

Kindergarten Transition Support Guidance

The challenges of the past few months have led to many new and creative approaches in different areas of life, including education. As schools plan to implement a blended learning model for the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, it will be critical to recognize the impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on children and their families. Now more than ever, teachers will need to work closely with families as they begin the new school year and welcome children into their classrooms while considering families' range of experiences through the pandemic. [Research](#) demonstrates the importance of transitions, with successful transitions between pre-K and kindergarten resulting in children enjoying school, showing growth in all domains, and having families actively engaged in their learning. Unfortunately, the impact of inadequate transitions can result in children experiencing high levels of stress - thereby interfering with their academic performance and emotional adjustment.

For children beginning Kindergarten, who may be transitioning from home, a home daycare environment, or a Pre-K Center, Head Start program or NYCEEC, this may mark a significant transition and new experience for them. Additionally, note that children may have experienced multiple childcare settings over the past year, including potentially attending a Regional Enrichment Center (REC) during the pandemic. **The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and promising practices for school building leaders and teaching teams as you plan for the beginning of the Kindergarten year.** As always, any suggestions should be adapted to best meet the needs of the children and families in your school community.

The promising practices in this document are grounded in the big ideas below, adapted from "*Continuity in Children's Worlds: Choices and Consequences for Early Childhood Settings*" by Rachel Theilheimer:

1. Learn about and recognize the differences between the settings children are coming from and the settings they are entering. Acknowledge the differences to children and their parents.
2. Consider the families and what they've been used to and develop relationships with them while taking that into consideration.
3. Think about what children can do and have done, and capitalize on those strengths.
4. Think about what children need to learn and be able to do to succeed in the new setting without expecting them to know and be able to do those things already.
5. Analyze the culture and tacit rules of the new setting to be able to acclimate children and families to the culture - do not take it for granted.

Promising Practices to Support the Pre-K to K Transition:

- Programmatic Structures
- Building Relationships with Families
- Getting to Know Your Students
- Building Connections between Home and School
- Trauma-Informed Practices to Support Social Emotional Development
- Additional Resources

Programmatic Structures

- Consider creating a way to allow caregivers to support the transition into school during drop-off. This may include utilizing a staggered schedule.
- Consider creating a team of staff members with early childhood experience to support children who need additional emotional support and partner with teachers on practices that promote belonging, safety through routines, rituals and affirmations, and unconditional positive regard through positive interactions.
- Have a consistent individual greet children as they arrive at school each day. This will help to build children's sense of safety and predictability about their new school and/or classroom.

Building Relationships with Families

- Set up communication protocols with families prior to the start of the school year. Ask families about the best way to communicate with them (e.g. phone, email, etc.).
- Provide a family orientation at the beginning of the school year to share relevant information about what children and families can expect. This can be provided virtually or in-person.
- Create an FAQ document to share with families that addresses anticipated questions and provides information about resources available in the classroom and school, as well virtual resources. This could include a "who's who" of school staff, links to relevant documents, and information about local community-based organizations.
- Invite families to participate remotely in events and celebrations that allow them to build connections with you and their child's class as well as to highlight their family's culture, experiences, etc.
- Check in consistently with children and their families as to how they are feeling and what their needs are, and be flexible in meeting those needs. Share anecdotes and photos with families about what their child enjoys doing in school.
- Acknowledge and affirm each family's experience.

Getting to Know Your Students

- Families may have completed an end of year survey with their child's pre-K teacher that can provide you with important context about their child - see [here](#) for the survey that was shared with pre-K teachers. Support families who did not complete the survey in doing so. When possible, use the survey as a way to have two-way communication with families.
- Use small groups and one-on-one opportunities to get to know about children's interests and experiences. Consider asking them about their favorite foods, favorite stories, and/or favorite things to do.
- Ask families about their child's remote learning experience, as well as their family's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may include how they felt about remote learning, potential economic and health challenges, as well as possible grief and loss. This information will provide you with important context about family and children's experiences.

- Plan specifically for families and students with disabilities as well as those who are Emergent Multilingual Learners, including formulating a system for meeting their needs in September as well as supporting their growth in a blended learning environment.
- Acknowledge and affirm each child’s experience.

Building Connections between Home and School

- Create consistent, predictable, yet flexible, routines that provide children with opportunities for choice. Hang a visual schedule in the classroom so that children can see what to expect for the day. In a blended learning environment, and specifically when learning is happening remotely, encourage families to create a consistent routine that works for them and is as aligned as possible to school routines. Share samples with families to support the development of their at home schedule.
- Send home a simple visual schedule of home/school learning days for each group of children to help families and children adjust to the blended learning schedule.
- Set up a system that supports developmentally appropriate practices for separation and that is trauma informed. For example, invite families to send in a photo of loved ones for the child to hold onto. Other transitional objects such as a blanket or favorite stuffed animal can also help children feel connected to their family and support a smooth transition into the classroom.

Trauma-Informed Practices to Support Social Emotional Development

- Ensure children have ongoing positive interactions throughout the day and unconditional positive regard, believing that one is worthy and capable even when one is not acting or feeling that way.
- Create a cozy corner in your classroom that includes a feelings chart (a chart where feelings and diverse pictures to match those feelings are displayed), developmentally appropriate books related to feelings and emotions, and family photos to provide students with a calm space to visit when a variety of feelings arise. This provides children with opportunities for alone time and support for their individual social emotional needs.
- Find moments for grounding to support the transition into the school year. Teaching children about deep breathing, self-hugs and other grounding techniques can support children in feeling calmer and more ready to engage in their new environment. This may include using a regularly scheduled “feelings check-in” with a feelings chart to guide children in pointing at a specific feeling they are experiencing and/or setting up a system for children to take breaks throughout the day.
- Compile a book list that represents the children and families in your classroom with specific books that can provide social emotional support to children and families. A list of suggested books, including some digital versions, is accessible [here](#).
- Use nurturing, supportive and sensitive language when responding to individual children’s triggers. Consider asking yourself, “what has happened to this child?” rather than, “what is wrong with this child?”

- It is important to create an environment that provides physical and emotional safety for children, both in the classroom and when engaging in remote learning. This means having predictable schedules, organized and clean classrooms, and clear and easily accessible remote learning platforms. Child autonomy, choice, and empowerment during a time when children may feel like they have little control is another way to help create an emotionally safe environment through a trauma-informed lens.
- If children are transitioning from a pre-K classroom within your school, consider connecting with their pre-K teacher and inviting him/her to visit your classroom or participate in a remote learning experience. This will help build connections between children's previous learning experiences as they transition into Kindergarten.
- Provide children with opportunities to make sense of their feelings and emotions through play and telling stories. This could include having a child demonstrate how they are feeling through acting it out.
- Provide multiple opportunities for children to make their own choices and express their needs, wants and interests. When noticing what children are interested in, provide opportunities for children to be able to engage in activities around those interests.
- Remember that children may not have been in a school setting for several months and therefore may no longer be familiar with the normal routines that they experienced previously. It is best to acknowledge children where they are to be able to provide children and families with the individual support they may need.
- Accept, value, and treat children positively regardless of behavior.

Additional Resources

Transition/Re-opening Guidance

- [Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings \(NYU Metro Center\)](#)
- [Getting Ready for Readiness \(Teaching Young Children\)](#)
- [Transitions and Alignment from Preschool to Kindergarten \(Education Commission\)](#)
- [Planning for the Transition to Kindergarten \(NCOTL\)](#)
- [Easing First Day Jitters \(NAEYC\)](#)
- [Transitions to Kindergarten \(NAEYC\)](#)

Family Empowerment

- [Harlem/Brooklyn Basics](#)
- [Back to School: Why Creating Classroom Community is So Important \(NAEYC\)](#)

Special Education Resources

- [Early Intervention to Pre-K Transition](#)
- [Early Intervention to CPSE](#)
- [Special Education Service Provider Support](#)