

Transition to Formal Schooling

Best Practice Rubric for Formal School Settings (Receiving Schools)

Introduction: The transition into formal schooling can be one of the most significant events a young child experiences. Excitement, shock, fear, happiness, anxiety, surprise and a sense of being overwhelmed are a few of the emotions children and families might feel. The transition to formal schooling takes careful advance preparation and planning in order to be a successful milestone for the child. It is a dynamic process that is ongoing. 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.

Implementation of effective transition strategies has been linked to the sustainment of developmental and academic gains attained in quality early education settings (Howes, C. et. Al., 2007), increased and sustained family involvement (Barnett, M. A., 2009, Ferguson, C. & Wood, L., 2005), and positive developmental and academic outcomes (Ahtola, A. et al., in press, LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008).

Purpose: The Transition to Formal Schooling Best Practice Rubric provides school district and other local education agency personnel the means to evaluate current transition practice, as well as a means to plan for continual quality improvement. The tool is divided into five areas: Management of transition practices, school in community, child-to-school, family-to-school and school-to-school.

Management of transition practices:

This section emphasizes the necessary systematic and structural components for the implementation of best transition practices.

School in community

Adults can support young children's successful transition to formal schooling by viewing the transition as a collaborative process that happens over time. "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 & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). This section emphasizes practices which connect programs and services which touch the lives of children and family to provide a seamless system of early education. Linkages between school and these multiple partners provide access to resources and information that can enhance the outcomes of the transition process.

Child-to-school:

Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (2003) have noted that a successful transition to formal schooling is a key component of school readiness. This transition to formal schooling sets the tone and directions of a child's school career. Bailey, in Pianta (1999) notes that, "Formal schooling 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" (p. xv).

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 a new program must learn to cope with an unfamiliar place, changes in expectations, a new role, peer group, and authority figure, and many new experiences. If not handled well, these new experiences and relationships may be stressful for the child. This section emphasizes practices to help make transition an exciting event with a high level of comfort. These practices help foster positive attitudes toward school and learning, foster positive teacher-child relationships, and help children develop and maintain positive relationship with peers.

Family-to-school:

As families begin to prepare for the transition into formal schooling, they feel a range of emotions. There may be pride that their child is entering school and will be facing new challenges. There also may be concern about how their child will cope with the change. They may be apprehensive about their child growing up and having less control over the experiences of the day. They hope that the transition to formal schooling will be a smooth and happy one.

Studies show that successful programs actively involve parents in their programs. The family's influence is fundamental in the early years. Studies show that when families are actively engaged in the transition process their involvement tends to continue throughout their child's school career (Barnett, M. A., 2009, Ferguson, C. & Wood, L., 2005). Family involvement has been linked to positive student outcomes. This section emphasizes practices to involve and engage families in the transition process, fostering positive attitudes toward school and learning and helping families act as partners in their children's learning.

School-to-school:

Continuity across early childhood services in which all programs for children birth-age 8 in the community work together can ensure consistent and effective services throughout these important years. Continuity includes alignment of expectations, environmental design, as well as instructional practice. When sending and receiving teachers use similar strategies, children adjust more easily to school. It is essential that both early learning teachers and elementary school staff work together to overcome the barriers to smooth transitions for children and families.

Companion resources can be found at www.pakeys.org or at www.pdesas.org.

Management of Transition Practices

| | Best Practice Emerging | Best Practice Progressing | Best Practice Achieved |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| Audience | Transition practices are in place and are implemented for limited groups of children (i.e. those children with IEPs, children identified “at risk”). | In addition to transition practices offered to limited groups of children, some transition practices are offered to ALL children. | All available transition practices are offered to ALL children. |
| Personnel | Issues related to transition are handled by the guidance counselor or other district personnel as an add-on to position responsibilities. | Issues related to transition are handled by one, identified person as a dedicated portion of their job responsibilities. | There is a designated Transition Coordinator at the district level and one team leader within each feeder school. |
| | Most, but not all, of individual elementary schools within the district participate in transition activities. | All elementary schools within the district participate in transition activities. Some of these activities are coordinated events across the district. | In addition to the previous indicator, school district personnel also participate in and/or promote county-wide and/or state-wide transition initiatives. |
| | Teachers volunteer time to engage in transition practices that extend beyond their contractual obligations. | Incentives are provided for teachers to engage in transition practices that extend beyond their contractual obligations. | Transition practices are incorporated into and are compensated as part of teachers’ contractual obligations. |
| Transition Plan | A written Transition Plan is present. | A written Transition Plan is current, is implemented, and is reviewed and updated periodically. | A written Transition Plan is current, is implemented and is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Plan effectiveness is evaluated annually. |

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| Data Collection | Teachers are asked to identify children who have a difficult transition experience and supports are available for these children. | There is a systematic collection of data on how children are transitioning into formal schooling. Supports are available for children who have a difficult transition. | There is a systematic collection of data on how children are transitioning into formal schooling. Data is maintained from year to year and is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the written Transition Plan. Supports are available for children who have a difficult transition. |
| School registration | School registration is held by June 30. | School registration is held by April 30. | School registration is held by April 30 followed by intentional outreach to families who have not registered by this date. |
| Resource Use | School administration uses the Office of Child Development and Early Learning's Transition Toolkit to plan and implement transition practices. | School administration uses the Office of Child Development and Early Learning's Transition Toolkit to plan and implement transition practices and shares information from the toolkit with individual school personnel including Kindergarten teachers. | School administration uses the Office of Child Development and Early Learning's Transition Toolkit to plan and implement transition practices and shares information from the toolkit with individual school personnel including Kindergarten teachers. Additional resources and information is sought from additional resources including networking with other school district personnel. |

School in community

| | Best Practice Emerging | Best Practice Progressing | Best Practice Achieved |
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| Participation in Community Transition Team | A school district representative is involved in a community transition team. | A school district representative is involved in a community transition team and a district level transition team has been formed. | A school district representative is involved in a community transition team and a district level transition team has been formed which includes representation of key stakeholders including but not limited to family members, local early education providers, and other community partners. |
| Partnerships | Aware of and communicates with community partners serving children who will transition into school. | Establishes intentional links to community partners, such as use of school building for community events, partner with community partners for screenings and education, houses a community pre-K and/or after school programming. | School functions a community hub. For example school is open after normal school hours for community events, school houses health services and other community services. |
| Promotion of Quality Early Care | District personnel and/or teachers are aware early care programs in their community which participate in quality initiatives (STARS, Pre K Counts, Head Start, Early Intervention, etc.) and share written information about quality early care. | District personnel, schools, and/or teachers participate in events which promote quality early education. | District personnel, schools, and/or teachers partner with community agencies to develop events which promote quality early education. |

Child to school

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| Orientation to school | School provides written, informational materials to the family about the school and the child's classroom. | School provides at least one orientation activity to familiarize the child with the school/teachers. e.g. visit to school, child-level "welcome to our school" booklet or DVD, open house event or activity. | School provides multiple and varied opportunities for child to become familiar with the school/teachers/future classmates. |
| | Teachers intentionally address the differences between the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten settings. | Environment including room design is similar to pre-Kindergarten settings at the beginning of the school year. | Teachers design room lay-out, instructional practices, and routines to match a majority of the children's previous settings at the beginning of the school year. |
| Relationships | Teachers make contact with all children in writing prior to the start of school. | Teachers make personal contact (phone call, home visit, open house) with most children prior to the start of school. | Teachers make personal contact (phone call, home visit, open house) with all children prior to the start of school. When children cannot attend activities at the school, an effort is made to establish contact with children through other means (phone call, home visit, and visit to child care) prior to the start of school. |
| | School plans events prior to the start of school which allow children to meet their peers. | School intentionally plans for children to transition into their new classroom with a least one peer from their previous setting/neighborhood. | School intentionally plans for children to transition into their new classroom with groups of peers from their previous setting/neighborhood. |
| Orientation to child | School receives information about the child from the child's family. | School has information exchange policies and documentation in place with sending programs and receives information from children's pre-kindergarten classrooms, as well as from the child's family. | Information about the child is received from multiple sources and is provided (where appropriate) to the child's new teacher for use in instructional and transition planning. |

Family to school

| | Best Practice Emerging | Best Practice Progressing | Best Practice Achieved |
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| Orientation to School | School provides written information to families about the school, classrooms, registrations, expectations. | In addition to written information, school provides opportunity for face-to-face contact with school personnel including the child's teacher prior to the start of school (this can be at registration event but must include designated and intentional time for families and school personnel to meet and connect). | School engages in intentional outreach to families prior to the start of school. This might include the participation in home visits, individual meetings with incoming families that go beyond mere filing of paper work; personal outreach by family mentors, the transition coordinator, or members of the PTA. |
| Orientation to Family | School receives basic family information as part of registration paperwork. | School develops a family needs survey which the family is asked to complete as part of registration process and provides written information or a resource list to families with identified needs. | School develops a family needs survey which the family is asked to complete as part of the registration process and personally follows up with families with identified needs. |
| Partnerships | School provides written information to assist families in preparing their child(ren) for school. E.g. distribution of readiness calendars and other materials. | The school provides developmental screenings including basic health screenings as part of registration and follow-up activities are offered for identified children (summer readiness activities, parent workshops). | Developmental screenings including health screenings are provided multiple times throughout the year and follow-up activities are offered throughout the year. |

School to school

| | Best Practice Emerging | Best Practice Progressing | Best Practice Achieved |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| Partnerships | School has open communication with at least one early care provider from which a majority of children transition. | School partners with one or more early care providers from which children transition. Partnering includes providing the early care providers with information on the school expectations, curriculum, transition process, etc. | School partners with most of the early care providers from which the children transition. Partnering includes providing the early care providers with information on school expectations, curriculum, transition process, etc, as well as establishing community of practice in which providers and formal school teachers collaborate. E.g. through joint professional development, intentional sharing and continuity of curriculum goals, etc. |
| | There is a release of information agreement between sending and receiving school. | There is a release of information agreement between sending and receiving school and a process in place for sharing of information. | There is a release of information agreement in place between sending and receiving school, a process is in place for sharing of information, and the information shared goes beyond required forms to include information which creates a “snapshot” of the child including developmental information, unique interests, learning styles, etc. which is shared with classroom teachers (when appropriate). |
| Resources | Schools within the school district share resources and coordinate transition efforts. | Neighboring school districts share resources and coordinate some transition efforts (e.g. PSAs advertising K registration) | There is active mentoring, shared resources, and coordination of transition efforts among multiple school districts (possibly county-wide). |