

Building Bridges: Educators Supporting Successful Transitions to Kindergarten

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Narrator: Head Start educators play a critical role in helping families bridge the transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Head Start educators support successful transitions to kindergarten by using evidence-based transition practices throughout the year. These practices bridge the path from Head Start to kindergarten, creating a smooth transition for families, children, and educators. A successful transition is built on sharing information, building relationships, and program alignment. Educators in Head Start programs share information about the kindergarten transition by preparing children for what to expect, communicating with families in their home languages, and sharing data with families and the receiving elementary school.

Educator: Her name is Miss Bindergarten.

Student: Miss Bindergarten!

Educator: Gets ready for kindergarten!

Narrator: Preparing children for what to expect helps children move from their Head Start program to kindergarten, confident and ready for the transition.

Laurie Yarger: We did some school visits together if they were moving out of the school, and kind of talk about what to expect and also try to provide some resources.

Amber Escott: We also put together a kindergarten readiness packet every year, because some of the kids don't stay with us through summertime. So, we put a big packet that has a lot of fun math activities and math games and even some dry erase little practice sheets for them if they wanted to.

Narrator: Let's hear about some ways educators might share information with families about the kindergarten transition.

Edwin Garcia-Prieto: We do like a fun night with the families, and we present the information. We invite people that are experts or they are in the public school to come and talk about kindergarten and we try to help the parents and the children to be registered on time and have all the documentation ready for it. So, if the parents have any questions or any concern, they might get the answer from their resource.

Narrator: Sharing data with families and the receiving elementary school can help to sustain the learning gains children have made in their Head Start program.

Yan Dang: We do share some assessment data. And for example, we have individuals' profile.

Ann Tracey: Some of the data that I'm used to as a kindergarten teacher and as an administrator this year is viewing the teaching strategy's goal data. 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.

Katrina Jones: One of the other things we do is have a big transition meeting for our students that have an IEP. And so, those transition meetings are with the school and then the support staff. So that way, when the kiddos come in, there's already a plan in place for them.

Narrator: Educators in Head Start programs build relationships by getting to know the unique strength of the families in their program and partnering with the receiving elementary school. Building positive relationships with families and children helps ensure that families are confident and ready to transition from Head Start to kindergarten.

Yan: Most of the parents, they probably have a different cultural education background. When I came to this country, everything was new for me — new language, new culture, new education system. My child attended Denise Louie Education Center years ago. Because of my own experience, I am more easier to understand the family and then help to build a relationship.

Edwin: It's a new journey for them, kindergarten, and there's going to be a lot of feelings about it.

Stacey Lough: We're also empowering the parents to advocate for their children when they go to public school. And we're introducing them to the community and they're actually, I found, a lot of my families that were able to actually participate in community activities. So, it fosters a lot of successes.

Narrator: Partnering with receiving elementary schools supports the relationships needed for effective kindergarten transition.

Katrina: It's critical that you have time to plan and meet and really work together as a team.

Narrator: Educators can align with their receiving elementary school by participating in joint professional development, partnering around transition activities, and ensuring curriculum and assessments support kindergarten readiness. Let's hear from educators about how Head Start programs and receiving elementary schools might share in joint professional development.

Yan: Sometimes we partner with a public school program or an elementary school panel of the kindergarten teachers, and then to find out what is the difference, kindergarten and preschool. So, how can we make that gap more closer?

Educator: The purpose of our learning walks today is to go out and observe in actual kindergarten classrooms.

Bernadita Ginoza: The learning walk is actually helping a lot of our teachers to go and observe what the kindergarten teachers are doing in their classrooms so we can better prepare our kiddos that are going there, to help them, say, "Hey, this is what the kindergarten teachers are going to be doing in their classrooms. It might be the same as what we are doing here, but it's close what we are ... The schedules that we are doing and the transitions that we do in our preschool classroom."

Narrator: Partnering around transition activities helps children and families move from their Head Start program to kindergarten, confident and ready for the transition.

Bernadita: We do have a collaboration effort with all of the kindergarten teachers, because we do like a yearly meeting with them. There is a list of things that we're going to be working that we put together as a group that they would like us to be working in our classroom with the kids, so when they go to kindergarten, they are ready to go.

Students: Now we're ready to go!

Bernadita: For us as teachers, it's kind of nice to see what the other teachers are, you know, teaching in the classroom and finding or looking at different strategies that they are using with their kids so we can incorporate them into our classroom.

Laurie: In our class, towards the ends of the year, we start doing more seat work, and it's kindergarten readiness. And it's still fun activities, but it's really getting them used to the idea that there's going to be more time in a seat. Dude, that is a perfect R if I've ever seen one. Thanks, my friend! We would change, for instance, lunch or snack. Instead of doing it in the classroom, we would move them to the cafeteria with the other kindergarteners. Kindergarteners come to us and do a story time with us and have them kind of talk to the kids, because honestly, a kindergartener can tell them more than we can about what kindergarten's like.

Narrator: When Head Start educators ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten, everyone succeeds.

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