

Overview

Steps to Kindergarten Transition



School Readiness Task Force
Hawai'i Good Beginnings Interdepartmental Council

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Introduction

Kindergarten transition in Hawai'i

In Hawai'i every year thousands of young children make the transition from their home, preschool or child care provider to their first encounter with formal schooling-- kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten is one of the most significant transitions that a young child experiences in his or her formative years. What happens may lay the foundation for a child's adjustment to and future success in school. The transition to kindergarten is much more than a one-time event. It is a journey that takes time, preparation and advanced planning.

What is the transition to kindergarten?

The word transition refers to the process of change. It involves moving from one situation to another. It can be smooth and satisfying or bumpy and frightening for a young child. While it is the child who directly experiences the transition, other groups of people are involved. The attitudes and actions of those who are directly involved can do a great deal to make the transition to kindergarten a positive or not so positive experience for a young child and his or her family. Following are some of the effects that the transition to kindergarten may have on the different groups of people who are touched by it.

For the child:

The transition can be exciting because the child is moving to something new that the adults in his or her life regard as important. He or she may be apprehensive about leaving familiar people and routines and facing the unknown. A child entering kindergarten must learn to cope with an unfamiliar place, changes in expectations, a new role, peer group, and authority figure, and many new experiences like riding the bus and eating in a cafeteria. If not handled well these new expectations and relationships may be stressful for the child.

For the family:

There is pride that their child is entering school and will be facing new challenges. There is also concern about how their child will cope with the change; if he or she will be successful, and the change this may bring to their role as parents. They hope that the transition to kindergarten will be a smooth and happy one.

For the early education and care teacher/provider:

Transition means saying good-bye to children to whom they have grown attached. Early childhood educators would like to be asked about the child's progress in their care and hope that the experiences they have provided the child have built a solid foundation for continued learning and development.

For the kindergarten teacher:

Transition means saying hello to a new group of children. They hope the children will be well prepared for school expectations from their previous experiences in school or home. They hope that the children who enter their classes will be ready to be successful in the kindergarten program.

For elementary school principal and staff:

Principals and other school staff members are also preparing to say hello to a new group of kindergartners. They also hope these children will come well prepared and that their families will be supportive of the school and its programs.

For the community:

Members of the community want to know that children are successful and thriving in school. They want productive citizens and schools that are a model of excellence. When children enter school ready to be successful learners these goals are promoted. For each community the hope is that kindergarten teachers and staff, Early Education and care teachers, along with

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administrators and elementary school level transition teams, will work in collaboration and plan in advance for a successful transition to kindergarten for all children and families.

Why is the transition to kindergarten important?

Thoughtful planning for this transition can have meaningful results for children, families, teachers, schools and communities that last well beyond the first weeks of school. The transition to formal school sets the tone and direction of a child's school career and can even be a turning point in a child's life. "Kindergarten is the place in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners. If no other objectives are accomplished it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of the school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners." (Bailey in Pianta, 1999, p. xv)

The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) point out that the

to kindergarten is a significantly important time to establish competencies critical to a child's school success and achievement. They point out that the transition involves not only how children adjust to kindergarten, but also how families and school interact and cooperate. Their research documents that it is not just the child who makes a transition-families and school personnel are also involved. (NCEDL, 2002)

A successful transition to kindergarten is seen as a key component of school readiness. (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) Research shows that children who experience continuity as they enter the formal world of elementary school are more likely to be successful in school. (Glicksman & Hills, 1981; Lombardi, 1992; Pianta & Cox, 1999)

Research conducted in the last fifteen years has also shown that children, especially those at risk for school failure, who experience continuity as they enter the formal world of school are more likely to sustain gains that were achieved in preschool programs. Early school adjustment has been shown to have a long-term impact on children's later school success. (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Parker and Asher, 1987)



What can be done to make the transition to kindergarten successful?

The transition to kindergarten can be seen as an ongoing process that has a number of steps and can be made more successful when the adults in children’s lives recognize its importance and plan in advance for it thoughtfully and carefully.

Before they enter kindergarten, many young children have already made the transition from home care to an early childhood program

or care provider. Moving from a known, comfortable environment to one that is different and unfamiliar is challenging, especially if careful attention is not given to the transition. And the more different the settings are the more difficult that transition may be.

A positive school entrance increases the chance for a successful school experience. A well-planned transition benefits children, families, teachers and builds trust and relationships for the whole school community.

Transition = moving from one situation to another

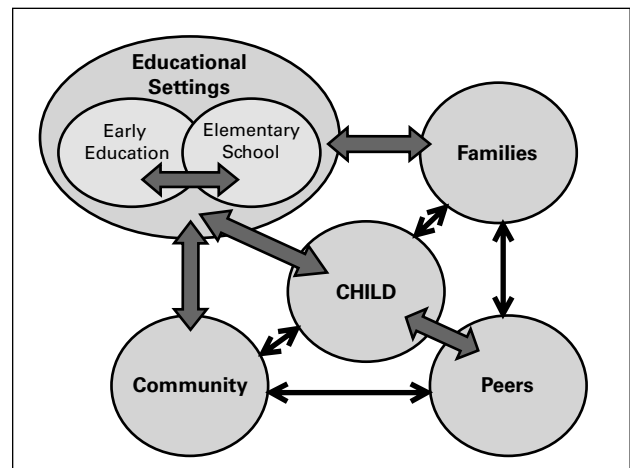
Transition plan = the steps that will be taken and by whom

Transition planning = the process that happens in advance to help families and staff make the transition process as smooth as possible.

Transition activities = the events undertaken by children and their families, often initiated by educators or leaders in the school community, to bridge the gap between preschool or home and kindergarten.

Developing systematic transition strategies must become a common goal of communities as a way of supporting children and families. Collaboration between the home or preschool, the elementary school, and the community is a way to enhance the children’s development while supporting and empowering the family in the process.

Several groups of people in a community who impact children’s lives (the family, the early education and care program and the elementary school) influence a child’s transition to school. The following diagram illustrates that education settings must connects with each other, with the child, the family and community to smooth the transition process.



Adults in each of these settings can contribute to young children's successful transition to kindergarten in the following ways:

Families can:

✓ Know what is expected for the registration to kindergarten process

- In January of the year a child will turn 5, call the neighborhood elementary school and ask when they will hold Kindergarten registration. If a geographical exemption is necessary, ask at the school office about the application process.
- Go to the neighborhood elementary school office and ask for help with the Kindergarten registration process.
- If a child's birth certificate is not available or is lost, order one in January of the year your child will turn 5 from the Department of Health. The form is available at: http://www.state.hi.us/doh/records/vital_records.html. (Scroll bottom) It is also possible to use the child's passport or baptismal record.
- Make sure your child's immunizations are up to date for Kindergarten entry. A Tuberculosis Clearance (TB test) must be completed within one year before entrance into school in Hawai'i. (Preschool or K to 12)
- Pick up a "Transition to Kindergarten Brochure" in the school office or call Good Beginnings Alliance at 808-531-5502 and they will mail one to you.

This brochure will give you ideas about how to:

- o Prepare your child for the transition to kindergarten ahead of time.
- o Become involved with the school and show your support.
- o Maintain ongoing communication and cooperation with the school & teacher
- o Share activities that will prepare your child for school success.

Early education and care program personnel can:

✓ Reach out to the elementary schools

- Find out which elementary school each child plans to attend and make sure the family registers at that school in the early Spring. Provide parents with information including: the school address, name of principal, telephone number, and dates of registration.
- Call the elementary schools and find out what types of activities are available for incoming kindergartners. Provide the families with the information. Find out if tours of the school are available for preschool children/families.
- Create and support collaboration with elementary schools.
- Find out if the local elementary school has a "Transition to Kindergarten Team" and join if possible.
- Transfer appropriate preschool records to the elementary school.

✓ Guide preschool staff in fostering each families' involvement with the new school

- Foster family-school links and encourage a relationship with the new school.
- Include assessments and helpful information in children's kindergarten bound portfolios.

✓ Prepare families and their children for the transition to kindergarten.

- Let the child know that he or she is growing and ready for this new experience.
- Let the child and family know they are always welcome to come back to visit.
- Provide "culminating preschool experiences" such as memory books, slide shows and photo collages of the year, which will help families, prepare for the transition. (*Memory books are particularly recommended because families can personally share the book with the kindergarten teacher to build relationships and share preschool curriculum.*)



✓ **Build summer peer connections**

- Support peer relationships outside of school.
- Encourage natural peer links for summer play with children who will attend the same kindergarten class or the same elementary school by providing linking information to families.
- Let families know about summer activities in the community.

Kindergarten teachers can:

✓ **Reach out to early education and care programs**

- Increase communication with early education and care colleagues. This helps teachers to build relationships and to gather and share information regarding children and instructional practices.
- Invite “feeder” preschool teachers/directors and family day care providers to become members of the elementary school “Transition to Kindergarten Team.”
- Go to visit incoming children in their familiar setting or do “home visits.”
- Communicate with and get to know incoming parents and children before school begins.

- Provide incoming families with information they want and need about your school.

✓ **Welcome children and their families**

- Establish and maintain “Home-School” partnerships and communication.
- Create meaningful Teacher-Child-Family relationships.

Elementary school principals can:

✓ **Be a liaison to the community**

- Establish a “Transition Team” which includes a variety of stakeholders from the community.
- Serve as an active member of the transition team.
- Build connections within the community through ongoing collaboration and advanced planning for transition by all stakeholders.
- Develop a written transition plan for the school. Monitor and revise it each year.
- Allocate resources to support transition efforts.
- Welcome incoming kindergartners and their families to the campus.
- Work to create relationships with nearby early education and care programs.

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- Reach out to families whose children did not attend a formal preschool.

✓ **Model collaboration and enact policies that support collaboration**

- Create opportunities for kindergarten teachers to visit early education and care programs.
- Include nearby preschool staff in professional training on the elementary campus.
- Invite nearby early education and care teachers/children to special events on the elementary campus.
- Sponsor or host special activities and programs for young families on the campus.
- Generate kindergarten class lists as soon as possible.
- Schedule staff time for early education and care teachers and kindergarten teachers to plan together.

✓ **Be a leader in “Home-School” partnerships**

- Set the stage for families to feel comfortable in their relationship to the school.
- Support the efforts of teachers and staff to reach out to incoming kindergarten parents in non-traditional ways such as night registration.

✓ **Support children and families with strong instructional practices**

- Create Summer Pre-K Transition Programs for children who have not attended preschool.
- Establish and support effective early intervention and literacy programs for pre-K students and their families by providing space on your campus for programs such as Evenstart and Head Start.
- Promote meaningful assessments.
- Seek and share the latest information on effective transition practices with your staff.

Communities can:

✓ **Make sure there is a process in place to support the transition to Kindergarten in your community**

- Establish systems in the community which support “Sending programs” (early education and care programs) and “Receiving programs” (elementary schools/kindergartens).
- Develop situations where staff from both programs can meet such as joint training, workshops provided by professional organizations such as HAEYC (Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children) or Good Beginnings Alliance or the Department of Education. Early childhood leaders in each community in Hawai'i must work together to seek collaboration and support for effective transition practices.

The Department of Education has a state STEPS team (Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools) and Interagency STEPS teams in each of seven geographical areas of Hawai'i. The mission statement of STEPS is: “To develop a seamless transition system for all children, prenatal to grade three..... with an emphasis on successful transitioning into Kindergarten.” Each of the Department of Education’s *IDEA 619 Coordinators is a member of the Interagency STEPS Team in the geographical area they are assigned to.

The people below can help you build collaborative relationships in your community: *IDEA-Individuals with Disabilities Act

Department of Education *IDEA State Preschool Resource Coordinator

Michael Fahey 808-284-9009
www.histeps.org

The DOE IDEA 619 Preschool Resource Coordinators by Geographical District:

Honolulu District-Pauline Kokubun 733-4989
Central District-Joanne Miyasato 421-4258
Windward District-Phyllis Ida 233-5717
Leeward District-Manu Anana 675-0384
Kaua'i District-Jeannie Odo 274-3504

Hawai'i District- Gayla Coloma 974-4080
 Maui District Bobbie-Jo Moniz-Tadeo-
 281-1568

Also available in four counties in the State of Hawai'i is the Good Beginnings Alliance. The Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) works in partnership with families, communities, policy makers, early childhood providers, and advocates to:

- Shape public will and public policy
- Mobilize action, and
- Maximize resources

to ensure that all of Hawai'i's keiki are safe, healthy and ready to succeed.

***Good Beginnings Alliance State Office
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***Critical Elements in the Transition to
 Kindergarten***

Adults can support young children's successful transition to kindergarten by viewing the transition as a collaborative process that happens over time. When planning for the transition to kindergarten, it is useful to keep in mind that it is a process, not a single event.

Thinking of the transition as a process means that there is collaboration between early education and care programs and elementary schools. Each community works together to design a set of activities that connect across programs and families (Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster, 1994; NCEDL, 1999). These activities go

far beyond the typical transition activities such as kindergarten visitation or orientation.

When viewed from a broader perspective, transition planning encompasses basic communication across programs and staff and community. Within this broader perspective there are five critical elements to be considered to ensure successful transitions for young children and their families (Glicksman & Hills, 1981; Bredekamp, 1987). Elementary teachers and staff, early education and care teachers, together with families can make starting school a positive experience for all by focusing attention on each one of these five critical elements to a successful transition to Kindergarten: (Bredekamp, 1987 Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003)

1. Create and promote connections and relationships in the community: Family, school and community are three major interrelated spheres of influence in a child's life. Transition has to be understood in terms of the settings that contribute to child development (e.g., family, classroom, community) and the connections and relationships among these settings at any given time and across time" (Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003) It is important for neighborhood communities to understand that school transition is not a one size fits all program. What works in one community may not be effective or even needed in another community.
2. Maintain Ongoing Communication: Early education and care staff and kindergarten staff can increase educational program continuity by getting to know each other, sharing information about their programs, and planning for effective transitions. Policy makers can support teachers by adopting a common transition system, model or guide which will work to coordinate the process. Early education and care personnel and kindergarten teachers have limited time outside the classroom. Therefore, opportunities for formal and informal contact should be supported throughout the year by flexible time scheduling and advanced



planning, preferably by a collaborative transition team which meets regularly.

3. Prepare Children for Transition: Although many parties are involved in the transition to kindergarten, children themselves are the most affected by the changes. Children can enter kindergarten with vastly different experiences. In turn, kindergarten programs are diverse in purpose, structure and schedule. No matter what a child's previous experiences, all children need to be accepted at their own developmental level. Preparing children for the transition to kindergarten does not mean "getting them ready" by focusing on a narrow range of academic skills, drilling on new rules, or retaining them in preschool for another year. School is a place where children and parents expect to find opportunities for growth and development from whatever starting point the child brings to the new setting.
4. Involve Parents in the Transition: Studies indicate that successful early childhood programs actively involve parents in their

programs. This involvement should not stop when children reach the elementary school campus. The family's influence is fundamental in the early years and successful schools welcome family members in ways that go beyond the traditional parent activities such as fundraising, parent-teacher conferences, May Day and Back-to-School Night. Ongoing meaningful two-way communication between parents and teachers is important. Parents can be involved as decision makers and volunteers on campus and at home. Schools must respond to the diversity among families. Parent activities need to be responsive to the language, culture, and socioeconomic needs of children and families.

5. Provide program continuity through Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: "Programs for young children should not be seen as either play-oriented or academic. Rather, developmentally appropriate practice, whether in a preschool or a primary classroom, should respond to the natural curiosity of young children, reaffirm a sense of self, promote positive dispositions toward

learning, and help build increasingly complex skills in the use of language, problem solving and cooperation." (Lombardi, 1992). Continuity across early childhood services is facilitated by the degree to which all programs for children birth-age 8 in the community work together to ensure continuous and effective services throughout these important years. Children whose teachers use appropriate practice in both early education and care programs and kindergarten are more easily able to build on earlier experiences to help them make sense of their world. When early education and care teachers and kindergarten teachers use similar strategies, children adjust more easily to school. Attending joint training sessions can help teachers to communicate about and share information about curriculum. It is essential that both early education and care teachers and elementary school staff work together to overcome the barriers to smooth transitions for children and families.

A positive school entrance increases the chance for a successful school experience, not only for the child and the family; a well-planned transition builds trust and relationships for the

whole school community. The Hawai'i School Readiness Task Force adopted the following definition of school readiness and it was passed into law in 2002:

Young children are ready to have successful learning experiences when there is positive interaction among the child's developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support.

As stated in the definition, working together to build a more continuous educational experience for young children and their families is an important aspect of school readiness. Children and the families that nurture them do not develop apart from the community around them. In fact, the home, the school, and the community all contribute to the lifelong (long-range) success of children. With this in mind, developing systematic transition strategies must become a common goal of communities as a way of supporting children and families. Collaboration between the home or early education/care program, the school, and the community is a way to enhance the child's independence while supporting and empowering the family in the process.



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