

# Considerations on Transition to Kindergarten During the COVID-19 Response

## Purpose

The intent of this document is to provide kindergarten transition guidance for Supervisory Unions/School Districts (SU/SDs) on the best practices to help families, early educators and children prepare, understand and plan their transition to kindergarten. SU/SDs should make every effort to identify and locate each resident child who is age eligible for kindergarten within their SU/SD. Whether a child is transitioning to kindergarten from a prequalified public or private prekindergarten education program, a childcare center, or entering public school for the first time, families need to be informed of SU/SD expectations and transition activities. The strategies below will help ensure each and every child and their families, will be prepared and welcomed into a safe and secure kindergarten learning environment.

## Before Transition

### Planning for Kindergarten Transition

The typical transition from home and/or early education settings to kindergarten is an important event in children's lives and can be challenging for those who are not prepared for the adjustment. This may be especially true for children whose first public school experience may look different from the norm as a result of the SU/SD's response to COVID-19 and adherence to public health guidance.

SU/SD leaders can support a smooth and seamless transition process for resident children by establishing a transition team that may be comprised of, but is not limited to administrators, educators (PreK, kindergarten and special education), school counselors, school nurses and families. Teams will collaborate to develop, strategize and/or revise their current transition plan, in anticipation of implementing a possible combination of remote and site-based learning to support each and every child's successful transition. It is important to remember that in order to effectively execute the plan, the transition team should assess what resources and supports they might need, as individuals or team members.

Given that transitions directly affect a child's ultimate success, it is also imperative to involve families early in the process. Families know their child best. When families are given the opportunity to share information about their child, educators may then use this information to prepare and implement a successful transition and kindergarten experience.

### Transitions and Individualized Education Programs/504 Plans

For children with disabilities that have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the transition process should begin at least six months before the child enters kindergarten. The IEP team, which includes the family, should consider remote learning implications and delivery, specific school choices, least restrictive environment, and supports needed in the new

environment, all prior to transition to kindergarten. When writing new or reviewing IEP goals and objectives, teams should discuss how the goals will be implemented in traditional and remote learning environments, discuss any needed accommodations and modifications, and any other concerns regarding the transition such as building/safety, transportation and equitable access within the least restrictive environment.

Children may enter kindergarten with challenges that do not qualify for special education services but are still significant (physical or social and emotional needs that substantially limit their activities). Children in this situation may be eligible to receive additional services or accommodations to support their full participation in kindergarten and school activities through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## **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 SU/SDs as they establish or revise kindergarten transition plans for the upcoming school year.

**Step 1: Assess your partnerships**, identify transition team members and designate transition leaders.

**Step 2: Identify goals.** Once the transition team has been formed, it is essential that all members understand the scope of the work. To do so, the team needs to establish a common vision of what the transition to kindergarten should look like and use this vision to set goals.

- **Broad goals** are meant to create a long-term vision for your transition team (e.g., “To enhance children’s school readiness” or “To foster the child-school connection”).
- **Measurable goals** are used when setting up transition goals. Your team should set goals that include benchmarks that can be used to measure the degree of success you are achieving. This will help you determine whether specific transition practices should be continued.
- **Attainable goals** must be realistic and achievable for your transition team.
- **Time-bound goals** should have a deadline for every goal.

**Step 3: Assess what current transition activities** are being practiced in your community. Consider community-based partnerships with family organizations, prequalified private PreK programs, Building Bright Futures Regional Council, center and home-based childcare, Head Start, playgroup, Early Childhood Mental Health, and other early childhood organizations.

**Step 4: Identify data or evidence** you have that transition planning practices are or are not working. The goal of this step is for the team to create a data collection process, or use data you already have, to identify evidence of whether current practices are working. This is a crucial step mainly because your team will use these data to evaluate transition activities and revise future transition plans.

**Transition plans** should include consideration of:

- identification of a child’s strengths and needs;
- individual supports necessary for each child, including those with disabilities;
- awareness for and respect of each families cultural and linguistic differences;
- opportunity for PreK educators who are sending students and kindergarten educators who are receiving them to share specific information about each child in order to address needs and create a sense of belonging as they enter kindergarten.

**Step 5: Plan and prioritize.** Reevaluate goals or create new ones and plan steps to take. This step of transition planning is perhaps the most involved, and therefore may require the most time in the planning process. Step 5 is complex because there are several aspects that should be considered, such as the need to (a) reevaluate goals, (b) anticipate barriers, (c) create a timeline and (d) assign roles to appropriate individuals.

**Step 6: Implement and evaluate the transition plan.** Once transition activities and the timeline for these activities are established, the implementation process can proceed. Transition teams should review the planned activities and timelines, and then implement practices as scheduled. Ongoing and regular meetings of the collaborators may be necessary to ensure smooth and timely implementation.

### **Transition Planning: Resources to Explore**

- **Head Start/Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).** (2020). [Transition to Kindergarten: Collaborations, Connections and Six Steps to Success](#). This document outlines a step-by-step approach to build, implement, and evaluate a kindergarten transition plan.\*
- **Head Start/ECLKC.** (2020). [Transition to Kindergarten](#). There are four points of connection that, when strengthened, facilitate effective transitions: family-school, child-school, program-school, and community-school.
- **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.

### **During Transition**

#### **Transitional Routines and Expectations**

Due to a possible change of what a traditional school day will look like, typical kindergarten schedules, routines, and expectations may be unfamiliar and challenging to each and every child, their families, and their SU/SD.

Whether learning is happening remotely or on-site, the actions listed below are **critical** to ensure each and every child's needs are addressed. Early educators can reduce the adverse effects such as separation anxiety, social/emotional concerns as well as learning challenges, by:

- quickly identifying children who may be struggling;
- intervening to create positive, supportive experiences;
- building relationships by reinforcing feelings of safety and security through meaningful connections;
- providing additional time and patience for children and educators to adapt to new routines;
- anticipating that some children may have unexpected needs. Educators should be responsive to unmet needs by providing a continuum of universal, targeted, and intensive instructional evidence-based practices;
- explicitly teaching children to identify, understand, and express emotions;
- assessing if strategies are making a difference to promote positive results for the child and family; and
- recognizing your own feelings of stress and being overwhelmed. Consider activities that help you feel calm and implement them within the classroom routine on a more frequent basis.

### **Family Engagement Resources and Supports**

Due to COVID-19, kindergarten screenings may occur remotely through a virtual home visit with families. Early educators can interact with families and children through virtual home visits to discuss kindergarten expectations. These meetings provide an opportunity for educators to learn more about the family's culture. When possible, communications should be in the family's home language.

Additional family engagement strategies include:

**Sending a family questionnaire:** A family questionnaire can be completed by the family prior to the initial team meeting. This questionnaire can include hopes, concerns, developmental history, strengths and any special information they wish to include and share. This questionnaire could be completed virtually or by mail. With this information, the team can begin to establish a common vision of what the transition to kindergarten should look like and use this vision to set goals.

**Offering virtual open houses and orientations:** Early educators can create opportunities for children to visit their kindergarten classroom by offering virtual open house or kindergarten orientation. Orientation could include a visual tour of the classroom or any other areas that will be utilized modelling classroom procedures and routines such as pick up/drop off, morning meeting and lunch time. A visual tour could also include the school bus and staff that children may interact with daily.

**Sharing school routines and procedures:** Early educators can help children prepare for their new environment by establishing routines and procedures, then sharing this information with

families before the transition occurs. Connections between family, early educators and peers should be a focus.

**Establishing peer connection:** Early educators may wish to establish connections between children who will be transitioning into kindergarten. Early educators may use technology to facilitate virtual introductions and allow children to connect with each other during the virtual classroom tour.

**Supplying families with books and materials about kindergarten:** Books and resources can be offered online through classroom webpages, social media (Facebook or Google Classrooms) or through school drop off/pick up. Materials (in their home language) can support families with information, activities and ideas to help prepare their child for kindergarten.

### **During Transition: Resources to Explore**

- **National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI). (2018).** [How to Use Social Stories to Teach Your Child New Skills and Expectations](#). Backpack Connection Series. Children love to listen to stories. Not only are stories used to entertain children, they can also be used as tools to teach new skills and expectations.
- **Galuski, T.** [Ready or Not Kindergarten, Here We Come](#). NAEYC. This article looks at the whole child and all the skills and strengths each child has developed.
- **Kielty, M., Sancho Passe, A., and Mayle, S.R. (2013).** [Transitions to Kindergarten](#). NAEYC. Going to kindergarten is an important life event. Preschoolers can feel excited and a bit worried, too. This article, we'll offers tips to help children prepare.
- **Lentini, R., Anderson, R. and Wimmer, A. (2020).** [We Can Be Problems Solvers!](#) NCPMI. Story format for step by step problem solving strategies and solutions for children.
- **Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA). (2020).** [Transition from Preschool Services to Kindergarten](#). ECTA offers a collection of transition services and resources from national centers, states, studies, including a parent transition handbook.

### **After Transition**

A child's kindergarten transition should be as seamless as possible and designed to take into consideration their continued individual social, emotional and academic well-being. During the first few months of kindergarten, this can be done by providing stability and structure through consistent, predictable routines and activities. This transition period is critical to allow children time to gain the self-confidence they need to become engaged with their peers, acclimate to their new learning environment, and to become an active participant in their own learning.

**Transition teams should meet regularly** to discuss immediate and long-term assistance for children acclimating to their learning environment (this may be learning at home, staggered days, staggered school-based scheduling or a hybrid model).

**Involve families in developing bi-directional communication** plans to share information about resources, family-to-school connection, school-wide events, distance learning, special activities, etc.

**Early Educators can support relationship building** by identifying inclusive peer-to-peer connections between children and fostering connections within small groups, thus establishing a safe, healthy and trusting learning community.

**Support children and their families with dual language learning needs** by providing services to allow full access and participation in the inclusive learning community.

**Reconnect with a previous early educator or care provider** to learn more about the child. Discuss any concerns, brainstorm any additional helpful strategies that may better support the child and report back on how the child is doing in their new educational setting.

### **After Transition: Resources to Explore**

- Espinosa, L. M., & García, E. (2012) [Developmental Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners with a Focus on Kindergarten Entry Assessment: Implications for State Policies](#). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.
- PBS. (2020). [It's Going to be Okay: The Transition from Play-Based Preschool to Kindergarten](#)
  - Sesame Street: [Kindergarten Here We Come](#) collection
  - Sesame Street: [Ready for Kindergarten Challenge](#)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). [Transitioning to Kindergarten](#). Helpful tips on what you can do to prepare both you and your child for kindergarten.
- Common Sense Media. (2020) [Best Books For Kindergarteners](#). These books can help ease first-day-of-school jitters by showing kids the lay of the land: classroom, cubbies and playground.

### **Transition Tools and More Resources to Explore**

- PACER Center, Inc. (2018). [Transitioning from Early Childhood Special Education \(ECSE\) to Kindergarten: Tips for parents of children with challenging behaviors](#). Attending elementary school signals that your child has reached an educational milestone and can look forward to new adventures and opportunities.

- **Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA). (2018).** [Your Child’s Transition from Preschool Special Education to Kindergarten.](#) Transition tips for families who have a child moving from preschool special education to kindergarten. [Spanish version.](#)
- **Bodine, M. (2020).** [How Teachers Can Ease the Transition to Kindergarten.](#) **Edutopia.** Three strategies early childhood educators can use to help prepare their students for the changes ahead.
- **Reading Rockets. (2020).** [Paving the Way to Kindergarten for Young Children with Disabilities.](#) Best practices to make for a smoother transition to kindergarten using a collaborative team approach.
- **Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA). (2020).** [E-Notes: Updates from the ECTA Center \(for\) Coronavirus Disease \(Covid-19\).](#) Subtopics to support the re-opening of schools and childcare centers, and increasing in-home services following the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **North Carolina Office of Early Learning. (2019).** [Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition.](#) North Carolina’s Pre-K to K transition 2016-2017 pilot bill directs the departments to devise a way for preschool teachers to prepare a preschool to kindergarten transition plan for all children enrolled in the NC Pre-K programs.
- **Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. (2020).** [Help your Child Feel Good about Using and Seeing Others Wearing Face Masks](#)
- **USA Today. (2020).** [Coronavirus Chronicles: Will school closures affect separation anxiety for kindergarteners?](#) A video of a Virginia family attempting to maintain structure for their kindergartener during school closure while also keeping grandparents safe from COVID-19.