

Building Bridges: Leaders Supporting the Transition to Kindergarten

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Narrator: More than 400,000 children transition to kindergarten every year from Head Start programs. A new school year can be both exciting and stressful for families and children.

Lexi: I'm going to kindergarten, but ...

Suheib: I was a bit, a little bit confused. Interviewer: What were you confused about?

Suheib: That there's so many kids.

Rocio Jordan: I am nervous about kindergarten, because I don't know what that's going to look like.

Dayona: I don't want to go to kindergarten because I miss, I will miss Ms. Karen.

Isaac: Me too!

Quinn: Okay. You'll miss me when I go to kindergarten.

Educator: I will miss you.

Makyla Melonson: Children that attend Head Start – and I know that for a fact for myself, because I'm a Head Start product – it does set us up for lifelong success, even beyond kindergarten.

Dedy Fauntleroy: Partnering with Head Start not only makes sense, the data shows that it's good for families. And when you empower families, they take that forever.

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Narrator: Leaders at Head Start programs and receiving elementary schools play a critical role in ensuring schools are able to support families and sustain the learning games children have established in their Head Start program.

Class: Put it in my pocket. Now, we're ready to go.

Susan Yang: Children are school-ready. The children really feel confident in their abilities to ask questions, to learn how to take turns.

Educator: Can you flip this over? And you can just leave it right there. Boom.

Dedy: Knowing letter recognition, sound recognition, knowing how to write their name, with our Head Start, they already knew it when they came in the door.

Educator: Good job!

Narrator: Program and school leaders can work together to support a successful transition to kindergarten by using evidence-based transition practices.

Tarra Patrick: As building leaders and Head Start leadership and district leadership partner together, we create the foundation for the bridge that allows the students, and families, and community, to walk across from Head Start to elementary school, so that they can have a successful start to their educational career.

Narrator: Children that experience a smooth transition to kindergarten are more likely to have improved academic achievement, positive social and emotional skills, and fewer behaviors that interfere with learning. A successful transition is built on sharing information, building relationships, and program alignment. Meaningful partnering between school and program leaders can establish processes that encourage information sharing through communication with families, preparing children for what to expect, and providing opportunities for educators to share data.

Ann Tracey: We had a Kickoff Kindergarten Roundup night, and this is how you sign up for school, and here's all the forms, and our office talked to the parents, and it was great. And parents walked away with resources.

Kim Burnett: So we'll have a family night where we invite the school district and Indian Education Department to come in and work with our families. Our special needs manager works very closely with families of children that have IEPs that are moving on to kindergarten to ensure a smooth transition. All of our classrooms visit an elementary school before the end of the year.

Hani Ismail: We will have what they call Jump Start. So, one week for just the kindergartens. They get to know the school, the environment, and I think that will be amazing for them.

Tanya Cornejo: We saw a couple classrooms – it was a kindergarten classroom specifically – just to see kind of the difference of how it is.

Ann: Not only do we get to view their social-emotional skills coming in, but also where they are academically. And that's a huge, huge benefit for teachers.

Narrator: Strong relationships between the leaders at receiving elementary schools and Head Start programs can lay the foundation for systems that intentionally support relationship-building within their community and with families.

Susan: So, as the Head Start director, one of the really big things that we do is help to build relationships in the community, help to build relationships with community partners, and really help the families understand the importance of these relationships to the school readiness transition.

Kim Pressell: At the very beginning of the year, before school even opens, I contact both principals and just introduce myself and say, "This is who we are. This is what we do. If you ever have time in your day, I'd really like to meet with you."

Connie Mueller: Also making sure that they meet the kindergarten teacher, and the kindergarten teacher needs to come down to the preschool, too because teachers are incredibly important to preschoolers.

Boy: Missed me!

Educator: I missed you too!

Dedy: I do appreciate when families have the opportunity to participate in Head Start, because not just the kids, but the adults have a chance to form relationships around schools, and that helps their child to be more successful when they transition to kindergarten. They come ready.

Susan: The parents understand that they are their child's first and most important teacher and they're also their child's first and most important advocate when they go to the public schools.

Narrator: Strategic collaboration between school and program leaders can foster alignment by encouraging participation in joint professional development, and partnering around transition activities, assessments, standards, and curricula.

Tarra: There's professional development that needs to happen for building principles at district leadership and the Head Start leadership all together. There's professional development that needs to happen for the kindergarten teachers and Head Start teachers to find opportunities to collaborate together.

Makyla: Our Head Start teachers visit the kindergarten classrooms, especially around that social-emotional curriculum.

Educator: I am unique.

Class: I am unique.

Makyla: Our teachers were able to take some of that back and implement it into the classroom now.

Class: I love myself!

Dedy: As leaders, we need to make that space so that our teachers can collaborate, and then they can provide those transition activities, and then we can create just kids that are ready to go to kindergarten ready to go, feeling super confident and families that are ready to go to kindergarten and ready to go and super confident.

Narrator: When leaders from Head Start programs, and receiving elementary schools, partner around information sharing, relationship building, and alignment, everyone succeeds.

Makyla: My hope and my dreams are to see Head Start and kindergarten to be a partner in the community, within the schools, so that the communities as a whole can experience success.

Suheib: It was a little bit scary, but now I'm not scared. Interviewer: How do you feel now about school?

Anabelle: Kindergarten is awesome!

Isaac: My new playground is huge.

Jovanni: Kindergarten rocks!

Tarra: Kids that are confident and supported and have a sense of ownership over this space come in and own kindergarten.

Julissa: This is my class.

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