



Transition to Kindergarten Best Practice Guidance

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Transition to Kindergarten Best Practice Guidance

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) developed this guidance document to support Local Educational Agencies' (LEA) efforts to build effective partnerships between schools and families to support improved school readiness and ultimately, positive student outcomes. This document can be used to supplement your family engagement plan strategies. A thorough Transition to Kindergarten plan will ensure your young learners begin their first day of kindergarten school-ready and are supported by school, family, and community to establish positive outcomes.

Transition and its importance

For students, parents, families, and school staff alike, the transition to kindergarten can be an exciting but challenging time. A recent study found that more than 70% of children entering kindergarten were reported by their teachers as having at least one challenge during the transition to a more formal academic environment. Children may be transitioning from staying home with a family member to more structured classroom environments and may not have had prior experience with following schedules or working in groups with peers. Families may not be familiar with how best to communicate with new school staff regarding their children's learning experiences, and teachers or other school staff may find establishing partnerships with new families to be a challenge.

Studies have found that **school-planned transition activities can influence positive academic outcomes for students, improved teacher perceptions of student skills, and increased rates of highly engaged families.**^{1,2} Students who participate in more transition activities are more likely to have positive academic outcomes by the end of kindergarten (with greater increases among children from lower socioeconomic status)

¹ Bennett, Kelley. 2022. "Children's Transitions to Kindergarten May Benefit from Effective Coordination across Early Childhood and K-12 Systems." *Child Trends*. August 18, 2022. <https://www.childtrends.org/blog/childrens-transitions-to-kindergarten-may-benefit-from-effective-coordination-across-early-childhood-and-k-12-systems>.

² Abry, Tashia, Scott Latham, Daphna Bassok, and Jennifer LoCasale-Crouch. 2015. "Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers' Beliefs about Early School Competencies: Misalignment Matters for Kindergarten Adjustment." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 31: 78–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.01.001>

and some studies suggest these effects continue through primary education years.³ High parent participation in transition activities is also linked to parent-initiated school involvement, which also improves student outcomes.

These studies emphasize that transition is not simply a one-day event, but that effective and impactful transitions begin the year prior to a child beginning kindergarten and extend into kindergarten. Additionally, it is not the responsibility of just one individual but should be implemented by a range of partners from a variety of settings (school campus, district office, Head Start programs, private preschools, community programs, etc.). Strategic planning and implementation of transition activities to meet the specific needs and concerns of families transitioning into the kindergarten classroom are key to creating a foundation of information, resources, and partnership for a child's academic career.

LEAs should be intentional when creating a transition plan to ensure that the transition to the kindergarten classroom is a smooth one for students, families, and campus staff. The transition plan should make children and families feel welcome and supported in the school setting while also creating a foundation for open communication and collaboration with families and other community members to ensure optimal student outcomes in kindergarten and beyond.

What to consider when developing your Transition plan:

- What environments are new kindergarten students transitioning *from* (public prekindergarten classroom, childcare setting, home with a caregiver, etc.)? What questions might the child and their family have?
- What are your LEA's goals regarding welcoming ready students to the kindergarten classroom? What resources, information, activities, and supports can the district provide so that families and students feel ready?
- How can the LEA create a culture of continuous collaboration and partnership with incoming kindergarten families? What barriers to attendance or participation might schools and families experience?

Keep in mind the value of including families (especially so early on in children's public-school career) as partners in their children's education. Laying the foundation for a positive relationship and effective communication with families now will improve family engagement and student outcomes throughout a student's education over the next 13 years.

³ Ludvik, Dana. 2022. "Teacher-Child Relationships Promote a Successful Transition to Kindergarten, Long-Term Outcomes." Early Learning Network. September 1, 2022. <https://earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu/2022/09/01/teacher-child-relationships-promote-a-successful-transition-to-kindergarten-long-term-outcomes/>.

Who to involve in the process

The responsibility for creating and implementing a thorough Transition to Kindergarten plan should be shared among a varied group of stakeholders. District and school staff may have ideas of initiatives that are already being implemented, but other team members from within the community can bring new ideas and perspectives to the table. Current and former kindergarten families can provide insights about experiences they had enrolling a child in public school for the first time and can share the questions they had. Staff from community early childhood programs or other family-facing entities may also have insights on the challenges families of young students experience, and possible resources outside of the school available to these families during transition. Create a transition team of individuals with diverse roles and perspectives to be active participants in creating, implementing, and evaluating your LEA's Transition to Kindergarten plan.

School Staff: This might include superintendents, Early Childhood Education (ECE) coordinators, school administrators, parent outreach coordinators, kindergarten teachers, prekindergarten teachers, Early Childhood Special Education teachers, etc.

External Early Childhood Staff and Community Programs: SOther early childhood professionals (teachers or administrators of Head Start, private prekindergarten, or childcare programs), community programs (social workers, Texas Home Visiting Program staff), health professionals (Ear Nose and Throat Specialist, home health nurse, Applied Behavior Analysis/Speech/Occupational therapist, etc.) can provide valuable input on the experiences and challenges of enrolling families. Consider too if there are other community partners local to your LEA who can help with transition efforts. (community resource fairs, public library, health clinics to provide free well child checks, hearing/vision screenings, etc.)

Parents and other family members: Are there any former or current prekindergarten or kindergarten families who can contribute family perspectives and participate in planning, events, and offering peer support to incoming families? What opportunities are offered to families to give feedback on the transition process and transition activities?

Take into account that your transition team will likely need to meet multiple times to have ample opportunity to reflect on the needs of families preparing for transition, evaluate the activities that are currently being implemented, and develop new strategies to address new or ongoing needs. Schedule multiple dates for the transition team to convene and evaluate the plan before publishing.

Building a Transition Team:

[TEA Transition Team Development Tool](#)

Transition timeline

The opportunity to build a relationship of trust and comfort with students and their families begins well before the child starts their first day of school and continues throughout their educational career. As part of the transition plan, a timeline of activities and events can help the transition team determine whether sufficient opportunities exist throughout the year, not just during the registration window. The timeline should be revisited throughout the year and adjustments made based on the needs of the LEA and the families it serves. Reflect on how these activities and events can reach and engage families throughout the school year, not just during registration.

Consider events and activities that future kindergarten students and their families will find helpful or informative, such as:

- Kindergarten open houses – Meet the Teacher nights/lunches
- A kindergarten class “field trip” to visit prekindergarten or Head Start classrooms on campus for current kindergarteners to act as “experts” for incoming kindergarteners
- Informational sessions with community programs regarding overall child development of kindergarten-aged children, behavioral challenges during times of transition, etc.
- Staff attendance and participation in events hosted by community partners to raise awareness or share insight (story time at the library, resource fairs in town, parent groups at the community center, parent workshops hosted by Texas Home Visiting programs)
- A PTA event to welcome new parents
- Distribution of summer learning activity packets to incoming families to encourage learning over the summer break and give families strategies to support age-appropriate skills such as early literacy and social emotional development
- Creation and distribution of a guidebook for new families — how to navigate the parent portal, academic calendar, pick up/drop off procedures, what a typical day looks like, important contact info, etc.

- Information sessions on kindergarten registration dates (include information on how and what information to have ready)
- Opportunities to connect with and follow an LEA's social media accounts

Transition resources and information for enrolling families

LEAs can be a resource for families interested in ensuring they and their children are ready to transition into kindergarten.

Consider providing information to families on:

- Events and activities outlined in your LEA's family engagement plan
- What a typical kindergarten school day looks like
- Books about starting kindergarten (or resources/inspiration for families to make their own)
- Concepts or topics families can start talking about at home: classmates, recess, taking turns, making friends
- Early academic skills that will support classroom learning (letter and number recognition, letter sounds, following 2-3 step instructions)
- Activities families can do at home — what skills would you like to see new kindergarten students already familiar with?

Collaborate with other community agencies or programs to provide additional information and support such as:

- Materials to ensure school readiness (Books Beginning at Birth, Ready to Learn)
- In-home support regarding early childhood development and school readiness (Texas Home Visiting, Early Childhood Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education)
- Reports from previous prekindergarten, childcare, Head Start programs (to provide specific insights on a child's educational experiences, strengths, etc.)
- Medical appointments such as Well Child Checks, hearing and vision screenings, immunizations, etc.

Evaluation and continuous improvement

As a final step in your LEA's Transition to Kindergarten plan, evaluate the effects of your efforts. Identify a method for evaluating the impact of your transition plan, collect relevant data, analyze the data, and adjust your transition plan as needed, using the input of your

transition team and families. Continuous improvement (not just one-time changes) is a crucial component of successful implementation of your LEA's Transition to Kindergarten plan and High-Quality Prekindergarten program!

Keep the following in mind when determining an evaluation tool to use:

- What are the goals of your transition plan?
- What kind of data do you need to gather to know if those goals were met?
- Have you collected feedback from team members, families, and community partners?
- How frequently will you evaluate your transition plan?

TEA's Early Childhood Education Division has published self-assessment tools for prekindergarten through second grade programs. Each tool includes a section on transition strategies that LEAs may use to evaluate their transition plans.

[TEA Early Childhood Program Self-Assessments](#)

A successful transition to kindergarten for children, families, and schools is the goal, but it is not the end of collaboration. Continue to identify ways to partner with families throughout their children's educational careers, such as connecting transition events and activities to the engagement strategies in your High-Quality Prekindergarten Family Engagement plan or Title I Parent and Family Engagement policy.

