

Transition to Kindergarten

Educator Practices for Successful Transitions to Kindergarten

The move from an early learning program to kindergarten is a major transition for young children and their families. Research shows that a smooth and successful transition to kindergarten is strongly linked to children’s academic and social success in the school years to follow. The more transition practices are implemented, the better the transition process goes. This list offers research-based activities, organized by four Points of Connection, for educators to implement in the days, weeks, and months leading up to and following the start of kindergarten.

Point of Connection	Transition Activities
Child–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in a spring or summer kindergarten orientation for children and their families. • Organize visits to kindergarten classrooms, and visits from kindergarten teachers. • Bring children to attend events at the receiving elementary school. • Have children practice kindergarten routines—such as lining up, putting on backpacks, or carrying lunch on a tray—in the early learning setting. • Incorporate familiar activities or routines from the early learning setting into the kindergarten year. • Encourage kindergarten support staff to visit future students in their early learning settings. • Help make connections between children and families who will attend the same receiving elementary school. • Establish a “buddy system” between children who will be entering kindergarten and students who are currently in kindergarten. • Provide children with books and interactive materials about kindergarten in the months leading up to the transition, including materials that children can take home to share with their families. • Encourage families to have discussions and read with their child about kindergarten. • Stay in contact with children and families formerly enrolled in Head Start. Visit them in their elementary school setting, and encourage them to visit the Head Start program.

Point of Connection	Transition Activities
Family–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in a spring or summer kindergarten orientation for children and their families. Invite families of children who have previously attended kindergarten to come talk about their transition experiences and tips. • Arrange for families of children who are dual language learners to receive kindergarten information and registration materials in their home language(s), and provide support for completing registration forms and enrollment requirements. • Contact families in person or by phone in the days or weeks prior to the start of the new school year. Prepare questions for families, and invite families to ask questions. • Participate in orientation events for children and families before and during the beginning of the kindergarten year, to build relationships with children and their families in the new learning setting. • Identify the preferred communication methods of individual families. • Determine the level of support needed for individual families. In some cases, facilitating family engagement may require providing only basic program information, while other families may benefit most from regular home visits, phone calls, home learning activity ideas, or other individualized supports. • Establish a primary point of contact for families, and communicate regularly throughout the school year, with extra frequency in the beginning of the year. • Meet with families in person periodically. • Collaborate with families around any specific transition issues that arise for their child. • Ensure that child data is accessible to families, and that families have opportunities to contribute information about their child. • Provide families with information about community resources, such as health screenings, library story times, meal programs, and other services. • Encourage families to do learning games and activities at home to prepare for kindergarten, and provide resources in their home language(s). • Invite families to participate in the learning setting and in program-wide or school-wide events. • Provide opportunities for families to help plan events or activities, and to offer feedback on events and activities they participate in. • Send letters, program information, and other helpful resources to families in their home language(s). • Provide families with tips and other resources about how they can support their child through the kindergarten transition.

Point of Connection	Transition Activities
Program–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in joint professional development opportunities for education staff from Head Start programs and kindergarten classrooms. • Participate in meetings between Head Start and kindergarten educators to discuss and coordinate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ strengths-based child data ◦ special information for supporting individual children and their families ◦ classroom routines and procedures ◦ learning standards, instruction, and assessment • Visit the learning settings of partner schools and programs. • Collaborate to develop common routines and language used in early learning and kindergarten classroom settings.
Community–School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in joint events and partnership activities between Head Start programs and receiving elementary schools. • Tell families about literacy opportunities offered in the community, such as library story times or language learning services. • Identify and partner with organizations in the community—such as medical offices, grocery stores, libraries, popular restaurants, or meal programs—that could offer resources for families, children’s books, or activities about kindergarten. • Participate in community efforts or events about school readiness and kindergarten— such as story time, school playground gatherings, or school supply drives. • Join the local kindergarten transition task force, together with families, other educators, leadership, and community members, to coordinate kindergarten transition efforts. • Support research-based policies related to the kindergarten transition. • Identify and promote the community’s hopes and expectations for children.