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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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**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.

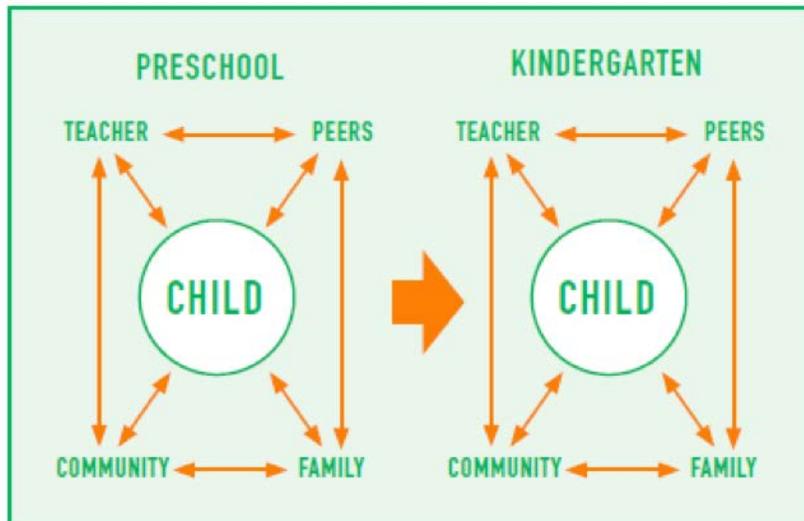
### *A Collaborative Approach*

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
Child-School	<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>
Family-School	<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

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

– Woonsocket Transition Team Member

*Steps to Success:*

- » **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

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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.

understand whether current transition practices are or are not working. Although each team did 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.

**“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.

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.

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

– West Warwick Transition Team Member

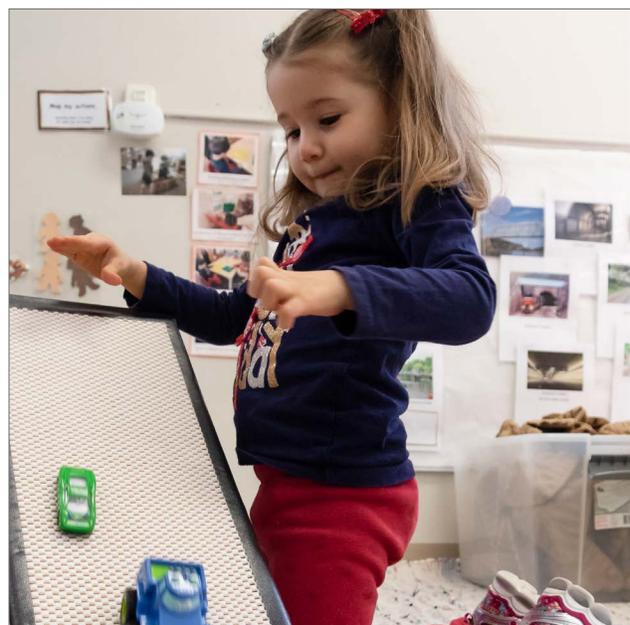
Kindergarten teachers will increase their knowledge of and familiarity with incoming kindergarteners and their families prior to the beginning of the school year.

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.

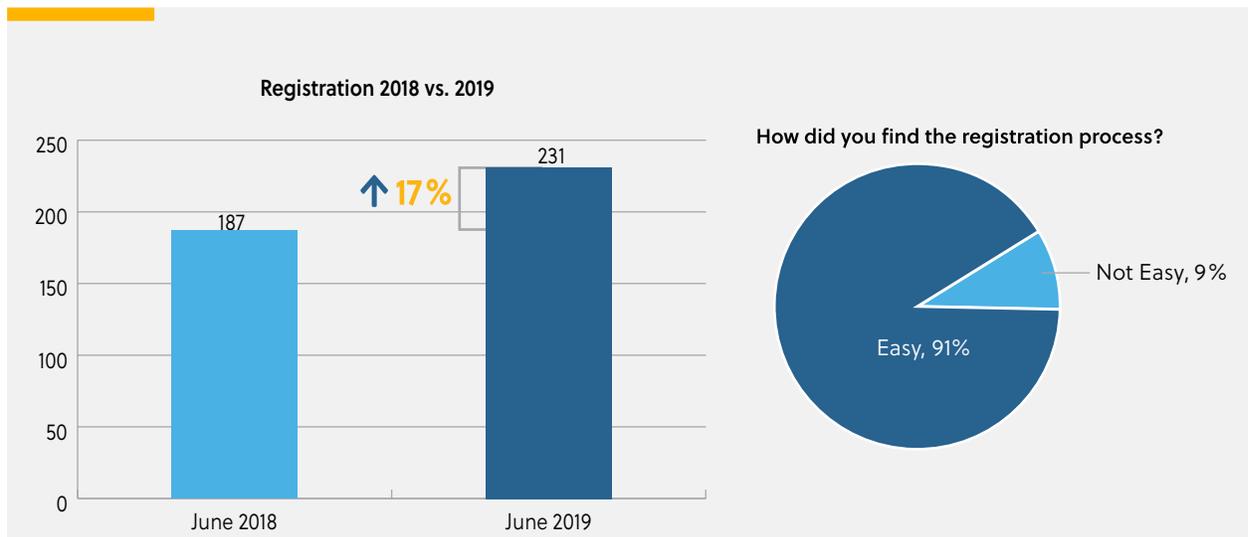
## Challenges & Lessons Learned

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 lunch-room, 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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