

Early Childhood Education Family Engagement Strategies for Engaging with Families

This is not an exhaustive list by any means. Feel free to add strategies that you would like to try too. They are all meant to help families feel welcome, to communicate with families, and to learn about families.

1. Family Surveys
Send home a get-to-know-you survey for parents to fill out at the beginning of the year.
2. Parent Newsletters
Send home newsletters updating families of classroom occurrences throughout the year.
3. Positive Phone Calls
Call families to alert them of the wonderful things their child has done.
4. Parent-Teacher Conferences
Meet with families to discuss their child's progress and action plan.
5. Integrate Cultural Traditions
Incorporate families' cultural traditions in your lessons.
6. Create a Welcoming/Anti-Bias Physical Environment
Include elements in the physical environment that make families feel like the space is welcoming.
7. Help Parents to Be Advocates for Their Children
Support families in knowing how they can use their strengths to advocate for their child.
8. Focus on Family Strengths
Play to family strengths with creating student activities and volunteer opportunities.
9. Home Visits
Visit the child's home to learn more about the family and to share more about yourself.
10. Sharing Data
Communicate student-level data progress regularly.
11. Content-Based Nights
Invite families for literacy, science or math nights to participate in hands-on take home activities
12. Attend After School Activities
Attend students' dance recitals, sports events, church, etc.... when invited.
13. Progress Surveys
Consistently collect feedback on your work through feedback surveys or one-on-one check-ins
14. Log books
Use log books to keep track of family communication touch points
15. Bulletin boards
Create bulletin boards that have pertinent information for families or allow families to communicate between themselves.

Early Childhood Education Family Engagement Strategies for Engaging with Families

16. Parent Volunteers
Invite families to play meaningful roles in the classroom (not just cutting and laminating!)
17. Families of the Week
Highlight a family each week and have them come in and share about their cultural traditions
18. Discussions about Articles on Parenting
Invite parents to come discuss articles sent home about parenting over coffee
19. Allow Parents to Have Decision Making Opportunities
When making choices about the classroom, invite parents to participate in the decision
20. Saturday Field Trips
Invite families to visit local museums, festivals, movies, cultural events...etc. on a weekend afternoon with you
21. Family Exploration
Have a science or social studies themed recital open to families and then students and families get to work together on a project
22. School-Sponsored Field Trips
Invite family members to chaperone field trips or take students on a field trip to a parent's place of employment
23. Guest Readers
Invite family members to come in as guest readers of a read aloud or to read with small groups of children
24. Potlucks
Host informal potlucks for families after school to join together and share a meal
25. Resource Cart
Create make-and-take activities that parents can check out to enjoy with their children at home. Activities can be put in big Ziploc bags and you can also include books for parents to check out!
26. House Meetings
Have a parent host you and a couple of other parents from the class (potluck style) and have conversations about what they envision for their students, what their expectations are for the teacher, and they can provide feedback
27. Send Positive Notes Home
When a child does something extraordinary, send home a positive note to make sure their family is aware. You can also send home a note when a family member does something to contribute to your class
28. Family Projects
For example, have students create a page with the recipe of their favorite dish they eat at home; parents will have fun working on it with their child and then you can create a class recipe book using all of the recipes students turned in

Kindergarten Transition Resources: Family

National PTA in partnership with the National Education Association produced several Family Guides preparing children for their new learning adventure as they transition to kindergarten and beyond in “Starting Off Kindergarten Right” in English, and “Preparing Your Child for School” at <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/family-resources/2018/family-guides/familyguide-preparing.pdf> and in Spanish <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/family-resources/2018/family-guides/familyguide-kindergarten-esp.pdf>.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) produced several resources that support families and their children as they transition to kindergarten. This link provides materials for early educators and families with articles about the various stages of transitioning, with helpful strategies.

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2014/transitions-kindergarten>. The following articles provide families guidance: Transitions to Kindergarten (Teaching Young Children | Vol. 6, No. 4; and Transitioning to Kindergarten (NAEYC® for Families) <http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/transitioning-kindergarten>

Sesame Street produced “Sesame Family, Kindergarten Here We Come!”

<https://www.sesamestreet.org/family/kindergarten> which includes a Sesame Street themed backpack Parent Guide with videos and hands-on materials to help guide parents with their transition discussions with child.

Head Start website <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten> includes a video made about the transition to kindergarten from the perspective of children and an activity calendar for families.

Scholastic Parents includes a series of articles from how to dress to social-emotional concerns about transitioning to kindergarten in “Countdown to Kindergarten for parents”

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/school-success/school-success-guides/count-down-to-kindergarten-new.html>

“12 Ways to Help a Child Make the Transition to Kindergarten: (Harvard Health Blog) article provides parents guidance in having conversations that address the child’s concerns about transitioning to kindergarten: <http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/12-ways-to-help-a-child-make-the-transition-to-kindergarten-201308166611>

Kindergarten Transition Resources: Parents of Children with Special Needs

“A Toolkit for Early Educators” for guidance on transitioning to kindergarten includes a toolkit for parents by the National Center for Learning Disabilities: Transitioning to Kindergarten for Parents: https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/t2k_parents.pdf.

“From Pre-k to Graduation and Beyond” <https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/Special-Education-Toolkit/Special-Education-From-Pre-K-to-Graduation-and-Beyond> National PTA produced a special education specific transition guidance.

“A Successful Kindergarten Transition” parent’s guide includes a focus on special needs children in “What should I know about transitioning a preschooler with special needs?” <http://www.nea.org/home/59881.htm> National PTA in partnership with the National Education Association produced.

Promising Practices to Support Families Transitioning to Kindergarten

Preparing Young Learners for Their Future

Key Understandings

The Transition into Kindergarten is one of the most important transitions children make in their education trajectory. The earliest years of children's lives are critical—setting them up for success in their K-12 experience and beyond.

- What does it mean for our children and families to transition from a highly relationship based context to a more formal, somewhat transactional setting?
- Research is clear- Relationships and respect matter. If we want improved outcomes for families and children, we have to invest in the relationship between families, teachers (ECE and K), schools, health care providers and other stakeholders. Getting out of the silos of how we do business and really connecting everyone that really works with children.
- We need truly collaborative professional dialogue about our children. Transformative change can happen when all voices are heard and acknowledged.
- Enable pre-k and k teachers to be active agents of change, improvement and innovation- this work should be led by teachers. Early Educators can lead change!
- What the Kids Say about Transitions – Kids know a lot and have some misconceptions – Key issues are social/emotional readiness – “Will I have friends? Will I get along with new rules?”
- New Normal- we need to change the culture around the transition from Pre-K to K with ongoing and year-round consideration. When do our families need information on school choice? How can we assist them in that process?
- Accountability is not a one-way street! Both the existing Pre-K teacher and new K teacher should feel “on the hook” for creating a successful and meaningful transition to K. Each teacher is accountable to the other to achieve the shared goal of access to a high quality ECE experience for all children and families.

Why is the Transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten Critical?

A 2014 Sesame Workshop study revealed that children living in poverty are academically at risk when entering kindergarten. Those with multiple risk factors are almost a year behind their peers in reading and math—a gap that widens as school progresses and keeps millions of children from reaching their full potential. When we can ensure that, every child and family is prepared for the meaningful transition to Kindergarten then we will have done our part in accelerating the pace of change in the movement of educational equity.

Promising Practices to Support Families Transitioning to Kindergarten

Preparing Young Learners for Their Future

- Early School Experiences Matter
 - Effective early school experiences can close the opportunity gap
 - High quality preschool and other interventions improve children's kindergarten school readiness
 - High school graduation rates are directly correlated to high quality ECE experiences
 - School to prison pipeline- our Pre-K families must be encouraged to continue their strong advocacy for systems level change as inequality persists along racial and gender lines.
 - Impact on long-term student success- preschool and specifically Head Start helps kids succeed as they move through elementary school. The transition window from Pre-K is a key component to this success.
 - Stability in school experiences is crucial for our youngest learners- relationships matter both at the classroom and leadership level.
 - Teachers' emotional support consistency predicts children's social and academic skills

How?

Families must be engaged and respected as a key lever to a K successful transition. Parents are children's first teachers but need (and want) guidance and tools to help their child love Kindergarten as much as they did Pre-K! Early childhood & early grade educators (and families) must get together continue the rich narrative that began at 2 or 3 years old.

- In order for children to feel safe and secure in their learning environment they need to have information. Parents need the same thing. ACCESS to tools, applications, surveys, websites, scholarships, recruitment efforts, etc. has been a barrier for decades and is connected to a much larger systemic problem. ACCESS is essential.
- Meet parents where they are- it is important for everyone in the parents circle to speak the same language. Getting out of the silos of how we do business and really connecting everyone, across sectors that work with children, this includes multi-generational support, health care providers, educators (ECE and early grade educators, principals) and community advocates.
- Year-round conversation- how can we begin to prepare our families to make informed choices for K? ACCESS to school applications, tours, parent coordinators, school nurses, open houses earlier. Late access to materials and deadlines should not dictate parent choice.

Kindergarten Transition Resources: Multilingual Children

[Procedures to Determine if an Emergent Multilingual Learner \(EMLL\) in Prekindergarten might be an English Language Learner \(ELL\)/Multilingual Learner \(MLL\) in Kindergarten](#)

Since English language proficiency is not a factor in student's designation as an Emergent Multilingual Learner (EMLL) upon entering Prekindergarten, but is the deciding factor in determining if that same student might be an English Language Learner (ELL)/Multilingual Learner (MLL) upon entering Kindergarten, and if so, at which English language proficiency level and associated programming, NYSED requires School Districts to implement [CR Part 154 ELL/MLL screening, identification, and placement procedures](#) to all incoming Kindergarten students – regardless of a child's possible participation in a District's prekindergarten program the prior school year. Contact NYSED's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages at OBEWL@nysed.gov for assistance.

[Encouraging the Development and Achievement of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood](#)

Espinosa, Linda M. (2018). *American Educator*, 42 (3), 10-11, 39.

Espinosa presents how research demonstrates the best outcomes for Multilingual Learners relies heavily on both systematic exposure to English and ongoing support for home language maintenance and development.

[Getting to Know ELLs' Families](#) Breiseth, Lydia. Educational Leadership, Feb. 2016, pp. 46–50.

Breiseth, manager of [Colorín Colorado](#), a website serving educators and families of ELLs/MLLs nationwide presents seven practical and implementable strategies to forge relationships and meaningfully engage with ELL/MLL families.

[Ready for La Escuela: School Readiness and the Languages of Instruction in Kindergarten](#) Tazi (Morell), Zoila PhD (2014) *Journal of Multilingual Education Research: Vol. 5 , Article 3.*

Morell presents a study of a New York school district that offered both bilingual and English-only instruction to Spanish speaking kindergartners. Children who received bilingual instruction in kindergarten were found to be four times more likely to be rated as Very Ready for School in four out of five developmental domains than the children who received instruction only in English. All the children benefitted from attending kindergarten, but these findings suggest that bilingual instruction for Spanish-speaking children was a more effective approach to enhance their school readiness.

[Young Dual Language Learners: A Guide for PreK-3 Leaders](#) Nemeth, Karen N. (2014) Caslon Publishing

Nemeth provides clear and concise expert responses to questions that early childhood and elementary education administrators ask about educating multilingual children in culturally and linguistically responsive ways.

[Many Languages, One Classroom: Teaching Dual and English Language Learners](#) Nemeth, Karen N. (2009) Gryphon House

Nemeth addresses the language diverse challenge that many early childhood and early elementary classrooms face. For more of Nemeth's resources for educators working with linguistically diverse young children, see her [Language Castle](#) website.



**Harvard Family
Research Project**



Ready for Success:

Creating Collaborative and Thoughtful Transitions into Kindergarten

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Introduction

The transition from preschool or other early learning settings into kindergarten marks an important event in the lives of more than 3.5 million young learners and their families each year.¹ The transition is associated with challenges and changes for both children and their parents. For children, beginning kindergarten means adjusting to a change from the social and emotional support received from early caregivers and educators to the academic rigor and expectations of a school setting.² This transition also involves new peer-related negotiations as students work to maintain existing friendships and form new relationships,³ and it requires adapting to a new environment with a different (often larger) physical layout, as well as new behavioral boundaries and rules.⁴ For families, meanwhile, the transition is usually accompanied by decreased communication with teachers⁵ and an increased desire to understand the academic expectations of school.⁶ For working parents and families, the transition is also accompanied by challenges in identifying afterschool care and transportation options to meet school schedules, particularly for half-day kindergarten programs.⁷

The challenges that new kindergarten students face during this transition period were highlighted in a national survey administered to kindergarten teachers in 2000. According to these teachers, 48% of their incoming kindergartners experienced a transition marked by “some problems” or “serious concerns.” Difficulty following directions was the most common problem.⁸ Families have similar concerns. In a small 2007 study of 132 parents with children transitioning to kindergarten, 56% expressed concerns about their children attending a new school, while 42% and 55% expressed

concern about their children’s behavior problems and ability to follow directions in kindergarten, respectively.⁹

Given that early social performance and academic achievement are predictors of later school success, ensuring that children get off to a good start in kindergarten is critical. Some problems may be addressed by exposing children to better transition practices and focusing on the development of school readiness skills. In fact, while currently limited in number, research studies suggest that kindergarten transition practices—such as having preschoolers visit a kindergarten

classroom and having kindergarten teachers visit pre-kindergarten classrooms—have a modest positive effect on academic achievement during the kindergarten year,¹⁰ are associated with kindergartners receiving more favorable ratings from teachers on social competencies,¹¹ and are linked to faster skill development from preschool to

kindergarten as transition practices increase in number.¹² These outcomes are all magnified for students from low-income families.

To maximize these outcomes, more widespread use of high-quality transition practices is needed—those that begin before the start of kindergarten, include individualized communication with families and children,¹³ and involve a collaborative effort among and between the different adults (families, teachers, and community providers) and institutions in children’s lives.¹⁴ A collaborative approach, particularly one that engages families, creates a sense of continuity in children’s lives and equips families with the information that they need to help prepare their children for school success.

Unfortunately, however, rather than using these types of collaborative, communication-based

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practices to help prepare children for the transition to kindergarten, schools tend to rely instead on a few group activities implemented after the start of the school year (e.g., back-to-school nights). Parents and teachers both report that their schools offer only low-intensity transition activities such as in-person registration days or parent classroom visits after the start of the school year.¹⁵ Teachers have also noted that a lack of district-wide transition plans, an absence of dedicated funding, and a lack of complete class lists before the start of the school year are among the barriers that prevent them from implementing quality practices.¹⁶

State and Local Approaches to Transitions

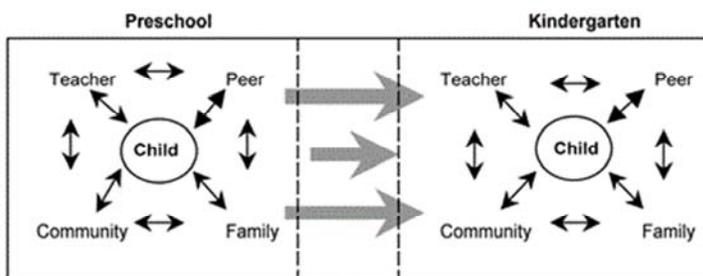
Given the importance of funding and guidance from leadership at the school, district, and state levels to support teachers' use of quality transition practices, understanding how policymakers, administrators, and principals can effectively provide this support is essential. This brief highlights promising practices in six states—New Jersey, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Virginia, and California—that make use of collaborative efforts and rely on local- and state-level leadership. Each of these case studies looks at initiatives in

which state departments of education, advocacy organizations, school districts, early education teachers, kindergarten teachers, families, and community members work together to help kindergartners enter school ready for success. The brief concludes with a set of recommendations for policymakers to help support these innovative practices at the local, state, and federal levels.

This brief is framed around a model of transition that accounts for the influence of multiple learning environments and stakeholders. In Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition,¹⁷ transitions are informed by ongoing and evolving interactions among and between children, families, communities, schools, and classrooms (see Figure 1, below). In this way, the transition becomes a process that is shared and experienced simultaneously by all of these institutions and persons. Each of the case studies presented in this brief, focuses on programs' uses of social connections (preschool–family partnerships, preschool–school partnerships, and preschool–community partnerships) to support children through transitions.

Figure 1

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition



From Kraft-Sayre, M. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). *Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families, and schools*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, National Center for Early Development & Learning.

Case Studies

In an attempt to promote best practices statewide, the majority of the states profiled in this brief rely on the expertise of the early learning branches of their departments of education to roll out and oversee transition programs and initiatives. Each case first highlights these state-level transition strategies and then focuses on the local-level practices that they support. The six states each illustrate an integrated approach to transition through the use of two or more of the following types of supports:

1. **Aligned assessments, standards, and curriculum.** By using a sequential curriculum combined with aligned assessments and standards, the state is able to coordinate early learning experiences with later academic experiences and establish continuity in children's learning.
2. **Professional development.** States play a key role in supporting collaborative transition practices by offering training opportunities for preschool and kindergarten staff to participate in together. Such shared training fosters a mutual understanding of the work being done in each setting.
3. **Programs for special populations.** To support districts in their efforts to reach special populations, states provide funding for summer programs and high-quality universal preschools to help at-risk preschoolers and young 5-year-olds (those born after September 2) prepare for kindergarten.
4. **Communication and dissemination.** States use ad campaigns and websites to reach out to families to encourage them to access and read information about their children's health, nutritional, and social and cognitive developmental needs.

In addition to highlighting states' efforts to support transitions, the case studies in this brief

also include programs at the district and county levels that have successfully turned their states' transition policies and initiatives into meaningful practices. This brief showcases those collaborative local efforts among preschools, families, schools, and communities. Promising local-level transition practices include:

Articulation and transition teams. Many of the programs lead or are a part of transition and/or articulation¹⁸ teams that involve families, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and community providers, such as library staff and healthcare workers. Members of these teams meet monthly to plan for the transition of children and their families to kindergarten. They also select, implement, and evaluate transition activities, such as contacting families and connecting children with kindergarten teachers. Unlike transition teams, however, articulation teams also focus on creating and implementing course content that bridges preschool and kindergarten to provide continuity of instruction to help children make a successful transition to kindergarten.

Feedback surveys. To improve future practices and understand transition concerns, programs administer surveys to families and future teachers in order to gather feedback. In this way, planning decisions are informed by multiple stakeholders.

Ongoing/year-round activities. These local programs view transitions as a process, rather than as a one-time event. While some offer events, such as a fairs, registration days, or orientations, as part of their larger plan, their focus is on engaging children and families in ongoing and recurring transition activities.

Methods

To develop the case studies, we conducted interviews with a total of 24 informants

representing families, early care educators and administrators (from both summer programs and academic-year programs), state departments of

education, advocacy organizations, and early childhood foundations.¹⁹

NEW JERSEY

A Systemic Approach to Learning from Preschool to Third Grade

State Supports

The Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) within the New Jersey Department of Education is responsible for the development, implementation, and alignment of standards, curricula, and assessment from preschool to third grade (PK3).

For successful transitions to kindergarten, state supports emphasize:

- Professional development that showcases best practices
- 31 school districts (known as *Abbott school districts*) that offer high quality preschool programs in the neediest communities
- Transition plans that engage schools, families, and community agencies

Professional development. To push districts toward a PK3 system, DECE offers voluntary professional development workshops and trainings for administrators and teachers. The three-part *PreK–3rd Leadership Training Series*, for example, now in its third year, provides administrators with strategies and techniques to implement aligned programs in their schools and districts. Additionally, the [High Quality Kindergarten Today](#) video series,²⁰ co-produced with Advocates for Children of New Jersey and based on the newly-released *New Jersey Kindergarten Implementation Guidelines*, explains and showcases best practices in kindergarten classrooms.

Abbott preschool program. In 1998, a series of rulings in a school funding case in the New Jersey Supreme Court established 31 Abbott

preschool districts in the state. The ruling required that all 3- and 4-year-old children in New Jersey's 31 highest-poverty districts have access to a high-quality preschool education—defined by enrollment in a full-day, full-year program with no more than 15 other children per classroom—and that each classroom have both a teacher's aide and a PK3-certified teacher who uses a research-based curriculum. DECE employs program specialists who are assigned to support these and other PK3 programs in the state.

Transition plans. As part of their five-year plan, all district boards of education statewide (including those in Abbott districts) are required to submit a transition plan to the DECE for approval. The plans must include the district's process for collaborating with other preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school administrators; methods for sharing information about individual children with their future teachers; and a process for sharing data with parents. DECE encourages districts to focus on ongoing transition practices, rather than events (e.g., a one-time visit to a kindergarten classroom) in their plans. Every three years, program specialists from DECE visit districts to validate the implementation and fulfillment of the districts' plans.

Local Practices

The Orange Public School District, an Abbott district, serves approximately 800 children in 54 mixed-age preschool classrooms. Each classroom is staffed with both a teacher and a paraprofessional. The district also employs a community and parent involvement specialist, social workers, inclusion teachers, and master teachers. The master teachers have the responsibilities of visiting classrooms, coaching other teachers, and providing feedback on teaching practices. As part of the PK3 initiative, classroom teachers connect their work with that of the elementary school by using a sequential curriculum and aligned assessments. Currently, the curriculum is sequenced from preschool to third grade for reading and math. Assessments are aligned for preschool and kindergarten, and administrators are currently working to align kindergarten and first grade assessments so that by the 2012–2013 academic year, all preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers will be using the same tools. To support this work, Orange’s early childhood education supervisor is attending the *PreK–3rd Leadership Training Series*.

Preschool–family partnerships: Using year-long conversations and orientations to keep families informed. The early childhood administrative team in Orange believes that, in order for children to feel safe and secure in their learning environments, they need to be equipped with information. Parents have the same needs. For seamless, successful transitions to occur, children and their families need to know what is going to happen and how it is going to happen. Throughout the school year, preschool teachers talk to their students and

their parents about kindergarten and invite kindergarten teachers to come and participate in classroom activities. In the early spring, while parents attend an orientation at the elementary school, children spend a half-day in a kindergarten classroom where they have snacks, participate in circle time, and explore the classroom. Leading up to, and also after the

visit, preschool teachers read books about transitions so that the visit is not an isolated event but rather is connected to the preschool day.

The early childhood education supervisor also administers an end-of-year survey to families about the Orange Public School District’s transition practices. Survey items ask families about which practices they liked, which they did not like, and which they

though could be improved. Administrators aggregate the data by school and use this information to improve practices at each site.

Preschool–school partnerships: Co-creating and sharing student portfolios. Preschool and kindergarten teachers co-designed a prototype of a portfolio for each preschool child in the district and developed a checklist of items that should be included in the portfolio. The portfolio is updated throughout the preschool year. Prior to the start of the school year, portfolios are hand-delivered to kindergarten teachers, who use these packets to learn about their incoming students and inform classroom instruction. In the first months of school, master teachers as well as intervention and referral specialists from district preschools follow up with kindergarten teachers to discuss the quality of the portfolios, children’s progress, and any additional needs.

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GEORGIA

Building Longitudinal Data Systems to Follow Students from Preschool to College

State Supports

Created to streamline services for children from birth to age 5, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, dubbed “Bright from the Start,” oversees the state’s universal pre-K program and child care quality improvement initiatives. Over the last several years, Bright from the Start has focused on developing common standards, assessments, and practices that build strong connections between pre-K and kindergarten.

State supports feature the following elements:

- Aligned standards and assessments that include a testing identification initiative to track children’s progress from pre-K to college
- Joint professional development for preschool and kindergarten teachers as the new assessments are implemented
- Summer enrichment programs to boost children’s preparation for kindergarten

Aligned standards and assessments. As part of this work, Bright from the Start commissioned a study in 2010 to determine how well the Georgia Early Learning Standards (GELS) aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards for kindergarten through third grade. A new set of aligned early childhood standards will be released in late 2012.

In addition, the state is implementing a testing identification initiative that attaches an ID number to a child’s assessment data, enabling the data to follow the child from pre-K through college. As part of this effort, the state has moved from relying on paper and pencil assessments to using the online Work Sampling System (WSS) for all preschool children. The electronic storage and transfer of assessment data and

demographic information enabled by this system allow smoother transitions for both children and their data, particularly for children who may be in need of social-emotional or cognitive support. The data collected by preschools are easily transferred to the elementary school level, where administrators can refer children for early intervention or remedial programs from the start.

As the new assessments are implemented, preschool and kindergarten teachers receive joint professional development in the areas of standards, assessments, and data-sharing. The effort is meant not only to increase collaboration between teachers, but also to establish a common language between preschool and kindergarten teaching practices.

WORK SAMPLING SYSTEM

The Work Sampling System (WSS), a product of Pearson, is an instructional assessment tool that uses guidelines and checklists to look at personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, and physical development and health; portfolios that include samples gathered throughout the year; and summary reports that record progress and communication with parents.*

* Meisels, S. J. (2009). The Work Sampling System: An overview [Webinar]. *Early Childhood Webinar Series*. Retrieved from www.pearsonassessments.com/NR/.../Early_ChildhoodWSSSM.ppt

Summer programs. The state of Georgia funds an 8-week summer transition camp for children who score low on school readiness assessments. The camp focuses on early literacy and provides children with individualized learning plans based on their assessment scores and needs, one-on-one instructional time, and group activities to promote social skills. Statewide, the summer transition camp runs in 60 classrooms in 19 counties, with average class sizes of about 16 students and 2 teachers.

Local Practices

The Scottdale Child Development and Family Resource Center, Inc. believes that kindergarten transitions form an ongoing process that continues throughout the entire school year, and therefore has created a year-long transition plan focused on school readiness. These plans are developed by the Center's director and teachers in partnership with local elementary schools and families.

Preschool–family partnerships: Hosting kindergarten panels to prepare families for the transition. Family partnerships are at the crux of the Center's pre-kindergarten program's transition plans. At the beginning of the preschool year, a center-wide meeting orients families to the upcoming transition process and encourages them to get engaged by expressing their needs, advocating for their children, and taking on leadership positions with the Parents and Teachers as Partners in Education (PTAPE) group. During this time, families are surveyed to gather feedback about family concerns surrounding transitions.

Throughout the school year, families meet with teachers and administrators to discuss different aspects of the transition process and hear various perspectives on the move to kindergarten. For example, in response to parents' questions about the different types of elementary schools available in the county, the Center now organizes a panel for parents in

early spring with presentations from principals and head masters, as well as teachers from traditional neighborhood schools, charter schools, and theme schools. These meetings give families the opportunity to learn about the logistics of school enrollment and the paperwork, screenings, and immunizations that their children will need prior to enrollment. Additionally, two parent workshops are organized, in which families can hear kindergarten teachers describe the typical elementary school day and the social and academic expectations for children in kindergarten. Parents who have previously transitioned children from the Center's pre-kindergarten program into kindergarten are also invited to describe their experiences and offer advice.

Preschool–school partnerships: Familiarizing children with new learning settings. After identifying the kindergartens to which children are likely to transition, the Center's administrators establish partnership agreements with elementary schools. The partnership allows preschoolers to become comfortable with their future school environment by participating in elementary school assemblies, book fairs, and lunch periods while still in preschool. In previous years, families and teachers both identified cafeteria lunchtime as a big, and often frightening, change in routine for incoming kindergartners. In addition to having these children experience the lunchtime routine at a local elementary school, the Center also changes the lunch routine for 4- and 5-year-olds after winter break in order to familiarize them with the kindergarten system. Under these new procedures, rather than continuing with the pre-K program's typical family-style dining, the children are asked to line up to get their own lunches on trays from the preschool kitchen, just as they will have to do in kindergarten.

Additionally, the school partnerships allow the Center’s teachers and kindergarten teachers to observe each other’s classrooms and collaborate on planning transition strategies.

The Center’s educators are currently using the online WSS and are anticipating the electronic transfer of data to kindergarten teachers in the coming year.

MARYLAND

School Readiness through Instruction and Assessment

State Supports

The Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) at the Maryland State Department of Education is responsible for early child care and education regulations and policies. As a result of its state and local endeavors—including a statewide definition of school readiness, a universal school readiness assessment system, and comprehensive early care and education programs (Judy Centers) in all but two counties—Maryland has been ranked number one in the nation for its transition and alignment efforts for four years in a row by *Education Week’s* “Quality Counts” report.²⁰

The state’s supports contain the following important features:

- A model of school readiness that promotes the cognitive, social, and physical development of young children through a systemic approach that includes instruction, assessment, family engagement, community collaboration, and professional development
- State-funded comprehensive early care and education programs affiliated with elementary schools

Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR). Each of the 24 local education agencies in Maryland uses the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), a framework that assists early educators in instructing and assessing young children across seven domains of learning, including language and literacy, mathematical thinking, personal and social

development, scientific thinking, social studies, physical development, and the arts. The five components of the MMSR are (a) classroom instruction, (b) assessment (a modified Work Sampling System), (c) communication with families, (d) coordination with early education programs, and (e) professional development. During the fall, kindergarten teachers use the Work Sampling System to assess their students on 30 performance indicators across the MMSR domains. Kindergarten teachers, who are all trained in the MMSR, report these data to the state and share the results with students’ families and first-grade teachers.

Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Program. Established in 2000 under a senate bill, Maryland’s 25 Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Program centers (known as the “Judy Centers”) are state-funded early care and education programs whose mission is to provide a comprehensive set of coordinated services for children from birth through age 5 and their families. Judy Centers are located in or affiliated with elementary schools. In these spaces, educational and community-based organizations form partnerships and collaborate under one roof to provide full-day services to children and their families, including adult education classes; dental, hearing, and vision screenings; family engagement activities; case management; and childcare.

To support these Centers, DECD employs a full-time Judy Center Partnerships Specialist

who delivers technical assistance and training to each of the Centers and organizes an annual statewide meeting for local Judy Center coordinators.

Local Practices

The Allegany County Judy Center and the Overlook Judy Center Partnership in Garrett County coordinate a number of the transition activities that occur between early education programs and elementary schools in their respective rural counties. These transition practices connect families, educational systems, and communities.

The between-program connection is most evident in the widespread use of the MMSR. At the Allegany and Overlook Judy Centers, all of the pre-K teachers, including those from childcare programs and Head Start, are trained in the MMSR. Judy Center staff use the information and scores from the MMSR to make decisions across several of their programs—decisions related to the activities for children, programs for parents, and trainings for teachers. Their data-based decision making reflects the approach of other practitioners statewide: as the state MMSR Coordinator said in an interview for this brief, “Most, if not all, of the local school systems have taken the 30 indicators [that children are assessed on] and integrated them into their programs...teachers are looking at the indicators [to make decisions] all year long.” These indicators include such benchmarks as a child’s ability to interact with other children; gain meaning by listening; show understanding of number and quantity; seek information through observation, exploration, and descriptive investigations; and perform self-care tasks competently.

Program–family partnerships: Using surveys to give parents a voice in the transition process. The Allegany County Judy Center administers bi-annual surveys in the fall and spring, to families of kindergarten and pre-K children. The fall survey, administered at the start of the school year, asks families about their needs and about the number and type of family activities that they would like to participate in throughout the year. The spring survey asks families about their satisfaction with these activities. These surveys give parents a voice and drive decisions about topics for training and programs.

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Program–school partnerships: Giving children continuous exposure to the elementary school. The Allegany and Overlook Judy Centers organize a number of activities to orient children to their new elementary schools before the first day of kindergarten. Overlook, for example, hosts one-week kindergarten summer camps at both of its partner elementary schools, where kindergarten teachers serve as the instructors in the camps’ six classrooms. The camp is open to

all students eligible for kindergarten. Other practices include connecting teachers each spring with the teachers in the child’s next grade level to discuss ability level, special interests and needs, allergies or other medical problems, and family concerns. The elementary school also holds lunches and assemblies for preschoolers involving special guests and attractions (e.g., fire trucks and animals). The goal of these practices, as the Contract and Data Quality Manager at Overlook stated in an interview for this brief, is to give children a lot of exposure to the school so that once kindergarten starts, “they have attended so

many activities that they're very familiar with the school and their teacher.”

Program–community partnerships: Using a local mall to engage large numbers of families in transition activities. The Allegany County Judy Center hosts a School Readiness Fair at a local mall each spring. While the fair is a one-time event, it is situated within the context of the program's year-long approach to transitions. The fair's booths are staffed with an array of teachers and community partners, including pre-K and kindergarten teachers who

register students and hand out education packets to parents, speech specialists who administer speech tests to incoming students, Lion's Club members who offer free vision screenings, GED Testing Service staff who enroll interested parents, librarians who register children for library cards; and staff from a national bank who talk to families about financial literacy. Allegany uses the informal and public setting of the mall to attract large numbers of families.

MINNESOTA

Creating Preschool–Kindergarten Bridges for Families and Children

State Supports

The Office of Early Learning (OEL), which opened in 2011, coordinates programs and services for young children across the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Department of Human Services. OEL serves as a management and leadership structure in the state. School districts in Minnesota are under local control; however, OEL and the Early Learning Services Division (which the Director of OEL co-directs) provide school readiness and transition leadership, guidance, and support to districts.

The key state supports for transitions include:

- An interactive website for parents that offers information and activities
- Developmental screenings for children
- A School Readiness Program for children ages 3-5 at risk of not being prepared for kindergarten

The Parents Know website. Funded by the 2006 Minnesota Legislature, hosted by MDE and developed with input from parents, the *Parents Know* website²¹ is an online resource where parents can access information on child

development, consumer safety, and health and nutrition. To support thoughtful transitions, the website includes a “[Getting School Ready](#)”²² video and [monthly activities](#)²³ for parents to do with their children to prepare for kindergarten. Data collected from parents prior to the website's launch indicated that they wanted information available in their first language and preferred to access the information digitally rather than receive it on paper, so all of the information on the website is presented in multiple languages and is available in multiple formats including text, interactive tools, webinars, videos, and audio podcasts.

To increase the number of parents accessing the webpage, the MDE advertises on billboards and city busses, and uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Early Childhood Screening program. The Early Childhood Screening program, introduced in 1977, is a statewide health and development assessment administered at centers in each county and required for all children entering kindergarten in public schools. Used to identify issues that may interfere with learning and growth early on, this

free screening program alerts educators and parents about areas of concern and connects families with community resources that can address those concerns. For example, data from the screening are used to identify children who qualify for such targeted initiatives as the School Readiness program (described below).

School Readiness Program.

Minnesota Department of Education [School Readiness/Kindergarten programs](#)²⁴ are offered in all but one district in Minnesota and aim to prepare at-risk 3- to 5-year-olds for kindergarten by acting as a bridge between preschool and other early learning settings and elementary school. Children are taught by licensed early childhood teachers who expose them to basic academic skills (e.g., letter names and letter sounds) and build their social skills. The programs are delivered by school districts and vary in length and duration across the state: some school districts deliver a half-day, year-round program; some offer a Saturday program; and others run a full-day program in the summer.

Local Practices

The Bridges to Kindergarten program is a School Readiness program in Northfield, Minnesota, that serves the school district's three elementary schools. The free program, which is entirely funded by Northfield Area United Way, runs for three weeks in August at the elementary schools. Each classroom is staffed by a preschool teacher, a kindergarten teacher, and an English Language Learner specialist. By integrating the state's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress into their curriculum and assessments, the program builds

children's pre-academic skills and prepares them for school-day routines, such as sitting in a circle and lining up. These activities help to alleviate stress by familiarizing children with upcoming changes in their daily activities. One mother of a former Bridges student reported that the program took away the surprise element for her son and

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One mother of a former Bridges student reported that the program took away the surprise element for her son and gave him an opportunity to learn the new routines in a safe setting.
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gave him an opportunity to learn the new routines in a safe setting. Another way to ensure continuity and therefore help lessen children's transition anxiety is to suggest that they use the same mode of transportation to get to Bridges and back as they will when they attend kindergarten—whether by being dropped off/picked up by family, by walking, or by taking the bus (Bridges partners with a local bus company to provide busing).

Program–family partnerships: Inviting families into classrooms. Bridges hosts an event for families during each week of its 3-week session. Through an open house during week one, a classroom activity (circle time or center play) and a guest speaker during week two, and an end-of-program celebration during week three, Bridges connects families with the elementary school setting, teaching staff, and classroom activities. To obtain feedback on these family practices and the program as a whole, the coordinator administers a survey to parents at the end of the summer.

Program–school partnerships: Surveying kindergarten teachers to prepare students in the right areas. The coordinator of the Bridges program surveys kindergarten teachers about the school-specific vocabulary that they use in their classrooms and about their classroom management systems. She uses these data to identify classroom practices that her teachers should introduce in the summer program. To

confirm that the Bridges program is preparing its students in the right areas, she also reviews the kindergarten assessments to see what indicators kindergarten teachers are looking for at the beginning of the school year.

Program–community partnerships: Bringing together local leaders to support early childhood education. The Bridges coordinator also belongs to the Northfield Early Childhood Initiative Coalition, a community-based

campaign made up of parents, educators, and community and business leaders, including those from Americorp, the medical community, and the public library. The group meets monthly to mobilize efforts around promoting and piloting early learning programs and projects. These efforts include family outreach, marketing, donations, and event planning. The Bridges Program grew out of one of the Coalition’s meetings in 2005.

VIRGINIA

Building Business and Community Coalitions

State Supports

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation was created in 2005 to partner with state government departments in coordinating kindergarten readiness efforts across local programs. The structure of this public/private foundation allows collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including communities and private businesses. Among its initiatives, the Foundation has funded 29 “Smart Beginnings” communities that set kindergarten readiness goals, established Virginia Job One as an advocacy group of business leaders working toward improved early childhood activities, and piloted a quality rating system called the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.

State supports focus on the following elements:

- Reaching communities through planning and implementation grants that create sustainable early childhood programs
- Measuring outcomes such as the number of community programs participating in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative and the number of children entering kindergarten with the necessary literacy skills

Reaching communities. In 2007, through a program called Smart Beginnings, the

Foundation began offering funding to communities as part of a major initiative to ensure that children were prepared to enter kindergarten. Smart Beginnings communities are awarded a \$50,000 planning grant and up to \$600,000 in additional funding for creating and implementing 3- to 5-year strategic plans focused on one of six sectors of early childhood, including kindergarten transitions. As part of the grant requirements, Smart Beginnings communities form leadership councils—which may include school board members, Head Start directors, business executives, civic leaders, health department staff, and other stakeholders—to help inform and direct the communities’ early learning plans and strategies. The goal is to use the Smart Beginnings grants to create a sustainable, widespread focus on early childhood that shifts the priorities of the community, rather than simply filling a budget gap.

The communities that have chosen to focus on kindergarten transitions work with an approach developed by Kraft-Sayre and Pianta,²⁵ which focuses on connections among and between preschools and kindergarten, families and schools, children and schools, and communities and schools.

Measuring outcomes. In order to track progress, the Foundation measures outcomes across Smart Beginnings communities. Some of the desired outcomes include increasing the percentage of children entering kindergarten with the necessary literacy skills and increasing the number of early care programs participating in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.

The Virginia Star Quality Initiative is a voluntary assessment and improvement system that provides a quality rating for early childhood programs based on measures of interactions, structure, staff ratios, environment, and instruction. Transition practices, including how schools orient families to kindergarten and whether curricula focus on transitions, are also evaluated in the rating.

Local Practices

With the recent increasing rigor of elementary school curricula, educators in the Chesterfield County public schools began noticing that the 4,000 incoming kindergarteners each year were starting school further behind and less prepared than in previous years. In response to this concern and to the growing statewide attention to kindergarten readiness, the Chesterfield County Pre-kindergarten Program joined Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond and began implementing innovative strategies targeted at transitions and school readiness.

Preschool–family partnerships: Engaging families in learning through at-home activities and donated books. To bridge the school readiness gap for children who have had little exposure to books and language in their homes, the district applied for and won a grant to give each preschooler six books related to the

school curriculum. The books help families start their own libraries and help build a sense of school-to-home continuity.

In addition to providing families with books, teachers use assessment scores to provide them with a snapshot of their children’s development; teachers also suggest targeted activities for building their children’s needed skills. To build on these activities, families and children are invited to a district-wide “Transition Night” prior to kindergarten registration in the spring. Families attending this event can enjoy educational games placed among kiosks throughout the school, and kindergarten teachers and administrators are on hand to answer questions.

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Preschool–school partnerships: Sharing curriculum themes to

acquaint children with kindergarten work. All of the district’s pre-K programs, including Head Start, are located within elementary schools and align their curricula and assessments with the kindergarten. For example, when the K–12 programs added a global connections theme to the curriculum, the pre-K program also began focusing on global awareness. The close relationship between the pre-K programs and schools also allows preschool children and their families to get acquainted with the kindergarten curriculum ahead of time.

Preschool–community partnerships: Using a common, district-wide registration day to streamline enrollment. District administrators sit on the board of Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond, along with representatives from other area preschool programs, social services, and health departments in order to better coordinate efforts and services. This partnership committee has developed a common list of readiness skills and resources

for parents so that the community can share the same framework and goals around transitions. The committee also launched a common registration day for the 10 participating school districts to help minimize confusion, streamline the process for incoming kindergarten families, and increase the number of families registering on time. Additionally, the committee has made efforts to improve outreach to parents and

families. For example, the summer of 2011 saw the creation of a television ad campaign and the establishment of a regional 211 telephone number—both designed to alert families about a regional kindergarten registration date and to promote early education. As a result, regional on-time registration numbers increased across the state.

CALIFORNIA

Addressing the Needs of Young Five-Year-Olds

State Supports

The Child Development Division (CDD) at the California Department of Education (CDE) works in partnership with stakeholders in and outside of the CDE to support early education and care programs in their transition and alignment work. The transition to kindergarten is viewed as a shared responsibility of public and private sectors that requires a birth–8 perspective.

Key state supports include:

- Public-private partnerships with a common mission to create high-quality early childhood programs
- Innovative programming that fills gaps in early learning experiences for children

Public-private partnerships. One external partnership that has been instrumental to transition work within the state is with Preschool California, a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities for California’s children. As an advocacy organization, Preschool California works collaboratively with CDE to push for an early learning agenda that includes a quality education system for children from birth to age 8—one that ensures that children are striving in

preschool, ready for kindergarten, and successfully learning by third grade.

Innovative programming. One of the key innovative initiatives that Preschool California focuses on is Transitional Kindergarten (TK), the first year of a two-year kindergarten experience for young 5-year-olds (those born after September 2). The initiative was created under the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 as a bridge from preschool to kindergarten.²⁶ Taught by credentialed teachers, TK classes, as part of the public school system, are free to families. The same broad coalition that supported the passage of Transitional Kindergarten—including policymakers, Preschool California, the CDE, K–12 education advocates, and business leaders—is now working on its implementation by hosting statewide summits and community forums, and by maintaining the [TK California website](#).²⁷

Local Practices

Several districts elected to implement TK prior to the mandated implementation scheduled for 2012–2013. Two early implementers were the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District in Fresno County. Recognizing that the academic demands of kindergarten were not meeting the

developmental needs of their young 5-year-olds, administrators from these districts felt that the program was a good fit and offered it as a voluntary pilot to eligible children in 2010; both districts have had programs in place since that time. In LAUSD, Transitional Kindergarten is offered in 115 schools, while Kingsburg has TK in one of its schools. To create a consistent two-year kindergarten experience, LAUSD and Kingsburg looked to the CDE's Kindergarten Standards and the California Preschool Learning Foundations to create hybrid standards for TK—standards that are developmentally appropriate, yet consistent with kindergarten standards.

School–family partnerships: Empowering families to make decisions for their children and schools. As early implementers of TK, staff from LAUSD and Kingsburg had many opportunities to engage parents in the decision to bring a voluntary TK program to their schools and enroll their children. In LAUSD, parents sat on an advisory group with the Administrative Coordinator for LAUSD Early Childhood Education Division and representatives from the teachers and administrators unions to develop the district's approach to TK. In LAUSD Local District 1, in fact, it was parents who brought the program to the schools: after hearing about TK, parents approached their schools' leadership team and district superintendents to campaign for its early implementation.

In Kingsburg, parents serving on the Washington's School Site Council approved TK as part of the school plan—including its curriculum and expenditures. Parents have remained involved throughout the implementation phase. They serve as volunteers

in the school's two TK classrooms and advocate the program throughout the community and to other parents.

Preschool–school partnerships: Building capacity through monthly meetings.

Kingsburg's monthly Kindergarten Articulation Team meetings bring together teachers from local preschools, childcare centers, and kindergarten classrooms. Recent agenda items from these meetings include supporting

programs' implementation of quality preschool classrooms, ensuring seamless kindergarten transitions, and discussing best practices for sharing data between early care and kindergarten programs. Currently, kindergarten teachers have access to children's preschool and TK assessment data and use this information to drive instruction; however, the Team is thinking about ways to share other types of data

(such as the needs of individual children) among programs. Each year, the Team uses an established articulation plan that they share with parents at the beginning of the school year.

At the Washington School in Kingsburg, the principal and teachers are part of a Transitional Kindergarten Professional Learning Community, which is supported by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and receives guidance from Preschool California. The Learning Community brings together school districts from across the state to discuss best practices in TK programs.

School–community partnerships: Reaching beyond the schools to inform the public about TK. Administrative staff from the LAUSD office partner with Preschool California to run monthly tours of their TK program sites for

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California teachers, legislative representatives, and parents. During these tours, staff from both organizations host panel presentations, lead observations of TK classrooms, and field questions about TK.

In Kingsburg, the Washington School has partnered with the public library, doctor's offices, clinics, City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, and a local grocery store to distribute informational brochures (in English and Spanish) about TK. Librarians created a

space for these brochures in the children's book area, while managers at the local grocery store created a bulletin board that showcased all of the services and programs available at Washington School and included information about how and where to register children for these programs. Kingsburg has also opened its doors for many school districts to come and observe TK and receive technical assistance from the staff.

Policy Implications

Nationwide, significant efforts have been made to encourage, support, and expand transition practices at the local, state, and federal levels. The state-level practices in these six cases illustrate what these efforts can look like in the field. And new directions at the federal level—including the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT–ELC) and Secretary Duncan's announcement of a proposal for an Office for Early Learning²⁸ at the U.S. Department of Education—reflect a heightened awareness of the importance of the education of the youngest students. The continuation of current policies and funding at the federal and state level to support early education work, especially around transitions to elementary school, is critical. Continued funding and support at the state level, meanwhile, is needed to ensure partnerships among key players.

State and federal policies to support collaborative and thoughtful transitions should accomplish the following:

Promote the importance of family and community partnerships during transitions through reporting and accountability systems. Policymakers can encourage relationship-based transitions by ensuring that rating systems like the Virginia Star Quality Initiative, and templates for five-year plans like that mandated by the New Jersey State Department of Education, include sections

about these types of partnerships that districts/programs must address. To support educators in these efforts, resources for engaging families and community members should be made available on state departments of education websites for administrators and educators to learn from and disseminate.

One successful example of support for partnership is the federal Promise Neighborhoods program. This program aims to improve the outcomes of children living in distressed communities by building a coordinated continuum of health, social, and educational supports. Through communities of practice, the Promise Neighborhood grantees engage in peer-to-peer professional learning. They share opportunities and challenges, strategies to leverage federal investments in data systems, and best practices. The transition to kindergarten is one area in which Promise Neighborhoods can create partnerships and use its communities of practice to promote young children's learning, growth, and success.

To promote family and community partnerships, policymakers should also provide educators with guidelines on data sharing with families. Sharing data effectively with families, that is, by being positive and specific about observations and sharing and asking for interpretations of the data,²⁹ will likely help families feel comfortable using data and

empower them to ask for and engage with data in kindergarten and beyond.

Make joint preschool and kindergarten training and professional development opportunities available to increase teachers' knowledge of transition practices. Teachers who have received specialized training in transitions report using more of all types of transition practices than those who have not had such training.³⁰ The states profiled in this brief spoke about a number of different training opportunities—from summits to leadership series—offered around school readiness and transitions. Nationwide, several states have begun to align standards, curricula, and assessments³¹ in early childhood with primary elementary grades.³² However, to build on these efforts, training practices are needed at both the state and local levels so that administrators and teachers can learn about state requirements and so that local efforts can be made to implement these practices. For local education agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funds, existing funds can be used to organize joint transition training.

Build capacity for continued statewide and regional sharing of promising practices. Several of the educators and administrators interviewed for this study described the importance of their memberships in state, regional, and local coalitions and learning communities. These groups allow teachers to prepare for the implementation of new initiatives, share lessons learned about different transition practices, and discuss how best to share data with families and each other. However, a lack of cross-learning within, between, and among states also suggests the need for a national space for sharing ideas, tools, and promising practices. This issue may be addressed effectively by using digital technologies to promote inter-state communities of practice to accelerate learning and scale up successful

family–preschool–school–community partnerships. The U.S. Department of Education is working to create an Early Learning Network for this purpose.

Provide districts with funding opportunities to support their transition practices. Many of the local programs profiled in this brief noted that they leveraged external funds to run and support their transition programs and practices. Policymakers can create competitive or needs-based grant programs that allow programs to extend their current transition efforts. Some existing relevant grant competitions include Promise Neighborhoods and the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3). To help districts identify funding sources outside of state departments of education, advocacy organizations can provide districts with lists of organizations that support early childhood education. Several of the local programs profiled here, for example, are supported by local United Ways, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, which all offer grant programs that support children, families, and communities.

DATA.ED.GOV

The Early Learning page on data.ed.gov* features a list of grant names and an interactive U.S. map spotlighting individual discretionary grant programs that focus on or include early learning. For additional resources on transitions, see the [Transition to Kindergarten Wiki](http://transitionwiki.pbworks.com)** from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement and the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning.

* <http://data.ed.gov/early-learning>

** <http://transitionwiki.pbworks.com>

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About Harvard Family Research Project

Since 1983, we have helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. Our work focuses primarily on three areas that support children's learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education.

Building on our knowledge that schools alone cannot meet the learning needs of our children, we also focus national attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach, which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. Underpinning all our work is our commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability.

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program, specific local transition practices used, and successes and challenges in using these practices. Supplemental information for each state was obtained on websites and from resources that the interviewees provided.

²⁰ Watch the videos online at <http://www.youtube.com/user/acnjforkids#p/c/D7B337CBA5613B79>

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²² Visit the website online at <http://parentsknow.state.mn.us>

²³ Watch video online at http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3_5/tips/VL/PKDEV_000919

²⁴ View the activities online at <http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknowstellentprod/groups/parentsknow/documents/presentation/001814.pdf>

²⁵ Learn more online: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/SchReadiK/index.html>

²⁶ Pianta, R. C. & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, & schools*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

²⁷ *Preschool California*. (n. d.). *Transitional Kindergarten: Preparing California's children to succeed in kindergarten*. Retrieved from <http://www.preschoolcalifornia.org/resources/resource-files/outreach-packet/preschool-california.pdf>

²⁸ Visit the website online at <http://www.tkcalifornia.org/>

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education. (2011, November 4). U.S. Department of Education proposes dedicated office for early learning. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-proposes-dedicated-office-early-learning>

³⁰ Office of Head Start National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement (2011). *Family engagement and ongoing child assessment*. Cambridge, MA: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. Retrieved from, <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/family-engagement-and-ongoing-child-assessment-081111.pdf>

³¹ Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001.

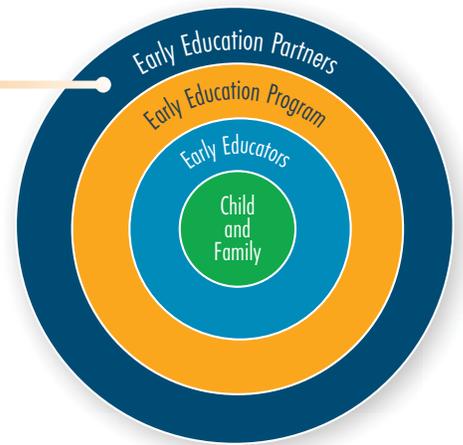
³² States that have aligned pre-K to 3rd grade standards include Rhode Island, Minnesota, Maryland, and New Jersey.

³³ Council of Chief State School Officers (2012). *Confronting the quiet crisis: How chief state school officers are advancing early childhood opportunities*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Appendix: Transition Practices by State

	California 	Georgia 	Maryland 	Minnesota 	New Jersey 	Virginia 
Use of family surveys		Parent survey about child's K readiness	Judy Center family surveys	Transition survey at the end of Bridges to Kindergarten	Family survey on transitions	
Transition team	Kindergarten Articulation Team	Center-based transition team		Northfield Early Childhood Initiative Coalition	District-wide transition team	Smart Beginnings Coalition
Summer transition program		8-week transition camp	Judy Center 1-week camp	Bridges to Kindergarten		5-week summer school readiness program
Transition plans		Local practice			Required by state for all preschool programs	Part of Smart Beginnings plan
Parent education component		8-month Total Development Series		Parents Know website		
Statewide data/assessment system		Georgia Testing Identification	Work Sampling System			Voluntary Star Quality rating system
Aligned professional development	K teachers trained on Preschool Foundations	Joint pre-K and kindergarten trainings on standards and assessments	Maryland Model for School Readiness		PreK-3rd Leadership Series	
Aligned standards/curriculum	Hybrid standards for TK	To be released in 2012			PK3 System	

SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS: Working with Early Education Partners



Partnering to Create Continuity

Children experience many transitions in their young lives. They move from home to infant and toddler care, to preschool, and on to kindergarten. With each new setting comes a new environment, routines, activities, and people, as well as different expectations. When early education programs, schools, and community organizations collaborate, they can create continuity across these systems.

Continuity makes transitions smooth and promotes a sense of belonging for both children and their families. Continuity requires strong leadership and collaboration between both the sending and the receiving programs.



Program leaders are the cornerstone of successful transition. They ensure success by creating a culture of collaboration among families, staff, early education partners, schools, and community stakeholders. Committed, engaged leaders serve as role models for families, staff, and partners. They strive to develop mutual understanding, ongoing communication, and trusting relationships—all necessary components of successful collaboration among partners.

Program leaders may ask:

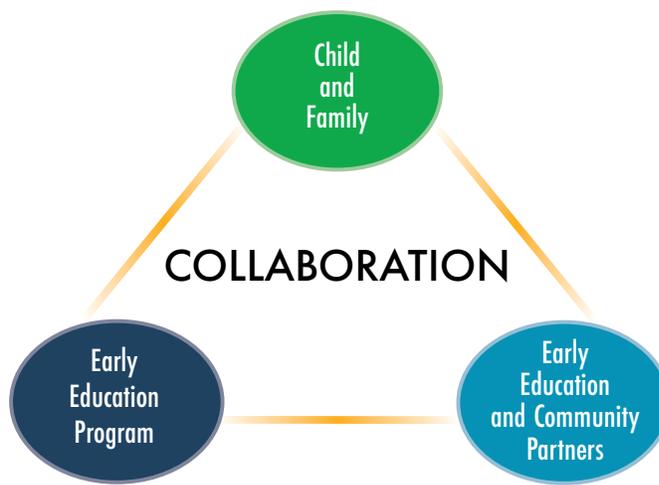
- What kinds of policies and practices foster collaboration with early education partners?
- How can programs and schools align their systems to enhance transition services?
- How can community organizations, agencies, and businesses support transition?

This brief provides guidance to program leaders on collaborating with early education partners, schools, and community stakeholders to enhance transition services for children and their families. It offers suggestions on developing policies and practices to support external partnerships. Information on internal policies and practices for partnering with families and supporting staff can be found in the companion brief *Supporting Transitions: Program Policies and Practices*.

Who are your partners?

Early education partners in this brief include:

- Sending and receiving programs—the early care and education programs that children attend before entering your program and the programs they transition to when leaving your program (e.g., Early Head Start, Head Start, child care, and elementary schools)
- Agencies providing support services to children and families (e.g., early intervention, special education, social services, health services, and mental health services)
- Community organizations, agencies, and businesses in the community that have a vested interest in young children and families (e.g., cultural organizations, service organizations, museums, libraries, and recreation programs—see [Appendix A: Leveraging Community Resources to Support Children and Families with Unique Needs and Backgrounds as They Transition](#))



Research on collaborative approaches to transition has found that:

- Ongoing communication between the sending and receiving early education programs strengthens relationships. It also leads to programs sharing consistent information with families. This has a positive impact on children's early school success
- Communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers about curriculum, expectations for kindergarten, and individual children helps teachers prepare incoming kindergartners socially, emotionally, and academically
- Providing preschool children with learning activities similar to those they will experience in kindergarten correlates with more rapid social and emotional adjustment and increased academic performance in kindergarten

While most research on transition focuses on transition to kindergarten, collaborative transition practices can benefit children throughout early childhood and across all settings.

Collaborating with Early Education Programs and Schools

Establishing transition policies on how you will collaborate with other early education programs, schools, and community services helps provide continuity for children and families as they move into and out of your program. As a leader, your role is to ensure that your transition policies address a collaborative approach not only within your program, but also with early education partners, schools, and community services outside your program (see [Appendix B: Building Bridges](#)).

Developing successful partnerships is a process that takes time—especially when partners are from different systems. Policies can be a springboard to more formal collaboration with other early education partners. For example, they can lead to formal agreements and memoranda of understanding.

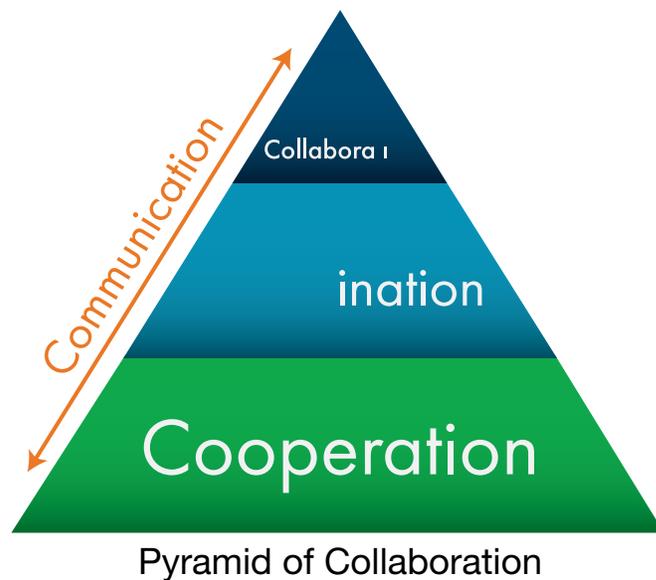
Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require programs to collaborate with families and other organizations in providing transition services. Collaboration can mean different things to different people. Let's take a closer look at what collaboration with external partners looks like.

The [Pyramid of Collaboration](#) illustrates three levels of collaboration that are important to use in transition policies: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. These help a program work with external partners toward a common vision of transition based on shared values. Ongoing communication is essential at all levels. Use the principles of the pyramid to promote understanding of the different levels of collaboration and guide policy development.

Cooperation occurs when a program informally communicates with external partners to share information that relates to their common interest in supporting transition. These might be short-term or one-time exchanges. When programs cooperate, each maintains full authority over its own operations, and no mandates are placed on another partner.

Cooperative practices may include:

- Sharing information on program regulations, child outcomes, curriculum models, and assessment processes
- Offering samples of the individualized transition-planning forms you use when a child transitions into and out of your program
- Distributing recruitment and enrollment information to families and other programs
- Inviting early education and school staff to open houses and other public events
- Providing program information, such as website and social media addresses



Coordination occurs when a program co-plans and coordinates transition-related activities with other programs. Programs may share resources but have no binding fiscal obligations.

Coordinated practices may include:

- Holding joint staff meetings and professional development opportunities on topics such as how alignment promotes continuity for children and families
- Providing release time for teachers to visit each other's programs
- Co-hosting child and family transition events and experiences, such as visitation days, open houses, and joint home visits
- Establishing a formal protocol for transfer of children's records

What is continuity and why is it important during transition?

Continuity is consistency in children's learning experiences and expectations among early education settings. It is achieved through mutual understanding and alignment of the curricula, teaching strategies, environments, and learning expectations between the settings that precede and follow a transition.

Continuity across settings supports and sustains children's learning across developmental domains. What children learn across domains in one setting is built upon in later settings. Research indicates that when there is continuity between programs, children are more likely to retain what they learned and experience less "fade out" later in their schooling.

Collaboration occurs when a program works together with other programs toward a common vision based on shared values. Programs may share fiscal and even legal responsibilities (e.g., special education and related services). Often, programs formalize their partnerships with written agreements or memoranda of understanding. It is important to regularly review these agreements to keep them current.

Collaborative practices may include:

- Aligning early learning outcomes, curricula, and assessment between programs
- Developing interagency agreements that address services for children with disabilities, including transition services, with early intervention and local education agencies
- Establishing cross-program systems that support children and families with unique needs, such as families who do not speak English, are recent immigrants, are experiencing homelessness, or are foster families
- Organizing and co-sponsoring large events for families, staff, and the community (see the ECLKC resource, [*Transition to Kindergarten: Transition and Alignment Summit Guide*](#))
- Collaborating at district and state levels on transition initiatives (see in this brief, [*What Is the Status of Transition Services in Your State? Collaboration at District and State Levels*](#))

Summary of Transition Services in the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

The HSPPS are the mandatory regulations that all Head Start grantees must follow. [Part 1302 Subpart G—Transition Services](#) specifically addresses transition services requirements for grantees. A summary of Subpart G and additional transition-related standards are listed below.

§1302.15(b)(3) Transition of homeless children and children in foster care

- Make efforts to transition a child who is homeless or in foster care to a program in a different service area if a family or child moves.

§1302.17(b)(3) Transition of children with persistent and serious challenging behaviors

- After a program has explored all possible options, and it is determined that their program is not the appropriate placement for a child, the program must work to facilitate transition to a more appropriate placement.

§1302.53 Community partnerships and coordination with other early childhood and education programs

- Establish ongoing collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations to promote a coordinated systems of comprehensive early childhood services.

§1302.61(c)(2) Plan and implement transition services for children with disabilities

- Collaborate with parents and local agencies responsible for implementing IDEA Part B services for children birth to age three and local education agencies for children age three to five.

§1302.63 (b) Coordination and collaboration with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA.

- Develop interagency agreements for services for eligible children, including transition services as children move from services provided under Part C of IDEA to services provided under Part B of IDEA and from preschool to kindergarten.

§1302.70 Transition from Early Head Start

- Collaborate with parents and Head Start to support successful transition of children and families out of Early Head Start.

§1302.71 Transitions from Head Start to kindergarten

- Collaborate with parents, local education agencies, and kindergarten teachers to support children transitioning from Head Start to kindergarten.

§1302.72 Transitions between programs

- Support effective transition to Early Head Start, Head Start, other early education programs, pre-kindergartens, and kindergartens.

§1302.82(b) Family partnerships services for enrolled pregnant women

- Engage and support pregnant women and other relevant family members, such as fathers, in planning an infant's transition to program enrollment.

Las Cruces Head Start Looks at Alignment Between Early Education Programs

Las Cruces Head Start is a large grantee that operates Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, Early Head Start, and State Child Care programs. Children and families transition into and out of the program or from one program option to another within the program (e.g., home-based, family child care, and center-based) as children grow, families move, and family incomes change. Let's see how Las Cruces Head Start addresses continuity and alignment between programs . . .

Knowing how important continuity is for smooth transitions and children's school success, the Las Cruces Head Start transition team held a meeting to discuss alignment of child outcomes, assessment, curricula, and family engagement among programs. Members of the team included families, staff at various levels within the program, staff from other local early education programs, school district teachers and administrators, and early intervention and special education teachers.

Each early education program and the school district gave a short presentation to the whole group on their program's child outcome requirements, curriculum, and assessment instruments. Next, the participants broke into smaller roundtable discussions to go more in depth on these topics, compare approaches and instruments, and brainstorm ideas on increasing alignment and continuity among programs.

Las Cruces teachers Jada and Alex joined the preschool curriculum discussion. The teachers began by comparing each program's curriculum goals in the language and literacy domain. Most of these curricula included language and literacy experiences that followed a developmental continuum, such as the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) and the state's early learning guidelines. They discussed how the language and literacy activities in these curricula supported or did not support children's school readiness. For instance, the curriculum used by a wrap-around child care program that many Las Cruces preschool children attended did not include print and alphabet knowledge activities. Jada and Alex offered examples of activities they use in their classroom to promote writing skills, such as providing writing materials for children to make lists and create their own books.

Claudia, Las Cruces' program director, invited Carlos and Reyna Sanchez to the family engagement roundtable. They were very involved parents and had much to share. They talked about ways they had participated in Head Start. During the discussion, they learned that the opportunities for family engagement were different in many other programs, but they happily discovered that all the other programs welcomed family volunteers. Some also had parent boards or site councils where families could learn about the program and share ideas and concerns. Most of the programs involved the families of children who transitioned into their program, but not all programs involved families when children transitioned out.

At the end of the day, someone from each group shared what their table had discussed and the ideas they came up with for increasing alignment among programs. After groups shared, the large group developed an action plan with the recommendation that some of the ideas be added to existing written agreements among agencies.

The leaders discussed ways their programs could work toward alignment. They agreed to share assessment instruments and processes they use and to establish a formal protocol for the transfer of children's records. They planned some next steps, including continuing the discussion and having similar meetings with teachers, home visitors, and child care providers.

What's happening here?

- Las Cruces Head Start transition team held a meeting to discuss alignment of child outcomes, assessment, curricula, and family engagement among local programs.
- Speakers from each program and the school district shared their program's requirements, instruments, and processes.
- In-depth roundtable discussions were held on each topic.
- Table groups reported on their discussions and ideas for increasing alignment.
- An action plan was developed with the recommendation that some of the ideas be added to existing written agreements between programs.

Promoting Continuity Through Alignment

Collaborating on transition can be challenging because there may be significant differences among systems. Child outcomes, assessment instruments and processes, curricula, environments, and family engagement often differ greatly. Each early education or school program may follow different regulations and enrollment requirements. Even the goals of the programs may be different.

To increase continuity for children and families, leaders need to work toward alignment across programs when possible. Alignment means that child outcomes, assessment instruments and processes, curricula, and family engagement are coordinated to promote continuity in children's learning as they move from one program to the next. The purpose of alignment is to ensure that the expectations and activities in the current setting create the foundation for learning in the next setting.

Successful alignment must involve coordination between the sending and receiving programs throughout early childhood. The very first step in alignment occurs when programs for pregnant mothers enroll their infants into Early Head Start or child care (see [HSPPS 1302.82\(b\)](#) for guidance). Ideally, infant programs align

with toddler programs, which then align with preschool programs; preschool, in turn, is aligned with kindergarten. Alignment includes ensuring continuity in children's learning when they move from one program option to another within Head Start (i.e., family child care, home-based, or center-based) and across settings (i.e., Early Head Start, Head Start, other infant/toddler and preschool settings, and kindergarten).



Early Learning Outcomes

Early learning outcomes are the skills and concepts children are expected to learn by a certain age. Different states and programs use various names for early learning outcomes (e.g., early learning standards, early learning guidelines, or child outcomes).

Head Start's ELOF describes the learning and development expectations for children from birth to age five across five domains of learning and development. Its goals outline children's learning sequences and provide a roadmap for continuity across age levels.

When sending and receiving programs are able to align their expectations of children, such as the ELOF with kindergarten standards, they build continuity across settings. Such alignment allows children to naturally progress from what they learn in one setting to what will be expected of them in the next and from one age group to the next.

To align child outcomes between your program and other early education programs and schools:

- Share and compare the child outcomes in the ELOF with your state's learning standards or guidelines for infants and toddlers, preschool, and kindergarten
- Identify learning goals that may exist in one program but not the other, such as goals for children who are dual language learners
- Discuss how child outcomes are used to guide assessment and curricula in your programs
- Contact your state's Head Start Collaboration Office to learn whether your state has an initiative to align child outcomes (sometimes called standards) with curriculum and assessment (see [National Standards Crosswalk Tool](#))

Child Assessment

Child assessment is used to measure children's development and whether they are progressing as expected. When the assessment processes of the sending and receiving programs are aligned, and programs share information (with written consent) on individual children, early educators know where individual children's current skills are in relation to what will be expected from them. Note that programs do not need to use the same assessment instrument to be aligned. Early educators can use the assessment data to individualize curriculum and teaching practices and to support each child's unique strengths and needs to provide continuity in their learning.

To align assessment, meet with your sending and receiving early education partners to:

- Share and compare your assessment instruments and processes
- Discuss how assessment data are collected, analyzed, and used to inform program planning (e.g., policies, program self-assessment, and professional development)
- Agree on what assessment information will be shared between your programs and how it will be shared (including obtaining written consent from families and ensuring confidentiality)
- Discuss how to include families in assessing their own child's progress and what information will be shared with their child's new program or kindergarten



Curriculum

Each curriculum provides learning goals, experiences and activities, and teaching practices in key areas of children's development. The alignment of curricula between sending and receiving programs provides a continuum of learning experiences across settings (e.g., infant and toddler programs to preschool programs to kindergarten).

Meet with your counterparts in the sending and receiving programs or schools to:

- Share and compare your curricula and arrange for early education staff to do the same
- Discuss how your curriculum addresses each of the ELOF essential domains
- Discuss how the curricula build on each other and support children at different age levels along the developmental continuum (e.g., learning experiences that support children's development of emerging mathematical thinking in infant and toddler years provide a foundation for children's math abilities during preschool years, and similarly, mathematical learning experiences during preschool years set the foundation for kindergarten)
- Identify overlaps in your curricula and discuss how they can be used to reinforce and expand children's learning
- Consider any gaps that each program can fill in to create continuity, such as both programs agreeing to use some of the same developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate educational materials
- Hold joint professional development and in-service training on common curriculum topics, such as arranging the learning environment and guiding children's behavior
- Discuss how families participate in curriculum planning and individualize learning experiences for their own children

Family Engagement

Family engagement is essential for children's success. It is built on mutual respect and shared roles between families and educators and reinforces families' strengths and aspirations. At the program level, families and educators develop positive relationships and work toward goals that families choose for themselves and their children.

When programs work together to align their family engagement strategies across early learning systems families benefit and continuity is enhanced. They are able to advocate for their child's learning and development as their children transition to new learning environments (see the companion brief *Supporting Transitions: Early Educators Partnering with Families*).

To explore and align family engagement strategies with other early education programs and schools:

- Share how you can partner together with families as they transition into and out of your program. For example, discuss how you can
 - > coordinate opportunities for families to connect with other families in the new early education program and school
 - > encourage families to become involved in advocacy and leadership opportunities in the new setting
 - > co-plan and coordinate program visitations, family nights, and other transition activities
- Commit to fully engaging families in their children's transition processes by
 - > finding ways to use individual family information (with written permission) to support each family's transition process
 - > providing opportunities for families to discuss, with teachers, their child's strengths and challenges



What Is the Status of Transition Services in Your State, Territory, or Tribe?

Many states have introduced services to help early education program leaders, school administrators, and stakeholders work together to support children and families as they move from early education programs to kindergarten and beyond. These services provide community-, program-, and child-level strategies. Their goal is to promote continuity for children as they move from one system to the next.

Learn about and use ideas from these innovative strategies to provide continuity for children and families in your program. Examples of strategies used include:

- Holding city, county, and/or statewide events to share resources that encourage collaboration
- Developing a community-wide electronic enrollment process for all early education programs so families will only need to complete one set of registration forms even if applying to more than one program
- Creating a local school readiness campaign to raise public awareness about the importance of transition
- Making sure families register their children on time and feel welcome in their new setting

State transition initiatives have shown increased understanding of the role transition plays in children's school success. To find out more about your state's, territory's, or tribe's efforts to provide transition services, contact your [Head Start Collaboration Office](#).

Las Cruces Head Start Collaborates to Host a Transition Summit

Let's see how early education programs, schools, and stakeholder organizations collaborated to improve transition services in their community . . .

Las Cruces Head Start's transition team assessed its current services and developed an improvement plan. Members of the team included current and past families, staff at various levels, staff from other early education programs, school district teachers and administrators, and early intervention and special education teachers. Transition team members represented the cultures and languages of enrolled families.

In addition to the core team members, they invited representatives from community stakeholders, such as the library, children's museum, local colleges, pediatric association, foster care services, homeless shelters, and the local Office of Refugee Resettlement.

One action step included in the improvement plan was to collaborate to co-sponsor a Transition Summit. Participants included families, early education and kindergarten teachers, program leaders and school administrators, service agencies, and community stakeholders. They used the [Transition Summit Planning](#) resource from the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center and other resources to help plan a two-day summit. Some session topics included:

- Establishing Core Values for Transition Practices
- Family-Program Partnerships for Successful Transition
- How Separation Impacts Children's Social Emotional Development
- IDEA and Transition Requirements for Young Children with Disabilities
- Innovative Transition Projects: What Is Happening in Our State and Across Our Nation?
- Nurturing Responsive Transition for Infants and Toddlers
- Family Voices: Our Transition Stories

The most popular session was a panel discussion titled "Transition Is Everybody's Business: How Community Partners Can Support Transition Efforts." In this session:

- A children's librarian talked about special story times she holds during the summer, when she reads books on going to child care, preschool, and kindergarten
- A pediatrician shared a pamphlet she reviews with families who are taking their infants to out-of-home care for the first time
- A children's museum director showed slides of an exhibit set up like a classroom where children can "play school"
- A migrant farm workers' organization shared bilingual pamphlets on relevant parenting topics, such as "How to Spend Quality Time with Your Children When You Work Dawn to Dusk"

The summit was a huge success. Participants left with personal action plans to use what they learned.

What's happening here?

- The transition team met with members from early education programs, schools, and the community, assessed Las Cruces Head Start's transition services, and developed an improvement plan.
- The transition team planned and co-sponsored a Transition Summit.
- Families participated as planners, presenters, and attendees.
- A wide range of topics applicable to families, early educators, early education partners, school administrators, and community leaders was presented.
- A panel discussion featuring community partners showed the benefit of community involvement.
- Participants wrote action plans on how they will use what they learned at the summit.

Developing Partnerships with Outside Agencies and Community Stakeholders

For children with disabilities, health, mental health, and other unique needs, it is important to involve organizations that provide other relevant services to the child and family in the transition process. Children and families benefit when service agencies, organizations, and community stakeholders support transition efforts. These organizations often have information and resources that can be leveraged to improve the quality of your transition services or to support children and families with unique needs.

Related Services and Specialized Resources

Related services can include health, mental health, early intervention, special education, nutrition, and social services. When programs partner with organizations that provide these services to children and families, it increases the chances that services will not be interrupted as children transition and that similar services will continue after transition. For example, when Early Head Start children with disabilities transition to Head Start at age three, they also transition from early intervention services to special education. By partnering with early intervention, special education, and Head Start, the Early Head Start program can work on the continuation of services.

Community organizations and agencies can also provide specialized resources and support for children and families with unique needs and backgrounds, such as children in foster placements,

families experiencing homelessness, and families seeking refuge. For example, the Office of Refugee Resettlement can provide information useful to refugee families and organizations working with them. For a more detailed list of organizations, see [Appendix A: Leveraging Community Resources to Support Children and Families with Unique Needs and Backgrounds as They Transition.](#)

Children and families benefit when other agencies, organizations, and community stakeholders support transition efforts.

Community Stakeholders

Children and families also benefit when programs develop transition partnerships with organizations that provide community services to children and families, such as libraries, museums, recreation centers, colleges, health clinics, and pediatricians. Libraries and museums can create displays, or offer puppet shows and story hours about going to child care or school. Recreation centers can offer physical fitness and special recreation classes for targeted age groups. Colleges can offer children's dance, art, and other classes to help them gain skills and confidence. Health clinics and pediatricians can hand out enrollment information and talk with families about the impact transitions can have on their child and family.

Stakeholders from the broader community can also provide valuable support for transition. These may include faith-based organizations, cultural organizations, chambers of commerce,

local businesses, television and radio stations, newspapers, and service organizations. Partnering with stakeholders can assist in strengthening continuity for children and their families. They can provide access to services for programs and families, promote awareness of the importance of transition, fund transition events, and include Head Start and other early education programs in local plans. Reaching out to partner with community stakeholders also educates the community on the importance of transition and its role in the continuity of children's learning.

Partnering with stakeholders can assist in strengthening continuity for children and their families.

Putting It All Together

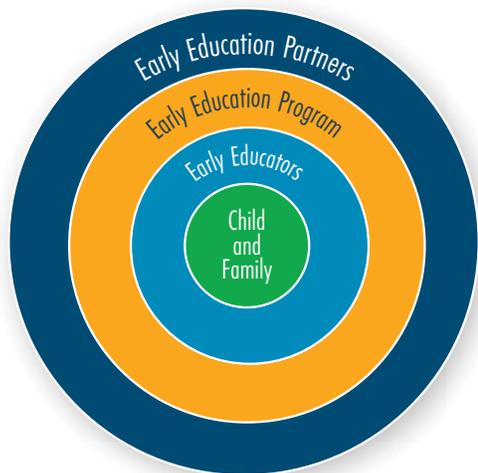
Smooth transitions depend on collaboration among all partners involved in the process, including families. When early education programs, early education partners, schools, and community stakeholders collaborate on transition, continuity is increased across these systems. Leaders play an important role by establishing policies and practices that promote cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

A key way to provide continuity is to align learning expectations, assessment instruments and processes, and curricula to support children's learning as they move from one program to the next. Aligned systems allow children to build on what they have learned and be prepared for what they will be learning next. This helps increase the likelihood that the social, emotional, and academic gains children made in preschool, for example, will continue to build after elementary school entry.

Children and families benefit when early education programs and schools collaborate with community stakeholders. Transition partnerships may include organizations that provide additional services to children, such as special education and health services. Stakeholder organizations, community services, and businesses can help support early childhood transitions become a collaborative, community-wide effort.

Where to Learn More

Transition Briefs in This Series



SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS:

Using Child Development as a Guide

Early Educators Partnering with Families

Program Policies and Practices

Working with Early Education Partners

Resources

Collaboration and Coordination of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C Programs

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/ed-hhs-miechv-partc-guidance.pdf>

DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education

<http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices>

ELOF Implementation Tool Kit

[URL forthcoming](#)

Get Ready for Kindergarten! Activity Calendar for Teachers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/transition-calendar.pdf>

Get Ready for Kindergarten! Activity Calendar for Families

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/transition-calendar-family.pdf>

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework 2015

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/elof>

The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework: Promoting Family Engagement and School Readiness, From Prenatal to Age 8

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/pfce-interactive-framework>

Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302 Subpart E—Family and Community Engagement

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-subpart-e-family-and-community-engagement-program-services>

Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302 Subpart F—Additional Services for Children with Disabilities

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-subpart-f-additional-services-children-disabilities>

Resources (continued)

Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302 Subpart G—Transition Services

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-subpart-g-transition-services?language_content_entity=en

National Program Standards Crosswalk Tool

<https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/crosswalk/>

Transition to Kindergarten Summit Presentations

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

Transition to Kindergarten: Transition and Alignment Summit Guide

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/transition-summit-guide.pdf>

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Leveraging Community Resources to Support Children and Families with Unique Needs and Backgrounds as They Transition

Transition activities that involve children and engage families as they move from one early education program to the next are strongly linked to children's positive adjustment to and success in their new learning setting. These activities include experiences such as kindergarten visits, training for families on the transition process and its impact on their child and family, family support groups, and home activities for families to do with their children.

According to Rous, Hallam, McCormick, and Cox (2010), "Studies show children and families from non-dominant cultures as well as low-income backgrounds may be particularly vulnerable during [transition]" (p. 18). Some families and children may benefit from additional support, services, and resources as they transition. These specialized resources may not be readily available from the sending or receiving programs. Special knowledge or skills may be required, language or cultural barriers may exist, and reaching families may be a challenge.

Involving community stakeholders on your transition team to address such factors benefits children, families, and programs. These stakeholders often have information and resources that can be leveraged to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of your transition services. As you form your transition team, or seek resources for children and families, consider involving the following types of organizations.

Children with IFSPs, IEPs, 504 Health Plans, or serious and persistent challenging behaviors

- Early Intervention (IDEA Part C)
- Special Education (IDEA Part B)
- Related services providers, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, and augmented technology experts
- Mental health clinics and professionals

Children who are dual language learners and families who speak languages other than English

- Cultural organizations
- Language clubs and schools
- Local affiliates of the American Sign Language Teachers Association
- Local chapters of the National Association of the Deaf

Children in foster families

- Local affiliate of the National Foster Care Coalition
- State and county child welfare and social service agencies
- Child protective services agencies

Families experiencing homelessness

- Local homeless shelters and service providers
- Local Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office
- Food and clothing banks
- Community Action Agencies
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices

Migrant and seasonal families

- Migrant Health Centers
- Migrant and Seasonal Head Start
- Local school district Office of Migrant Education

Newcomer, immigrant, and refugee families

- Cultural organizations
- Local and State Office of Refugee Resettlement
- Refugee family sponsors, such as faith-based and community organizations

Pregnant mothers in Early Head Start

- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Obstetricians, pediatricians, and medical clinics
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)
- Minor parent programs at school districts

Building Bridges

Early education programs often have opportunities to engage with community partners to create a circle of care for the children and families they serve. Community partnerships can build networks, leverage the expertise of many different partners, and allow for the provision of necessary services to smooth transitions as children and families move into and out of early education settings within your community.

You may be well on your way to having a full circle of partners as you work to support children and families. Or, you may just be getting started. In either case, this resource will help you assess how far along you are in developing partnerships with community stakeholders.

Activity: Partnering to Promote Successful Transition

For this activity, think of the primary goal of partnering as **providing children and families with the continuity and support they need to transition smoothly between settings.**

Part 1: Levels of Partnership

Consider the three levels of partnership that can exist between programs shown in the diagram below.

Level 1: Cooperation (building relationships, getting to know one another, and sharing information)

- *Example:* networking and informally meeting to learn about each other's programs

Level 2: Coordination (implementing projects and activities together)

- *Example:* planning and co-hosting an information meeting for families

Level 3: Collaboration (sharing of resources to meet mutual goals)

- *Example:* aligning early learning outcomes, curricula, assessment between programs



Part 2: Supporting Children and Families

Think about your hopes and dreams for supporting children and families as they transition into and out of your setting and about how current or future partners might help you achieve smooth transitions. As you think about these partners, consider the definitions of **early education partners** discussed in the brief. Write your ideas in the table below.

Your Hopes and Dreams for Children and Families	To fulfill this hope/dream, what resources do you need that other organizations in your community might have?	Name a few organizations that might be able to help.	What level of partnership are you at with each organization (coordinating, cooperating, or collaborating)?
When children come INTO our program, we hope they . . .			
When families come INTO our program, we hope they . . .			
When children transition OUT OF our program, we hope they . . .			
When families transition OUT OF our program, we hope they . . .			

What do your responses tell you about the types of partners you have? What about the types of partners you need to add? What might you need to do to strengthen existing partnerships or establish new ones as you work toward providing children and families with the continuity and support they need to transition smoothly between settings?



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: ^{i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi,vii}

- 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

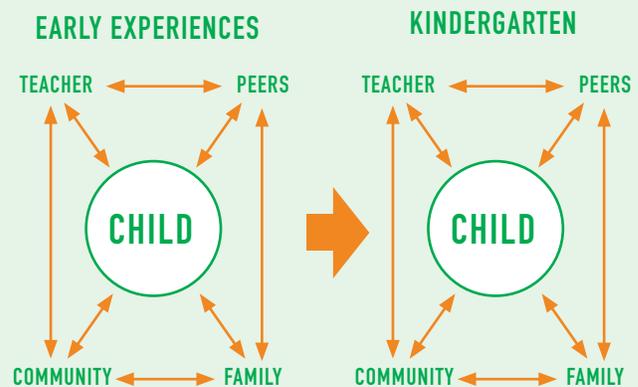
HOW

DO WE IMPROVE CHILDREN'S TRANSITION?

Educators can use these key principles: ^{viii}

- 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.^{ix}

The child, family, school, peer, and community factors are interconnected^x 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.^{xi}

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^{xii,xiii} 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.^{xiv,xv,xvi,xvii}

HELPFUL RESOURCES

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BOOKS

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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.^{xviii} 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.^{xix}

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.

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ONLINE VIDEOS

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TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Transition and Alignment Summit Guide



WINTER 2014



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Quality Teaching
and Learning





“What I was so appreciated about the Transition Summit was how it gave districts and grantees really concrete things to address that can make almost an immediate difference in the lives of families and children.”
 — Head Start Collaboration Office Director



Transition to Kindergarten: Transition and Alignment Summit Guide

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ADDITIONAL SUMMIT MATERIALS

Organization

Appendix A: Agenda for Half-day Summit

Appendix B: Agenda for Full-day Summit

Appendix C: Summit Announcement

Appendix D: Pre-summit Questionnaire of Transition Practices

Appendix E: Sample Activity Materials

Appendix F: Post-summit Feedback Questionnaire

Handouts

Transition to Kindergarten: Tips for Children with IEPs

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

Transition Activity Ideas by Connection

Selected Children’s Books about Kindergarten

Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten

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

Transition Plan (example)

Transition Plan Form

Transition Resources for Families

Transition Resources for Educators and Administrators

Transition Resources for Researchers

References from Presentation Slides

INTRODUCTION

The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL), in collaboration with the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE), has developed resources to guide statewide and regional summits on transition and alignment in early childhood. We provide this guide as a road map to conduct a transition summit, along with materials you can use in planning and carrying one out. Summit planning and delivery are the responsibility of local agencies or individuals, and these materials should be individualized for each summit.

TRANSITION AND ALIGNMENT

Successful transition to kindergarten requires more than ensuring that children have the necessary academic and social skills. Smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten depend on connections made between participants in the process, such as those between schools and families, and between preschool and kindergarten teachers and classrooms, especially connections made prior to kindergarten entry. Aligning preschool and kindergarten practices, standards, curricula, and assessments is an important element for promoting successful transitions. The extent to which elements of each environment are comparable and build on one another can affect how seamless the preschool-to-kindergarten transition is. For example, alignment of environmental factors, such as what restroom signs look like, can ease children's anxiety about entering a new environment. Furthermore, alignment of curricula and assessments can help teachers better support children in continuing to expand their knowledge and skills. Aligned preschool and kindergarten curricula help to create an instructional environment in which children are naturally progressing from what they have learned in preschool to what will be expected of them in the kindergarten setting. Aligned assessments allow kindergarten teachers to see where children's current skills are in relation to what will be taught in order to better target instruction. Promoting successful transition and alignment practices requires continued communication, collaboration, and compromises from decision makers representing both entities.

CONSIDERING "SCHOOL READINESS"

When approaching the subject of children's transitions from preschool to kindergarten, it is likely that the topic of school readiness will come up. A commonly asked question either within the planning team or at the summit is, "What is school readiness?" The answer to this question varies, but certain themes are typically included and should be considered when planning your summit and summit goals. One key point to make is that school readiness is not just about a child's skills, but includes the connections around that child that support him or her to make a successful transition to kindergarten. In a "school ready" environment children are armed with a set of social and academic skills that will help them succeed in kindergarten. But just as importantly, schools create an environment that is welcoming and ready to receive children. Effective transition and alignment practices play an essential role in promoting school readiness.

PURPOSE OF THE SUMMITS

We believe there are six reasons to conduct a transition and alignment summit. They are:

- To bring together key stakeholders in early childhood education, including Head Start teachers and administrators, other early childhood education providers, elementary school teachers, as well as administrators, parents, and community members. Bringing stakeholders together to work in a neutral setting is an important first step in collaborative kindergarten transition planning.
- To communicate the importance of successful early transition experiences for children. Reaching this goal involves providing content on how well children are doing in kindergarten and how successful transition experiences can help children, families, communities, and schools become more “school ready,” which in turn, helps close gaps in kindergarten performance.
- To educate participants on best practices for creating successful early childhood transitions. This includes presenting a framework for transitions through which children, families, communities, and schools contribute to the transition process. Concrete examples of how to link each of these entities successfully are especially useful for participants.
- To allow participants to share current transition and alignment practices and ideas for practices. This can be achieved through group discussions focused on practices that participants are already using or through panel discussions featuring leaders who have successfully addressed transition and alignment planning, have overcome common challenges, and have achieved successful outcomes in their work.
- To assist participants in moving forward with their own transition and alignment work. It is important to apply the knowledge gained about successful practices by adapting them to fit their own needs. An effective summit is one where participants are given the opportunity to create specific goals and plans to begin or expand their transition work.

- To provide participants with the knowledge and resources they can share with others. Because all stakeholders cannot possibly attend these summits, participants can play a vital role in conveying the importance of this work, how to conceptualize it, and how to carry out transition plans to colleagues in their field.

CREATING A SUMMIT PLANNING TEAM

A group of summit organizers should collaborate on summit planning. This group could include Head Start representatives, personnel from your state department of education and area school districts, and community members involved in early childhood education. Team members should work together to set goals for your summit, decide what content should be covered, and organize the day. Tasks for summit preparation can be divided across team members as they see fit.

SUMMIT GOALS, ATTENDANCE, AND CONTENT

The number of summit attendees can range from 20 to 200, depending on goals and the audience for the event.

Summit goals are unique to every area, so consider carefully your audience’s circumstances, in terms of transition teams, local educational coalitions, and other partnerships. Before creating specific conference goals, it is important for summit organizers to consider where their state is in terms of their current work, infrastructure, and policies regarding the preschool to kindergarten transition. A state that currently puts little emphasis on the transition process will need to first address some basic goals, such as informing state-level policy makers of the importance of this work. Other states that currently provide more support to transition work should typically work on goals to address more local-level issues, such as enhancing partnerships between preschool programs and local education agencies.

In addition to evaluating the statewide supports in place before the summit, one goal often addressed during the event is to assess what your particular locality is doing in terms of transition, whether at the state or local level. This initial goal can assist participants in deciding what steps should be taken to attain their end goal, including talking with policy makers, forming transition teams, fostering collaboration, and implementing specific transition practices. Once you create specific summit goals, they will drive summit attendance and content. Following is a discussion of how summit participants and content may vary depending on circumstances.

- If a locality is in the early stages of transition planning and has not yet formed coalitions or alliances to address transition issues, you might focus on educating stakeholders about the importance of smooth transitions and getting buy-in from school superintendents and policy makers at the state level. In this case, attendees would include educational policy makers, superintendents, principals, and other stakeholders who could get transition planning underway. Superintendents and principals are especially important because of their unique ability to recruit others within their system to be involved in this process. Head Start State Collaboration Office directors should also be invited because of their frequent ability to provide assistance in connecting elementary schools with Head Start programs. Transition is a priority for State Collaboration offices, so they have a vested interest in facilitating successful transition practices. Additionally, you may want to consider including members of the state Early Childhood Advisory Council. It is important to promote diversity among stakeholders involved, in terms of individuals' roles, geographic regions represented, and racial/ethnic groups, to be sure that all viewpoints are represented. Content for this type of conference would focus on principles of child development, how important smooth transition experiences are at this stage of life, and evidence demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of early attention to academic and social outcomes.

- If a locality has a good infrastructure in place for transition planning, including local initiatives and planning teams, attendees might learn from each other's experiences in transition planning and fine-tune their own plans to overcome barriers. During this event, participants would include teachers and administrators representing Head Start and elementary schools, local community leaders, and other stakeholders, such as parents, Head Start State Collaboration Office directors, and members of the state Early Childhood Advisory Council. As mentioned above, diversity in stakeholders represented is an important factor to consider. Content for this type of conference would include making connections that foster successful transition practices and planning activities to craft practical strategies to launch after the summit.

BEFORE THE SUMMIT

Planning the event

Based on goals for the summit, one important step is to select appropriate speakers for each of your topics and invite them to attend. We recommend that you solicit some feedback on content from presenters, but as this is your summit, make sure local organizers drive the majority of the content. Once you work out the content, the next step involves creating an internal "working agenda" for the day. This document should include details about each part of the day, such as who is responsible for speaking, how much time is allotted, and how attendees can participate.

You can plan summits for an entire day or a half day, depending on how much content you would like to cover. Typically half-day summits are used for participants who are not yet organized into teams and are not far along in the transition planning process. Full-day summits are ideal for audiences who have already formed transition teams and are ready to make significant plans to move forward in their work. In deciding how long the summit should last, consider whether you will be providing lunch and lodging for those who need it.

We provide sample agendas for both half-day and full-day summits in Appendices A and B. An initial welcome from organizers is recommended, not only to orient participants to the day, but also to emphasize the collaboration that has occurred between organizers, speakers, and others involved. Since the planning and implementation of transition practices is a collaborative process, it is good to demonstrate how the organization of the summit is based in collaboration as well. Note that some key activities to include are ones that ask participants to share information and ideas with one another—such as table discussions guided by focused questions. Panel discussions are also an effective addition if you have a group of people who have successfully worked with one another on early childhood transition and can share their experiences and take questions from participants. Above all, make sure to evaluate whether the agenda you develop will ultimately help you reach your summit goals.

Summit announcement

Prior to releasing an official summit announcement, it is often beneficial to circulate a “save the date” announcement once the summit date is set so that invitees can secure the date on their calendars. In this initial announcement, mention that more information will follow providing further details about the summit. The official summit announcement or invitation should address the needs of the community or state being served, and it should always include such basic elements as the summit’s purpose, goals for the day, a few statements about why the summit is important, who should attend, and what participants should expect from their experience. You should also include information on how to register (via the web, email, phone, or mail) so that you will know who will be attending. You should use this opportunity to gather contact information, such as email addresses, which you will need to send out questionnaires or contact participants if summit plans change. Be sure to include a registration deadline that is far enough ahead of the event to give you time to make arrangements, such as the amount of summit materials needed. Include contact information for one or more of the summit organizers in case potential participants have questions about the event. Mention whether you are providing

Team members should work together to set goals for your summit, decide what content should be covered, and organize the day.

lunch, refreshments, and/or take-home resources. In the event that you are inviting participants to attend in pre-existing teams, it is useful to tailor the registration form to allow teams to submit one form, which would include all team members’ names and information, instead of having each team member submit a separate form. In Appendix C, we provide a sample summit announcement and registration form.

Pre-summit questionnaire

It is often desirable to obtain information about potential attendees’ demographics and transition practices before holding your summit. This kind of information can inform you and summit participants about what is going on in the field, which can be very useful for learning from one another and brainstorming ways to overcome barriers. It is also useful to tailor questions to relate to summit goals, so that you can gather information on how people are already progressing toward those goals. You can easily send out a survey via email several weeks before the event, with a deadline that will allow you time to compile a summary of results to share with summit participants. We offer a sample pre-summit survey of transition practices in Appendix D that can be modified according to your needs.

Logistics

Organizers are responsible for coordinating logistics with Head Start National Centers or other agencies in their designated locality. Following are some of the important tasks that you will need to consider and delegate:

- **Creating a budget**

Assess what funds are available from collaborating agencies, outside contributions, or other available sources. Your budget will likely end up driving decisions about participant numbers, whether food can be provided, and the amount of handouts or take-home materials you will be able to provide.

- **Sending out invitations**

Designate a contact person for RSVPs. Use email or paper mail. If sent by email, we recommend that the invitation document is a PDF attachment.

- **Facilitating registration**

Be sure to provide registration information in the summit announcement or invitation. Registration on the web is typically the most efficient method for collecting participant information. Websites can often be used for free or for a minimal fee. Other options are email, phone, or mail-in registration.

- **Securing a meeting space**

When searching for a space to hold the summit, be sure to secure a space with enough room for the anticipated number of participants. Discuss seating arrangements with the venue management; we recommend using individual tables that seat 6–8 people to facilitate table discussions. Also be sure to consider room for registration tables and space for any materials you would like displayed.

- **Arranging for all necessary technology**

Be sure to speak with management at your chosen venue about the availability of needed equipment, such as a projection screen, projector, computer (if not bringing your own), access to a sound system that will hook into your computer, and microphones. You may consider hand-held microphones if you would like to hand them to participants for reporting out from group discussions or asking questions. If such equipment is not available, you will need to make arrangements to bring it yourself. A/V equipment can be rented if you do not own what you need.

- **Arranging for lodging**

This will be your responsibility if the summit lasts a full day. Keep in mind that participants may need to spend a night either before or after the summit. Arranging lodging opportunities at a reduced rate or at least providing a list of local hotels with contact information is recommended.

- **Providing refreshments for the day**

You can often arrange refreshments and lunch through venue management. If this is not possible, you should make catering arrangements. If there is no available funding for the provision of food for the day, there is also the option of allowing participants to break for lunch and getting food on their own. This option is less desirable, as it tends to break up the flow of the day and limit time that participants can use for networking and conversing about summit content.

- **Procuring take-home materials**

Summit attendees will always appreciate take-home materials such as children's books or texts on effective transition practices. We also recommend providing notepads, workbooks, pens, or other materials with which participants can write down key points or ideas throughout the day. Base the number of resources you will need on registration information or a well thought-out estimate of the number of participants you expect to attend.

- **Printing handouts for participants**

Handouts will include the day's agenda and other materials, such as sheets with table discussion questions and space to take notes, documents provided from the National Centers (transition planning guides; parent, family, and community engagement materials; etc.), and relevant state-specific resources, such as state Head Start/ kindergarten alignment documents. (Presentation slides may be distributed by email.) Most documents should be printed in black and white and double-sided where possible. Other documents with color-coding or those that do not read well in black and white may also be printed in color.

- **Staffing for the day**

You will typically need two to four (depending on your number of attendees) extra people on the day of the summit to help with logistical tasks, such as setting out materials for participants, checking people in as they arrive, distributing name tags, and helping to facilitate table discussions throughout the day.

DURING THE SUMMIT

PowerPoint presentation

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation, "Effective Transitions to Enhance School Readiness," is a general guide for a summit presentation and includes notes for each slide. You can modify, add, or eliminate slides as needed, especially when outside presenters bring their own slides to work into a presentation. Following are descriptions of each of the presentation's seven sections:

It is often desirable to obtain information about potential attendees' demographics and transition practices before holding your summit.

1

The State of School Readiness

In this section, we provide an overview of how young children are doing in early education settings. We emphasize the achievement gap—particularly relevant to the Head Start community—that exists between high- and low-income children. We also present evidence of children having problems with the adjustment to kindergarten. These slides should be used either in part or in their entirety when making the case that some children are clearly falling behind in their early years, that this situation affects their achievement in later years, and that prevention of early school problems through effective transition planning is a wise investment.

2

Why We Are Concerned About Early Transition Experiences

We explain how early adversity and early school experiences can have a significant impact on children's development and later school outcomes. This is particularly relevant since the transition to kindergarten can be quite stressful for students and lead to difficulties in early

school years. We also include a brief video about how early experience can shape children’s later brain development. The slides present research evidence that more transition activities are associated with more positive outcomes for children in kindergarten. We contend that less intervention is necessary to change a child’s developmental trajectory when caregivers or teachers prevent problems early rather than attempting to remediate them later.



The Nature of Kindergarten Transition

This section examines the contrast between preschool and kindergarten environments and how misalignments can cause children to have trouble adjusting to kindergarten. We include quotes from families that show positive and negative experiences with the kindergarten transition.



Conceptualizing Effective Transition

In this section, we present three major components for fostering successful adjustment: information, relationships, and alignment. We also explain how a child-focused view of school readiness is not adequate to support successful transition. We introduce an ecological framework of school readiness that considers factors outside of the child (e.g., teachers, peers, family, and community). We also address the needs of different populations.



Transition Connections

This section covers the goals and importance of each of the four types of transition connections: child-school, family-school, school-school, and community-school. It also provides examples of efforts that have been done in the past to foster these connections.



Building Successful Transition Experiences

In this section, we discuss six important steps to successful transition planning. For each of the six steps, we present tools and tips to help facilitate the planning and implementation process. In addition, we provide samples of transition planning for transition teams.



Additional Slides

In this section, we provide alternate slides that presenters may find to be helpful.

Activities and participant involvement

The slides include several ideas for activities within the presentation. These are optional components of the presentation, and presenters should consider how each activity adds value to their message given the goals chosen for their particular summit.

Give participants time in at least one portion of the summit to discuss and share ideas around what is being presented, what they are currently doing to foster transition, and how they might want to expand on those practices. These discussions should be guided by questions that keep participants focused on the goals set for their conversations. Allot some time for groups to share highlights of their discussions if desired.

We provide sample materials for activities in Appendix E.

AFTER THE SUMMIT

Create a plan for summit follow-up

People who attend a transition summit often get to thinking about transition planning and implementing new strategies. However, summit participants often face other pressing issues that may hinder transition plans if they are not held accountable by some sort of follow-up. Below are a variety of summit follow-up practices that should be considered:

- Encourage participants to conduct short “back-home” trainings for colleagues who did not attend the summit. This will help solidify content in participants’ minds, as well as further disseminate information on the need for effective transition planning and what successful practices can be put in place to facilitate such transitions.
- Have a person or agency with a connection to the region, such as a Head Start Early Childhood Education (ECE) Specialist or the agency sponsoring the summit, initiate follow-up emails or meetings to keep the work moving forward. For example, a Head Start ECE Specialist may call key summit attendees following the event to see how their initial efforts to facilitate transition are progressing and to ask if they need extra help or resources to keep their work moving.

- Hold a follow-up meeting with team leaders who attended the summit. Conversations at such a meeting might focus on sharing the progress teams are making regarding the goals they set for themselves at the conference, as well as discussing barriers they are encountering in their work, so that the group can brainstorm solutions.

- Have participants or team leaders share the plans they developed during the summit with summit organizers (via email, photocopies of plans, or shared websites) so that these can be anonymously shared with all summit participants for the purpose of groups learning from each other’s ideas.

Post-summit feedback questionnaire

After conducting a transition summit, it is useful to get feedback from participants about their experience. You can share this information with all of the summit collaborators, including any Head Start centers involved, to help plan events of this nature. We provide a template for creating a summit feedback survey in Appendix F.

RESOURCES

Some additional resources that might be of use when planning a summit are located on Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website in the “Transition to Kindergarten” section on the NCQTL page. Here is the link to this information:

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/transition>

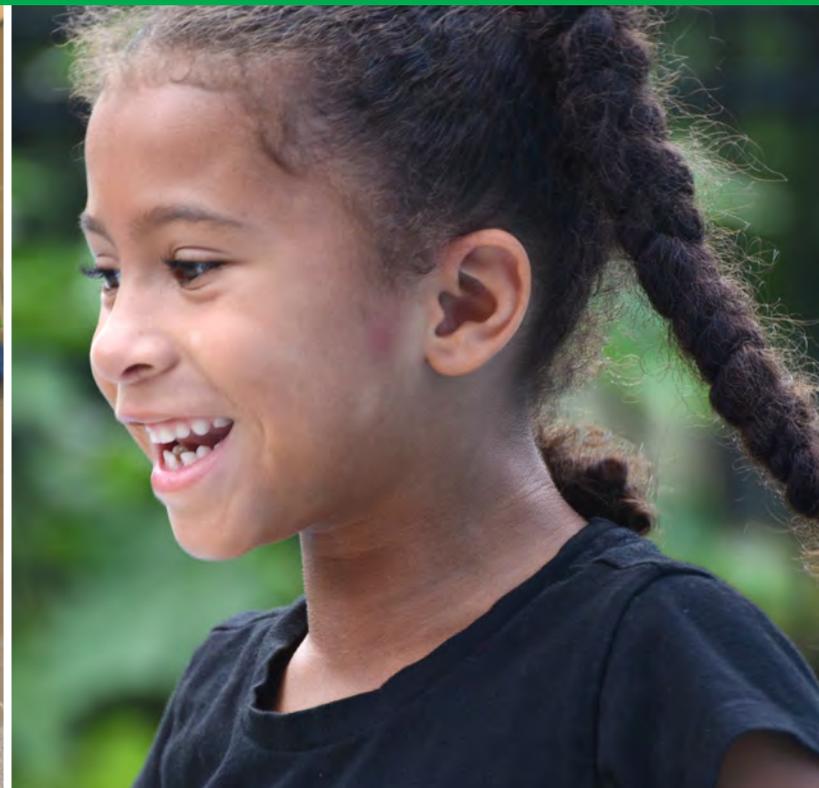
One resource on this website that is particularly useful is a summary of the Washington State Transition Summit accompanied by video of the featured speakers. These videos can give you an idea of how the presentation portion of a summit might look. Here is the link to the summary and video:

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/transition/partners.html>



For more Information, contact us at: NCQTL@UW.EDU or 877-731-0764

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