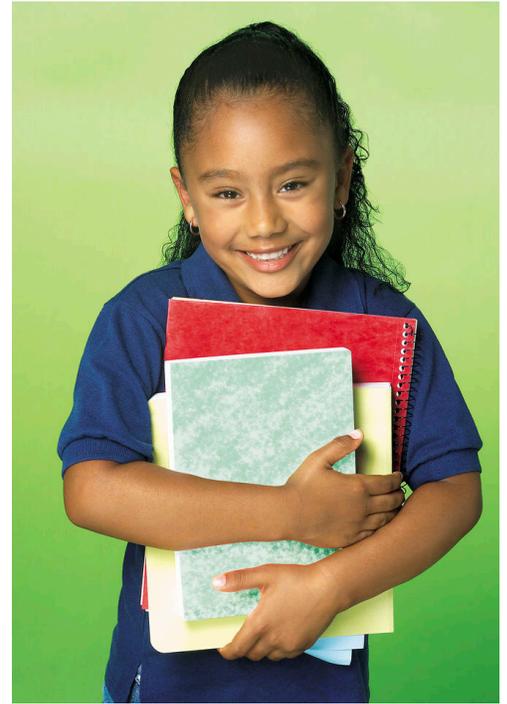


Preparing Kids for School

Missouri's plan for helping children transition from early childhood programs to elementary school



Starting school is an important time for young children, their families and educators. A successful transition from home and early childhood programs to elementary school has a positive, long-lasting effect on a child's ability to learn. Smooth transitions occur when children know what to expect and are excited about learning and when parents are active participants in the education process at home and at school.

Transition Activities

What schools can do to assist children and families:

Home visits: Visit the children at home. Many schools have found that a home visit by a teacher or principal before a child enters school has a substantial impact on a kindergartner's adjustment to the new setting. A home visit allows the child to share some favorite items such as toys, books or games. At the same time, a home visit allows parents to gain information and to ask specific questions about their child's new school.

Community links: Link with the community and local early childhood programs, including Head Start and family child care programs, and collaborate with the Parents as Teachers program to help ease the transition to kindergarten. Finding out where children have spent their early years can be a first step in the kindergarten transition process. Some schools compile a list of local programs including family child care programs, contact the directors or caregivers, and plan transition activities appropriate to the community.

Early learning standards: Work with early education staff, using resources such as the Missouri Early Learning Standards to establish realistic expectations for kindergarten readiness, to help provide consistency from program to program.

Resource centers: Create parent and family resource centers that include books on parenting and school-related information and provide a referral system to community services, classes and/or workshops. Additional activities may include back-to-school fairs, open houses, parent/teacher conferences, etc.

Parent/teacher meetings: Provide opportunities for parents and teachers to meet and work together.

Field trips: Invite pre-kindergarten children to visit their elementary school to increase the children's familiarity with the elementary school environment.

Development programs: Encourage participation in programs such as Parents as Teachers and family literacy programs that help parents develop language and pre-literacy skills in their young children.

Health: Encourage parents to take their children for regular visits to the doctor and to update immunizations as needed.

Summer school: Provide a summer school program for children entering kindergarten in the fall. This would allow the children to become familiar with the classroom and the school facility and enable the kindergarten teachers to get to know the children through observation and involvement in activities.

What early childhood programs can do to assist children and families:

- **School visits:** Schedule visits to the new school so that the children can become familiar with the school. Allow the children to express their feelings about the new school through dramatic play activities.
- **Children's books:** Read and have available children's books on the topic of going to kindergarten.
- **Visitors:** Invite a kindergarten child or older sibling to visit the early childhood program and talk about school.
- **Orientation sessions:** Encourage parents to attend kindergarten "round-up" and/or other orientation sessions that are planned for incoming children and their parents.
- **Child care options:** Discuss child care options, including before- and after-school programs, with working parents.
- **Role play:** Develop a prop box of items that will allow the children to role play being in kindergarten.

Benefits of Implementing a Transition Plan

Benefits for Children:

When early childhood programs and kindergarten teachers help children move more easily into a new environment, benefits for the children may include:

- Continuity with earlier educational experiences.
- Increased motivation and openness to new experiences.
- Enhanced self-confidence.
- Improved relations with other children and adults.
- A greater sense of trust for teachers.



Benefits for Parents:

When parents are involved with teachers and other school staff in providing a smooth transition for their children, the parents gain:

- Increased confidence in their child's ability to achieve in school.
- Improved self-confidence in their ability to communicate with school staff and a positive influence in the educational system.
- A sense of pride and commitment in their ongoing involvement in the education of their children.
- A greater knowledge and appreciation of early childhood programs and staff.

Benefits for Teachers:

Teachers who cooperate with others to ease children's transition between early childhood programs can expect:

- Increased knowledge of the children and an enhanced ability to meet individual needs.
- Increased parent and community support.
- More resources and a larger network of professional support.
- Increased awareness of the early childhood programs in the community.
- A renewed sense of professionalism and pride in their efforts to reach out to young children and their families.

Source: *Easing the Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten: A Guide for Early Childhood Teachers and Administrators* – Head Start Information and Publication Center



A successful transition plan requires that:

- Families are a critical part of the home, school and community partnership and are the decision makers concerning their child's care and education.
- A wide range of home, school and community partners (e.g., parents, Parents as Teachers educators, early childhood staff, kindergarten teachers and other school staff) share leadership and guide decision making.
- Care, education, health and social services focus on the full range of needs and circumstances of individual children and their families. Plans should be flexible and include a range of practices.
- Home, school and community partners maintain open communication.
- Schools and community partners effectively manage resources such as people, time, materials, space and funds.
- Home-school and community partners document their efforts and use evaluation information to improve policies, programs and practices. Examples of information to collect include children's comments and drawings, parent surveys and feedback, and documentation on children's progress in kindergarten.



Administrators in both early childhood programs and kindergarten classrooms/elementary schools can set the stage for successful transition activities by supporting ongoing communication and cooperation among early childhood teachers. Opportunities for communication and cooperation should occur throughout the program year. Depending on the size of the community, it may be helpful to establish a community-wide transition committee to involve all programs in planning transition activities.

Developing a Community-wide Transition Committee

To establish a community-wide transition committee, start by:

- Developing written policies and procedures that will guide transition efforts.
- Planning informal visits to meet the staff of the early childhood and kindergarten programs. This will provide an opportunity for staff to get to know each other, share information about the program and discuss the need for transition activities.
- Including representation from early childhood programs, public schools, Parents as Teachers programs, parents, private schools and other agencies in the community.
- Developing in-service workshops that focus on transition as well as other issues facing early childhood educators.
- Planning kindergarten registration in conjunction with early childhood programs.
- Meeting with health and social services staff to discuss consistency of services for children and families.
- Developing a plan for transferring specific records to the elementary schools. This would include records of families who have participated in the Parents as Teachers program, early childhood special education programs, etc.
- Scheduling follow-up meetings in the fall to answer questions and discuss children's progress.

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