



Winter 2009

**Transition Tool Kit:
Information and Resources for PreK, Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers,
Parents, Administrators and Community Members**

The transition between early learning programs or home to school can be one of the most significant events that a young child experiences. Excitement, shock, fear, happiness, anxiety, surprise and a sense of being overwhelmed are a few of the emotions that a child might feel. Differences in class size, bathroom and building size, more structure and less freedom of movement, being away from home, a longer day, new staff and new children and less teacher attention can all cause a child to experience a variety of emotions. The transition to a new program or class and particularly to Kindergarten is a one-time event that takes careful advance preparation and planning in order to be a successful milestone for the child.

Transition refers to change. It involves moving from one situation to another. All children will experience this change differently. Thoughtful and deliberate attention to this process by those who are directly involved can make this a positive experience for a young child and his/her family.

In 1996, The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCELD) conducted a landmark national survey of 3,600 kindergarten teachers focusing on the transition practices into kindergarten. Teachers reported that 52% of children have a successful entry into Kindergarten, while 48 % experience moderate to serious problems in making this transition. It was evident from this study that transition practices needed more attention. This study was the impetus for a national transition conference held in Charlottesville, VA in 1998 and for ongoing research in the area of transition.

The NCELD survey revealed important information about school practices related to transition into kindergarten and from kindergarten into first grade. Schulting, Malone & Dodge (2005) reported that the survey indicated:

1. There is often a poor fit between the skills of incoming kindergartners and expectations of their teachers.
2. Schools need to focus on development and implementation practices of transition practices into Kindergarten **and** first grade.
3. Teachers of the sending early learning program and receiving Kindergarten program should communicate with parents frequently regarding transition.
4. Teachers in urban, high minority and high poverty areas report the most challenges with successful transitions. Up to half of these children experience some difficulty adjusting to school.

Development of a transition plan from early learning environments and home to kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade is essential for all stakeholders to ensure that all children are starting their new experience ready to learn. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) note three key concepts can dramatically affect the success of a transition plan:

1. Begin with a **Team Approach**. The team should be a collaboration of all those who currently interact with the child or will do so in the future. The sending program, the receiving program, parents and administrators should all be working together to ensure successful transition. Many county Community Engagement Groups (CEGs) are working on the task of providing effective transition plans for pre-K programs into kindergarten. These committees are made up of preschool, early learning and elementary teachers and principals as well as others from the community with a vested interest in Early Childhood Education. Does your local community have a CEG that is already working on this plan? To find your local CEG contact, go to: http://www.pakeys.org/pages/Community_Groups.aspx .

2. **Planning** is defined as deliberate identification and intentional use of strategies to support transition. The transition team can develop a chart of specific strategies, the responsible parties and timelines for implementation. These strategies should be varied and implemented frequently and should support all learners in the program. This planning should include those strategies being used in the learning environments and ideas parents can use at home. A good implementation plan should include four steps:

1. Assessment of the current system (if any)
2. Determining goals and strategies
3. Implementing the strategies
4. Evaluating the process and success of the process for children and families

3. **Continuity** refers to the experiences children and families have as they move from one environment to the next. The team should intentionally discuss ways to support this concept as part of the transition process. Robert Pianta's research shows that children frequently experience discontinuity between the early learning program and Kindergarten. Therefore, the sending and receiving programs should have compatible environments. The Head Start Transition Project demonstrated that children who knew what to expect in kindergarten before they entered school experienced less anxiety when they began school. Additionally, the transition to kindergarten is easier for children who have acquired basic school readiness skills such as, social and communication skills, peer group entry strategies, and basic cognitive skills. Many school districts and early learning communities are taking this concept to the next level by not only identifying similarities and differences in the environments, but by forming local workgroups to evaluate the alignment between early childhood assessment and curriculum and the kindergarten assessment and curriculum.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning is pleased to provide this Transition Toolkit to strengthen connections among children families, early learning programs and school districts in your community. The ideas and information presented in this toolkit have come from a review of national research and a statewide collection of successful transition practices. Research, information and tools have been selected to provide a

springboard for additional learning in this area. This toolkit is not a comprehensive resource, but rather suggestions and strategies that can be adapted to meet the needs of all those involved in the transition process. Remember, transition is not a one-size-fits-all process or a once-and-done program. Effective transition is ongoing and carefully planned to meet the specific needs of each community and each child.

Stakeholders in the transition process are encouraged to intentionally plan for transition into and out of Kindergarten by using the research and resources included. Districts should work collaboratively with the preK providers in the community to assure thoughtful and meaningful transitions practices. PreK providers should be in contact with local districts to develop an understanding of the expectations of the Kindergarten program. Your local Community Engagement Group is ready and willing to partner with you on this journey. Please contact them for assistance and support as you work through the strategies and ideas that will work best for your children and community.

The tool kit is divided into seven sections. Each section provides ideas and information that could guide and inform your process. The documents in the overview section provide background about transition from the national perspective and more specifics about the efforts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The research section can assist local communities in uncovering best practice and the latest information that should be considered to assist children and families with transition. The research can be used to help teams plan for sustainable, ongoing transition projects and to provide a common focus and framework for conversation.

Ideas and suggestions within sections 3 – 6 can be used as beginning implementation strategies, topics for discussion and professional development and a stepping stone for creating individual community strategies. Section 7 provides resources and links for further information. These resources are cited throughout the document.

- Section 1: Overview
- Section 2: Research
- Section 3: Child to School
- Section 4: Family to School
- Section 5: School to School
- Section 6: Community and School
- Section 7: Bibliography