Terrific Transitions

Ensuring Continuity of Services for Children and Their Families

SERVE™
Improving Learning through Research & Development

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About SERVE

Introduction

The transition to kindergarten is a critical time in children's development. On one level, the transition from home (or preschool) to school is simply a change in physical location. However, this transition is often much more complicated than simply changing buildings or settings. For children, it means learning a new set of rules and behaviors, adjusting to a new peer group, and getting to know new teachers. For families, it means making sure that records and information about children are transferred, meeting and communicating with teachers, attending school programs, and adjusting to established school/district policies. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the concept of transition and its importance to school success. This document includes a variety of transition strategies that can be tailored to the individual needs of children and their families. Additionally, the Appendix contains sample forms, letters, and examples of transition activities.

Early Signs of Successful Transitions to School

How will you know if the process developed in your program or school has been successful in helping children, parents, educators, and communities? According to Ramey & Ramey, 1994, some early signs are:

- Children will like school and look forward to going to school.
- Children will show steady growth in academic skills.
- Parents will become actively involved in their children's education—at home, in school, and in the community.
- Classroom environments will promote positive feelings for both teachers and children.
- Teachers, staff members, and families will value each other.
- Schools and programs will celebrate cultural diversity in their communities.
- Developmentally appropriate practices will be visible within the classroom.
- The community will show consistent investment in the education of children and will strive to increase available learning opportunities.

Transitions

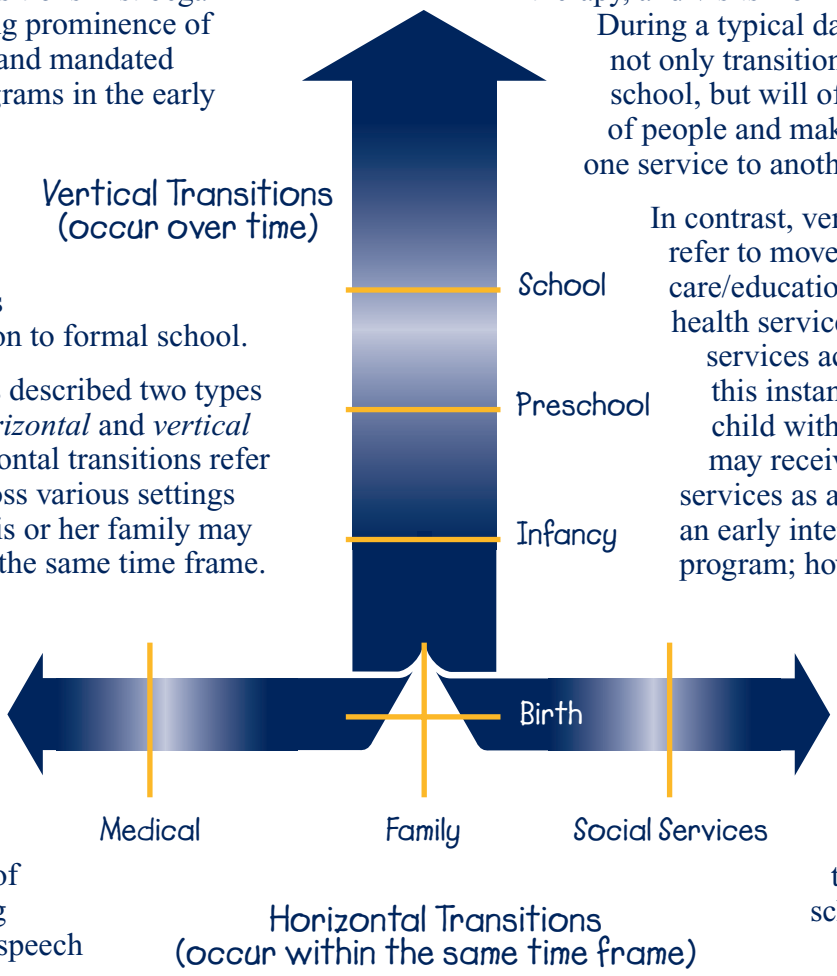
Defining Transitions

In the field of early childhood care and education, the word *transition* has traditionally been used to describe changes between different types of activities. More recently, *transition* has been used to refer to differences in services among environments, agencies, or institutions (Lombardi, 1992). The most significant transitions seem to occur as children move from home to preschool, preschool to early elementary school, or school to after-school activities. They also occur as children and families seek and receive health and educational services from a variety of providers.

Horizontal and Vertical Transitions

The focus on transitions first began with the increasing prominence of pre-kindergarten and mandated kindergarten programs in the early '80s and with the recognition that one of the most significant changes that occurs in a child's life is the transition to formal school.

Kagan (1992) has described two types of transitions: *horizontal* and *vertical* transitions. Horizontal transitions refer to movement across various settings that a child and his or her family may encounter within the same time frame. For example, a child with special needs who lives at home and attends a local preschool may receive a variety of services including physical therapy, speech therapy, and visits from a social worker. During a typical day, this child will not only transition from home to school, but will often see a variety of people and make transitions from one service to another within the day.



In contrast, vertical transitions refer to movement among care/education programs, health services, and social services across time. In this instance, the same child with special needs may receive rehabilitative services as an infant through an early intervention program; however, as the child approaches school age, he/she will begin to receive special education and other related services through the public school system.

Continuity

Sometimes, service providers do little to share information or link their services. At other times, they work hard to collaborate and coordinate their efforts. The stronger the links or connections between settings/events the smoother the transition; these connections are referred to as *continuity*. Continuity is essential for children and families as they move from one setting or program to another. When programs work together to facilitate children's transitions and involve families as full partners in the process, children experience less stress and are more likely to show progress more quickly in the new setting. As children become more familiar with each setting and its expectations of them, the more comfortable they become.

Promoting Continuity Between Early Childhood Settings and Elementary School

Efforts to help smooth children's transitions evolved out of a concern that, for some children, movement from one activity to another—or from one environment to another—is often overly abrupt and may interfere with the child's ability to adjust. In order to deal with transitions, processes need to be developed that make it comfortable and easy for children (and their families) to move and change from one program to another. *Continuity* (and *discontinuity*) refers to the experiences children and families have as they move from one environment to the next (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992). If the two environments are similar or compatible, there is a continuity of experience. That is, when rules and expectations established in the first environment are maintained, children are able to make a smoother transition. However, if the two environments are different or incompatible and children and families aren't prepared for these differences, then children may experience discontinuity as they make the transition from one environment into the next. For these children, the behaviors learned in the first environment are no longer appropriate, and new behaviors must be learned (Love et al., 1992). In studying transitions, researchers have found that when transitions are eased, supported, or smoothed, the gaps between activities, experiences, or services are "bridged," and continuity results.

Providing continuity means building bridges for the transitions that young children and their families naturally move through. These "bridges" can be built, in part, through the alignment of several critical components shared by the early care and elementary settings. Some specific areas that may need this focus of alignment include (Pianta, 2005):

- Quality of learning experiences
- Teacher qualifications and training
- Curriculum and standards
- Assessment of children

Major transitions for children, such as entering kindergarten, can be very difficult due to the differences in curriculum, teaching practices, and standards. What children learn and experience in preschool and what they are expected to know and be able to do when they enter kindergarten are at times distinct and unrelated. It is important that elementary schools works with families, preschools, care providers, Head Start programs, and other community partners to align

curriculum and create a more familiar learning environment for children as they make the move from early care to elementary school (National Governor's Association, 2005).

Current Research Regarding Practices and Benefits of Transition Planning

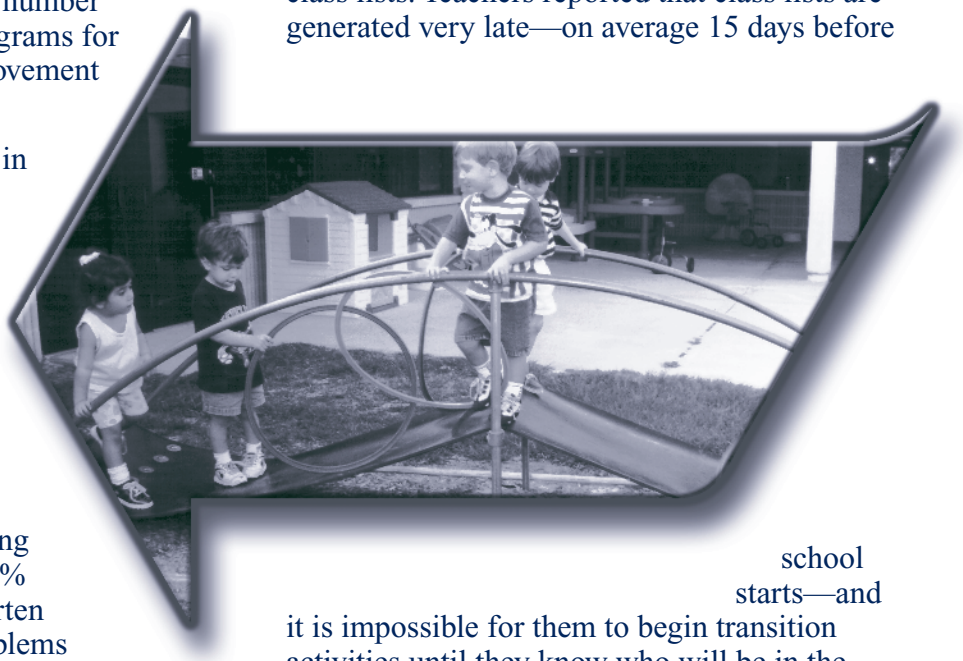
While transition has long been a topic of interest and study in the field of special education and for Head Start programs, it has recently become a more important topic of discussion among early childhood professionals (Rous, 2000). According to Pianta and Cox (1999), several recent trends have sparked renewed interest in children's transition into school: 1) the integration of developmental psychology and education, 2) the diversity of America's families and school population, 3) the increase in number and type of public school programs for young children, and 4) the movement toward greater accountability.

Further adding to the interest in transitions are the results of a recent survey conducted by Pianta and colleagues (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; NCEDL, 1999). The results of this survey found that kindergarten teachers were concerned about children's transitions to school. According to teachers, approximately 48% of children entering kindergarten have moderate or serious problems with skills such as following directions, working independently, communicating needs, and working within a group with peers.

Results from the survey may provide clues to the basis for the difficulties. According to the teachers, their most common transition practices to help families and children through the process are to send a letter to parents after the beginning of school, attend an open house after school starts, provide a flyer or brochure after school starts, and read records of the child's previous experiences. None of these strategies provide deliberate opportunities to fully involve parents and carefully prepare children for their transition. The least commonly reported strategies (visiting the child's home, calling the child's home before school starts or after school starts, and visiting programs where four-year-olds are enrolled) are, ironically, the most effective strategies for facilitating transition.

Similar results were reported by Rathbun and Germino-Hausken (2001) who also surveyed teachers about their transition practices. In this study, teachers reported that their most common practices were calling parents, sending home information about the kindergarten program, and inviting parents to an open house/orientation. Least common activities were home visits and gradually introducing new students by shortening the school day at the start of the year.

Teachers offered a number of administrative and other barriers to effective transition practices (Pianta et al., 1999). The barrier teachers most commonly listed (56%) was the timing of class lists. Teachers reported that class lists are generated very late—on average 15 days before school starts—and it is impossible for them to begin transition activities until they know who will be in the classroom. Other barriers teachers listed included no compensation for summer work (47%), no schoolwide transition plan to follow (43%), and the time it takes to implement transition activities (37%). It seems that teachers are willing to implement specific activities to help children make the transition and do not feel that they are discouraged from doing so. The least frequent responses for barriers (less than 8% for each) were lack of interest on the part of preschool teachers, concern about creating negative expectations, and being discouraged from contacting parents before school. Administrative and logistical barriers seem to be the more important impediments.



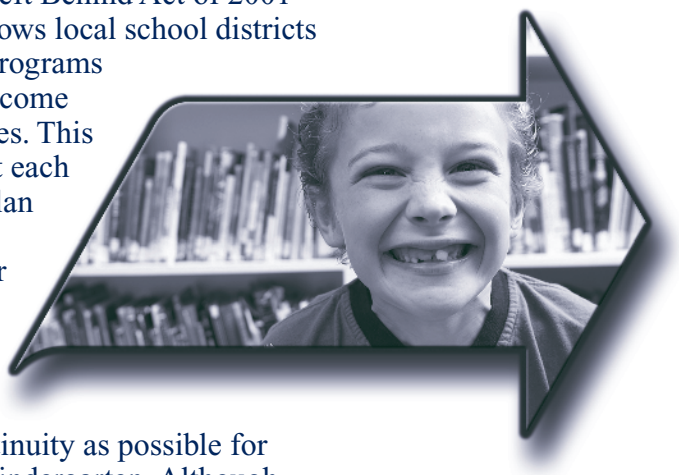
State and National Initiatives in Transitions

Planning for smooth transitions not only benefits children and families; it is the law.

Preparing the child for success in the future environment is a critical component of transition. As a result, specific practices and requirements have been mandated through legislation that will help children and families as they make the transition between home, preschool, and kindergarten settings. To date, much of the attention in establishing transition services has focused on those most likely to encounter difficulties in regular settings—children with special needs and those from disadvantaged families (West Virginia Education Association & AEL, 1994). Of the laws relating to young children, there are three pieces of legislation that most directly relate to the need for states to establish transition services: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C; IDEA, Part B; and Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Part C (birth to age three) and Part B, Section 619 (age three to five) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 102-119) were created to provide a seamless delivery of services for young children between birth and age 5. This legislation specifically mandates that programs support transition planning for children who receive early intervention or special education services. (For more on this legislation, see the section, *From Early Childhood Special Education Programs to Public School*.)

Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provides funding that allows local school districts to develop and operate programs designed to assist low-income students and their families. This legislation stipulates that each district must prepare a plan for the transition of each child from Head Start, or other early childhood development programs, to kindergarten. The goal of this legislation is to create as much continuity as possible for five-year-olds entering kindergarten. Although efforts to assist children and their families in the process of transition may differ slightly, most legislation requires attention to the following key elements (West Virginia Education Association & Appalachian Educational Laboratory, 1994):



- Serving underserved children or those with special needs and their families
- Establishing communication and coordination between service providers
- Involving families as partners in planning and decision making

In addition to the above legislation, Head Start also is mandated to assist families and children as they move from Early Head Start or Head Start into the elementary school setting. This legislation encourages Head Start programs to coordinate and collaborate with other education and social service agencies to better serve children and their families.

When transitions are handled hastily, children and families may experience distress that leads to other difficulties. However, by developing a transition plan prior to a child's entrance into a new setting or program, both staff and parents can prepare for and ensure the delivery of appropriate services.

Transitions for Children and Families with Special Circumstances

Children with Special Needs

Parents and families often have to overcome a multitude of obstacles when trying to locate accessible, high-quality early education services for their young children with disabilities. Several federal laws have been enacted to assist them in this process. These include the

- *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA)
  - The ADA gives children with disabilities the opportunity to be included in regular childcare settings. Generally speaking, children may not be excluded from a childcare setting based solely on their disability.
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEA 2004).
  - Under IDEA, all eligible children with disabilities birth to 21 are to receive services.
    - Part C ensures early intervention services for children with disabilities under the age three.
    - Part B, Section 619 ensures free, appropriate public education for three- to five-year-old children with disabilities.

In 2001, over 231,000 children under the age of three (infants and toddlers) received early intervention, and 599,000 children age three to five (preschoolers) received special education services. Approximately 36% of the preschoolers were served full-time in early childhood settings; and another 12.9% were served part-time in early childhood settings (US GAO Report #02-394). Both ADA and IDEA 2004 have provisions that help ensure that children with disabilities will be served in regular settings, such as a childcare program or a classroom that includes children who do not have a disability. For infants and toddlers, these settings are considered "natural environments" and in preschool settings "inclusive or general education settings." It is very likely that you will be a part of the planning team for children with disabilities and their families.

Part C of the IDEA governs the services for children birth to age three. These services are coordinated through the *Individualized Family Service Plan* (IFSP). The IFSP is a document that is written by a joint planning team that includes the parent(s) or guardian(s) and other service providers—teachers, therapists, physicians, etc. The IFSP includes specific goals and outcomes for the child, as well as outlining services to address the family's resources, priorities, and concerns as they relate to addressing their child's needs, growth, and development. As children approach age three, federal law requires that planning for transition begin at least 90 days and up to 9 months prior to the child's third birthday; some states require an even earlier intervention. This planning conference is intended to promote interagency collaboration, form partnerships with families, and support individual children in their transition from Part C to other services and settings (e.g., Part B, childcare, home).

As children grow and develop, the programs they attend and the services provided by the various agencies will change. For example, the home-based intervention program may shift to services being provided in a center-based or school-based program. Additionally, the way goals are written will change format. As children transition from Part C services to Part B, the birth to three-year-old documents (and sometimes older, depending on locale) change from the *Individualized Family Service Plan* to the *Individualized Education Program*. Understanding the differences between the laws that govern early intervention and those that govern services to three- to five-year-olds may help families prepare for the changes that will occur. It is critical that families understand the differences in the programs and how the new program will address their children's changing needs. Some of the changes that might occur between early intervention and preschool programs include:

- Location of services (home-based versus center-based)
- Family-focused versus the child-focused planning process
- Frequency, availability, and location for related services (physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, etc.)
- Options and requirements for family participation

While transitions are common for young children, they may be more intense and frequent for children with special needs. To prepare children with special needs for change and to ensure that the transition between programs unfolds smoothly, it is important that parents, family members, educators, and other service providers communicate well in advance. This coordinated effort is supported by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). NCLB emphasizes coordination between Head Start, Early Reading First, and other early childhood programs and the public schools. Activities specifically mentioned in Section 1120B include:

- Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for receiving records, transferred with parental consent, as children move from Head Start into the local education system
- Establishing channels of communication to facilitate coordination of programs
- Conducting meetings involving parents, kindergarten or elementary school teachers, and Head Start teachers to discuss the developmental and other needs of individual children
- Organizing and participating in joint transition-related training of school staff, Head Start staff, and where appropriate, other early childhood development program staff

To prepare children with special needs for change and ensure that transition will transpire smoothly, it is important that parents, family members, educators, and service providers communicate well in advance. Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Donegan, Fink, Fowler, and Wischnowski, 1994) point out these six strategies to prepare a child for an upcoming change:

- Begin early.
- Talk about the new setting in positive ways.
- Encourage the child to ask questions and express fears.
- Engage the child in concrete experiences.
- Teach the child specific skills and routines that will be useful in the new program.
- Communicate and share information between programs in advance.

They also point out the following additional strategies that families and providers can use following initial entry into a new setting to ensure a successful adjustment:

- Incorporate information obtained from the sending program and family into the receiving program plan.
- Maximize parental involvement and support during the initial entry and adjustment.
- Individualize communication with the child's family.
- Adjust expectations for the child's behavior.

Exemplary Programs

Creative Preschool

Leaving the safety and security of a childcare setting—which some children may have attended since infancy—can be an especially hard adjustment for both children and their families. One preschool in Tallahassee, Florida, has a comprehensive plan to make sure that the move from their childcare setting into the public school setting is a smooth one. This center, Creative Preschool, is recognized as a national and state model for the inclusion of children with disabilities. In 2005 23% of the children at Creative Preschool had some type of identified disability. They have built a solid partnership with the local public school system, Leon County Schools. The school system provides many services to children ages three to five within the childcare setting. Certified teachers employed by Leon County provide direct service to the children in the childcare setting alongside the child's typically developing peers. Any needed therapies—speech, occupational, physical—are provided in the setting as well.

At Creative Preschool, planning begins at the first IEP meeting when a child is four-years-old. At that time, the lead teacher of special education begins conversations with the family about what the options for the following year are most likely to be. Some practices utilized by Creative Preschool include:

- The preschool staff research in advance where children will most likely attend school based on the child's residency. Then the lead teacher of special education at the preschool makes an effort to visit all the schools where the children will most likely attend the following year. These visits are made in January or February and are used to acquaint the teacher with programs and staff of the schools and to begin to plan what options might be best for individual children.
  - If there doesn't appear to be a good match between assigned schools and a child's needs, there is time to look at further options. The school system has a representative that can place children in an alternate setting if deemed necessary.
- After exploring options, the lead teacher will accompany family members as they visit different programs and finalize where children will attend public school.
- Teachers from the elementary school are encouraged to visit the preschool program to observe any children they will have the next year. This allows the elementary staff to see the child in an environment that he or she is most comfortable with.
- The child's preschool teacher visits the public kindergarten classroom where a child will go the following year to help in preparing an individualized plan for transition.
- Children's portfolios are shared between settings.
- Preschool teachers consult with their elementary counterparts when a child is having a difficult time adjusting to the new environment.

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Migrant Children and Families

Children of migrant farm workers make many transitions throughout their lives, but many transition into new schools as often as two to three times within a school year (ESCORT, 2001). For highly mobile families, continuity in education is a luxury not often acquired. Moving into a new community and school multiple times a year can be very difficult for children. In addition, their parents are often undereducated and have limited knowledge of the English language, restricting the support parents can give their children in the transition to school. Therefore, starting school and/or moving into a new school can be very intimidating for young children. For educators, the challenge is to develop strategies that support children as they migrate to their schools. By learning more about migrant families, educators can begin to develop transition plans that support continuity.

Migrant farm workers travel between school districts, usually across state lines, in order to obtain work in the agricultural field. Many migrants are married with children and maintain one home as their "base" for the majority of their time. This home base may be in their native country, like Mexico, or in a specific part of the U.S. They stay in temporary housing during the remainder of the year. Sadly, the temporary housing can be substandard and/or a shared place with friends or family. The living conditions are usually cramped with little individual space.

Indeed, according to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000), 52% of migrant farm workers are married and 45% are parents—with a third of parents reporting to have more than three children. The vast majority of farm workers are foreign-born (81%), primarily from Mexico (77%), although others are from countries in Latin America and Asia.

Language and literacy levels can be barriers for adults trying to assimilate into the mainstream culture. Spanish is mainly spoken among the population, and the average adult has only completed the sixth grade. Moreover, 85% have difficulty obtaining information from printed materials in any language (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000).

Three of four farm workers are paid an hourly wage averaging $5.94, making an annual income of less than $10,000 per year. Sixty percent of families are living below the poverty level. Families work together to increase the family income. In fact, it is estimated that between 200,000 and 800,000 children work in the fields alongside their parents.

Given the statistics, it is safe to assume that children of migrant farm workers have an especially difficult time attaining a quality education. Because of parents' limited education and English skills, compounded with their own negative feelings toward previous school experiences, parents are not always able to sufficiently support their children as they begin school. Still, migrant parents are overwhelmingly in favor of their children receiving educational services and feel it is extremely important to the future success of their children.

Educators can assist migrant children by understanding their complicated lives and searching for unique and innovative ways to support their transitions. For example, migrant programs across the country provide families with red bags that contain pertinent information children need for school as well as health records. Families are instructed on the kinds of information needed and to only keep these records in the bag and not use it for other purposes. One program, as another example, compiled children's information, such as health records, immunizations, screening results, and allergy risks, on a CD that they could carry with them as they migrated.

Most communities have a Migrant Education Program that recruits, records, and serves migrant children from birth to age 21. These programs are very helpful and informative when dealing with migrant families.

Other ideas for supporting migrant children in transition include:

- Seek assistance from the local Migrant Education Program in identifying migrant children and those who may be in need of extra support.
- Hold transition parent group meetings at local churches, in the house of an active parent, the early childcare program where many migrant children attend, or at local businesses migrant families patronize to reach migrant families who may not be comfortable going to the school.

- Hire staff from the migrant community.
- Provide diversity training to teachers so that they have a better understanding of the homes from which children come.
- Be sensitive to the language, culture, and education levels at home when sending home materials, flyers, or assignments.

Homeless Children and Families

According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001, homeless children are those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. These can include children and youth who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. This includes families that move in with relatives or friends.
- Living in hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters, temporary foster care, or abandoned in hospitals.
- Have an evening residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as sleeping accommodations for humans, such as cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus, or train stations, and other substandard housing.
- Migrant children may also be classified as homeless.

People are homeless because of poverty and a lack of affordable housing. In fact, approximately 31.1 million people live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001, as cited in the National Coalition for the Homeless, 2000b), and 39% of all people living in poverty have incomes less than half the poverty level. Because housing is a large expense, it is often the first to be cut when there is little income. Emergency shelters are not always an option for families in crisis. In 2001, 50% of emergency shelter request from families were denied. A report from the U.S. Department of Education states that only 35% of homeless children lived in shelters, while 34% lived with family or friends, and 23% are in motels or other form of habitation (U.S. Department of Education, 2000, as cited in the National Coalition for the Homeless, 2000a).

Recent reforms in welfare laws have influenced the homeless problem. Although the number of welfare clients has decreased over the past several years, more adults are obtaining lower-wage jobs that do not permit them to obtain affordable housing. Because subsidized housing is limited, many working poor are becoming homeless.

Children's Educational Rights

(from the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE)

- Lack of records cannot prevent a homeless student from immediate enrollment in the new school. Parents should ask the school officials for assistance in getting children's records from the last school attended.
- Each child has the right to go to school, no matter where the child lives or how long he/she has lived there.
- Children are not required to give a permanent address in order to enroll in school. Schools cannot require proof of residency that might prevent or delay school enrollment.
- If homeless, the child has the right to stay in the school he/she last attended or move to the school in the district/attendance zone where the family is currently living. Parents and school administrators should jointly make this decision in the best interest of the child. Whatever option is chosen, the child has the right to transportation that is equal to that of other students.

It is important to know that 36% of the homeless population are families with children (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2000). Homeless families are often separated from each other because parents leave their children with relatives or friends so that they can remain in school. However, many children are placed in foster homes or separate living arrangements, as some shelters do not permit fathers and older boys to stay in the same location as women and younger children.

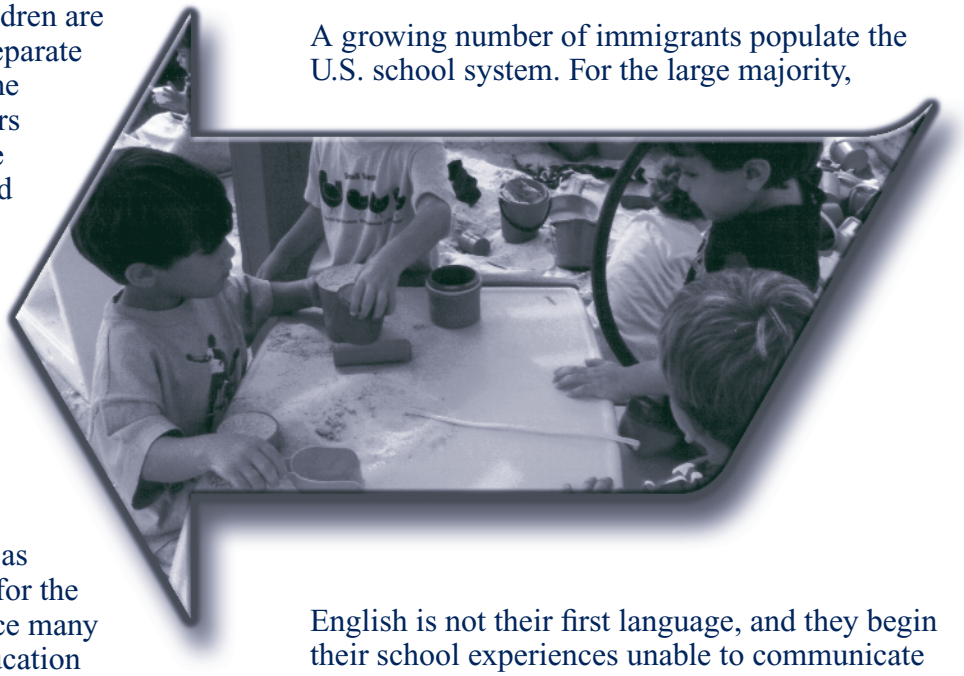
Homeless children are at a higher risk of health problems, including asthma, ear infections, stomach problems, mental health disorders, poor nutrition, and developmental delays (Better Homes Fund, 1999, as cited in National Coalition for the Homeless, 2000b). They face many barriers to continuity in education due to lack of transportation, slow transfer of education and immunization records, guardianship requirements, and a permanent address. They are less likely to have adequate clothing and school supplies, be evaluated for special education services, participate in extracurricular activities, and enroll in after-school programs.

Many of the considerations a transition team would make for migrant families can be used for homeless families. Continuity between settings can provide much-needed assurance for a child in life transitions.

- Enroll young children in the same school an older sibling attends, whether or not the family is "zoned" for that school.
- Contact the local homeless shelter for assistance and/or to provide referrals to other programs that support the entire family.
- Conduct outreach readiness programs at the local shelter or community agencies for parents and children.
- Provide teacher/parent/child meetings in non-traditional locations and times to meet the needs of homeless families.
- Conduct in-service training for staff regarding the McKinny-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the rights of parents.

Immigrant Children and Families

A growing number of immigrants populate the U.S. school system. For the large majority,



English is not their first language, and they begin their school experiences unable to communicate in the dominant language. In fact, of the approximately 48 million students enrolled in the K–12 system nationwide, about 4.7 million are deemed Limited English Proficient, a 95% growth rate since 1991. New York, Illinois, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California have the highest numbers of English Language Learners, with Georgia, Nevada, and Nebraska numbers growing the most rapidly. These immigrant students represent almost 400 different languages, the majority of whom speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Hmong, Haitian Creole, Korean, Arabic, and Chinese/Cantonese (OELA, 2002). Fifty-two percent of the foreign-born population is from Mexico or other Central American Countries, 25.5% were born in Asia, 14% were born in Europe, and the remaining 8.3% were born in other regions of the world (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Unfortunately, many immigrant children are at risk. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 51% of immigrants are from Central America. Of this population, roughly 35% have less than a ninth-grade education level. Moreover, this population has a higher poverty rate than the native group, 17% and 11%, respectively. In addition to the higher poverty rates, they are twice as likely to have larger families than the native population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Creating transition plans that include such a dynamic group as the immigrant population can strain resources. Fortunately, many districts only have a handful of languages and cultures represented in their schools. The following are ways that transitions can be made smoother for immigrant children:

- Understand that children who share similar languages do not necessarily share similar cultures.
- Recruit people from the local community who are representative of the culture to assist with transition activities, translate documents, and be a source of information in general.
- Be supportive of the home culture and/or language by providing a print-rich environment that includes examples from children's cultures, such as magazines, posters, pictures, food items, dress, etc.
- Ensure that children have an opportunity to see familiar cultural articles in the learning environment.
- Develop language/culture centers for children to play in.
- Learn a few key phrases from the child's language and/or culture.
- Understand the importance of a child's first language on the acquisition of English as a second language.
- Hire staff from the community who reflect the community linguistically and culturally in order to reach out to families and involve them in meaningful ways (Fleck, 1995).
- Provide opportunities for children to learn and communicate in their home language.

Simply gaining an understanding of the home language and culture of the children and families being served and providing opportunities for communication can help align expectations and smooth transitions.

To learn more about how to ensure continuity for non-English speaking children in early childhood settings, read next about what two programs in Florida are doing to promote transitions and support the family's home culture and language.

Exemplary Programs

Like many of Florida's communities, Okeechobee County and Volusia County schools serve a diverse population of students, including a large migrant population. Like other migrant communities, there is a high percentage of families who speak Spanish as their primary language. As a result, many of the children enter school with limited-English proficiency. This language limitation, coupled with other factors such as low-income and poor literacy rates among adults, makes early school success difficult for these children.

Okeechobee County Migrant Pre-K Program

The Okeechobee County Migrant Pre-K Program is designed to help schools connect with families and make the transition from pre-K to kindergarten a positive experience. The county has responded to the needs of the migrant community by implementing a number of services.

- Hiring a school-based migrant aide to provide academic assistance to students in grades K–2
- Conducting regular home visits
- Providing bilingual teacher aides
- Maintaining low teacher/student ratios
- Locating pre-K classrooms on the school campus
- Arranging for migrant pre-K students to tour kindergarten classrooms prior to the conclusion of the school term
- Ensuring that all migrant pre-K staff are included in staff development activities and school faculty meetings
- Providing English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training to all migrant pre-K teachers
- Conducting a summer home-based outreach program to reinforce readiness skills
- Providing a school-based migrant advocate at all schools in Okeechobee who can assist families with academic, social, and health services

Pierson Montessori Center

Located in Volusia County, Pierson Montessori Center is an early childhood program that enrolls 64 children from birth through five years of age. The Center is located in rural northwest Volusia County to serve its predominantly Mexican farmworker community.

Pierson Montessori Center has been recognized by both the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as a model program. The infant/toddler program is the model for the operating agency (Childcare Resource Network/CCRN) as an Early Head Start Grantee. In December of 2004, the Center received the Sally Provence Award for program excellence presented by Zero to Three.

In an effort to facilitate children's transition from preschool into elementary school, Pierson Montessori Center has focused on two important factors within an overall framework of philosophy and pedagogy: supporting children's home language and culture and interfacing with local schools who will be receiving children from Pierson Montessori Center.

From the time that they enter the program until they leave, children are related to and instructed in their home language. Children are provided daily instruction in their home language, and use of the home language is built into children's experiences at the center. This means that books and stories are read to children in their home language and that home culture is reflected in the activities and materials provided. The philosophy of the Montessori program places great emphasis on the child as an individual and maintains that a child's early years are of crucial importance for optimal development. The highly individualized nature of this approach greatly facilitates children's acquisition of the home language prior to the acquisition of a second language for the development of true bilingualism and bi-literacy.

Connecting with local schools is also part of Pierson Montessori Center's efforts to facilitate children's transition. Staff from the Center have visited local schools and observed kindergarten classrooms. Similarly, school personnel have been invited to tour the Center and observe children in the context of the program. Staff periodically meet with kindergarten teachers and school principals to discuss teaching philosophies and expectations, in hopes that such dialogue will create a greater mutual understanding and appreciation. Prior to movement from preschool into kindergarten, children are provided with an opportunity to visit future classrooms and meet future teachers. The instruction of these children also begins to change, moving from self-directed activities to more teacher-directed activities.

A critical component of this program is linking families to appropriate services. Because many of the families are unaware of available resources, as well as apprehensive about accessing them, staff members make every effort to bring families and community service agencies together.

Outcome

As a result of these programs, young children are entering school better prepared and ready to learn. The majority of children from Pierson Montessori are doing well in their respective schools and grade levels. Test scores and report card indices are generally in the upper percentiles. According to Okeechobee County teachers, children who participate in the Migrant Pre-K Program demonstrate greater readiness for kindergarten than children who did not participate in the program. There is also evidence that student attendance is improving. Since formation of the program, children's attendance in preschool has improved dramatically and remains steady throughout the year.

For more information about these programs, contact:

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Transition Planning

Preparing for Change

Helping children and their families prepare for the move to kindergarten involves a great deal of planning, as well as careful consideration of the specific needs of children and families within the community. In addition to the normal upheaval that occurs when children begin at a new school, many children and their families have specific needs to be met in transition. Just as politicians have "transition teams" to assist them with their new roles, children and families need teams to help them prepare for change. Helping to prepare children and families for change is called *transition planning*.

To ensure smooth transitions and continuity of experience for children and their families, a number of elements must be in place. First, it is important to think of transition as a process that occurs over time, rather than a one-time event (Rous, 2000; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1994). When transition is viewed as a process, this encourages thoughtful planning and collaboration between early childhood programs, elementary school programs, and other community agencies/organizations involved in children's transition into school.

In addition to viewing transition as a process, it is important that transition planning address the unique needs and characteristics of the children and families who live in the community and are served by the school (Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holburn, 1990; Rous, 2000). No two schools or communities are exactly alike; therefore, a well-designed transition plan will take into consideration the resources, strengths, and challenges of the school/community in order to

Transition Team Members

- Parents
- School personnel (e.g., teachers, district staff, administrators)
- Childcare and preschool
- Head Start
- Even Start
- Healthcare personnel
- Social service providers
- Mental health
- Childcare resource/referral agency representatives
- Local government
- Local nonprofit (e.g., United Way)
- Business partners

Administrators

Additionally, administrators can promote successful transition efforts by:

- Initiating and supporting the development of a transition plan.
- Forming a transition team.
- Serving as an active member of a transition team.
- Proactively initiating contact between their program and the local school.
- Allocating resources to support transition efforts.
- Scheduling staff time for planning and working together.
- Providing incentives for involvement.
- Modeling collaboration.
- Maintaining confidentiality for children and families

meet the diverse needs of children and families that live there.

What follows is an overview of a transition planning process developed by SERVE. This process provides schools (and districts) with a means for getting started and developing a plan that is ready for implementation.

Step 1. Round Out the Team

One of the most important pieces of forming the transition team is recruiting members. Discussion of transition issues requires the involvement of all key stakeholders, including families, school personnel, providers of early care/education services, healthcare providers, and social service representatives.

Look for partners who represent a cross-section of the community: parents, principals, teachers, childcare providers, human service providers, etc. Make sure your partners reflect a variety of perspectives, experiences, cultures, and levels of authority. A team's efforts to improve transitions will be enriched by a membership that is broad and diverse.

Step 2. Assess the Situation

In addition to learning about each other, partners need to know how the current system is working. In this case, schools and early childhood programs need to assess current services or activities related to transitions and examine barriers to successful transition activities.

Once the information has been collected, you will be able to see what services or activities exist and where there might be gaps. Use the information gathered to help develop goals and transition activities.

Step 3. Planning the Work

Include in your action plan a list of each goal, the steps or strategies needed to reach that goal, what additional resources are needed, the expected outcomes, how you will evaluate progress, who is responsible, and a timeline for accomplishing the goal.

Step 4. Working the Plan

Throughout the implementation process, ongoing meetings are essential. These meetings allow members to share their ideas about how the process is working and will allow you to make changes or modifications in the process as necessary.

Step 5. Measure Up

The purpose of evaluation is to help partners understand whether their efforts are meeting identified goals. Having a well-planned process for gathering information and reporting results can be a powerful tool for generating additional support in your communities. Teams can use data to show where they are going, why they are going in that direction, and the progress they are making.

Forming an effective transition team is a challenging and complex task that requires time and commitment. Below are more ideas for making the process easier.

Working Together in Transition

Role of Administration or Leadership Team

Administrators are perhaps those most responsible for ensuring a smooth transition for children and families. Their leadership sets policies and procedures, oversees the budget, and outlines the agency priorities. Administrators can also begin the necessary cross-agency communications that are necessary for really effective transition plans.

Communication between early-care-setting staff and elementary school staff needs to be established. The initial conversations and planning often take place at the administrative level. Effective programs utilize many strategies in order to promote good communication. The following ideas are helpful for establishing communication and collaboration between early care settings and the elementary school:

- Plan joint professional development sessions and workshops—invite preschool and kindergarten staff. Many issues are pertinent to both staffs. This can also save money by blending training funds and is an excellent way for the staff of both agencies to get to know one another.
- Schedule regular meetings and sharing sessions between the staffs of preschool and kindergarten. Some childcare centers reported that they hold breakfast meetings or luncheons for kindergarten teachers on elementary teacher workdays in order to encourage school staff to visit their program.
- Learn about the elementary staff and their programs. Each school is unique, and many districts have magnet schools that teach the regular elementary curriculum along with a particular focus—mathematics, science, arts, technology, culture, foreign language, etc. Become familiar with the schools that children will attend, and be able to talk to parents about each school.
- Become familiar with the childcare programs within the community. Learn about the curriculums being offered and meet the teachers and administrators.
- Make it a practice to arrange visits to the schools that children are most likely to attend. Have teachers take pictures of the facility and the staff during their visit. When they return, encourage them to make picture books to put in their reading centers.
- Invite teachers and principals from schools to visit your center. Some centers have reported that they have a "teacher swap day" where the kindergarten teacher and the early childhood teacher swap classrooms for a few hours or a whole day. This is a great way for staff to become familiar with each other's schools and curriculums.
- Find out what information about children the schools would like you to forward to them. For example, are there particular items they want flagged—allergies, other health information, etc.?
- Share school or center newsletters with each other's programs—what activities are going on, what field trips you are taking, or what themes you are exploring.
- Help build a stronger support system by encouraging pairing up between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers. This allows teachers to bounce ideas off each other, plan units of study, and share ideas. For example, pair a more experienced teacher of four-year-olds with a new kindergarten teacher.
- Offer parent meetings where personnel from the elementary school(s) are invited to answer questions from parents.
- Survey parents in order to find out if you are providing them with the information they would like to have available as their children make the move to kindergarten.
- Conduct ongoing evaluations of how communications between the center and the school are working. For example, you might survey former parents and/or teachers from your program and from the school to see what they think about the help provided for children entering kindergarten. Make adjustments to your transition plan based on the feedback you receive.

- Develop a listserv for information about early childhood issues and happenings. The listserv would include any Head Start teachers, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, elementary principals, childcare directors, Head Start directors, early intervention specialists, and others interested in early childhood issues that you might have met through trainings or workshops. Encourage everyone to share details on events, trainings, etc., that others might be interested in participating in.

- Work with others in your community who are interested in early childhood to host a community forum on early childhood education.
- Call the local school systems to inform them that you are willing to help disseminate information about kindergarten registration and public school events.

What Can Childcare Teachers Do to Help?

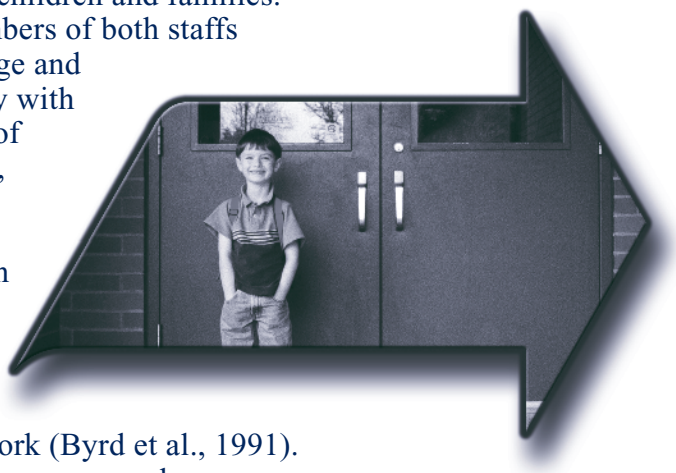
Childcare teachers often have a great deal of contact with families and their children. This provides many opportunities throughout the year to help them as they transition from the 4-year-old program into the elementary school. Here are some ways you can assist children and families:

- Provide children with opportunities to practice behaviors expected at the elementary school—carrying lunch trays, getting on a school bus, walking in a line, etc.
- Be an active participant in transition planning. Get involved in cross-program visits, classroom observations, and/or in-service trainings. Be a member of either the community-level or school-level transition team. If there is not a team, advocate for one being formed.
- Become educated about how a family's culture can affect a child's transition to school. For example, in some cultures, parents feel it is disrespectful to ask questions of teachers. If you suspect that this is affecting your communication with the families, you could put forth extra effort to make sure that parents know that you expect input from the families—you really want to hear their opinions.
- Become informed about where your children will be attending school next year. Ask questions and pass answers along to parents. Create child-specific packets that contain information about the schools and staff for parents. It can include the principal's name, the school secretary's name, phone numbers for the school, school times and calendar, location, health policies, staff photos, etc.
- Invite parents to participate in the transition planning process with you.
- Talk to children and their families about the differences between the current program and the elementary school.
- Read and discuss books about starting school or about changes. You can download an extensive list of books for this purpose through the Terrific Transitions website at *www.terrifictransitions.org/booksfor.pdf*
- Invite a past child from your program to come back and talk about the school he/she attends.
- Have the children dictate a story to you about what they think starting the new school will be like.
- Arrange for class trips to visit a kindergarten classroom while school is in session.

- Encourage children to ask questions and express their concerns about starting at the new school.
- Share with your children some experiences you have had with transitions in your life. Let them know that everyone experiences changes in their lives and that it is okay to feel scared or nervous.
- Create scrapbooks of the schools that the children will be attending. Have pictures of the buildings, the kindergarten staff, the administrators, etc. Place the scrapbook(s) in the reading center so that children have ample opportunities to look through them.
- With parental permission, create and distribute a "Buddy List" of children who will be attending the same school. Encourage parents to arrange playtime with these buddies before the new school year begins.
- Distribute flyers about kindergarten registration. Encourage parents to register and offer to assist them with forms or questions they have.
- Adopt a kindergarten classroom to be pen pals. Have your students periodically dictate and illustrate notes to send to the kindergarten.

Staff Development and Training

Well-trained staffs at both the sending and receiving program are critical to the successful transition of children and families. It is important that members of both staffs have sufficient knowledge and skills to work effectively with each other. Knowledge of specific activities, goals, and personnel will help staff members maintain effective communication and will foster an atmosphere of understanding and trust, collaboration, cooperation, and teamwork (Byrd et al., 1991). To accomplish this, many programs have begun to provide training that is relevant to personnel from all programs (e.g., Head Start, childcare, preschool, and kindergarten). Joint training promotes continuity of services, builds relationships, eliminates an "us-versus-them" mentality, and helps to define the transition activities that will facilitate children's entry into the new program (Bridging Early Services Transition Taskforce, 1995b).



It is important that training be scheduled by program representatives to ensure convenience and accessibility. Programs may also find it helpful to share financial and organizational responsibilities. For example, one program may contribute to the actual cost of a speaker or consultant, while the other program provides the facility, refreshments, or materials so that training is a joint investment (Swan & Morgan, 1993).

Exemplary Programs

Transitions into kindergarten at J.A. Thompson Elementary are made with "Red Carpet Style!" Located at Vero Beach, Florida, J.A. Thompson Elementary is a public school of approximately 500 students. The campus is home to a pre-K–5 program, several exceptional student programs, as well as a Head Start program. Creative teachers, strong administrative support, a desire to ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten, and a family-friendly philosophy have led to the creation, development, and implementation of two innovative transition programs: Red Carpet Roundup and Staggered Start.

Red Carpet Round-Up

Red Carpet Round-Up is an enhanced spring registration day for future kindergarten students and their families. Parents and future students are invited to spend the morning in the kindergarten classrooms with the teachers and students. They experience firsthand thematic, integrated lessons; interact with the current students; and meet the teachers as they demonstrate what they do best…teaching! Pertinent registration information is presented, questions are answered, and fun is had by one and all. The children who participate in this adventure are the Head Start and pre-K students on site, other preschool students who reside in the attendance zone, and younger siblings of any current students along with their families. An undertaking of this nature can only reach its potential with community collaboration and, again, administrative support.

Staggered Start

Staggered Start is a four-day program of staggered participation for the new pre-K and kindergarten students during the first week of school. Students attend only one of the first four days of school in a small group with the entire class in attendance on the fifth day. This arrangement allows the teachers and students to learn about each other and experience school with a low teacher/student ratio. At J. A. Thompson Elementary, the transition from home to school for new students is taken in small, positive steps, making the journey enjoyable for everyone. Everyone starts the school year confident, comfortable, and ready!

J.A. Thompson Elementary School
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Preparing Children for Transition

To ensure a smooth transition between programs, it is important that staff members from both the sending and receiving programs develop activities that will facilitate children's adjustment. Children need to know what is expected of them in the new program and need to be presented with opportunities to practice appropriate behaviors. They should look forward to the experience with a sense of excitement and anticipation, rather than a feeling of fear or dread. Transition activities for young children can include stories, games, role playing, and field trips. The following are tips that staff members from both programs can use to help plan and implement transition activities for children.

Tips for Supporting Children's Transition

If you are sending a child to another program, here are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Develop written policies and procedures that will guide transition efforts.
- Provide opportunities for staff to visit programs that will be receiving children.
- Participate in joint transition planning with the receiving program.
- Offer parent education regarding the receiving program.
- Inform parents that their children will be attending a new program. Invite them to participate in the transition planning with you. (See "Sample Letter to Families" in the Appendix.)
- Talk to children about the differences between the sending and receiving programs.
- Encourage children to talk about any concerns or fears they may have about the new program.
- Provide opportunities for children to visit the new program several times, to meet staff, and to tour the new building.
- Arrange for the children to visit the new program while it is in session.
- Talk with the children about some of the rules that will be used in the new program and give them an opportunity to practice those new behaviors. For example, teach children using developmentally appropriate activities and games to line up and move in lines, if that is a rule in the new program.
- Ask children to write or dictate a story about going to their new school. Allow them to create a puppet show around the story they have written.
- Read stories to children that discuss changes or moves.
- Invite a kindergarten child or older sibling to visit the preschool and talk about the school he/she attends.
- Survey parents to find out what services or information they need to help their children make a successful transition. (See "Sample Family Transition Questionnaire" in Appendix.)

Communication

Some ideas for facilitating communication between sending and receiving programs include:

- Plan joint inservice training and workshops on topics applicable to both settings.
- Plan cross-program visitation.
- Schedule regular meetings and sharing sessions.
- Encourage communication via telephone, e-mail, or conference to discuss a particular child.
- Develop a packet that will follow the child into the new program. Include information such as work samples, likes/dislikes of the child, and strengths/needs seen in the child.
- Celebrate successes together.
- Use peer coaching to support and assist each other.
- Provide social situations where staff from both programs can meet.
- Develop written policies and procedures regarding transition.

If you are receiving a child from another program, here are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Provide opportunities for staff to visit programs that will be sending children.
- Develop written policies and procedures that will guide transition efforts.
- Participate in joint transition planning with the sending program
- Review records for new children entering the program, and identify the current skill levels of these children. Adapt curriculum to these levels and build from there.
- Provide new parents with a schedule of the best times to call or visit the program.
- Invite new parents and children to an open house. Offer a tour of the facility, and make sure that parents meet staff who will be working with children.
- Talk about the new program with the children. Allow them an opportunity to ask questions and discuss any fears or concerns they may have.
- Provide an opportunity for parents and staff to meet, and allow parents to ask questions about their children's program. (See "Information About My Child" in the Appendix.)
- Review new procedures and rules daily during the first few weeks of class, and gradually fade this instruction.
- Use familiar curriculum materials from the sending program to supplement existing curriculum.
- Find out if new children know each other. Assign children to "buddies."
- Send a personal letter or note card to all new students welcoming them into the classroom.

Getting Families Ready for Transition

Families should be active partners with staff in the transition process. Parent involvement in the planning contributes to children's success in school. (See "Learning About Transition" in the Appendix.) The following list offers activities and suggestions that may be helpful to parents as they assist their children during periods of transition. Parents should consider:

- Checking with their child's current program for any documents or information to be sent to the new program. This information will be helpful in providing for their continued growth and development. Be sure that service

providers have obtained written consent before allowing them to share records or other information.

- Keeping a journal of their child's activities, skills, and interests. This may help to provide quick information to those who will be working with him or her.
- Helping their child get excited about the new program. Talk often about the new activities he or she will do there and how much fun it will be.
- Helping their child to feel comfortable and more confident about the move by discussing any concerns or fears he or she might have.
- Visiting and touring their child's new school or program.
- Asking if their child can bring a favorite toy or item from home to comfort him or her during this transition period.
- Sharing any strategies or methods for working with their child.
- Trying to meet all staff members who will be a part of their child's day in the new program (e.g., teacher, teacher's aide, bus driver, specialists).
- Asking their child's new teacher or specialists to observe the child in his or her current program.
- Talking with families of other children who are currently enrolled in the program.
- Finding out what is being offered to new families and making a point to attend those functions (e.g., open house, observation opportunities, support groups).
- Helping their child begin to develop some basic self-help skills such as independent toileting, handwashing, tying shoes, and buttoning and zipping clothes.
- Inquiring about special transportation if their child needs to move from one program to another during the day.

- Becoming involved in school meetings such as PTA/PTO or school advisory council.
- Maintaining ongoing contact with their child's teacher, either through phone calls, notes, or regular meetings, to discuss his or her adjustment and progress.

Other SERVE Products and Publications

The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has a variety of products and publications that are designed to assist schools and communities in the transition improvement processes.

- The *Terrific Transitions* website was developed jointly by the SERVE Center at UNCG and the National Head Start Association. This new tool provides early childhood educators with the latest and best resources for creating and supporting a successful transition into kindergarten. *Terrific Transitions* is intended for nearly everyone involved in the transition process—families, preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators, Head Start staff, and community partners. (*www.terrifictransitions.org*)
- SERVE also has developed a trainer's guide, *Planning for Terrific Transitions: A Guide for Transition-to-School Teams*, to facilitate an eight-hour transition to kindergarten training. This training is designed to help learners improve their transition processes through more effective planning, implementation, and evaluation. By the end of training, participants should be able to:
  - Form a comprehensive transition team.
  - Initiate a needs assessment process.
  - Explain how to conduct a focus group.
  - Initiate a Transition Plan.
  - Explain their role in transition implementation.
  - Plan for the evaluation of their transition goals and strategies.

This training is intended for school transition teams, which may include early childhood education staff (e.g., school-based pre-K staff, Head Start and community-based child-care teachers and directors, home-based care providers, family childcare providers), kindergarten teachers and administrators, transition coordinators, and parents.

The training package includes the trainer's guide, a participant's guide, a CD with all the transparencies needed, and a camera-ready copy of all the handouts necessary for the training. You may request a complimentary copy of the training materials by phone at (800) 352-6001, by fax at (850) 671-6020, or by e-mail at *camwake@serve.org*.

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Appendix

Sample Transition Timeline

(Adapted from Chandler, Fowler, Hadden, Stahurski, 1995)

This sample transition timeline identifies what steps will be followed in transition, who is responsible for each step in the transition process, and when each step will be accomplished. This includes steps that are required by law as part of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and steps that are options to consider when developing a transition plan.

Date	Responsibility	
		Hold first planning meeting to begin the transition process.
		Develop a transition plan (as part of the six-month IFSP review) and provide information concerning child and parent rights and options for services.*
		Identify goals, objectives, and methods to prepare the child and family for transitions.*
		The family provides consent for release of information to public school and other programs or services.*
		Identify necessary evaluations to determine eligibility for special education and related services and conduct evaluations.*
		The transition team discusses eligibility for (continued) special education services and other issues related to transition, and identifies future program options (MDC meeting).*
		Members of the transition team visit program options.
		If the child is eligible to receive special services, the transition team writes the IEP and identifies new program(s) and services.
		The family and child visit the new program, meet with the teacher and related services staff.
		The early intervention staff transfers records and contacts the new program staff to exchange information.*
		The child starts the new program on the eligible or agreed-upon date.*
		The family meets with the new program staff to assess child adjustment.
		Early intervention and the new program staff evaluate the transition process, including child adjustment and family satisfaction.

** Steps that are required as part of the IFSP*

Preparing Your Family for Transition

(Chandler, Fowler, Hadden, Stahurski, 1995)

Transition can be an exciting time, one that can provide new opportunities for your child and family. It also can be a time of great change and adjustment. Your child or family may need to adjust to new teachers and therapists, new children, different schedules and daily routines, new classroom activities, and new options for parent involvement. You may find that both you and your child experience separation anxiety. It may be hard to "let go" of the staff and services in the early intervention program and to learn to trust and communicate with new staff. Your family may need to learn about the public school system, your child's and family's rights, new evaluations and technical terms, and how to advocate for the child when necessary.

All children and families make adjustments during transition. The amount of time required for these adjustments varies across children, families, and programs. It is normal to experience some uncertainty and, with that, some stress during transition. This is true for all families and children who start a new program, regardless of whether the child has special needs. Families who participate in transition planning report reduced stress. Some strategies that families have used to prepare for transition are listed below.

- Plan ahead for transition. Don't wait until the last minute to begin thinking about transition. Give yourself and your family time to make decisions and adjust to the changes that will occur.
- Realize that stress, uncertainty, and separation anxiety are normal emotions. Many, if not all, parents experience these feelings when their child starts preschool or kindergarten.
- Ask questions throughout the transition process. You have a right to obtain information about transition and to be involved in the transition planning.
- Attend transition planning meetings. Share information with the team about your child and your family, your resources, your priorities, and any concerns that you may have.
- Talk with other families who have made the transition from early intervention to preschool programs.
- Talk with members of your family about transition and some of the changes that may occur.
- Learn about your child's and family's rights, how to interact with new program staff, and how to advocate for your child in the new program.
- Visit different programs to help select the program that best meets your child's needs.
- Try to identify aspects of the new program that may be different or difficult for your child and give your child experiences with those aspects before the new program begins. For example, if you think that your child will have trouble working or playing alone, you might give your child an opportunity to play alone for short periods of time each day.

Sample Letter to Families

This letter could be sent to each family whose child will be entering a new school or program next year. It can be personalized to fit your particular situation.

(Date)

(Parent name)

(Address)

Dear (Parent's name):

I am writing to let you know that your child may be enrolled in a new school or program next year. Sometimes when children are moving into a new program or school, the change can be scary and uncomfortable. Now is the time for us to begin thinking about and planning for the change. We want to make sure that when (child's name) begins (his/her) new program that (he/she) feels comfortable and confident about the move.

I would like to meet with you and discuss how we can best help (child's name) make a smooth transition into the new program. You will also have the opportunity to visit the new school/program as well as meet with new teachers and staff members.

Please call me at your convenience to set up a time. I believe that, by working together, we can make this a successful transition for (child's name). If you have any additional questions, ideas, or comments, I can be reached at (phone number) between the hours of ____ and ____.

Sincerely,

(Teacher's name)

Sample Family Transition Questionnaire

(Adapted from Cook & Johnson, 1992)

This brief questionnaire may be given to parents to help them determine and/or clarify their needs and concerns. It also represents one way of learning more about what children and families need in order to make a smooth transition.

Read the following questions carefully and circle your answers. Please add any additional comments or questions that you might have.

I need more information about or assistance in:

1. Preparing my child for a new school or classroom. Yes No

_____

_____

2. Arranging a visit to my child's new school/program. Yes No

_____

_____

3. Identifying the school or program that my child will be attending. Yes No

_____

_____

4. Contacting other parents whose children are currently enrolled in the school/program. Yes No

_____

_____

5. Locating community services that may provide additional resources. Yes No

_____

_____

6. Understanding my legal rights and responsibilities. Yes No

_____

_____

Additional Questions or Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name:

_____

Information About My Child

This form may be given to parents as a way of eliciting information and involving them in the educational planning for their children. Teachers and caregivers can use this in an initial meeting with parents or send it home with the children at the beginning of the year (Adapted from Kentucky Early Childhood Transition Project, May 1995).

These things please me most about my child:	These are things my child does well:	My child really likes:

Right now, I am most concerned about:	I would like my child to learn to do these things:	My child learns best when:

I think these services would help my child:	Our family could also use help with:	I would like to be involved in my child's program in these ways:

Learning About Transition

(Chandler, Fowler, Hadden, Stahurski, 1995)

An important step in promoting a positive transition for your child and family is learning about the transition process. At least three months before your child makes the move from early intervention to preschool, someone from the early intervention program will meet with you to talk about transition and will work with you to develop a transition plan.* Some of the topics that should be discussed during transition meetings are:

- What is involved in transition?
- When will your child make the transition to a new program?
- What decisions need to be made related to the changes in service delivery?
- Who will be involved in making decisions?
- When will the decisions be made?
- What is your family's role in the transition process?
- Is your child eligible for special education and related services?
- What options are available (for example, community preschool, pre-kindergarten, self-contained special education)?
- How can you get information and learn about service options?
- What are the differences between early intervention and preschool programs?
- What are your child's and family's legal rights related to special education services?
- How can you prepare your child and family for transition?

Your family should feel free to ask questions during transition meetings and at any time during the year. Often it is helpful to make a list of questions or topics that you wish to discuss with program staff or the transition team. Space is provided here for you to write questions that you have or issues that you want to talk about.

* Federal law requires that planning for transition begin at least 90 days before a child turns 3; in some states, such as Illinois, state law requires that planning begin even earlier, at least 6 months before the third birthday.

About SERVE

The SERVE Center at UNCG, under the leadership of Dr. Ludwig David van Broekhuizen, is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. The organization's commitment to continuous improvement is manifest in an applied research-to-practice model that drives all of its work. Building on research, professional wisdom, and craft knowledge, SERVE staff members develop tools, processes, and interventions designed to assist practitioners and policymakers with their work. SERVE's ultimate goal is to raise the level of student achievement in the region. Evaluation of the impact of these activities combined with input from stakeholders expands SERVE's knowledge base and informs future research.

This rigorous and practical approach to research and development is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that support educational improvement and increase student achievement. In the last three years, in addition to its basic research and development work with over 170 southeastern schools, SERVE staff provided technical assistance and training to more than 18,000 teachers and administrators across the region.

The SERVE Center is governed by a board of directors that includes the governors, chief state school officers, educators, legislators, and private sector leaders from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

SERVE's operational core is the Regional Educational Laboratory. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast is one of ten Laboratories providing research-based information and services to all 50 states and territories. These Laboratories form a nationwide education knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared and disseminated nationally and regionally to improve student achievement. SERVE's National Leadership Area, Expanded Learning Opportunities, focuses on improving student outcomes through the use of exemplary pre-K and extended-day programs.

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