

Supporting Transitions and Meeting Standards

Kindergarten transition practices can amplify the ability of both Head Start programs and elementary schools to meet a number of critical federal, state, and internal policy standards. The tables below describe the regulations that can be addressed when strong kindergarten transition practices are implemented.



Notable Policy Connections

Head Start Act

The Transition and Alignment with K-12 Education section of the Head Start Act outlines the responsibilities of Head Start programs when coordinating with other local education programs.

Policy	Summary
Section 642A	Requires that Head Start agencies coordinate transition practices and other services with any Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that conduct early childhood programming or provide educational services to enrolled children.
Section 642(e)(5)	Requires that the overseeing Head Start agency establishes a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with all local programs that provide Head Start services. This MOA should describe program activities, including outreach and family engagement, for smooth kindergarten transitions.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

This act is the main law for K-12 quality and student achievement in the United States, with specific guidelines for involving families and supporting disadvantaged students. Public schools meeting ESSA standards are eligible for funding connected to those measures. ESSA was signed into law by President Obama in 2015, replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Policy	Summary
Section 1116: Parent and Family Engagement	<p>Ensures that schools have family outreach programs, activities, and procedures in place.</p> <p>States that families must be meaningfully consulted in the planning and implementation of family engagement activities.</p> <p>Requires that schools distribute a family engagement policy to all families which describes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to participate in educational and event planning. • The school's family engagement strategies. • Opportunities for feedback, review, and improvement of engagement strategies. • Parent advisory board opportunities.
Section 1119: Coordination Requirement	<p>Requires educational programs to systematically coordinate with Head Start or other programs serving preschool age children by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which outlining a plan to share student information. • Arranging for educators to participate in joint professional development and planning time together. • Planning family engagement opportunities. • Coordinating with other specialists and agencies serving children in the community.
Section 3123: Coordination with Related Programs	<p>Ensures close cooperation between schools and other organizations that serve language-minority and English learners.</p>
Section 4107: Activities to Support Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities	<p>Requires that schools receiving certain funds apply a portion of the funds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with other schools and community programs. • Partner with recognized public or private organizations to implement "well-rounded educational opportunities".
Section 4108: Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students	<p>Directs schools to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with other community programs. • Ensure a healthy, supportive academic environment. • Promote parent involvement. • Partner with reputable public or private organizations to support student well-being and success.

Head Start Program Performance Standards

§1302 Subpart G – Transition Services in the Head Start Program Performance Standards. This section outlines the requirements for Head Start programs to provide services for children transitioning into and out of various Head Start settings, including requirements specific to the transition to kindergarten.

Policy	Summary
§1302.71(a): Implementing transition strategies and practices	Requires that programs serving children of preschool age implement strategies to support the transition to kindergarten.
§1302.71(b): Family collaborations for transitions	<p>States that programs must support parents to ensure a successful kindergarten transition, and that parents remain involved in their child’s education after the transition. Required strategies must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help families understand their children’s progress during Head Start. • Help families support their children’s academic and social success during and after the transition. • Prepare families to exercise rights and responsibilities in an elementary school setting, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Obtaining language instruction services. ◦ Obtaining services for children with disabilities. • Prepare families to participate in ongoing educational decision-making for their children.
§1302.71(c): Community collaborations for transition	<p>Ensures that programs collaborate with community agencies and kindergarten teachers to support family engagement and successful transition practices for children.</p> <p>Requires that transition strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination between schools and community services to share student data. • Communication between Head Start and elementary school staff to align instruction. • Joint professional development for Head Start and kindergarten education staff. <p>Requires programs that do not operate in summer to arrange for children to participate in summer kindergarten orientations and programs.</p>
§1302.71(d): Learning environment activities	<p>Ensures that, at a minimum, programs enact transition practices that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize children with new school routines and environments. • Build confidence about the transition.
§1302.71(e): Transition services for children with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)	Requires that programs provide additional transition services to children with an IEP.
§1302.60: Full participation in program services and activities	Notes that programs must ensure full participation in program services for children with disabilities.
§1302.61(c)(2)(ii): Additional services for children	States that programs must collaborate with parents and the receiving elementary school to ensure that children and their families are supported during the transition in a timely and appropriate manner.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA is the federal special education law providing rights and protections to children with disabilities and their families. It seeks to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to children with disabilities, and provide their families with a voice in their education. While IDEA does not include language specific to the transition to kindergarten, it does address transition services, IEP development, and enrolling a child with disabilities in a new school.

Policy	Summary
Section 1401. Definitions	Defines “transition services” as “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability” that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are results-oriented and focused on academic and functional development that support the child’s independence and participation.• Are strengths-based and individualized.• Include instruction, services, and community experiences which promote the development of living objectives and daily life skills.
Section 1414.d.2.B Program for child aged 3 through 5	If a child aged 3 through 5 has an existing Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), the IFSP may serve as the IEP, if state law and the child’s family agree. If not, the IFSP must be considered throughout the development of the new IEP.
Section 1414.d.2.C.i.I Program for children who transfer school districts	When a child with an IEP enrolls in a new school district, the local education agency must provide the child with services comparable to those in the previously held IEP until the local education agency either adopts the existing IEP, or develops a new IEP consistent with federal and state law. The new school must promptly take steps to obtain the child’s records from the previous school in which the child was enrolled. The previous school must promptly respond to requests for information from the new school.

Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA)

The DLLPA supports Head Start programs in managing and assessing their efforts to support full program participation for children who are DLLs, as well as their families.

Policy	Summary
Page 59: Transition Services	<p>Emphasizes importance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication in families' home languages.• Outreach to community agencies involved in DLL services. <p>Notes DLL requirements specific to the transition to kindergarten, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborating with families to help them advocate for their children, and remain involved in their education through the transition and beyond.• Preparing families to identify and obtain services available to children who are dual language learners.• Preparing families to identify and obtain services available to children with disabilities.

Individual State Policies

Check the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) profile for your state to review any state-specific transition policies that may apply: <https://qualitycompendium.org/>.

If your state receives a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grant, consider any requirements outlined in your state's CCDF plan.

If a CCDF plan and/or QRIS profile does not exist for your state, review your state's early childhood and education policy for any applicable requirements.