

# Transitions to Kindergarten: Partnering with Families and Schools

## Introduction

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The **Strengths-Based Attitudes** and **Relationship-Based Practices** can be applied by professionals in the early childhood field in their relationships with families, with colleagues, and with community partners. This is especially important when a program is preparing children and families for their transition from Head Start to a receiving public school. It is even more critical when preparing families whose child has been receiving special developmental services, and will have an individualized education plan (IEP) in their new public school. This simulation engages us in practice of the Strengths-based Attitudes (SBAs) and Relationship-based Practices (RBPs) as applied to relationship-building between a HS Coordinator and a receiving public school Special Education Team Leader.

Together these Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices can guide early childhood professionals in their interactions with professionals outside the HS system. These engagement strategies form the basis for learning, sharing, and coordinating. They can strengthen partnerships that serve the developmental needs of children, improve quality of care, and support family and provider well-being. Providers who adopt such attitudes and practices across education settings help create a safe, genuine, and caring community for children and families.

## Applying the Strengths-Based Attitudes to Partner with Schools during Transition Planning

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Recall from earlier simulations that the SBAs are ways of reflecting, thinking, or feeling about someone or something that is often evident in a person's behavior. We can begin transition planning and interactions with a *receiving school district* with an attitude that presumes that the receiving school staff has strengths. In contrast, when we approach our interactions with worry and lack of intentionally adopted positive attitudes that do not consider the school staff's expertise and caring, we are more likely to make judgments, and even anticipate a less-than-ideal outcome. Adopting a positive attitude gives us a place to start with the receiving school that shows respect and encourages collaboration. The four NCPFCE Strengths-based Attitudes that we use to remind ourselves to start with a family's strengths can be adapted for building relationships with a receiving school system and staff representative.

### **LEARN by Adopting Strengths-based Attitudes:**

- Public school systems and staff provide important teaching and support for kindergarten children.
- The receiving school and staff are our partners with a critical role in the child and family's experience and development.
- The receiving school system and professionals have expertise about children and their families.
- The public school-based practitioners' contributions are important and valuable.

### Examples of Using the Strengths-based Attitudes

#### **To Understand the New School Setting and professionals while Building a Relationship:**

- "What have you done before to help transition children and families that we could try here?"
- "What do you do to comfort children while they are transitioning in the beginning?"
- "Tell me how you think children entering kindergarten settle in and learn best."
- "How can you tell when she is really interested in something?"
- "What kinds of expectations will the new kindergarten teacher have for him separating from his parents when it's time for him to be in the classroom? Invite the school to share their goals and hopes for the child.

## Applying the Relationship-Based Practices to Partner with Schools During Transition Planning

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Just as Relationship-based Practices promote the family's engagement with us and build strong partnerships, we can use the RBPs to build strong engagement with the new school. This makes it more likely that the family and the new school will mutually engage from a strengths-based vantage point in which both assume that the other has the best interests of the child at heart. Reflecting on how we apply Relationship-based Practices can improve our efforts to strengthen our relationship with the receiving school. The six Relationship-based Practices can support our efforts to build meaningful, effective, and on-going partnerships with receiving schools in service of more successful transitions for children and families to kindergarten.

**SHARE by using Relationship-based Practices:**

- Observe and describe the child's behavior to open communication with the public school contact (Team Leader).
- Reflect on your own personal and cultural perspective
- Reflect on the public school contact's individual and school-setting perspective

**COORDINATE by using Relationship-based Practices:**

- Acknowledge and Support the competence of the public school contact
- Focus comments on the family-child and the school-family relationships
- Value the IEP Team Leader's passion

## Examples of Using Relationship-based Practices with Receiving Schools

**To Understand the School's Perspective while Building a Relationship:**

- Be aware of your own biases, and recognize that what you say is always interpreted through the school's perspective.
- Share positive and specific information about the child and family.
- Use simple, clear, and objective descriptions of the child's behavior.
- Acknowledge and comment on an interaction between a parent and the school representative that demonstrates something positive about the relationship.
- Invite the school representative to share their perspective on the child's behavior and development.
- Recognize the child's strengths.
- Reframe the family's emotions as passion for their child.