“My class list was complete day one . . . and we didn't have stragglers coming in for the next two weeks, which was a huge difference . . . I think that had to do with all the work we did with the registration process and the way we changed it and we made it easier for parents.”**

– West Warwick Teacher and Transition Team Member

## Next Steps

Moving forward, the team expects to continue their current transition activities. The team plans to engage all community prekindergarten teachers in kindergarten classroom visits. Additionally, a schedule is in place to allow new kindergarten teachers an opportunity to visit prekindergarten classrooms.

New ideas include plans to create a video, narrated by a child, to profile a day in the life of a kindergartener. The transition team will engage with the high school graphic arts department for assistance. The team also plans to work with the graphic arts department to brand their registration materials with the school logo—Little Wizards. Finally, they hope to expand their books about each school and to offer a community event for all incoming kindergarteners to foster a sense of community.



## Woonsocket: Deepening Collaboration in Support of Children and Families

Woonsocket, Rhode Island, is a city of approximately 42,000 people. Many of the city's residents are economically disadvantaged (75% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 24% live below the poverty line; the median household income is \$38,000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The city is predominately White (77.6%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (17.3%), and Black or African American (8.6%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The city supports prekindergarten children in four Head Start facilities and in 16 licensed preschools. Nearly 500 kindergarten students attend the city's seven elementary schools (RIDE, 2019). In the 2018–19 school year, teachers were negotiating a new contract and working without a contract for many months.

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**"We're a family."**

– Woonsocket Transition Team Member  
speaking about the team dynamics

### Transition Plan

The Woonsocket transition team initially articulated three goals at the start of the 2018–19 school year, using the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's collaborative framework:

- » Strengthen systems of communication between programs and schools.
- » Strengthen systems of communication between schools and families.
- » Support children in getting ready for kindergarten.

These goals are designed to establish deep, collaborative connections between key stakeholders. The team chose this emphasis in order to promote the sustainability of their transition plan even if there are staffing changes or turnover in the future, which is what led to the breakdown between the programs and schools during a past kindergarten transition effort. By strengthening the communication systems between early childhood education programs and schools, and between schools and families, the team hoped to lay the foundation to better support children in transitioning to kindergarten.

During the course of the year, the team articulated an additional goal: *Implement an integrated state funded prekindergarten program in the city's Head Start settings and in the Woonsocket elementary schools.* This goal arose because the city received a grant from the state to open two such programs.

## Progress toward Goals

The transition team made significant progress toward each goal, as described in more detail below.

### Strengthen systems of communication between programs and schools.

For the past several years, the Woonsocket Head Start team and the Woonsocket Public Schools team did not have a strong relationship. In fact, at the first professional learning series summit, the staff did not know one another. Over the course of the school year, through their work on the transition team, the Head Start team and the Woonsocket Public Schools team established a very close and collaborative partnership. This partnership led to improved processes (e.g., establishing class rosters) and opportunities to showcase their transition efforts (e.g., at a National Head Start Collaboration Office event). When the district was awarded four additional state-funded prekindergarten classrooms, transition team members worked closely to establish class rosters. As one team member noted, the process was “100% collaborative between the school department and Head Start. We shared data agreements and permission from parents to share the information so that we could place [the children] where they needed to be.”

The transition team’s deep collaboration was also beneficial when the Head Start team and the Woonsocket Public Schools team transitioned students from self-contained classrooms into general education prekindergarten classrooms. One transition team member noted that this “collaborative effort was probably the cornerstone of our collaboration.”

The team further addressed this goal through a variety of activities:

- » Hosting an information-exchange and discussion event for all early childhood education providers in the city, both public and private.
- » Fostering collaboration between the Head Start providers and the school district by offering kindergarten registration at Head Start locations.
- » Updating the existing prekindergarten transition form based on feedback from prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, and working with teachers to ensure that the most useful information was collected.
- » Creating an online system for sharing transition form information with kindergarten teachers.  
Note: Though this process was ultimately successful, setting the appropriate permissions so that confidential information was not shared proved to be challenging.

### Strengthen systems of communication between schools and families.

To address this goal, the transition team focused their activities around sharing information with families. To foster the community-school connection, the team held a community breakfast at the public library, where they showed a kindergarten informational video and distributed informational flyers about kindergarten. As one transition team member noted, at this event, every child received a backpack “full of ideas for preparing for the start of kindergarten.” The team also distributed a district-made calendar of events for children and families, which outlined activities to try each day to help prepare children for the start of school.

The team further addressed this goal through sharing kindergarten readiness information with Head Start students via packets. School district staff also provided a workshop at a Head Start parent conference in the spring that included information for parents on how to prepare their children for kindergarten.

### Support children in getting ready for kindergarten

The Woonsocket transition team relied on several activities to address this goal, including the creation and distribution of a kindergarten video and book. These materials are designed to orient children to kindergarten by showing the school buildings and classrooms; kindergarteners, who are Head Start alumni, appear in the video and book to explain what a day in kindergarten entails. The prekindergarten teachers used the book in their classrooms to explain what was similar and different between prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. The transition team showed the video and distributed the book at their community event at the public library. One parent explained that the event was a positive experience for her child:

He really enjoyed it. They had snacks, and they watched [the district's kindergarten transition] movie, and other kids from his class were there. Some of his [prekindergarten] teachers were there. He could ask questions if he chose to. He didn't, but some of the other kids did. It was helpful for him.

(See the inset "A Parent's Perspective" for further insights from this parent.)

#### WOONSOCKET SPOTLIGHT: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

One parent of a child who transitioned from a Head Start classroom to kindergarten in September 2019 provided her thoughts on her son's transition. As a mother of several other children who participated in Woonsocket Head Start and the public schools, she had a unique comparative perspective on this year's transition compared to previous transitions.

Overall, she believed that her son had a positive experience: "I think the transition went really well. Everything was already set up for him." Her son's teacher had information about his IEP. In fact, the parent made sure of it: "[She] did because I actually questioned her about [having his information] on Meet the Teacher night, and she was fully prepared for him. So as far as we're concerned, the transition went really well."

In reflecting on her older children's experience, she said, "I think it went a lot smoother this year than it did in the previous years." She attributed this to the transition activities, such as the community event at the library, which helped prepare her son for what to expect in kindergarten. As a parent who experienced transitions in another school district, she was very pleased with her experience with the Woonsocket Public Schools: "So far, this school district is the best school district that I've dealt with for a transition. We've been in this school district for three years, and it's been the best so far. It's the little things that you guys are trying to put in place now for the little guys that make a world of difference."

At the event, the librarians provided library resources to children to help prepare them for kindergarten, such as showing children and families age-appropriate books. By sharing kindergarten information at the local library, this event fostered a community-school connection.

Prekindergarten teachers helped address this goal by creating social connections for students who would attend the same elementary school. For example, teachers told students the specific students who would be in their kindergarten class and encouraged those friendships so that the children would have a friend in their new school. One parent shared that her child, who was in a Head Start prekindergarten classroom, participated in a drawing activity where the children drew pictures of themselves. The pictures were then arranged on the wall by which elementary school they would attend, so the children had a visual display to make peer connections.

Another strategy that was very well received by children, families, and teachers was having Head Start teachers attend the first three days of kindergarten. This facilitated the transition by providing children with welcoming faces in the classroom and allowing the kindergarten and Head Start teachers opportunities to discuss the children's strengths and needs.

In an effort to better prepare children for kindergarten, the school district provided a phonemic awareness curriculum to the prekindergarten program providers in the community. This curriculum is already in use in the kindergarten classrooms, and the transition team hopes that it will provide greater continuity for the children.

### Implement an integrated state funded prekindergarten program in the city's Head Start settings and in the Woonsocket elementary schools.

The Woonsocket Education Department (WED) and Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association (WHSCDA) worked collaboratively to come up with a plan to integrate preschoolers who receive special education into general education preschool classrooms. This ultimately required WHSCDA to apply for additional state prekindergarten funding and for WED to renovate two preschool classrooms in the Governor Pothier Elementary School. WHSCDA received the funding, and the renovations were completed for the 2019–20 school year. The WED Office of Pupil Services worked closely with WHSCDA's ERSEA and disabilities department to place the students who need special education in Head Start and prekindergarten classrooms throughout the city. Approximately 60 children, who were previously in self-contained 2.5-hour classrooms, are now enrolled in 4- or 6-hour classrooms within high-quality early learning programs.

## Challenges & Lessons Learned

The Woonsocket team experienced several challenges:

- » Working with teachers during the “work to rule” situation.
- » Forming relationships between the many early childhood education providers in the city. The team overcame this challenge through honest conversations and establishing a collective agreement that team members could openly share their opinions.
- » Conforming to the Department of Children and Families’ regulations for the Head Start programs operating in the elementary schools; meeting these regulations required new construction, such as additional bathroom facilities.
- » Logistical challenges related to the opening of two new Head Start classrooms, which included transportation and furnishing the classrooms with needed materials.
- » Engaging other early childhood education providers in the city in the transition activities, such as transition team meetings and community events. Although these providers were always invited, they did not always attend.



The Woonsocket team learned valuable lessons throughout the year, including the importance of solid relationships, honest communication, and creating a shared vision for the team. All these factors contributed to the overall success of the transition efforts. For example, the team’s strong collaboration and communication allowed for a smooth experience of assigning students to classrooms. Moreover, having written documentation about each child made the assignment process easier when transitioning students from self-contained classrooms to general education classrooms.

Additionally, the team understood well the importance of organization, that is, having organized documentation of their implementation efforts, such as meeting materials. The team maintained a tracking sheet with their goals, changes, and progress, which they updated weekly. Documenting their implementation helped to keep all team members abreast of the team’s efforts and also facilitated information-sharing at national events.

The team was very pleased with the new transition practice of having Head Start teachers join the kindergarten classrooms for the first three days of school. One teacher noted that this practice was good for everyone involved:

It was good for the families, too. I think they felt comfort having a Head Start person there as well as the kids. But then, for us—I had a kid who was screaming and did not want to come up to me, and the Head Start teacher said, “Oh, he does that, and then as soon as he gets familiar with you, he’s fine.” It was good to have that bridge for students, families, and teachers.

The transition team plans to continue this practice moving forward.

## Next Steps

The transition team was pleased with their progress toward their transition goals over the past year. They believe that they have met and exceeded their goals and have already articulated additional goals. Moving forward, the team will continue to address these goals and work toward their new goals. For example, although the transition team undertook several strategies to strengthen communication between their schools and families, the team hopes to expand on their efforts in the future. They plan to offer some supports in the kindergarten classrooms that the Head Start programs provide, such as the *Circle of Security* program.

The team also plans to implement a kindergarten ramp-up program next summer. They had hoped to provide the program this past summer for approximately 40 students who had not experienced preschool. However, due to fiscal reasons, they were not able to do so. The team is already planning ways to address this challenge.

To further strengthen communication and the partnership between programs and schools, the Woonsocket transition team plans to increase their efforts to garner participation from private providers. Over the past year, the team attempted to include other early childhood education providers in the city through invitations to participate in transition team meetings and community events and by providing progress updates. However, there was not consistent representation from these providers at meetings or events. The team would like more participation from these providers to ensure that all Woonsocket children experience a positive transition to kindergarten.



## Newport: Improving Kindergarten Registration and Information Sharing

This coastal city is home to approximately 25,000 people. Many of the city's residents are economically disadvantaged (64% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 15% live below the poverty line; the median household income is \$65,000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The city is predominately White (83.3%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (11.2%), and Black or African American (5.8%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The city supports prekindergarten children in one Head Start facility and in six licensed preschools, while nearly 200 kindergarten students attend the city's one large elementary school (RIDE, 2019).

### Transition Plan

Newport's transition plan includes three goals that address increasing the on-time kindergarten registration rate and information-sharing between programs and schools:

- » Improve the kindergarten registration process so families are registering by early August, thus allowing all families to participate fully in the Newport school district's transition activities.
- » Determine the most relevant and important transition information that prekindergarten teachers will share with kindergarten teachers for each child leaving prekindergarten and entering a Newport kindergarten program.
- » Foster knowledge of and familiarity with classroom settings and expectations between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

The team identified their first goal based on historical data showing that many families register for kindergarten outside of the designated registration windows, often immediately prior to or during the first few days of school. Late registrants made it difficult for the district to plan for the number of kindergarten teachers needed and the ability to assign students to the most appropriate classrooms. Additionally, late registrations mean that teachers do not have the developmental and social information they need about each student prior to the start of school.

Team members also chose to focus their efforts on information-sharing between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to enhance children's transition experiences.

**"The final days of school for our PreK children were filled with excitement. The children talked a lot about 'their new school' and the playground and lunchroom, showing that they had been to some of the K-Transition opportunities that we set forth in our goals."**

– Prekindergarten Teacher and Newport Transition Team Member

## Progress toward Goals

The transition team made significant progress toward each goal, as described in more detail below.

Improve the kindergarten registration process so families are registering by early August, thus allowing all families to participate fully in the Newport school district's transition activities.

To support this goal, the Newport transition team increased the number of kindergarten registration events from three to four. The team fostered community-school connections by hosting two events at the site of a local community partner and advertising at community childcare providers and community buildings, such as the Newport Mental Health Center. To maximize their reach, all flyers were translated into Spanish. The team tracked attendance and registered about 25 families at each event. At one event in May, called *Sailing into Kindergarten* (see inset), 40 families participated and registered their children.

Despite these efforts, the district still experienced a high number of late registrants. By the first week of school, approximately 142 students were registered, representing 83% of the October 2019 enrollment. The team attributed the high number of late registrants to an influx of new immigrant families who missed the general registration events, were unfamiliar with the process of registration, and who often lacked the appropriate documentation needed for registration. A lack of appropriate documents was a common challenge among Newport families in general, which caused delays in the registration system.

### NEWPORT TRANSITION TEAM SPOTLIGHT: SAILING INTO KINDERGARTEN

While not explicitly stated, an additional transition goal was to develop a significant presence in the community and to increase outreach events to support the transition efforts. The Newport team held four kindergarten registration events, beginning in April with a spaghetti dinner and school tours. *Sailing into Kindergarten*, an event held in May, gave families more information about kindergarten. Registration materials were provided, and families were offered support from interpreters and staff to complete the necessary paperwork. Kindergarten teachers gave tours of the kindergarten classrooms and provided specific information about the daily routines. Staff showed the children and families a video depicting a typical day in kindergarten, and families and children received a book about their "new school" in English and/or Spanish. Over 40 families and all kindergarten teachers attended the event.

As a follow-up, the district offered a second *Sailing into Kindergarten* celebration on a Saturday in August. This consisted of school tours, touch-a-truck (exploring a variety of vehicles), an exhibit from the local aquarium, and school bus rides. Two kindergarten teachers and many families attended this event, which provided incoming children and their families with opportunities to familiarize themselves with the school building, buses, teachers, and other children.

\* The Newport district offers all incoming kindergarten children the option to participate in a kindergarten "soft start," where teachers observe the children in the classroom setting. The goals are to acclimate the children to kindergarten and to gather information about the children to aid in the finalization of class rosters.

### Determine the most relevant and important transition information that prekindergarten teachers will share with kindergarten teachers for each child leaving prekindergarten and entering a Newport kindergarten program.

Using input from teachers, the transition team created a common transition form to address this goal. All prekindergarten teachers from all early childhood providers in Newport are asked to complete one form per child, with input from parents and guardians. The form addresses students' social-emotional skills, physical development and self-help skills, approaches to learning and language, services received (e.g., speech therapy), and other input. This year, the teachers from all but one community provider in Newport used the form. The team reported that the forms were shared with teachers in a timely manner, so they had an understanding of the students at the very beginning of the school year. Additionally, the district assigned one kindergarten teacher and a district coordinator to meet with the prekindergarten teachers to review each child's form. The teacher and coordinator met in person with each public prekindergarten teacher to discuss each child's information, and the prekindergarten teacher could provide additional context. The kindergarten teacher said that this process and the information were helpful in creating class rosters and supplemented what the teachers observed about the children during the optional kindergarten "soft start" days prior to the official start of school.\*

School and district administrators report that the forms were also very useful in providing administrators with the information they needed to support families through the registration process and for gauging how many prekindergarten students had not yet registered.

### Foster knowledge of and familiarity with classroom settings and expectations between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

To address this goal, the transition plan included various activities that not only increased teachers' knowledge of and familiarity with classroom settings, but also enhanced children and families' knowledge of and familiarity with kindergarten. Specifically, the transition team provided materials to increase children and families' familiarity with the kindergarten setting and daily activities. The team created a video that showcased the Pell Elementary School and its teachers, the kindergarten classrooms and other rooms (such as the cafeteria and library), and the various modes of transportation children use to get to and from school. The team also created a complementary picture book. These materials were available in both English and Spanish and shared at the district registration events and during the optional "soft start" days prior to the official start of school. The book was also used by the state's prekindergarten classrooms as part of their curriculum, which supports both child-school and program-school connections. The transition team heard very positive feedback from families about the book and about the transition experience. As one prekindergarten teacher noted, the families felt more comfortable sending their children to kindergarten because they had seen the school and had met some of the people their children would be with throughout the day. She also observed that the children were excited about their new school.

Throughout the year, the team shared curricular materials between the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to familiarize them with the learning and social expectations in each setting. Additionally, on one occasion the team convened educators from the community for an informal gathering where they discussed the kindergarten transition form. The team also created a plan for kindergarten teachers to visit prekindergarten classrooms and vice versa.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Newport transition team faced a number of challenges in implementing their transition plan, yet none were insurmountable. Many of the challenges related to the kindergarten registration process, for example:

- » Having enough staff, including translators, for registration events
- » Supporting families who struggled to provide the required documentation for registration
- » Accommodating the unanticipated influx of immigrant kindergarten children in late August
- » Providing coverage for cross-site classroom visits (i.e., kindergarten teachers visiting prekindergarten classrooms and vice versa)

In response to these challenges, the team learned a number of valuable lessons:

- » Plan early for events in order to secure enough staff participation, and hold events earlier in the year.
- » Secure support from the district registration office to assist with translation services, processing applications, and providing continued outreach to families whose packets are incomplete or who have not registered.
- » Invite someone from the Parent-Teacher Organization to join the transition team, which can enhance communication with families and benefit the team.
- » If the transition plan goals relate to kindergarten registration, invite school district registration personnel to join the transition team.
- » Have a dedicated transition team to provide outreach events to families, such as those the team provided in 2018–19.



The team also learned the value of having educators and administrators from both the prekindergarten and the kindergarten/public school district settings on the transition team. The

team attributed the collaboration between these groups as a key factor in making progress toward their goals and especially in fostering knowledge between settings.

## Next Steps

The transition team intends to continue implementing their transition plan, revising goals and adding new goals as needed. Although the team was not yet able to implement their cross-site classroom visit plan due to challenges in obtaining substitute teachers, they are committed to working toward this program-school connection activity moving forward.

The team plans to sustain their work by integrating their goals into the elementary school's school improvement plan. As one district administrator noted, "Having the plan in our school improvement plan with SMART goals will ensure sustainability."

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**"I'm just thankful that we have this opportunity to have this team and be able to meet, because we had issues trying to get these parents in and get them registered. And without the time, without the funding, and without the resources, it would have stayed the same. It wouldn't have changed. And now we're able to move forward with some changes and collect the data and hopefully see the huge increase in everything we've done."**

– West Warwick kindergarten teacher

## Implications and Considerations

During the 2018–19 school year, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) supported three communities in creating and implementing transition plans to create more positive transition experiences for children and their families. During EDC's professional learning and coaching series, the transition teams followed the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's Six Steps to Success process to build, implement, and evaluate kindergarten transition plans. This evaluation found that the transition teams fully embraced the cross-agency transition team structure, which fostered strong collaborative relationships. Additionally, transition teams found the training and support they received to be effective. Given these findings and those presented in this report, there are several implications for RIDE and for transition teams as they move forward with this work.

## Implications for RIDE

### *Provide varying levels of support to communities for their transition practices.*

As communities across Rhode Island continue to expand their prekindergarten programs, there is an increased need for training to support positive transition practices. It may not be feasible for the state to financially support every community with intensive professional learning and coaching on transition practices. Therefore, RIDE may want to consider offering varying levels of support, such as a toolkit combined with participation in a statewide one-day summit, a toolkit and a multi-day professional learning summit series, or a combination of a toolkit, coaching, and a professional learning summit sessions. RIDE should also consider how it will allocate the various support options (e.g., by district socio-economic demographics).

### *Create sustained processes and structures for school districts and community partners across the state to collaborate on a regular basis, such as through regional transition team planning days.*

Transition teams formed strong, collaborative relationships through their transition work together. Each team plans to continue their efforts and have structures in place to continue their collaboration, such as standing meetings each month. However, the teams also valued convening as a statewide network in addition to the time they spent in their own districts during their team coaching sessions. RIDE could play a role in offering regional or statewide meetings for teams to learn from one another. This could be especially beneficial if the communities from this first cohort can convene with communities from later cohorts.

## Considerations for Transition Teams

### *Support the presence of all teachers in future professional learning series meetings.*

Staff coverage for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and community-based providers was a challenge. Although compensation was available through the grant, the community-based preschools found it difficult to find coverage for their staff to participate in the summits and meetings. To have representation from important partners, transition teams should consider using multiple and flexible approaches to garner involvement—for example, have a virtual option for meetings, post meeting notes online and allow members to provide written input, or meet after school hours on occasion. Additionally, when proposing a professional learning series, communities should include stipends for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in their proposals.

### *Create a data collection plan and use data to evaluate transition practices over time.*

The Six Steps to Success recommends that transition teams create a data collection process or use existing data to understand whether current transition practices are or are not working. Although each transition team did use data to inform their transition plans, the types and depths of evidence varied from the use of informal observations to formal interviews and surveys of families and teachers. Similarly, data collection and use varied across communities, particularly in their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of their transition plans. When programs collect and use such data, it not only enhances the program's implementation, it can also help justify and sustain the work. Therefore, the transition work should emphasize creating a data collection plan, and teams should document the strategies that they will use to collect and make the best use of their data.

## Closing

Overall, participants were very appreciative of the opportunity to engage in this work and to convene with one another. They benefited not only from their local meetings with their coaches, but also from the Summit series content and the exchange across communities. These communities' experiences should contribute substantially to future transition efforts. The findings from this evaluation suggest that as Rhode Island continues to move toward universal prekindergarten, supporting the transition to kindergarten will be valuable and appreciated by community stakeholders.



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## **SECTION 9**

# **Family Engagement in Transitions and From Preschool Special Education to Kindergarten**



# Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten

The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement has created a Research to Practice Series on the Family Engagement Outcomes of the Office of Head Start (OHS) Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework. One in the series, this resource addresses the “Family Engagement in Transitions” Outcome: “Parents and families support and advocate for their child’s learning and development as they transition to new learning environments” and focuses on the transition to kindergarten.

This resource presents a summary of selected research, promising practices, and program strategies intended to be useful for Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), and other early childhood programs.

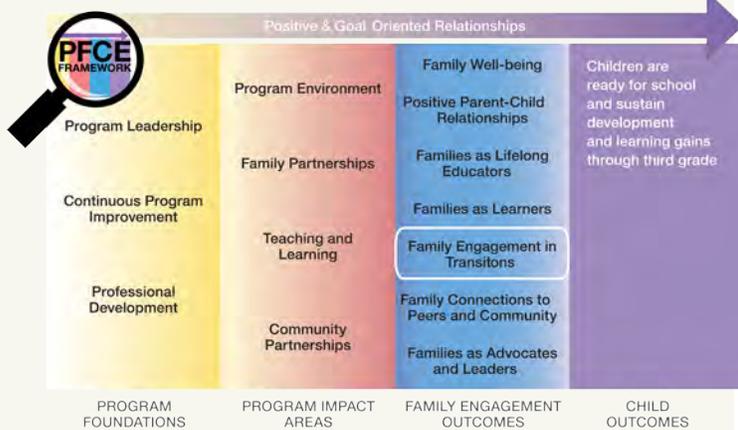
## Introduction

Children experience many big and small transitions in their early years. Small transitions may include moving from playtime to cleanup, from hand washing to snack time, or from playing outdoors to coming back into the classroom. Big transitions might include moving from home to Early Head Start or Head Start, from being an only child to becoming a big brother or sister, or leaving Head Start to go to kindergarten. Of all of these transitions, the transition to kindergarten is one of the biggest. This is a major event in the lives of children and families, and a pivotal point for establishing the kinds of practices that can help sustain gains children have made in their early learning settings.

The transition to kindergarten can be a time of great excitement and joy for everyone involved. For children, it is an opportunity to learn new things, master new skills, and proudly declare, “I’m going to kindergarten.”<sup>1</sup> For families, it can bring a sense of delight as their children reach another milestone. For Head Start and other preschool educators, it is a time to reflect on the progress the children have made.

This transition can also be a time of uncertainty and concern about the unknown. For children, it may involve a loss of friends and teachers who have worked to win a place in their hearts. At the same time, transition involves a separation from a safe, familiar, and loving setting.

### OHS PFCE Framework



The OHS PFCE Framework is a research-based approach to program change that shows how Head Start and Early Head Start programs can work together as a whole—across systems and service areas—to promote family engagement and children’s learning and development.

<sup>1</sup> For more resources on the child perspective, read “Transitions from the Children’s Perspective” at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/000685-Transitions-from-the-Childrens-Perspective.pdf>; and Dockett & Perry, 1999; 2003 (see full citation at the end of this document).



These changes affect many parents, too. They face the realization that their babies are quickly growing up and a sense that their children's dependency on them is fading. Some wonder, "Are they ready? Am I ready?" Many parents who have played a leadership role in their child's program might also wonder if the new setting will engage them in a similar way.

Preschool educators may experience a feeling of sadness at saying goodbye to children they have worked with for several years and worry what the next year will bring. For kindergarten teachers, it is a time to wonder, "Will my new group of children be ready, willing, and excited about working with each other and with me?" For community providers, particularly those in health services, it is a time to prepare their facilities and staff. In many states, there are appointments for health physicals and immunizations required for public school enrollment.



## The Importance of Smooth, Successful Transitions: What We Know

Parent participation in transition activities prior to the new school year is strongly associated with children's self-confidence, liking of school, and overall happiness in kindergarten (Hubbell, Plantz, Condelli, & Barrett, 1987). When the transition to kindergarten includes opportunities for children and their families to learn about the new setting, build relationships, and experience continuity in curriculum, assessments, and relationship quality across their changing settings, children show greater school readiness (Hubbell et al., 1987; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008), reduced stress at the beginning of school (Hubbell et al., 1987), and stronger academic growth over the kindergarten year (Ahtola et al., 2011; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

When early childhood education (ECE) programs and schools actively engage families in their child's transition to kindergarten, and when they are responsive to families' efforts to participate in these transitions, families show increased involvement during the kindergarten year (Schulting et al., 2005). This is particularly important given that family involvement in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten relates to better social skills (Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010), higher academic performance in math and language literacy in kindergarten, and higher achievement through high school (Barnard, 2004; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003). In short, when children experience more stability in their early school settings and in the relationships with the adults in these settings, they perform better socially and academically (Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009; Tran & Winsler, 2011) during their kindergarten year and beyond.

In order for children to feel safe and secure in their new learning environments, they need guidance, assurance, and as much continuity in expectations and experiences as possible (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Parents need the same thing. As one Head Start mother shared with us, "I don't think there is a very good transition of parents...it is a huge shock for parents who were in this warm, welcoming, all-encompassing coverage of a Head Start program... then you go to the public school system and it's like culture shock." Programs can set the stage for how families will handle their children's future educational experiences and transitions (to first grade, to middle school, to high school, etc.) by engaging them in this transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Staff can share all of the information families will need and support their skills as advocates by being responsive to their concerns.

Transition practices need to be effective to make a difference. Effective transition practices are activities that teachers, families, and community members can use to create supports and foster familiarity across early childhood settings and kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). These practices should be initiated early—prior to kindergarten—and should be tailored to the cultural, linguistic, and learning needs of individual children and families. They should also ensure that standards, curriculum, support services, and assessments for Head Start and kindergarten are carefully aligned (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Patton & Wang, 2012; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Head Start and other ECE programs can share these tasks with families, elementary schools, and other community partners. Collaboration and communication among everyone involved is the most important part of achieving successful and seamless transitions.

## Promising Practices

In the following sections, we highlight examples of promising practices that Head Start and other ECE staff are using to engage families across learning settings to help support children as they transition to kindergarten. To learn about these practices, we talked to parents, administrators (associate and executive directors), healthcare staff, family development managers, and educators from a variety of settings. These settings included a health clinic, Head Start programs, and other parenting and early education programs from across the United States.



**For each PFCE Framework Element described below, we provide examples of programs and promising practices. However, each program integrates multiple Framework Elements, making connections that increase the level of engagement and success.**

### Program Leadership: Using transition plans to create a shared vision

Head Start and school leaders share responsibility for ensuring successful transitions. Teachers have noted that a lack of guidance and support from leadership, including the absence of a district-wide plan, are major barriers to putting good transition practices into action (Pianta et al., 1999). One solution is the transition plan. Transition plans typically include a list of team members and their responsibilities; goals for students, families, and staff; and steps to reach those goals (for a transition plan template, see <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/transition/plan.html>). The best transition plans include the ideas of diverse groups of administrators and teachers from Head Start and kindergarten, parents, and community members. When members represent the different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of children and families in the community, transition plans, forms, and activities are meaningful and understandable to everyone.

Transition plans promote collaboration. They include regular opportunities for joint training for early childhood and elementary school teachers. One kindergarten teacher reflected on her experience of bringing everyone together to form a transition team and plan. She said, "Making time to sit down with everyone at the table has made all the difference for our kids. They are coming to school ready to learn."

The transition plan for the Orange Public School District in New Jersey has, for example, a process for collaborating across pre-kindergarten programs and elementary schools (from kindergarten through third grade). Their plan includes ways to share information about individual children with their future teacher and ways to align the early learning curriculum with kindergarten and elementary curricula.

### Continuous Improvement: Improving information-sharing practices within and across settings

Programs can use survey data, focus groups, and information gained from informal conversations with families, staff, and children about what worked and what didn't. This will help programs make ongoing improvements to existing transition practices (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). For example, a private non-profit that provides Head Start and Early Head Start and health and dental services to families in Rhode Island used input from families to improve their practices. They learned that parents wanted to be more involved in sharing child-level information with elementary schools. In previous years, staff informed parents about the information they were planning to share with the public school and asked parents to sign off on the release of information. In response to family feedback, the program decided to make the process more conversational between parents and the teacher. The release form was updated to include a section that asks parents, "What do you want the public school to know about your child?"

A New Jersey school district regularly strengthens a particular information-sharing practice. Each child in the district has a portfolio that is updated throughout the preschool year. It includes assessments, anecdotes, and examples of the student's work. Preschool and kindergarten teachers co-create the checklist of items to be included in each child's portfolio. Prior to the start of the school year, portfolios are hand-delivered to kindergarten teachers who use these packets to learn about their new students and inform their instruction. In the first month of school, preschool staff follow up with kindergarten teachers to discuss the quality of the portfolios and ideas for improvement.

### Professional Development: Training staff to work with families and community partners

Teachers who have had specialized training in transitions report using more of all types of transition practices (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). Staff training may be one way to expand the range of transition practices that staff are ready to use. For its transition-to-kindergarten model, called *Ready Freddy*, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development trains elementary school staff on how to create a friendlier environment for families and collaborate with external community partners to help with door-to-door outreach and marketing related to kindergarten registration (see <http://www.readyfreddy.org/>). They also use feedback and modeling to help *Kindergarten Club* (a summer club for at-risk children and families) staff who are anxious about leading discussions with parents speak to parents with confidence (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012).

**Family Partnerships:  
Empowering families to advocate for their child during the transition process**

Parents and teachers have to work together to meet the diverse learning needs of children. For children who need extra support, families can work with programs to understand their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and know about their school’s compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Their children should continue receiving services begun in the preschool years that are still necessary in kindergarten. Programs can help families of dual language learners learn about their rights. Programs can also provide relevant information in the preferred languages of families, as well as English. All families need to feel empowered to exercise these rights and to seek out the community resources they need to do so (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Knowing these rights and successfully advocating for them in a new school can be difficult. Strong staff-family partnerships can help.

**Teaching and Learning:  
Sharing child assessment data to engage families in children’s development**

Early childhood programs can begin preparing families for the transition to kindergarten as soon as a child enrolls in the program. For example, they can respond to families’ interests and concerns by sharing child assessment results with families in ways that are clear to them. Through this process, programs help families feel comfortable looking at, understanding, and talking about data (Weiss, Lopez, & Stark, 2011).

*Project EAGLE* Community Programs of the University of Kansas Medical Center, for example, use routine screenings, such as the Early Communication Indicator, to assess children’s short-term learning. Staff plot the findings and create graphs that reflect children’s growth and their use of multiple words. By sharing these graphs and having conversations about them with families, staff provide families

with information to answer important questions: “Is my child developing normally?” and “What can I do to help him become more ready for school?” (National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, Lopez, Rosenberg, & Westmoreland, 2010). With the help of teachers, families can use the information about their children to take additional action to support their learning.



**Strong partnerships among families, programs, and schools lead to greater success for children. To learn about how one Head Start program in Laguna, New Mexico, prepares children and families for the transition to kindergarten, visit <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/kindergarten.html>.**

**Community Partnerships:  
Offering comprehensive services through back-to-school fairs**

Interagency collaboration has been found to have a positive effect on school readiness because of the increase in resources and professional knowledge that it brings (Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006). For a more effective approach to transitions, Head Start partnerships can extend beyond families and elementary schools to other community partners. Specifically, Head Start programs and staff can look for ways to partner with health, mental health, food and nutrition providers, and out-of-school organizations.

In Loudoun County, Virginia, for example, the Loudoun Community Health Center, the Junior League of Northern Virginia (JLNV, an organization of female volunteers), and the Loudoun County Public Schools Head Start Program partner each summer to sponsor a Back-to-School Health Fair. Doctors, nurses, and clinic staff volunteer their time and services to provide free physical exams and immunizations required for kindergarten entry. JLNV volunteers provide each child with a backpack filled with supplies (donated by JLNV members and local and national businesses) that are on the county’s kindergarten school supply list.



## Conclusion: Bringing It All Together

All Head Start Programs are committed to positive family and child outcomes, but programs can differ in many ways. Programs have families with diverse needs, different relationships with local schools and community programs, and a range of available resources. Some local schools are close distances to Head Start programs while others are difficult to reach. And Head Start programs enroll children with different temperaments, personalities, and backgrounds. They all, however, can help promote successful transitions by exercising proactive leadership, demonstrating a commitment to continuously improve transition processes, and engaging in community collaboration.

Head Start and other preschool programs and schools can help families understand new administrative processes, and they can support families' emotional experiences during the transition to kindergarten. Programs can also foster family partnerships that engage families in transition-related activities that reinforce parents' roles as teachers, learners, and advocates. These practices can help programs support children and families as they face the challenges of transitioning to kindergarten. Support from programs and schools can help families overcome their concerns about the upcoming transitions, and enjoy the excitement of the changes and opportunities ahead.

**As programs, families, and communities work together toward the goal of engaging families in transitions, they are better equipped with information and skills to help children successfully move to new learning settings.**

## What Can Programs Do?

**Form a Transition Team.** Establish a collaborative team of parents, teachers, administrators, and community staff whose members are directly affected by the transition. Include team members that represent the different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of your community to help develop forms and activities that are accessible to everyone. To learn how to form a team, go to <http://www.readyfreddy.org/transition-teams/>, or read *Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting with Children, Families, & Schools*, by Robert Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre.

**Train Staff to Work with Families through Transitions.** Offer professional development programs for your staff and encourage your partner elementary schools to do the same. Try scheduling joint training or home visits that bring early childhood and elementary school staff together.

**Assemble a Kindergarten Transition Panel and Host a Panel Discussion Session with Families.** Convene a panel of experts who can address the specific strengths and needs of your program and community. Panelists can include

parents of current or former kindergarten students, teachers from schools and ECE programs (including Head Start), administrators, and representatives from programs that support the unique needs of families (e.g. early intervention for children with special needs).



**Help Families Learn How to Advocate for their Children and Access the Appropriate Resources.** Provide information to families about how to access extra support for themselves and their children once they reach kindergarten. Offer opportunities for families to share their children's strengths and challenges with their new school.

**Develop Systems for Sharing Information.** Collaborate with your partner elementary schools and families to determine what types of information should be shared. A document prepared by the Ohio Department of Education (see <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p267401ccp2/id/5102>) includes examples of data-sharing techniques to help teachers and parents ease children's transitions to kindergarten.

**Develop Community Partnerships to Address Children's Needs for Transitions.** Work with partners in your community who can help ensure that children's physical, mental, and emotional health needs are met as they transition to kindergarten. These partnerships can and should be mutually beneficial. For example, during transition events, partners from "out-of-school-time" organizations can talk to families about the importance of engaging children beyond the school day and use the opportunity to enroll students in their programs. Similarly, libraries can use the partnership as a new avenue to help families learn about their community's educational programs.

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## Transition from Preschool

### Special Education to Kindergarten

Children's transition from preschool to kindergarten is successful for families and children when collaborative relationships exist between the preschool and kindergarten programs. Personnel from early care and education programs, preschool special education, family resource and support programs, and elementary schools need to plan and coordinate transition activities for families before and after a child's entry into kindergarten. Collaborative planning, clear communication, and a variety of transition activities support child and family preparation for and adjustment to the new setting.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

## Learning Guide: Communication and Coordination in Transition Planning

- Form a team that includes preschool and kindergarten staff, school administrators, parents, and other key members to plan, coordinate, and evaluate transition activities that occur before and after the kindergarten year begins. Designate one or more staff to coordinate the development of a transition plan that informs the child's transition from preschool programs, preschool special education programs, or other preschool programs into kindergarten.
- Share key records with parental permission to coordinate parents' and teachers' participation in an IEP transition meeting. Work collaboratively with families to design special education services and supports for the child in the future kindergarten setting.
- Coordinate meetings with the kindergarten teacher once staff assignments are finalized. Continue discussions about child interests and strengths and address parents' and teachers' concerns about the child's transition to the kindergarten program.
- Ensure kindergarten and preschool program staff are knowledgeable about their respective program policies and procedures, so that families receive clear and accurate information about the requirements for kindergarten enrollment. Provide opportunities for parents to learn about kindergarten policies, visit the new classroom, and meet kindergarten and administrative staff. Remind families of open houses, informational meetings, and other kindergarten activities.
- Support families to identify their goals for their child's participation in kindergarten. Encourage parents to share their knowledge about their child's abilities, strengths, interests, and challenges, as well as the different kinds of supports their child will need to succeed in kindergarten.
- Talk with or read books to children about what they will experience in kindergarten, including kindergarten activities, routines, opportunities, and expectations. Provide opportunities for each child to visit the kindergarten classroom he or she will attend, meet teachers and other children, and observe classroom activities.
- Once the school year begins, help parents know how they can be involved in their children's kindergarten classroom. Communicate with family members about how plans for supporting the child are working and how the child is adjusting in the kindergarten setting.

### A Quick Peek

Jennifer, the Head Start disabilities coordinator; Maria, the Head Start classroom teacher; and Alberto, the preschool special educator are working with the Ramirez family to prepare for the transition of Lily, who has special needs, and twin Luisa to kindergarten in the fall. The preschool staff and the school's transition coordinator have worked together on a community transition team and are knowledgeable about activities the local school and the school system offer to parents whose children will be entering kindergarten. A transition plan is in place for the Ramirez family that reflects their wishes and concerns for their children's participation in kindergarten. The school staff have provided opportunities for the parents to attend the school's open house/ orientation event and visit the school to meet the kindergarten teacher and visit her classroom with their daughters. An IEP meeting is scheduled to determine services and supports for Lily in the kindergarten setting. The preschool team and the kindergarten teacher will work with the Ramirez family to ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten in the fall and have already discussed how ongoing communication among the parents and their team will be coordinated.



### You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Family members report transition planning activities are useful for increasing their knowledge and supporting their decision-making.
- Family members are familiar with kindergarten policies, curricular approaches, and daily routines and activities.
- Family members develop positive relationships with kindergarten staff.

Online resources about facilitating the transition from preschool special education to kindergarten include the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's [Transition to Kindergarten activities](#) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) web page on [Transition to Kindergarten](#).

## SECTION 10

# Integrating Attendance into the Transition to Kindergarten



# EARLY MATTERS

## Integrating Attendance Into Kindergarten Transition



February 2019

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## What Is the Transition to Kindergarten?

The transition into kindergarten, whether from a preschool or from home, represents an important milestone in a family's life. As children move into elementary school, there is a unique opportunity for schools to establish positive relationships with families and to encourage the development of habits that promote long-term success in school. A growing number of schools, preschools, districts, and communities now offer supports and programs to help families and children navigate this new experience.

Quality transition programming can be especially important for vulnerable populations such as families with children with special needs or those who speak a language other than English. Other vulnerable groups include families from a community with a history of negative experiences with educational institutions or those who are struggling with barriers related to poverty.

## Why Address Attendance During Kindergarten Transition?

Helping families overcome challenges to getting to preschool or school and nurturing a habit of consistent on-time attendance is an often overlooked element of supporting a smooth transition to kindergarten. Research shows that students who miss 10 percent or more of the school year (just 2 days each month) in the very early years are at risk of falling behind in reading and math by third grade.

Unfortunately kindergarten is typically the grade with the highest levels of chronic absence in elementary school. Kindergarten chronic absence is a warning sign that families don't have the supports they need to overcome barriers to attendance prior to and during kindergarten. This is most often true for vulnerable populations that lack the resources to make up for lost learning time.

Public policies now require attention to reducing chronic absence, defined as missing 10 percent or more of school or preschool for any reason - including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions. The Head Start Performance standards require programs to monitor and address the needs of students who miss 10 percent or more of the program. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires all states to include chronic absence in publicly available school report cards. And in 36 states and the District of Columbia, chronic absence is a school accountability metric starting in kindergarten.



### Who Can Make a Difference?

**Principals and preschool directors** are the critical leaders at the site level, creating the environment and the strategies that encourage families to make sure their children go to school every day and are on time. Site leaders are pivotal to ensuring every employee in the building – from bus drivers, office staff and cafeteria workers to teachers, social workers and health professionals – helps establish a positive, welcoming climate that motivates and supports consistent on-time attendance. The resources within this toolkit provide a “how-to” for integrating attention to attendance into key practices designed to smooth the transition to kindergarten.

**District administrators, public agency and non-profit leaders, policy makers, funders and other influential stakeholders** can use this toolkit to recognize how they can individually and collectively support implementation of the recommended practices. Attendance is more likely to be integrated into kindergarten transition practices when access to data, community-wide campaigns, professional development and funding are available.

# What is in this Toolkit?

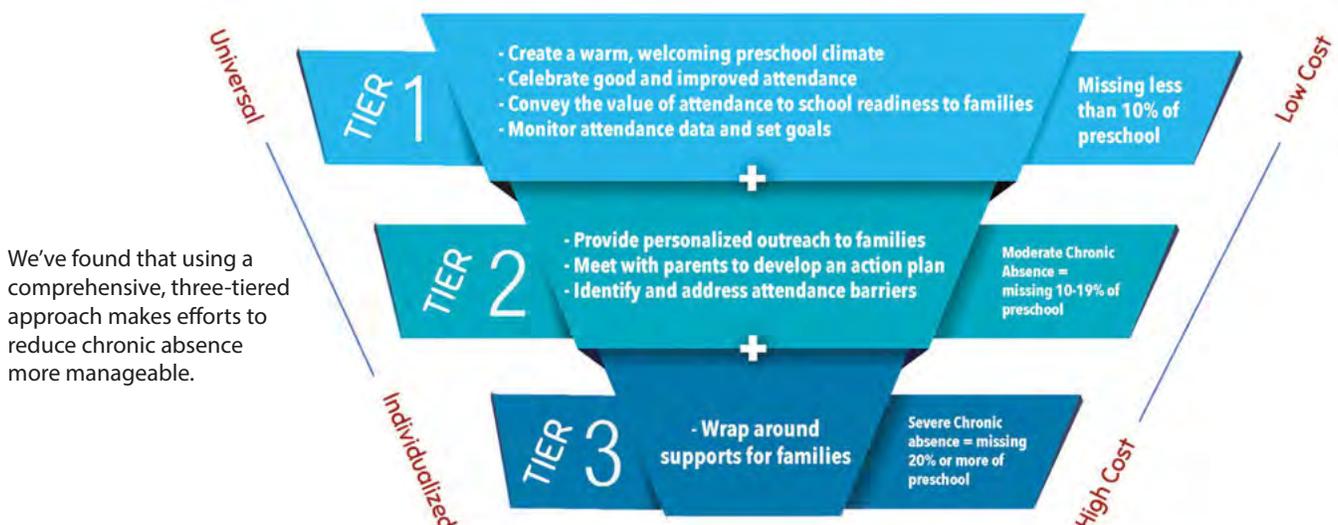


Early Matters offers ideas, resources and inspiring examples for schools, preschools and districts to help incorporate attention to attendance into practices for improving the transition to kindergarten at the site level. A separate set of practices are offered for districts and community partners to reinforce and encourage such practices through system level supports. Inspiring examples from sites and districts around the country show how integrating attendance awareness and positive attendance habits into transition practices can strengthen the impact of high quality programming and improve the likelihood that all children, including our most vulnerable students, can reach their full potential.

## Site Level Practices

Schools, preschool and districts can integrate attendance into these five site level practices that support the transition to kindergarten.

- 1. Address Attendance During Transition Activities.** Research consistently shows positive results when educators address transition with intentionality. Orienting children to kindergarten should begin during the preschool year. Transition activities that include a strong emphasis on attendance help parents and children connect attendance with academic success.
- 2. Discuss Attendance When Welcoming New Families.** Family-teacher and teacher-child relationships are the bedrock of enthusiasm for attending school and learning. Relationship building is a one-on-one effort that takes patience and persistence. Outreach can range from a personal call home before school starts to a comprehensive year-long home visiting program. The more personal and warm the contact is, the more effective it is likely to be.
- 3. Equip Families to Connect Attendance and Educational Success.** Children whose families hold high expectations, set goals, monitor progress and actively assist with learning at home are most likely to do well in school. Schools, preschools and communities can provide parents with a variety of opportunities to learn about how to support their children's education. Integrating attention to attendance into these efforts is essential.
- 4. Use Attendance to Nurture a Strong School Community.** Community and family engagement is critical to establishing a warm, positive climate that motivates daily attendance for all children. The transition to kindergarten offers educators a critical opportunity for helping incoming families meet others and know that they are valued members of their new school community.
- 5. Offer Supports to Reduce Health Related Absences.** Research finds that preschool families report that over 60 percent of their children's absences are health-related. During the transition to kindergarten, preschools and schools are in a unique position to provide students and their families with information and access to services that help children stay healthy throughout the year. These efforts are even stronger when schools and early education programs partner with health providers in the community and leverage health resources already available in school or districts.



## District and Community Supports

Whether or not preschools and schools integrate attendance into the site level practices is heavily influenced by whether districts and other key community partners work together to put in place systems to support adoption of good practice at scale. These supports create a foundation for infusing attendance into kindergarten transition efforts. What can districts and community partners do?



- 1. Engage Community Stakeholders in Promoting Attendance.** Districts play an essential role in setting the context for individual schools and preschools to improve their transition practice. The district, ideally in partnership with another public agency or prominent community leader, can convene stakeholders from local government, business, civic, social services and education sectors. Together they can discuss why attendance, starting in preschool and kindergarten, matters for long-term academic success and identify how they can work together to promote attendance.
- 2. Organize Attendance Campaigns that Reach Families with Young Children.** Families want their children to do well in school. But in the early school years, most families are still just learning that chronic absence, or missing just 2 days each month, starting in preschool and kindergarten, can result in young children falling behind. Community-wide messaging campaigns make it easy to share this important information with families and for families to hear reinforcing messages everywhere they go.
- 3. Monitor, Analyze and Review Chronic Absence Data.** Building capacity to monitor, analyze and review chronic absence data is essential to improving attendance. Children are at risk of chronic absence if they were chronically absent the prior year of school or preschool, or if they miss 10 percent of the school year in the first month. This toolkit provides ideas and resources to generate and share meaningful reports on chronic absence based on the attendance data they collected in schools and preschools every day.
- 4. Provide Joint Professional Development on Chronic Absence.** Too often administrators and educators are not aware that chronic absence is a challenge facing their schools or preschools, and they aren't familiar with effective strategies for improving attendance. Efforts to reduce chronic absence require schools and preschools to adopt a comprehensive, tiered approach. Key concepts, ideas and resources included in this toolkit can be integrated into existing professional development, or used to design professional development opportunities to equip educators to address chronic early absences.

# Roadmap: What to Do When

## Spring



### Welcome starts with registration!

#### Site-based opportunities

- Incorporate attendance messages into registration materials
- Include attendance awareness in open house activities
- Provide friendly health-related materials to parents
- Give children playful, hands-on attendance materials

#### System-level supports

- Convene elementary and preschool leadership to focus on kindergarten attendance
- Plan a community-wide attendance messaging campaign for families with young children
- Enlist community partners to support the attendance work

## Summer



### Preparation intensifies

#### Site-based opportunities

- Discuss chronic absence prevention during staff orientation
- Create an attendance team
- Recruit volunteers to play a friendly attendance mascot
- Plan year-round calendar of attendance celebrations

#### System-level supports

- Offer transition program for students without preschool experience
- Include chronic absence prevention materials in professional development
- Develop recognition activities and incentive programs for improved attendance
- Participate in the Attendance Works national [Attendance Awareness Campaign](#)

## Fall



### Welcome activities abound

#### Site-based opportunities

- Send each kindergarten family a welcome letter
- Conduct relational home visits
- Integrate attendance into family orientation events
- Engage students in monitoring their own attendance
- Analyze first month's attendance data
- Launch recognition and incentive activities
- Plan special back-to-school event after winter break

#### System-level supports

- Sustain or expand attendance messaging
- Analyze chronic absence data
- Use data to identify patterns and develop solutions
- Plan additional professional development
- Work with community partners to provide incentives

## Winter



### A fresh opportunity to succeed!

#### Site-based opportunities

- Launch the new year with a day that children won't want to miss
- Create friendly attendance competition among classrooms
- Offer playful "make and take home" family attendance activities
- Use attendance data to solve problems with families
- Talk with families about improved attendance

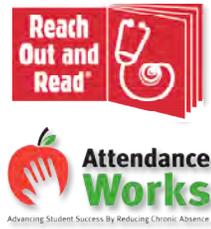
#### System-level supports

- Reach out to preschools and community partners to plan next year's transition
- Gather site and community leadership to analyze progress
- Develop strategies and professional development that reflect data trends
- Expand public visibility of attendance



Attendance Works is a national organization dedicated to advancing student success and closing equity gaps. Its website offers materials, studies, and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Sign up to receive updates at: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

This document is just a summary, for the full toolkit with links to many more resources, visit: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/integrating-attendance-into-kindergarten-transition/>



## Help Your Child Succeed in School: Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early

School success goes hand in hand with good attendance!

### DID YOU KNOW?

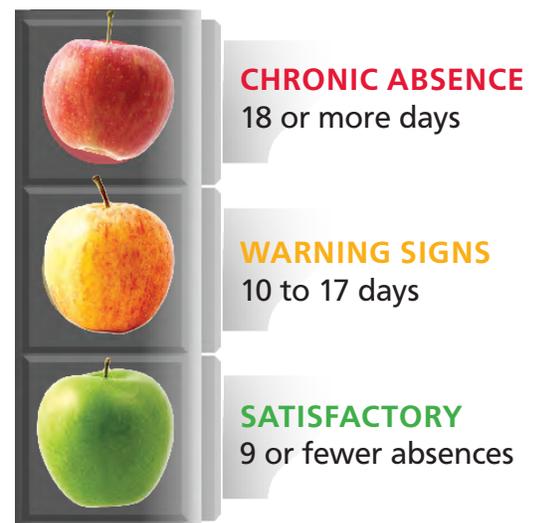
- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10 percent (or about 18 days) can make it harder to learn to read.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just a day or two days every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.

**Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Good attendance will help children do well in high school, college, and at work.**

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bed time and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots.
- Introduce your child to her teachers and classmates before school starts to help her transition.
- Don't let your child stay home unless she is truly sick. Keep in mind complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home.
- If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers, school counselors, or other parents for advice on how to make her feel comfortable and excited about learning.
- Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent.
- Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.

### When Do Absences Become a Problem?



Note: These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

For more on school readiness, visit [attendanceworks.org](http://attendanceworks.org) and [reachoutandread.org](http://reachoutandread.org)



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# Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit

## Rhode Island Statewide Summit: Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness