



TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Transition and Alignment Summit Guide



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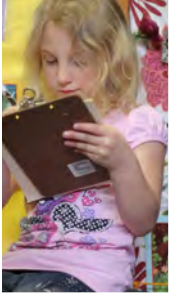


THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Quality Teaching
and Learning





“What Iowa 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

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Considering School Readiness	2
Purpose of Summits	3
Creating a Summit Planning Team	3
Summit Goals, Attendance, and Content.	3
Before the Summit	4
During the Summit	7
After the Summit	9
Resources	9

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.

3

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.

4

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.

5

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.

6

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.

7

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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