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The Transition Process: A Journey from Preschool to Kindergarten

By Betty Lansdowne

TRANSITION: "The process of moving from one setting to another involves smooth change in order for consistency, stability, and uninterrupted services to continue. Transition is an ongoing continuum of services. It is not just a single adjustment or a single activity but a process that includes commitment and partnerships between home, school, and community to ensure that systems are in place to facilitate the family's movement from one setting to another and establish the foundation for future school success." (from *Joining Hands: Strategies for Successful Transition*)

The move from a preschool program into kindergarten is an exciting, much anticipated experience for children and their families. It may be particularly stressful, however, for those youngsters with developmental delays and/or disabilities, and for their parents. Thus it is important for all affected agencies to be involved in the planning of the transition process, ensuring that IDEA federal and state regulations as well as agency policies are

followed and that provider agencies are ready. Careful preparation on the part of the staff will make the transition process a smooth and successful one for the children, their families, and the receiving staff.

Communication with families during this time is especially important to encourage them to be partners in the process. As they negotiate their way through an unfamiliar pathway such as this one, families need a knowledgeable contact person with whom they may ask questions. This resource person can be invaluable in making the transition a satisfying experience.

Steps to a Successful Transition from Preschool into Kindergarten:

1. Interagency representatives lay the groundwork by establishing guidelines, defining role responsibilities, and planning activities included in the transition process;
2. Names of incoming students are sent to the receiving schools well in advance of the child's entry date;
3. Consent forms are signed by the parents to allow the exchange of information. Receiving agencies review information to determine if additional assessments are needed;
4. A meeting is held with parents, staff from both sending and receiving schools, and other agencies involved. This affords an opportunity to meet and exchange information including family priorities, child needs, establish a timeline of events, sign forms for additional assessments needed, and discuss resources in the new district. Understanding the transition timeline can be calming to anxious parents;
5. Opportunities for children and families to visit classrooms and to participate in pre-k/ kindergarten activities often occur throughout the school year but especially in the months

leading up to the actual program change;

- 6. Following any assessments, an IEP is held to determine a child's eligibility for services. The IEP should occur well in advance of the beginning of the school year (at least 15 days) so that all services are in place when it begins.

The planning that is done prior to the actual transition will give agencies time to identify equipment needs, staff training needs, and remedy snags in the process. The family's experience in a new system is remembered and it flavors their reactions to interactions with the agency in the future.

References:

Joining Hands: Strategies for Successful Transition. New Mexico Youth and Families Department Head Start Collaboration Project. Call 505-827-9952 for a copy of the project guidelines. (Also available in Spanish.)

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S.P.A.R.K. (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids): An Early Childhood Transition Project in New Mexico

S.P.A.R.K is a national early childhood initiative, working to align curricula in preschools and kindergartens to promote smooth transitions from one setting to the other. There are six sites around New Mexico (San Juan Pueblo, Espanola, Laguna Pueblo, Dona Anna, Hobbs, and Albuquerque), each employing a coordinator who works with the staff to create transition plans following the *Joining Hands: Strategies for Successful Transition* project guidelines (Referenced above in the feature article.)

Staff members for S.P.A.R.K. facilitate communication within teams. They also help in planning family and center/classroom activities following the F.L.E.C.H.A. (Family Leadership for Education for Culture and Healthcare Access) curriculum.

Each transition experience is chosen because it builds the parent/child/school partnership; models developmentally appropriate activities; and provides collaborative opportunities for parents and staff. Now in the third year of their five year funding, S.P.A.R.K. involves the leadership built in the communities to focus legislative attention on building more programs that unite community, school, and family in similar ways.

Thanks to Marissa Wagner, Albuquerque S.P.A.R.K. coordinator, for sharing the information

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included in this article. If you would like more information you can contact the S.P.A.R.K. office at (505) 827-9952.

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Preparing the Parents for Their Child's Move to Kindergarten

Parents are not always aware of what is important to observe in a school environment. The information they gain from school visits helps them define their priorities in the school setting. They can be encouraged to notice:

- The communication systems between home and school;
- If the classroom matches their child's learning style;
- If the program compliments their family's values and cultural traditions;
- How families are involved in activities;
- If the room arrangement allows their child to move freely;
- If there is room for the equipment that their child needs;
- If their children can join the group easily;
- If the travel time from home to the program is reasonable; and
- If the staff needs additional training to take care of the needs of their child.

Adapted from: *Next Steps to Success.* (2002). Parents Reaching Out.

We would like you to join us in welcoming our new Training & Development Consultant, Betty Lansdowne. Prior to joining the Preschool Network Team, Betty had been working in a public school setting as a preschool special education teacher; an Early Childhood support staff member for children with special needs; and a resource teacher for homeless children and their families. Other professional history includes work in private schools, Head Start, a hospital language clinic, and private practice. She holds Master's degrees in Human Development, Special Education (with an emphasis in Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders), and Education Administration. We are very excited to have Betty on the Preschool Network team!





Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools

Pianta, R.C. & Kraft-Sayre, M.
Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

BOOK REVIEW

A smooth transition to kindergarten is important in a child's early academic experience. The authors include step-by-step methods to help programs make the process happen successfully. They describe the beginning stages of forming the team, involving families, tailoring the plan to meet individual needs, implementing the plan (including forms that may be photocopied) and **keeping the participants motivated and**

inspired.

The guide is based on developmentally appropriate principles. It is appropriate for all individuals participating in the transition process to read.

Children's Books to Support the Transition into School

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>
<i>Carlos Goes to School</i>	Eloise Anderson
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go to School</i>	Jan and Stan Berenstain
<i>Calico Cat at School</i>	Donald Charles
<i>Grover Goes to School</i>	Dan Elliot
<i>Mr. Rogers Talks About...</i>	Fred Rogers
<i>I'd Rather Stay With You</i>	Charlotte Steiner
<i>Morris Goes to School</i>	B. Wiseman
<i>When Will I Read?</i>	Miriam Cohen

Classroom Activity



Activities to Prepare Children and Families for the Move into Kindergarten

- # A portfolio recording each child's progress throughout the year is an exciting keepsake for the family and a valuable item for sharing with the new teacher (Engel & Gronlund);
- # Make phone books in which the children can write preschool friends' numbers;
- # Invite some kindergarten children who previously attended the preschool to visit and tell about their kindergarten experiences;
- # Set up the dramatic play area as a school cafeteria or part of a kindergarten environment. Include items unique to the new setting. Children can act out feelings about the move and routines at the new school;
- # Create a story and draw illustrations about the new school;
- # Create a time capsule. Children and families decorate a shoebox and put items inside that remind them of preschool. This could be a family night activity;
- # Make a puppet show about kindergarten for the older children to put on for the preschoolers;
- # Read books about transition with the children;
- # Encourage parents to have chores for their children such as sorting the laundry, setting the table, cooking with an adult, helping put away the groceries, and organizing their toys. These classification tasks are similar to skills used in kindergarten.

Reference: Gronlund, G. & Engel, B. *Focused Portfolios*. Redleaf Press.



Professional Development Opportunities

Check out the early childhood training calendar on the CDD Early Childhood Division website at:
<http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/calendar.html>

SouthWest Autism Training: Assessment, Communication, & Structured Teaching for Persons with ASD. November 17, 2005 in Taos, NM from 8:30 to 3:30.

NAEYC (National Association for Education of Young Children) National Conference. Dec. 7—10, 2005 in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit the NAEYC website at: <http://naeyc.org>.

22nd Annual Head Start Parent Training Conference. December 16—20, 2005 in Washington D.C. For more information, visit the website at: <http://www.nhsa.org>.

NMAEYC (New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children) 2006 Annual Spring Conference. March 4, 2006 in Albuquerque, NM at the Albuquerque Convention Center. For more information call (505) 823-0975 or 1-877- 744-KIDS or visit the website at: www.nmaeyc.org/Conference.htm. Scholarships available.



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