PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Why it Matters and How to Promote Success
The first day of kindergarten! It’s one of the most exciting events in a child’s life. The transition from Head Start to kindergarten can be a wonderful time. Head Start teachers know that it’s also a time of uncertainty, new demands, and big expectations for children and their families. How can we make this time less confusing and overwhelming?

As a teacher, you can make a significant difference in the early education experience of the children from your class when you build a process for a smooth transition to kindergarten. A transition that builds on familiar experiences and relationships will give the children in your class the best springboard to social adjustment and academic success.

**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:

- 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 preschool 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:

- 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. The child, family, school, peer, and community factors are interconnected 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.

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 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.

ALIGNING CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES ACROSS SYSTEMS
Children can build on what they have learned and be ready for what they will learn in the next stage of their schooling when their preschool is aligned with what they will experience in kindergarten. 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.

HELPFUL RESOURCES
ARTICLES

PRACTICAL GUIDES


BOOKS


ONLINE VIDEOS
Capistrano Unified School District. From kindergartener to kindergartener: “What’s important for you to know.” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMf1mveot3I

RESEARCH REFERENCES


xi ibid.


