



TAKING ACTION

What Principals and Administrators Can Do To Ready Their Schools To Support Kindergarten Transitions

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About Education Northwest

Education Northwest works to transform teaching and learning in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. Our services to states, districts, schools, community-based organizations, and foundations include rigorous research and evaluation of new and existing programs; research-based technical assistance in areas such as equity, school improvement, and distance learning; widely acclaimed professional development in the fields of literacy and mathematics education; and strategic communications that maximize impact.

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When children come to school from a wide range of early learning experiences and at different levels of readiness for kindergarten, what can principals and other administrators do to ensure their schools offer smooth transitions for all incoming kindergarten children and their families?

Research shows that children who are academically, socially, and emotionally prepared to enter kindergarten are more likely to do better down the road in school and in life (Patton & Wang, 2012). Therefore, it's increasingly imperative to support children's transition to kindergarten from varied early learning experiences, including preschool, daycare, family child care, and at-home settings with family members.

There's also evidence that effective school leadership influences early childhood achievement, as leaders play a critical role in improving classroom instruction—the most important factor related to the success of young students (Szekely, 2013).

This handout accompanies a white paper of the same title that looks at research in five specific—and sometimes overlapping—areas that principals and other administrators can focus on to support smoother kindergarten transitions. We include practical strategies that education leaders can use *at school, with families, and in the community* to help ease the transition into kindergarten and the early grades. These strategies are organized under each of the five research-based areas, with additional information and some links to resources. There is a plethora of information available for many of these practical ideas; conducting a Google search on each will yield other ideas that you may find helpful. This document and the accompanying white paper are both available on the Education Northwest website or at <http://bit.ly/principals-white-paper>.

Involve families and the community in the transition to kindergarten



ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

Encourage early registration and develop early class lists

This will help children and families feel included in transition activities, enabling families to prepare children and facilitating communication between teachers and families prior to school (see below for more information).

Hold a transition event

Families can come to a transition event to register for kindergarten, get a library card, meet teachers, and learn what they can do to help their child be ready for school. Find ideas for transition events at <http://selfwa.org/kready> and <http://www.readyfreddy.org/for-schools-and-communities/transition-to-kindergarten>.

Invite and encourage parents and children to visit the school and the kindergarten classroom before school starts

This can be done through a simple phone call, during a home visit, by email, or by letter. Conducting a Google search can help you identify what to include in the invitation if you need help to get started. It is also important to make sure the school is a welcoming place for families and children, including incorporating languages and traditions from the child's home/culture into the school environment. Suggestions are at http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin424.shtml and <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/welcoming-parents-in-schools>.

Create a transition team that includes parents, preschool and kindergarten teachers, administrators, and community members (e.g., library staff) representative of your community

Transition teams help smooth kindergarten entry by engaging families and children in the process. Transition team information is available at <http://www.readyfreddy.org/transition-teams>.

You could also consider a one-time *kindergarten transition panel* hosting a discussion with families. The panel can include current or former kindergarten students, teachers from early childhood programs, administrators, and representatives from programs that support families.

Encourage parents to be involved in the classroom and engaged in the school

Some ideas for engaging parents can be found at <http://www.readyfreddy.org/for-schools-and-communities/parent-engagement>. Other useful sites include http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice094.shtml and <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/strategies-for-engaging-parent-volunteers-karen-bantuveris>.

Involve families and the community in the transition to kindergarten



ACTIONS WITH FAMILIES AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Conduct outreach and consider developing an informational website

Families are more likely to *register early* if they see information about this option. Ideas for outreach can be found at http://www.readyfreddy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/RF-Outreach-Toolkit-Final_-03272014.pdf and <http://www.readyfreddy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/outreach.pdf>. Portland Public Schools offers an example of a helpful website (with information such as kindergarten roundup dates): <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/kindergarten>.

Encourage teachers to visit the child's home or at least meet with the parents and child prior to the start of the school year

Washington state has a principal's handout focused on this idea at http://www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/PrincipalSeries%202_FamilyConnection_May2015.pdf.

Share information with families

For example, Kansas provides families a booklet on kindergarten expectations in *Kindergarten in Kansas* at <http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/Kindergarten/KindergartenInKansas.pdf>

For information on kindergarten expectations, see *Getting Ready for Kindergarten* at <http://www.getreadytoread.org/transition-kindergarten-toolkit/print-the-toolkit>. Also check out http://center.serve.org/tt/fp_tips.html and <http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/KindergartenReadinessBrochure.pdf> and Oregon provides *Transition to Kindergarten: A Parent's Guide* http://www.ode.state.or.us/gradelevel/pre_k/eiecse/tran2kindeng.pdf

For information about your school (e.g., registration guidelines, kindergarten teachers, and curriculum) and how to access support networks, go to <http://www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/WaKIDSBrochure2013.pdf>.

Recognize parents as experts and encourage them to share expertise about their child(ren)

Parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and you can empower them as an important partner in their child's education. Suggestions for collecting parent input are at http://www.getreadytoread.org/images/content/downloads/Kindergarten_Readiness_Toolkit/getting_to_know_my_child-english.pdf and <http://www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/IntroducingMeRevisionEnglishSpanish.pdf>.

Foster communication between early care and school settings

Such communication can also help align expectations between early care settings and kindergarten. See *Focus on Practice (McFerran Elementary School)* at https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/LELCC_Executive_Summary.pdf and also *Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum* at <https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/leading-pre-k-3-learning-communities-executive-summary.pdf>. The Children's Institute describes how it has approached the link between early care and school settings through its Early Works initiative: <http://www.childinst.org/our-initiatives/early-works>.

Create professional development opportunities specific to teaching young children



ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

Provide teachers and other appropriate staff with the opportunity to attend national, state, or local conferences focused on teaching young children

The annual National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference provides multiple practitioner-friendly sessions regarding developmentally appropriate practice: <http://www.naeyc.org/events>.

NAEYC affiliates offer conferences as well. Check out this searchable directory: <http://www.naeyc.org/affiliates/conferences>.

Offer teachers and other staff the opportunity to participate in professional development that focuses on developmentally appropriate practice and the importance of play and movement

It is important to provide professional development to ensure quality teaching of young children. Principals, other administrators, and teachers need to build their knowledge about what is age- and developmentally appropriate across the continuum, along with whole child learning and how young children learn.

NAEYC provides information about upcoming professional development opportunities, including opportunities for principals specifically at <http://www.naeyc.org/ecp>.

Also consider job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers by engaging teachers in activities that include development and review of case studies and observation of fellow teachers. Encourage teachers to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs). Ideas for creating a PLC are at <http://www.edutopia.org/professional-learning-communities-collaboration-how-to>. One particularly helpful approach is to provide professional development opportunities for preschool and kindergarten staff together, which fosters a shared understanding.

Use books and videos focused on developmentally appropriate practice as lower cost options for providing learning about teaching young children

Sue Bredekamp discusses developmentally appropriate practice at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ny1u9a7-EJc>.

Purchase the DVD *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Focus on Intentionality and on Play* from NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org/store/node/17110>.

You can also provide handouts on developmentally appropriate practice from NAEYC: <http://www.imaginationplayground.com/images/content/2/9/2964/Developmentally-Appropriate-Practice-Play.pdf> or <http://www.naeyc.org/dap/10-effective-dap-teaching-strategies>.

Sometimes newspapers offer practical information online, for example, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/08/07/ten-ways-to-fix-the-mess-that-is-kindergarten>.

Videos are also a great option to show kindergarten teachers how to teach young children. For example, YouTube videos of kindergartners performing Madonna's "Vogue" and "Downtown."

Create professional development opportunities specific to teaching young children



ACTIONS WITH FAMILIES AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Invite early education providers in your community to professional development sessions to support sharing information and resources between early education and kindergarten professionals

Schedule staff time for early education teachers and kindergarten teachers to plan together

Encourage kindergarten teachers to visit early education classrooms

See *Guide for Principals: Leading Pre-K–3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice* by the National Association of Elementary School Principals for highlights of Hawaii’s statewide P–3 initiative that’s helping to build professional capacity across the learning community: <http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/leading-pre-k-3-learning-communities-executive-summary.pdf>.

Use the *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Pre-K-3rd Grade Approaches* by Kauerz and Coffman to self-assess depth of implementation and of teacher teams working across grade levels to align their instruction across grade levels to work together to foster teamwork: http://depts.washington.edu/pthru3/PreK-3rd_Framework_Legal%20paper.pdf.

Align standards, curriculum, and instruction



ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

Expand the focus of K–3 standards to include social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and creative learning, as well as school-related skills

As children approach the end of preschool, they should be working on tasks and concepts they will see in kindergarten. And, the classroom environment and learning activities in kindergarten should include things the children are familiar with from their preschool settings. Aligning standards across the early years has been challenging because early childhood educators have typically focused on milestones that reflect the development of the “whole child,” while K–12 educators tend to be more concerned with academic knowledge and skills. A guide from the National Association of Elementary School Principals provides information that helps with aligning systems: http://www.naesp.org/resources/1/NAESP_Prek-3_C_pages.pdf.

Ensure administrators and teachers are familiar with the domains of child development

If systems are going to be aligned, it is important for the early grades to continue to focus on the whole child (rather than just academics). To help with this, administrators and teachers should become familiar with the domains of child development, which are laid out nicely in this framework from the Office of Head Start: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/pdf/ohs-framework.pdf>.

Ensure that you and your professional staff learn about your state’s early learning guidelines

Alignment of standards between early learning and K–3 needs to start with an understanding of your state’s early learning guidelines. For example, Washington’s guidelines are located at www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/guidelines.aspx and Idaho’s guidelines are located at <http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/InfantToddlerProgram/EarlyLearningGuidelines/tabid/2280/Default.aspx>

Review how other states have aligned their standards and curricula from birth through third grade

Pennsylvania has developed a comprehensive set of learning standards that are aligned from birth through third grade. Pennsylvania also has taken steps to ensure that the standards, curricula, and assessments used within P–3 grade levels are aligned. To support local choice, Pennsylvania provides a detailed list of approved curricula that align to the early learning standards and has produced a number of materials to help local programs and entities choose appropriate and aligned assessment instruments.

Kristie Kauerz from the University of Washington is a national expert on alignment efforts. She has developed a *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Pre-K-3rd Grade Approaches*: http://depts.washington.edu/ptthu3/PreK-3rd_Framework_Legal%20paper.pdf.

Align standards, curriculum, and instruction



ACTIONS WITH FAMILIES AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Provide staff with time and resources to learn from early childhood providers, in order to improve alignment of curricula and assessment

As children approach the end of preschool, they should be working on tasks and concepts they will see in kindergarten. And, the classroom environment and learning activities in kindergarten should include things the children are familiar with from their preschool setting. Aligning standards across the early years has been challenging because early childhood educators have typically focused on milestones that reflect the development of the “whole child,” while K–12 educators tend to be more concerned with academic knowledge and skills. A guide from the National Association of Elementary School Principals provides information that help with aligning systems: http://www.naesp.org/resources/1/NAESP_Prek-3_C_pages.pdf.

Review, use, and share student data with families and teachers



ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

Use data to understand incoming kindergarteners and to guide class planning and decisionmaking

Many states have adopted Kindergarten Entry Assessments to assess a child's skills and knowledge upon kindergarten entry. Washington uses the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing skills (WaKIDS): <http://www.k12.wa.us/wakids/> and http://www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/GOLD_HNDT_Objectives.pdf.

Information about the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment can be found at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=3908>. This information can be used to understand incoming children's skills and knowledge upon kindergarten entry.

Provide resources to help teachers improve their ability to use data and to understand the importance of doing so

Diane Dodge provides guidance on how teachers can use assessment to improve their work with young children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPsO4fY2XBY>.

REL Northeast & Islands has created a toolkit for district and school leaders, teacher leaders, and coaches who want to conduct workshops for educators on data inquiry and data use at the school level. Find it at <http://www.relnei.org/publications/practitioner-data-use-toolkit.html>.

Also available is "Understanding Data Use To Improve Instruction," a self-paced online course for practitioners. Register and log in to the REL Northeast & Islands Workshop Center to take the course at workshop.relnei.org.

Use multiple forms of assessment to understand students and guide planning

Different types of assessments can be used to understand students and help guide student learning and teacher planning along the Pre-K–3 continuum, including observation, portfolios, and anecdotal records. These assessments can be embedded into the daily rhythm of the classroom. Find one example at <http://www.tkalifornia.org/resource-library/resources/files/formative-assessment-classroom-examples.pdf>. Another example is at <http://www.nieer.org/publications/policy-reports/technical-report-kindergarten-early-learning-scale>.

Review, use, and share student data with families and teachers



ACTIONS WITH FAMILIES AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Encourage district-level conversations between early learning programs and kindergarten teachers to review assessment information

WaKIDS provides information about collaborating with early learning programs at <http://www.k12.wa.us/wakids>.

Help parents understand what to expect about assessment

Many parents may not understand why children are assessed, and may not agree with assessing young children. To help families learn about assessment and its usefulness if done well, consider ideas in this parent guide to classroom assessment: <https://www.surreyschools.ca/ParentServices/ParentInfoBrochures/Documents/A%20Parent's%20Guide%20to%20Classroom%20Assessment.pdf>.

Meet with families to help them understand the Kindergarten Entry Assessment and how it is used

For example, The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment Parent's Guide includes information on how to help parents understand the assessment <https://oregonearlylearning.com/kindergarten-assessment/ka-for-parents/>

Provide data to families and invite them to discuss the data with their children's teachers

Share student assessment data with families and hold open and collaborative discussions with parents and guardians on how to address specific student academic needs. For ideas on how to do this, go to <https://www.choiceliteracy.com/articles-detail-view.php?id=490>.

Make sure children come to school



ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

Ensure that teachers track attendance on a daily basis (i.e., take roll everyday)

Ten facts about the importance of school attendance reinforce the need to track attendance information daily: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/facts-stats-school-attendance>.

Important considerations in creating and designing a data collection system can be found at http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org/H2ISA/H2ISA_SATFREC.html.

Regularly examine attendance data and collect quantitative and qualitative data to identify which students are most affected and contributing factors

Attendance Works has a number of helpful tools for walking schools through this process, including a brief description of how to conduct a data analysis: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/How-to-Conduct-a-Successful-Data-Analysis.pdf>. Find tools for assessing if your school has an issue with chronic absence at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/tools-for-calculating-chronic-absence>, and a brief description of those tools at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DATT-and-SATT-flyer-2.4.14.pdf>.

Use and distribute to staff a toolkit on the importance of being in school and working with parents to improve attendance

Multiple toolkits can be found online. One example is *Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit To Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism* (see pp. 18–24 of the downloadable tool at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism>). Access another toolkit to help engage families in addressing chronic absenteeism at http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/062215_AW_ParentToolkit-1.pdf.

Work with school staff to reward students who attend school regularly

Attendance Works offers a short and informative overview of considerations in establishing incentive programs, including promising approaches from elementary, middle, and high schools at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/AW-Incentives-two-pager-1-4-11.pdf>. Find additional ideas at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/incentives.pdf>.

Create a transition team that includes parents, kindergarten teachers, administrators, and community members (e.g., library staff) representative of your community

Transition teams help create a smooth transition to kindergarten by helping to engage families and children in the process. Transition team information is available at <http://www.readyfreddy.org/transition-teams>.

Make sure children come to school



ACTIONS WITH FAMILIES AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Provide information to families about the importance of being in school

Multiple toolkits can be found online. One example is *Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism* (see pp. 12–14 of the downloadable tool at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism>). Another useful resource is a video and related materials for parents at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-video>, including an infographic at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/AW-Infographic-2.12.1311.pdf>, and a one-page handout at http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Attendance_1PG_0911_FINAL.pdf.

Ensure that families know to call the school if their child will be absent

Sometimes absences are unavoidable, and families should know that you understand there are times when children cannot attend school. However, it is important that families know to call the school when their children will be absent. If they don't call, you or one of your school personnel should follow up directly with the family.

Follow up with families if a student is chronically absent and explain the importance of regular attendance for academic and social outcomes

Even if you've provided information to families about the importance of being in school, it is likely that some students will be chronically absent. Attendance Works has developed a short document to help you talk to parents and students about the importance of attendance: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/messaging-attendance-to-families1.pdf>.

Consult with all relevant parties to identify systemic barriers to attendance

A helpful tool to help with identifying the potential barriers to attendance is at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/ID-Cont-Factors-DEC-2010-.pdf>. Ideas for overcoming these barriers is at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/BreakingBarrierstoattendance.pdf>.

Partner with community agencies

There are programs that help schools address attendance issues. One example is *Success Mentors*, which matches caring adults with students who have a history of chronic absence. Information about *Success Mentors* is at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/new-york-city/success-mentors>. Find lessons learned about the program at <http://www.childinst.org/news/blog/663-lessons-learned-from-new-york-city-on-beating-chronic-absence>. A toolkit to help schools partner with community agencies is at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/creating-a-local-toolkit>.

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Szekely, A. (2013). *Leading for early success: Building school principals' capacity to lead high-quality early education*. Retrieved from National Governors Association website: <http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/center-publications/page-edu-publications/col2-content/main-content-list/leading-for-early-success-buildi.html>

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