

Transition to Kindergarten

Partnering with Families For Head Start Programs and Schools

Smooth kindergarten transitions have a direct impact on children's social, emotional, and academic outcomes in kindergarten and the years to follow. Families, Head Start programs, receiving elementary schools, and community organizations can collaborate to create continuity across systems and promote smoother transitions. Effective family engagement encourages parents to continue their roles as leaders and advocates and fosters child and family well-being.

Programs and receiving schools can engage families by focusing on these four approaches to create continuity for families and children as they transition to kindergarten:

- **Create family-friendly and welcoming environments.** Programs and schools can look for ways to create inclusive settings that address children and families' interests, strengths, and needs. Supporting families' participation early and throughout the transition can encourage parent engagement during the kindergarten year and beyond.
- **Promote home/school connections to foster parent engagement in learning and classroom experiences.** Adults who partner to support young children help them develop the skills related to later school success—early language, literacy, cognition, problem-solving, attention, and self-regulation. Families, Head Start programs, and schools can find ways to reinforce learning and curricular goals at home. These practices set a foundation for ongoing family engagement in children's learning.
- **Engage parents as leaders and advocates.** Programs, schools, and parent leaders can promote opportunities for parent leadership and decision-making in the transition process and in the future with the receiving school. Engaging parents in decision-making roles and sharing data can support parents' roles as advocates for their children. Schools can highlight opportunities in parent-led networks and school site councils, or similar groups, during the transition to kindergarten.
- **Support family well-being through coordinated delivery of comprehensive services.** Programs and schools can engage community partners to offer comprehensive family services to support family well-being. Schools can build on these partnerships and continue to connect parents to community services. Family well-being is a predictor of school readiness. Family well-being also contributes to successful transitions to kindergarten.



What the Research Says

Effective transition services include practices that are:

- Centered on children and families
- Individualized to address children’s and families’ diverse backgrounds, development, strengths, interests and needs
- Dedicated to promoting continuity within and across early education settings
- Focused on creating and maintaining collaboration between families, programs, and early education partners

What Can Programs and Schools Do to Support Family Engagement Continuity?

For each of these four approaches, programs and schools can use three research-based strategies that promote smooth transitions from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families.

- Sharing information—the more you know, the more at ease you feel.
- Building relationships—having people to support and guide you along the way is always important.
- Creating alignment—the more your new environment is like your old one, the easier your transition will be.

Consider the examples in the following pages. Choose activities to strengthen effective transitions with these four points of connection in mind:

- Child-School
- Family-School
- Program-School
- Community-School

What Can Leaders Do to Support Family Engagement Continuity?

- Allocate resources and funding for shared training and meetings with families, program staff, and professionals in new learning settings and other agencies. Supports may include space, transportation, food, and child care services.
- Ensure that transitions teams are culturally and linguistically responsive and have the expertise to carry out transition plans and activities that are meaningful and understandable to everyone.
- Consider the perspective and role of the child, family, program, school, and community. Consider how to form and sustain connections that promote continuity and enhance the child and family’s transition process. Family well-being is a predictor of school readiness. Family well-being also contributes to successful transitions to kindergarten.

Strategies for Supporting Continuity for Families in the Transition to Kindergarten

Sharing Information

Building Relationships

Creating Alignment

Create family-friendly and welcoming environments.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the priorities and requirements of receiving schools to prepare families for what to expect in the new system. • Share information about how the program and school each support children’s home language learning. Consider any differences in approach and how to bridge the gap. • Help families get familiar with the kindergarten setting and routine. Invite families to visit the receiving school’s playground or recess area, where possible. If the child will be taking the bus, arrange a practice ride. Schedule times that are convenient for families. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a transition event at the receiving school to help children get familiar with kindergarten. For example, invite parents and children to make a book that they can finish at home and bring on the first day of school. • Create opportunities for families to connect with other families in the program or community who have children of similar age transitioning to new learning settings, or who have transitioned recently. • Create opportunities for families to join their children and help with learning activities in the new kindergarten classroom. Schedule times that are convenient for families. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a panel discussion with representatives from programs, schools, and families from all backgrounds who will be entering the school system. Consider the perspectives of children and families when they transition to kindergarten. For example, what do they see and hear? What is the same or different in the environment? Consider ways to bridge experiences. • Schedule joint professional development opportunities for programs and schools about creating welcoming environments. • Create opportunities for both program and school staff to reflect on personal values, beliefs, experiences, ethics, biases, and issues regarding equity and culture that may arise when working with families. |
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Strategies for Supporting Continuity for Families in the Transition to Kindergarten, cont.

Sharing Information

Building Relationships

Creating Alignment

Promote home/school connections to foster parent engagement in learning and classroom experiences.

- Review and use child progress data regularly to provide the most relevant information to families as they prepare for and transition to new settings.
- Share data between programs and receiving schools with parental consent and as permitted by law. Consult with parent leaders about what data to share. Create opportunities for parents, programs, and schools to make decisions about how data will be used to strengthen learning experiences.
- Invite parents, programs, and schools to co-create a checklist of items to be included in each child's portfolio. Prior to the start of the school year, hand-deliver portfolios to kindergarten teachers, who can use them to learn about new students and inform teaching practices.

In the first month of school, follow up with kindergarten teachers to discuss the quality of the portfolios and ideas for improvement.

- Provide opportunities for children and families to meet school staff, including teachers, administrative and support staff, counselors, and leadership, and begin to build positive, trusting relationships.
- Offer opportunities to discuss how programs and schools can partner with families of all children, including those who have specific needs to identify how best to support them and their children.
Examples include children who are learning more than one language, have exceptional potential, and/or have specific needs, including children with a disability, developmental delay, or behaviors considered challenging.
- Host activities or events at the program or school for children to talk with other children about kindergarten.

- Ensure that families know how the receiving school can support the transition for dual language and multilingual learners.
- Work with libraries, museums, and with community partners to promote kindergarten registration and community-wide school readiness goals and practices to promote success for all children.
- Create and promote consistent and similar learning activities that may be done at home, the program, and school.

Strategies for Supporting Continuity for Families in the Transition to Kindergarten, cont.

Sharing Information

Building Relationships

Creating Alignment

Engage parents as leaders and advocates.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information and form partnerships with local parent-to-parent organizations, family peer networks, and parent-led school-community efforts to continue to support parents' roles as leaders. • Support and encourage parents to initiate and participate in child assessment and observation discussions with teachers and staff in the program and in the receiving school. • Promote volunteer and leadership opportunities for family members. Examples may include inviting parents to help with reading and homework, to volunteer in the school, or to join a school or community organization. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce parents to other parent leaders. Encourage parents and parent leaders to participate in transition planning and events and to speak at school board meetings. • Support parents' advocacy for their children and knowledge of their rights under federal and state laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). • Where possible, establish a district-wide kindergarten transition task force to build connections, coordinate the transition process, and publicize kindergarten registration and orientation programs. Include parents, educators, administrators, and representatives from parent-teacher associations and related community organizations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage partnership with families by inviting Head Start Policy Council parent leaders to speak at PTA and school board meetings. • Host breakfasts with community and business leaders, public officials, and families to collaborate on a shared vision for the transition to kindergarten and continued school success. • Engage families in planning, shared decision-making, and implementing and evaluating transition efforts at the program and school. |
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Strategies for Supporting Continuity for Families in the Transition to Kindergarten, cont.

Sharing Information

Building Relationships

Creating Alignment

Support family well-being through coordinated delivery of comprehensive services.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share research with programs, schools, and families about the importance of family supports and comprehensive services from early childhood through adolescence with programs, schools, and families. • Create systems for family services managers and school-based social workers and guidance counselors to share and use data about community and families' strengths and needs to inform planning and evaluation for partnerships with community organizations for the school year. • Share information about existing and potential community partnerships and services. Community services might include adult education and literacy resources, health services, housing supports, employment training programs and apprenticeships, money management, and benefits programs. • Work with local education agencies (LEAs) and programs to display or share information about available community services. Use the languages spoken by the families you want to reach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish collaborative relationships, partnerships, communications, and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with other early childhood programs, LEAs, schools, early intervention organizations, local health providers, and other community organizations to support child and family well-being. • Develop ways for family services managers and school-based social workers and guidance counselors to use community assessment data and families' feedback to form relationships with community agencies to improve access to resources that support family and child well-being. • Assemble a panel discussion with families about community services. Panelists and participants may include parents of current or former kindergarten students, teachers, Head Start and school staff, administrators, after-school staff, and representatives from programs that support the unique needs of families (e.g., early intervention for children with identified disabilities or developmental delays). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process for program and school administrators to partner with after-school or "out-of-school" organizations in the community to ensure children's physical, mental, and emotional health needs are met. • Partner with LEA homelessness liaisons to enroll younger siblings of school-age children experiencing homelessness. Discuss strategies around child attendance and supports for children and families. • Identify and work with other organizations in your community to coordinate services throughout the year. |
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See Related Resources on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) Website:

Transition to Kindergarten—Your Child is Going to Kindergarten: Making the Move Together

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series: Engaging Families in the Transition to Kindergarten

Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes Research to Practice Series—Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten

Supporting Transitions: Working with Early Education Partners

Supporting Transitions: Program Policies and Practices

Other Related Resources

PTA National Standards for Family-Assessment School Partnerships Assessment Guide

References

Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*(1), 39–62.

Pianta, R. C., Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, and schools*, Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

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