

Guidance for Transitions During Early Childhood

Entering pre-K and kindergarten is a major time of transition for children. Due to facility closures or family risk factors, many young children that would have typically been enrolled in high-quality child care, Head Start, or pre-K programs stayed home this year. While it is difficult to measure the impact of this, communities and school systems should anticipate needing to provide additional support to children to create a foundation for a lifetime of learning success.

Early Childhood Transitions

Transition is recognized as a process, involving many different partners, rather than a single event that happens to a child. Communities and school systems should provide a series of intentional experiences for the child to adjust to the new expectations of pre-K or kindergarten. Consistent, ongoing opportunities are essential in supporting the developmental needs of children as they transition. Individuals who play an important role in early childhood transitions are families, schools and early learning centers, early childhood practitioners, and community stakeholders.

Young children will encounter many educational transitions: from home to child care, from child care into a pre-K setting, and from an early childhood setting into a formal kindergarten classroom. An early childhood transition program should include a team of relevant adults in the child's life, a variety of learning settings, and multiple opportunities to create a smooth progression for the young child.

School readiness is more than supporting only the academic experiences of young children. To effectively prepare children for school transitions, a transition team should consider the child's holistic development, including cognitive development, but also social emotional development. Additionally, transitions should include opportunities for children within the context of their community, such as the library, museums, arts programs, and parks.

The [Head Start approach to school readiness](#) means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children.

When planning for early childhood transitions, school systems and community networks may consider adopting elements of this approach

Key Components of Transitions in Early Childhood

Children who participate in structured high-quality transition processes show improvement in academic achievement, demonstrate more social and emotional competencies, show less behavior disruptions, and develop skills quicker¹. All families want their children to be successful in their formal learning environment. Building transition programming that includes family feedback and involvement will equip families with the skills to support their child's transition and future school success.

- *Build Collaboration in the Unified Early Learning System:* Effective transitions are collaborative efforts between early learning centers, Head Start, schools, and families. Schools can develop working relationships with centers and Head Start to plan for children's success.

¹ Powell, D., Son, S., File, N., & Juan, R. (2010). Parent-school relationships and children's academic and social outcomes in public school pre-kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology, 48*, 269-293. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2010.03.002; Powell, D. R., Son, S., File, N., & Froiland, J. M. (2012). Changes in parent involvement across the transition from public school prekindergarten to first grade and children's academic outcomes. *The Elementary School Journal, 113*(2), 276-300. doi:10.1086/667726;

- *Creating Opportunity for All:* A robust transition program acts as a mechanism to combat both racial and economic disparity, and in particular, families with increased social and economic risk benefit the most from transition activities. Transition programs support children by creating a tool for advancing equity and incorporate culturally-relevant practices into teaching and learning.
- *Improving Child Outcomes:* A smooth transition to school—one in which children come to make new friends and understand and follow the rules and academic expectations of the classroom—can increase the likelihood of children’s positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes in years to come. Transition programs improve child outcomes and reduce anxious feelings about moving into a new environment, which in turn has a positive impact on educational climate, teacher satisfaction, and site/school performance.
- *Partnering with Families:* Meaningful transitions that include families from the inception promote children’s learning outside the classroom and facilitate family access to after school offerings, museums, libraries, and sports and arts programs. Transition programs support communities by building stronger connections with families, schools, child care providers, and communities.

Six Step Process for Kindergarten Transition Planning

Below is a summary of the [six-step transition planning process](#) developed by the Head Start/Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. The [full resource](#) is available to help guide school systems and early childhood community networks as they establish or revise pre-K and kindergarten transition plans for the upcoming school year.

Framework for Designing a Transition Program		
Steps	Key Actions	Resources
Step 1: Assess your partnerships, identify transition team members and designate transition leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinate and invite appropriate partners to the community network transition committee or team using an equity lens. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Designated a lead, facilitator or coordinator ○ Should include: 1 director, 1 principal, 1 birth to pre-k teacher, 1-2 center-based lead teacher, 1 kindergarten teacher, 1 EC special education teacher or interventionist, 2 different families, 1 Head Start representative (director or teacher), and 1 Early Steps representative. ○ Could include: parent group, community organizations, non-profit orgs., and volunteers). 	Collaborations, Connections, and Six Steps to Success
Step 2: Identify goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinate and invite appropriate partners to design a network-wide transition program for all children. ● Anticipate participation and equity barriers and create a plan to address barriers. ● Identify resources, funding sources, structure, human resources, training, and stakeholders engagement. 	Transition Planning Form Example Transition Planning Form
Step 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluate current transition goals (strengths and weaknesses) 	Host a Transition Summit

<p>Assess what current transition activities are being practiced in your community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enlist families to create innovative transition process(es), activities, welcoming culture, reduce engagement barriers, etc. ● Create a timeline and public-facing calendar of events ● Define roles and assign responsibilities 	<p>Designing a Pre-K/K Transition Program</p>
<p>Step 4: Identify data or evidence that transition planning practices are or are not working.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Literacy data (DIBELS and 3rd grade LEAP) ● Use a community-wide universal developmental screener to identification of a child’s strengths and needs 	<p>Early Childhood Developmental Screening</p> <p>Early Childhood Developmental Screenings Guidebook</p>
<p>Step 5: Plan and prioritize.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop an action plan to achieve transition goals by outlining smaller action steps that operationalizes who, what, when, where, how, etc. ● Provide support and training to program partners to communication with families, transition process, and implementation ● Develop collaboration between Early Steps, Early Childhood and Special Education and all program partners ● Provide training and support to families on the transition process and promote the importance of smooth transitions. 	<p>Opportunities for Early Learning at Home</p> <p>Transition to Kindergarten Calendar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educators ● Families

Additional Planning Resources:

- **Supporting Positive Environments for Children (SPEC). (2014).** [Pyramid Model Considerations for Re-opening After an Extended Closure.](#) This document is relevant for COVID-19 and offers concrete social emotional strategies for reopening.
- **The Harvard Family Research Project. (2015).** [Four Important Things Research Tells Us About the Transition to School.](#) This research project report highlights four important things that research tells us about the transition to school.
- **Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) (2019).** [Transition to Kindergarten: Supporting Children Who Are Dual Language Learners \(DLLs\)](#)
- **Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) (2020).** [Transition to Kindergarten: Supporting Children with Individualized Education Programs \(IEPs\)](#)