

Connections Overview

Partnering to Support Transitions

The transition from early learning settings to kindergarten presents one of the first major transitions in a child's life. Research shows that a smooth and successful transition to kindergarten relates directly to children's academic and social success in the school years to follow. Head Start and elementary school leaders have an opportunity to partner in their efforts to ensure that children and their families feel confident and prepared as they move into elementary school. This document outlines the four connections that are key to the transition to kindergarten, and describes research-based practices and activity examples that leaders can implement for successful kindergarten transitions.

Strengthening Connections

Head Start program and elementary school site leaders can foster connections with one another—and with children, families, and the community—through thoughtful and aligned transition practices. An understanding of the missions and values of partner organizations and individuals can deepen the impact of these partnerships. There are four key connections in the transition to kindergarten process that program staff and school leaders can work to strengthen:

1. **Program–School Connection:** To align practices, environments, and information between settings.
2. **Child–School Connection:** To provide children with familiar, stable relationships and classroom experiences.
3. **Family–School Connection:** To foster family collaboration and engagement with the school.
4. **Community–School Connection:** To create a network of understanding and support around the kindergarten transitions.



Program—School Connections

A strong Head Start program—receiving elementary school connection is critical to successful Kindergarten transitions. Continuity is achieved when leaders and educators from both settings work together to develop shared practices and understandings.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Shared Roles

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Familiarize and comply with the Memorandum of Agreement or Understanding (MOA or MOU) established between your state early learning and K-12 education departments.• Coordinate joint professional development and planning time between preschool and kindergarten educators.• Identify support for children who are dual language learners and their families.• Identify and plan for individual accommodations for children with disabilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the state-level Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) as a guide to create a MOA between local Head Start programs and receiving elementary schools, which outlines plans for:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Joint professional development.◦ Coordinating services and communication.◦ Family engagement.◦ Children with disabilities.◦ Dual language learners.◦ Instructional alignment.◦ Data sharing.• Plan one or more joint professional development event(s) for preschool and kindergarten educators to learn about and share kindergarten transition practices.• Plan in-service days for preschool and kindergarten educators to meet and discuss:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Student data and information sharing.◦ Individual student concerns or special circumstances.◦ Classroom routines and procedures.◦ Instructional alignment.• Exchange information about inclusion practices, including accommodations, special education and related services, and identify special transition needs of children with disabilities and their families.• Share information about the supports provided, strengths, and progress of dual language learners.• Share information received from formerly attended programs and schools about children of seasonal or migrant farmworker families. |
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Program—School Connections, cont.

Transition Practices	Activity Examples
Elementary School Leader	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out and review incoming student data. • Ensure that kindergarten educators and future students familiarize with one another. • Implement some familiar routines and language used in preschools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request incoming student data from Head Start program leaders, and follow up for any further information needed. • Make sure that kindergarten teachers review individual student data and information shared by families and Head Start programs. • Plan in-service days for kindergarten teachers to visit children who will be enrolled in kindergarten and to observe the incoming students' early learning environments. • Ask kindergarten teachers to incorporate routines and language observed in early learning environments into their own classrooms.
Head Start Site Leader	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Head Start educators are familiar with kindergarten classroom practices. • Maintain a relationship with formerly enrolled children and families. • Implement some of the routines and language used in receiving schools. • Share strengths-based child progress data, including information provided by families, with receiving schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan one or more in-service days for Head Start educators to assist in the kindergarten classrooms of recently transitioned students. • Ask preschool educators to recreate some of the routines, language, and classroom environments observed in kindergarten classrooms. • Support families to complete a questionnaire about their child — including hopes, concerns, developmental history, and any special information they wish to include and share with their child's new teacher. • Gather and share child data with receiving elementary schools that captures children's current strengths and challenges, developmental history, additional notable details, and family information.

Child–School Connections

The child–receiving elementary school connection serves two important purposes. One goal is to familiarize children with the kindergarten setting — including the classroom, new teachers, peers, and the greater school. Another goal is to familiarize kindergarten teachers with individual incoming students.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Shared Roles

- Create opportunities for preschool age children to visit kindergarten classrooms and attend events at the receiving elementary school.
- Establish connections between children who will be entering kindergarten and children who are currently enrolled in kindergarten.
- Support families in interacting and reading with their children about kindergarten.
- Seek to understand and value the diverse cultural perspectives that individual children contribute to the learning environment.
- Make sure that IEPs are current and signed, and that all included services and supports are in place for children with IEPs.
- Provide additional support for children with disabilities to orient themselves in the new classroom, school, and playground environments.
- Ensure that systems are in place to support full participation in programming and continued language learning for children who are dual language learners.
- Acknowledge and encourage children’s innate excitement about kindergarten.

- Arrange for preschool age children to take a tour of the kindergarten classrooms, school, and playground prior to starting school.
- Create a peer buddy system between preschool age children and current kindergarteners at the new school, to exchange letters or read together.
- Provide resources for families to interact with their child about kindergarten—such as a book list, activity ideas, or conversation starters—in their home language(s).
- Make sure classrooms reflect a range of home and cultural environments.
- Provide training for educators about culturally sustaining communication and pedagogy.
- Identify and plan services for children who are dual language learners and their families.
- Identify and seek any additional information about children from migrant or seasonal farmworker families.
- Identify and prepare accommodations ahead of time for children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Child–School Connections, cont.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Elementary School Site Leader

- Familiarize students with the new kindergarten setting, teachers, and other support staff involved.
 - Incorporate familiar activities or routines from early learning settings into the kindergarten year.
 - Ensure that kindergarten teachers and support staff get to know each new student individually, with extra frequency in the beginning of the year.
- Conduct a week-long summer kindergarten orientation program for incoming students.
 - Provide time for kindergarten teachers and support staff to visit the early learning environments of incoming kindergarteners.
 - Ask kindergarten teachers to conduct home visits to meet incoming students. When home visits are not possible, ask them to call families and send a letter in their home language(s), including photos and details about themselves and their classroom.
 - Implement a “staggered start” for kindergarteners at the beginning of the school year, where only one third of the class attends on each of the first three days of school, providing extra time for teachers to interact with individual students and their families.
 - Consider shortened school days at the beginning of the school year.

Head Start Site Leader

- Have children practice kindergarten routines in their early learning settings.
 - Encourage early childhood educators to stay in contact with formerly enrolled children and their families, and invite them to visit the program.
 - Identify and encourage connections between children and families who will be enrolled in the same receiving elementary school.
 - Make books and interactive materials about kindergarten accessible to children, both at home and in the early learning environment.
- Encourage Head Start educators to use the same transition routines and language observed in elementary schools, such as lining up to go outside or serving meals on trays.
 - At the beginning of the year, plan to offer one or more in-service days for Head Start education staff to assist in the kindergarten classrooms of children formerly enrolled in Head Start.
 - Post a family sign-up sheet for each school that children will attend, so that families can share their information and connect with other families headed to the same school.
 - Ensure that early learning environments are stocked with books and interactive materials about kindergarten. Create a lending library of such items for families.

Family–School Connections

The goal of the family–school connection is to support family engagement in the kindergarten transition process, and to facilitate ongoing family involvement in their receiving elementary school.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Shared Roles

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide tips and resources for families to participate in home learning activities about the kindergarten transition.• Arrange for families of dual language learners to receive registration and orientation materials in their home language(s).• Include families in the information-sharing agreements established between programs and schools.• Identify individual families' preferred methods of communication.• Seek to understand and support the diverse cultural perspectives that families contribute, and how they influence family expectations.• Maintain regular contact with families through school-wide events and individual meetings.• Ensure that key information about individual children is shared between family and teacher, when appropriate.• Provide families with information about available community services.• Collaborate with families to participate in school and classroom events and activities, when appropriate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Send home books and interactive materials about kindergarten, with guides for families about how to interact with the materials and why the activities help children prepare for kindergarten.• Find out ahead of time what languages are spoken by transitioning families, and contact cultural centers or translation services to translate registration and orientation documents.• Provide interpretation services at registration nights and other family events.• Obtain parent permission to share data between the Head Start program and receiving elementary school.• Ensure that educators check in with individual families on a regular basis to discuss any questions, concerns, hopes, expectations, or other special information about their child.• Provide professional development to educators about supporting and communicating with families in culturally and linguistically responsive ways.• Send individual child data home regularly, and provide support to help families understand what the data shows.• When possible, exchange data with past or future educators of children of seasonal or migrant farmworker families, to inform consistent learning and development across programs and schools.• Offer to connect families with community services, such as a literacy program, disability specialist, or health service, that may further serve their specific needs.• Ask families to plan a special activity for an upcoming school-wide event, or participate in the classroom by reading aloud or helping during meal time. |
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Family-School Connections, cont.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Elementary School Site Leader

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct family outreach before and during the kindergarten year to familiarize families with the school setting and inform them about the registration process, school attendance policies, and how they can help to prepare their child for the school year.• Ensure that kindergarten teachers make contact and begin familiarizing with incoming kindergarteners and their families before and during the kindergarten transition. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Host a spring or summer kindergarten registration night for incoming families.• Conduct an orientation for parents and children prior to the school year, and provide opportunities for them to visit the kindergarten classrooms.• Host an open house in the beginning of the school year to allow families, teachers, and students to connect. Invite families to help organize this.• Pair incoming kindergarten families with 1st grade families who can accompany them to school events and share tips at the beginning of the year.• Have teachers contact families in person through home visits, or at least by phone, in the days or weeks leading up to the start of the school year. Suggest that they share details about themselves and their classroom, prepare a questionnaire, and invite family questions and insights.• Conduct parent-family meetings to discuss student progress and goals periodically throughout the kindergarten year. If necessary, due to family time constraints, ask teachers to schedule a meeting via phone or video call, instead of in-person. |
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Head Start Site Leader

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide information and orientations to help children and families prepare for, and adjust to, new learning settings—both when newly enrolled in Head Start programs and in preparation for the start of kindergarten.• Support families during the kindergarten registration process.• Encourage families to become involved in advocacy and leadership opportunities at their receiving school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold a spring or summer preschool orientation for incoming children and their families.• Host a kindergarten registration night, providing registration materials and support for completing necessary forms in families' home language(s).• Inform families about specific opportunities to get involved in their new school, such as the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).• Invite children and families formerly enrolled in Head Start to share their experiences at kindergarten transition events. |
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Community–School Connections

The goal of the community–school connection is to identify and organize efforts by the greater community to support the community’s children during the transition to kindergarten. It also aims to offer community support to Head Start programs and local elementary schools in their effort to develop robust transition practices.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Shared Efforts

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a district-wide kindergarten transition task force of parents, educators, administrators, and other related individuals that represent the community to establish connections, coordinate the transition process, and publicize kindergarten registration and orientation programs.• Engage in community events themed around school and kindergarten entry.• Connect with community support agencies, and share information about their services with families.• Collaborate to build specific, research-based policies related to the kindergarten transition on the community level.• Stay informed about transition policies in your organization, district, and state.• In your approach to the kindergarten transition, reflect the norms, hopes, and expectations specific to your community. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet quarterly with the district transition team to plan and schedule transition activities, identify any gaps to fill, and delegate shared tasks.• Collaborate with the local library to hold a storytime focused on the kindergarten transition. Provide information about the kindergarten registration or transition process to distribute to families in attendance.• Display or send information about available community services, such as kindergarten registration nights, literacy resources, medical checkups, or language services. Make sure information is translated into families’ home language(s).• Ask community agencies, such as libraries or doctor’s offices, to display information about kindergarten transition and registration, and/or distribute books and interactive materials about kindergarten to children.• Regularly review updates to federal, state, local, and organizational policy about the kindergarten transition.• Consider and incorporate the diverse cultural perspectives represented in your community, and how they might guide and support kindergarten transition efforts. |
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Community–School Connections, cont.

Transition Practices

Activity Examples

Elementary School Site Leader

- Form a transition team to represent your school in the kindergarten transition efforts of the greater community.
- Foster connections between kindergarteners and their families and community support agencies.

- Identify family members, kindergarten teachers, and other school staff to form a transition team. Hold a monthly breakfast meeting with your transition team to discuss transition needs and community resources, track progress toward goals, and assign community outreach duties.
- Host a weekend playground gathering for families, and invite community agencies—such as health services, literacy programs, or cultural centers—to attend and share information about the services they offer.
- Host a kindergarten registration night for incoming families to receive help completing registration forms, and familiarize with the school and kindergarten settings. Provide registration materials and assistance in families' home language(s).

Head Start Site Leader

- Form a transition team to represent your program in the kindergarten transition efforts of the greater community.
- Participate in kindergarten transition events within the community, connect with relevant community agencies, and conduct outreach to raise awareness about the transition process.
- Provide families with information about kindergarten transition community events and information sources.

- Identify family members, family service workers, education staff, and other relevant team members who can form a transition task force. Hold a monthly potluck meeting with your transition team to discuss transition needs, community resources, track progress toward goals, and assign community outreach duties.
- Display brochures for community events and agencies where families can access them—such as at kindergarten registration night, story time, cultural centers, or health service offices.
- Invite representatives from community agencies and School Board members to attend Head Start events where they can connect with families.



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