



Transition to Kindergarten

Transition Summit Guide



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NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

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Introduction

The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (NCECDTL), along with the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) developed a set of resources to support statewide and regional summits on the transition to kindergarten. These resources include a guide to conducting a transition summit, along with planning materials and handouts. Summit planning and delivery are the responsibility of local agencies and individuals, and these resources can be individualized for each summit.

Successful Transitions

Successful transition to kindergarten requires more than ensuring that children have the necessary academic and social skills. Smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten depend on connections made between participants in the process, such as those between schools and families, and between preschool and early childhood educators and early learning settings, especially connections made prior to kindergarten entry. Aligning early childhood and kindergarten practices, learning standards, curricula, and assessments is an important element for promoting successful transitions. The extent to which elements of each environment are comparable and build on one another can affect how seamless the kindergarten transition is. For example, alignment of environmental factors, such as what restroom signs look like, can ease children's anxiety about entering a new environment. Furthermore, alignment of curricula, screenings, assessments, and language supports can help educators better support children in continuing to expand their knowledge and skills. Aligned early childhood and kindergarten curricula and supports for home languages and English development help to create an instructional environment in which children are naturally progressing from what they have learned in early learning settings to what will be expected of them in the kindergarten setting. Aligned and linguistically appropriate screenings and assessments allow kindergarten educators to see where children's current skills are in relation to what will be taught in

order to better target instruction. Promoting successful transition and alignment practices requires continued communication, collaboration, and compromises from decision makers representing both entities.

Considering "School Readiness"

When approaching the subject of children's transitions from preschool to kindergarten, it is likely that the topic of school readiness will come up. A commonly asked question, either within the planning team or at the summit is, "What is school readiness?" The answer to this question varies, but certain themes are typically included and should be considered when planning your summit and summit goals. One key point to make is that school readiness is not just about a child's skills, but includes the connections around that child that support him or her to make a successful transition to kindergarten. In a "school ready" environment, children are armed with a set of social and academic skills that will help them succeed in kindergarten. But just as importantly, schools create an environment that is welcoming, linguistically and culturally responsive, and ready to receive children. Effective transition and alignment practices play an essential role in promoting school readiness.

Purpose of the Summit

We believe there are six reasons to conduct a transition and alignment summit. They are:

- 1. To bring together key stakeholders in early childhood education**, including early childhood and elementary school educators and leaders, English language learning specialists, special education staff, families, and involved community representatives. Bringing stakeholders together to work in a neutral setting is an important first step in collaborative kindergarten transition planning.
- 2. To communicate the importance of successful early transition experiences for children.** Reaching this goal involves providing content on how well children are doing in kindergarten and how successful transition experiences can help children, families, communities, and schools become more “school ready”, which in turn, helps close gaps in kindergarten performance.
- 3. To educate participants on best practices for creating successful early childhood transitions.** This includes presenting a framework for transitions through which children, families, communities, and schools contribute to the transition process. Concrete examples of how to link each of these entities successfully are especially useful for participants.
- 4. To allow participants to share current transition and alignment practices and ideas for practices.** This can be achieved through group discussions focused on practices that participants are already using or through panel discussions featuring leaders who have successfully addressed transition and alignment planning, have overcome common challenges, and have achieved successful outcomes in their work.
- 5. To assist participants in moving forward with their own kindergarten transition work.** It is important that to apply the knowledge gained about successful transition practices to fit the needs of the community. An effective summit provides participants with an opportunity to create specific goals and plans to begin or expand their transition efforts.

- 6. To provide participants with the knowledge and resources they can share with others.** Because all stakeholders cannot possibly attend these summits, participants can play a vital role in conveying the importance of this work, how to conceptualize it, and how to carry out transition plans to colleagues in their field.

Creating a Summit Planning Team

A group of summit organizers should collaborate on summit planning. This group could include Head Start representatives, educators from your state department of education and area school districts, and community members involved in early childhood education. Team members should work together to set goals for your summit, decide what content should be covered, and organize the day. Tasks for summit preparation can be divided across team members as they see fit.

Summit Goals, Attendance, and Content

The number of summit attendees can range from 20 to 200, depending on goals and the audience for the event.

Summit goals are unique to every area, so consider carefully your audience’s circumstances, in terms of transition teams, local educational coalitions, and other partnerships. Before creating specific conference goals, it is important for summit organizers to consider where their state is in terms of their current work, infrastructure, and policies regarding the early learning-to-kindergarten transition. A state that currently puts little emphasis on the transition process will need to first address some basic goals, such as informing state-level policy makers of the importance of this work. Other states that currently provide more support to transition work should typically work on goals to address more local-level issues, such as enhancing partnerships between preschool programs and local education agencies.

The summit offers a valuable opportunity to assess current transition efforts on an individual level, and identify areas for expanding upon those efforts. This initial goal can assist participants in deciding what

steps should be taken to attain their end goal, including talking with policy makers, forming transition teams, fostering collaboration, and implementing specific transition practices. Once you create specific summit goals, they will drive summit attendance and content. Following is a discussion of how summit participants and content may vary, depending on circumstances.

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- If a locality is in the early stages of transition planning and has not yet formed coalitions or alliances to address transition issues, you might focus on educating stakeholders about the importance of smooth transitions and getting buy-in from school superintendents and policy makers at the state level. In this case, attendees would include educational policy makers, superintendents, principals, and other stakeholders who could get transition planning underway. Superintendents and principals are especially important because of their unique ability to recruit others within their system to be involved in this process. Head Start State Collaboration Office directors should also be invited because of their frequent ability to provide assistance in connecting elementary schools with Head Start programs. Transition is a priority for State Collaboration Offices, so they have a vested interest in facilitating successful transition practices. Additionally, you may want to consider including members of the state Early Childhood Advisory Council. In addition to the leaders and educators involved in the transition to kindergarten, it is important to include stakeholders—including cultural, linguistic, geographic, and special education representatives—who represent the demographics of communities served. Content for this type of conference would focus on principles of child development, how important smooth transition experiences are at this stage of life, and evidence demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of early attention to academic and social outcomes.
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- If a locality has a good infrastructure in place for transition planning, including local initiatives and planning teams, attendees might learn from each other's experiences in transition planning and fine-tune their own plans to overcome barriers. During this event, participants would include educators and administrators representing Head Start and elementary schools, local community leaders, and other stakeholders, such as parents,

Head Start State Collaboration Office directors, and members of the state Early Childhood Advisory Council. Ensure to include a diversity of stakeholders in the summit activities, so that as many perspectives as possible are represented. Content for this type of conference would include making connections that foster successful transition practices as well as planning activities for crafting practical strategies to be launched after the summit.

Before the Summit

Planning the event

Based on goals for the summit, one important step is to select appropriate speakers for each of your topics and invite them to attend. We recommend that you solicit some feedback on content from presenters, but, as this is your summit, make sure local organizers drive the majority of the content. Once you work out the content, the next step involves creating an internal “working agenda” for the day. This document should include details about each part of the day, such as who is responsible for speaking, how much time is allotted, and how attendees can participate.

You can plan summits for an entire day or a half day, depending on how much content you would like to cover. Typically half-day summits are used for participants who are not yet organized into teams and are not far along in the transition planning process. Full-day summits are ideal for audiences who have already formed transition teams and are ready to make significant plans to move forward in their work. In deciding how long the summit should last, consider whether you will be providing lunch and lodging for those who need it.

An initial welcome from organizers is recommended, not only to orient participants to the day, but also to emphasize the collaboration that has occurred between organizers, speakers, and others involved. Since the planning and implementation of transition practices is a collaborative process, it is good to demonstrate how the organization of the summit is based in collaboration as well. Note that some key activities to include are ones that ask participants to share information and ideas with one another—such

as table discussions guided by focused questions. Panel discussions are also an effective addition if you have a group of people who have successfully worked with one another on early childhood transition and can share their experiences and take questions from participants. Above all, make sure to evaluate whether the agenda you develop will ultimately help you reach your summit goals. Take a look at the sample half-day and full-day summit agendas provided in the summit planning materials.

Summit announcement

Prior to releasing an official summit announcement, it is often beneficial to circulate a “save the date” announcement once the summit date is set so that invitees can secure the date on their calendars. In this initial announcement, mention that more information will follow with further details about the summit. The official summit announcement or invitation should address the needs of the community or state being served, and it should always include such basic elements as the summit’s purpose, goals for the day, a few statements about why the summit is important, who should attend, and what participants should expect from their experience. You should also include information on how to register (via the web, email, phone, or mail) so that you will know who will be attending. You should use this opportunity to gather contact information, such as email addresses, which you will need for sending out questionnaires or to contact participants if summit details change. Be sure to include a registration deadline that is far enough ahead of the event to give you time to make arrangements, such as the amount of summit materials needed. Provide information in multiple languages, and include contact information for one or more summit organizers, in case potential partners have further questions about the event. Mention whether lunch, refreshments, and/or take-home resources (in participants’ home languages) will be provided. In the event that you are inviting participants in pre-existing teams to attend, it is useful to tailor the registration form to allow teams to submit one form, which would include all team members’ names and information, instead of having each team member submit a separate form. See the provided sample summit announcement and registration form in the summit planning materials.

Team members should work together to set goals for your summit, decide what content should be covered, and organize the day.

Pre-Summit questionnaire

It is often desirable to obtain information about potential attendees’ demographics and transition practices before holding your summit. It is also useful to include questions that relate to summit goals, so that you can gather information on how people are already progressing toward those goals. Send out the survey via email several weeks before the event, with a deadline that will allow you time to compile a summary of results to share with summit participants. This information can help inform planners, presenters, and participants about barriers and progress in the field. It can also be useful for summit discussions and brainstorming. We offer a sample pre-summit survey of transition practices in the summit planning materials that can be modified according to your needs.

Logistics

Local organizers are responsible for coordinating logistics with Head Start National Centers or other agencies in their designated locality. Following are some of the important tasks that you will need to consider and delegate:

- **Creating a budget**

Assess what funds are available from collaborating agencies, outside contributions, or other available sources. Your budget will likely end up driving decisions about participant numbers, whether food can be provided, and the amount of handouts or take-home materials you will be able to provide.

- **Sending out invitations**

Designate a contact person for RSVPs. Use email or paper mail. If sent by email, we recommend that the invitation document is a PDF attachment.

- **Facilitating registration**

Be sure to provide registration information in the summit announcement or invitation. Registration on the web is typically the most efficient method for collecting participant information. Websites can often be used for free or for a minimal fee. Other options are email, phone, or mail-in registration.

- **Securing a meeting space**

When searching for a place to hold the summit, be sure to secure a facility with enough room for the anticipated number of participants. Discuss seating arrangements with the venue management; we recommend using individual tables that seat 6-8 people to facilitate table discussions. Be sure to consider space for registration tables, display materials, and any additional areas that may be necessary for break-out sessions.

- **Arranging for all necessary technology**

Be sure to speak with management at your chosen venue about the availability of needed equipment, such as a projection screen, projector, computer (if not bringing your own), access to a sound system that will hook into your computer, and microphones. You may consider hand-held microphones if you would like to hand them to participants for reporting out from group discussions or asking questions. If such equipment is not available, you will need to make arrangements to bring it yourself. A/V equipment can be rented if you do not own what you need.

- **Arranging for lodging**

This will be your responsibility if the summit lasts a full day. Keep in mind that participants may need

to spend a night either before or after the summit. Arranging lodging opportunities at a reduced rate or, at least, providing a list of local hotels with contact information is recommended.

- **Providing time for lunch and breaks**

Plan time for a lunch break, as well as one or two shorter breaks in between sessions. Water and optional refreshments can be provided for participants.

- **Procuring take-home materials**

Summit attendees always appreciate take-home materials such as children's books or texts on effective transition practices. We also recommend providing notepads, workbooks, pens, or other materials with which participants can write down key points or ideas throughout the day. Base the number of resources you will need on registration information or a well thought-out estimate of the number of participants you expect to attend.

- **Printing handouts for participants**

Handouts should include the day's agenda and other materials, such as sheets with table discussion questions and space to take notes, documents provided from the National Centers (transition planning guides; parent, family, and community engagement materials; etc.), and relevant state-specific resources, such as state Head Start/ kindergarten alignment documents. (Presentation slides may be distributed by email.) Most documents can be printed in black and white, and double-sided, but some documents with graphic organizers may be more useful when printed in full color. Be sure to make information available in languages other than English. These handouts are available on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website linked here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

- **Staffing for the day**

Depending on the number of attendees, you generally will need two to four extra people on the day of the summit to help with logistical tasks, such as setting out materials for participants, checking people in as they arrive, distributing name tags, and helping to facilitate table discussions throughout the day.

During the Summit

PowerPoint Presentation

The Transition Summit Presentation provided with the summit materials is a general guide for a summit presentation and includes notes for each slide. You can modify, add, or eliminate slides as needed, especially when outside presenters bring their own slides to work into a presentation. Following are descriptions of each of the presentation's seven sections:

1

The State of School Readiness

In this section, we provide an overview of how young children are doing in early education settings. We emphasize the achievement gap—particularly relevant to the Head Start

community—children from high- and low-income families, as well as between monolingual English speakers and children who are dual language learners. We also present evidence of children having problems with the adjustment to kindergarten. These slides should be used either in part or in their entirety when making the case that some children are clearly falling behind in their early years, that this situation affects their achievement in later years, and that prevention of early school problems through effective transition planning is a wise investment.

2

Why We Are Concerned About Early Transition Experiences

We explain how early adversity and early school experiences can have a significant impact on children's development and later school outcomes. This is particularly

relevant since the transition to kindergarten can be quite stressful for students and lead to difficulties in early school years. We also include a brief video about how early experience can shape children's later brain development. The slides present research evidence that more transition activities are associated with more positive outcomes for children in kindergarten. We contend that less intervention is necessary to change

It is often desirable to obtain information about potential attendees' demographics and transition practices before holding your summit.

a child's developmental trajectory when caregivers or educators address challenges early rather than attempting to re-mediate them later.

3

The Nature of Kindergarten Transition

This section examines the contrast between preschool and kindergarten environments and how misalignments can cause children to have trouble adjusting

to kindergarten. We include quotes from families that show positive and negative experiences with the kindergarten transition.

4

Conceptualizing Effective Transition

In this section, we present three major components for fostering successful adjustment: information, relationships, and alignment. We also explain how

a child-focused view of school readiness does not fully support successful transition. We introduce an ecological framework of school readiness that considers factors outside of the child (e.g., educators, peers, family, and community). We also address the needs of different populations.



Transition Connections

This section covers the goals and importance of each of the four types of transition connections: child–school, family–school, school–school, and community–school. It also provides examples of efforts that have been done in the past to foster these connections.



Building Successful Transition Experiences

In this section, we discuss six important steps to successful transition planning. For each of the six steps, we present tools and tips to help facilitate the planning and implementation process. In addition, we provide samples of transition planning for transition teams.



Additional Slides

In this section, we provide alternate slides that presenters may find to be helpful.

Activities and participant involvement

The slides include several ideas for activities within the presentation. These are optional components of the presentation, and presenters should consider how each activity adds value to their message, given the goals chosen for their particular summit.

Give participants time in at least one portion of the summit to discuss and share ideas about what is being presented, what they are currently doing to foster transition, and how they might want to expand on those practices. These discussions should be guided by questions that keep participants focused on the goals set for their conversations. Allot some time for groups to share highlights of their discussions, if desired. You can find sample activity materials in the summit materials.

After the Summit

Create a plan for summit follow-up

A transition summit will usually get attendees started on the process of thinking about new strategies. But planning and implementing those strategies can be hindered by other pressing issues. For this reason, we recommend a variety of follow-up practices:

- Encourage participants to conduct short “back-home” trainings for colleagues who did not attend the summit. This will help solidify content in participants’ minds, as well as further disseminate information on the need for effective transition planning and what successful practices can be put in place to facilitate such transitions.
- Have a person or agency with a connection to the region, such as a Head Start Regional EC Specialist or the agency sponsoring the summit, initiate follow-up emails or meetings to keep the work moving forward. For example, a Head Start EC Specialist may call key summit attendees following the event to see how their initial efforts to facilitate transition are progressing and to ask if they need extra help or resources to keep their work moving.
- Hold a follow-up meeting with team leaders who attended the summit. Conversations at such a meeting might focus on sharing the progress teams are making regarding the goals they set for themselves at the conference, as well as discussing barriers they are encountering in their work, so that the group can brainstorm solutions.
- Have participants or team leaders share the plans (via email, photocopies, or websites) they developed during the summit with summit organizers, who can then share these anonymously shared with all summit participants for the purpose of groups learning from each other’s ideas.

Post-summit feedback questionnaire

After conducting a transition summit, it is useful to get feedback from participants about their experience. You can share this information with all of the summit collaborators, including any Head Start centers involved, to help plan future events of this nature. We provide a template for creating a summit feedback survey in Appendix F.

Resources

Helpful resources for planning your own summit are available at the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website on the “Transition to Kindergarten” page, found at this link:

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

One resource on this website that is particularly useful is a summary of the Washington State Transition Summit accompanied by video of the featured speakers.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten-summit-presentations>



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