

GOAL 5

TRANSITIONS

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT FAMILIES THROUGH THE CARE AND EDUCATION TRANSITIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

*When a child transitions to a new early care and education provider or to the formal education system, the child and the family change setting, teacher, and learning culture. These transitions are challenging for parents and families, and often for providers and teachers, to **navigate**. Therefore, Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should support families as they make transitions with their children to new learning environments.*

We talk a lot about transitions and try to support parents in the many transitions families have: Kindergarten, daily routines, into and out of different early care and education programs. What is meant by transitions and why can this be so challenging? Transition means change. Change can be difficult for many people, especially young children. For example, in a **structured environment**, young children are expected to stop playing and move easily into the next activity. They may be expected to transition into new programs or different activities that may be unknown to them because there are different rules; therefore, they do not know what to expect. This can be difficult for children and sometimes for their parents as well.



DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS

Changes in educational providers, programs, situations, or age/grade levels.



PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

To ensure transition strategies are in place to support all families and all types of transitions, effective leadership is essential. Program leadership can create and promote policies and procedures to ensure smooth transitions.

For example, early childhood programs that are accredited through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are required to develop transition plans for children entering and/or moving to a new group of children or program that communicates children's individual strengths and needs. Specifically, programs need to show the following:

- A written plan/policy for drop off and pick up.
- A system of noting when children and youth arrive, when they leave, and with whom they leave.
- Written plans/activities with local schools to connect school and child care staff.
- Evidence that staff and families are engaged in practices that encourage children's smooth transitions when entering a program and throughout the program.

For more information on MSDE Accreditation, please see the Resource Section.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Families have many different options available within the child care community. Child care providers should be aware of the range of services available in their area, including early intervention services and public pre-k, and share these resources with families as needed. This helps support families as they learn to navigate these educational systems and advocate for their children. The following is a chart providing strategies and resources to help programs support parents during transitions.



Type of Transition	Strategy/Resource
<p>Daily Routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classroom transitions ▪ Within program transitions 	<p>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions with daily routines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Maryland Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) website, created by the University of Maryland, provides a vast amount of information and specific strategies for transitions, including printable visual aids and social stories. ▪ Training for staff and parents is also available through this website. ▪ Your local Child Care Resource Center also provides training and resources for transitions. <p>For more information on the University of Maryland’s SEFEL and Local Child Care Resource Centers, see the Resource Section.</p>
<p>Between Programs</p>	<p>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions between programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with local school and child care programs with dually enrolled children and set up transition plans for teachers, child and family. ▪ Communicate on a regular basis about the progress and/or concerns of dually enrolled children.
<p>Special Education Services</p>	<p>Provide staff and parents information regarding Early Intervention and Special Education services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with the Local Infants and Toddlers Program (LITP) and Local School System Child Find Office to learn about programs and services for children with disabilities, ages birth to kindergarten, and their families. ▪ At the request of the family, participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to foster positive communication between programs, early intervention providers and preschool special educators. ▪ Communicate regularly with early intervention providers and preschool special educators to contribute information about strategies that have worked in your program for the child and to add to information shared by the parents. <p>For more information on early intervention and preschool special education services, see the Resource Section.</p>
<p>Kindergarten and School Readiness</p>	<p>Provide staff with training and information on Kindergarten Transitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be aware of and refer parents to Kindergarten workshops in the community. ▪ Partner with local schools and have Kindergarten teachers present at a parent meeting about the Kindergarten transition. ▪ Plan a field trip to the local school’s Kindergarten classroom. ▪ Meet with the local school or the local early childhood advisory council meeting to discuss transitions and how to work together to plan for them. <p>For more information on Local Early Childhood Councils, see the Resource Section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The Second Step Curriculum</i> provides information and resources to teach young children the self-regulation and social emotional skills they need to be successful in school. ▪ The <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> define the key aspects of development and learning that are the foundation for a child’s school and life-long success. These Standards act as a guide for educational and programmatic decisions by child care providers and early childhood educators. For more information on <i>Second Step</i> and the <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> see the Resource Section.



SOCIAL STORIES

A Social Story can be a written or visual story that describes various social situations, interactions, behaviors, skills or concepts that children may be developing.¹ Social Stories help to:²

- Teach students routines, expectations, and behavioral standards in an alternative way
- Reinforce correct behavior
- Present information in a story format
- Provide visual examples of behavior expectations
- Provide a more personalized and tailored behavioral intervention
- Involve students in the learning process
- Individualize learning for all children with different abilities

IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Programs that have established policies and procedures regarding transitions purposefully partner with families in their transition planning. Staff helps families identify the different types of transitions children and families may experience, what families can expect during transitions, and how to plan for them. Common transitions in early childhood programs that families may experience are:

- Moving into different classrooms in child care program
- Changes in a caregiver or a teacher in a child care program
- Transitioning from home to a child care setting or from a child care setting to home
- Transitioning from one child care program to another
- Entering Kindergarten or a structured school environment
- Transitions from Infants and Toddlers Program to Preschool Special Education

To ensure smooth transitions, many programs collaborate with families to develop specific transition plans. These plans make children's transitions more successful by bringing together the families and staff who support the child. These plans allow for a gradual timeline allowing the child to acclimate or adjust to new staff, a new environment, and other children.



TRANSITION PLAN

A transition plan should:

- Identify the type of transition (between home and school, between classrooms, transition to Kindergarten, etc.)
- Identify who is involved in the transition (families, staff members, children)
- Develop a timeline for the transition
- Identify supports and strategies for children and parents
- Anticipate possible behaviors and concerns
- Identify appropriate responses to behaviors

Head Start provides great resources for planning transitions in programs, with families and across agencies within the community. For more information see the Resources Section.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When we are working with families we may find that they are struggling with specific transitions. They might seem overwhelmed and not know where to begin. We want to make them feel as prepared as they can be when they are navigating educational services or entering new programs.

- When transitioning to new programs or different services, families often need help identifying and understanding quality criteria in early childhood settings. One simple way to help families with this is by referring families to Maryland EXCELS and showing them how to use this resource. This helps parents understand the programs in their area, if the services offered are right for their family, and if they are a high quality program. For more information on MD EXCELS, see the Resource Section.
- Families may have questions about early intervention or preschool special education services for their child. Providers can connect families with their local Family Support Services Coordinator, a parent of a child with disabilities who has direct experience with their child receiving services and who is knowledgeable of their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). For a directory listing of local Family Support Services Coordinators, as well as information about parental rights under the IDEA, please see the Resource Section.
- Navigating the early intervention and preschool special education systems can at times feel challenging and overwhelming to families. You can support families by offering to attend an IFSP or IEP team meeting with them, as both a "second set of ears" and to contribute important information you have about how the child functions in your program. IFSP and IEP team meetings can sometimes feel intimidating, so here are a few tips you can share with parents to make them feel more comfortable and prepared.



TIPS FOR IFSP AND IEP MEETINGS

- Share a list of common acronyms and suggest that they ask the IFSP or IEP team to clarify any unfamiliar term.

Suggest that parents create their own agenda with their purpose for the meeting along with a list of questions they may have before they go to the meeting. Providers can offer to help parents with this task.

COMPLETE THIS BEFORE THE MEETING - Bring it to the meeting to share

The Good News: (Something that is going right. Something your child has accomplished this year. Someone that is working well with your child. A strategy that has been successful, etc....)

Our frustrations: (Something that you would like changed. A problem that has arisen or that has been not been addressed. A strategy or tactic that has not been tried or implemented. Something that is not being done that is already in the IEP, etc....)

Our child's frustrations: (Something your child is challenged by or struggles with. A subject that is particularly difficult. A scheduling concern that your child has trouble with, etc....)

What our child needs: (The solution to your frustrations and your child's frustrations. A strategy, implementation, proposed schedule change, a creative solution that has not been tried, etc....)

(Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy 2012)

Example of at the meeting worksheet³

- Teachers can work with parents on determining and providing back up documentation and strategies to support child strengths and weaknesses.

FAMILY VOICE

The teacher at my son's school spoke to me regarding my son's listening skills and asked if I had his hearing checked. I had it checked and his hearing was fine, however, after the evaluation, we found out that he had speech concerns. He is now enrolled in a Prekindergarten program that picks him up and brings him back to the center seamlessly.

- Parent, Raspberry Children's Center, Charles County, MD

FAMILY VOICE

Having a child on the autism spectrum brings many new challenges to both the child and the parents, as everyone is introduced to the rigors of attending the school system at an earlier age than the child's peers. While the parents understand the benefits of early education and support, it does not change the fact that it can be intimidating knowing your child needs to be on a school bus on his way to an Intensive Structured Learning Environment (ISLE) classroom, while other kids his age might be laying down for nap time.

During Pre-Kindergarten years, my child attended half-day sessions in an ISLE classroom (along with a small number of other special needs children) and the other half at Kid's Campus Early Learning Center with typical aged peers. I felt this was a "best of both worlds" scenario, as my son was getting the early education he needed with the school system and he got to "be just a regular kid" at day care...all in the same day.

We made an extra effort to introduce the ISLE classroom teachers to the day care teachers, where they could discuss common goals for my child. This collaboration and information sharing proved to be greatly beneficial to my child's development. This included social, educational and building personal confidence in him. Day care staff were invited and happily attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to listen to educational goals for my child and made the extra effort to incorporate those goals into daily activities.

The IEP school staff was rather surprised when we invited day care representatives to participate in the meetings, but the joint efforts between teachers of the ISLE classroom and day care have paid immeasurable positive dividends in development for my son. Daily lesson plans and exercises from the ISLE classroom were shared, repeated and reinforced at day care during the pre-Kindergarten years. Those extra joint efforts from both early learning environments were absolutely crucial to my son's success.

After the transition to Kindergarten, my son began attending full school days and only attends after care hours at the day care, but the social development that was encouraged in his younger years with the typical peers is clearly evident now. Classmates include him in games, encourage his participation and make sure he gets a turn with activities they do. "Inclusion" is what any parent wants for their child, but for a parent of a child with special needs... it's a dream come true.

- Parent, Kids Campus Early Learning Center, Calvert County, MD

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Often times, early childhood programs and services work with some of the same children and families. Therefore, it makes sense to work together and establish community partnerships to truly be effective when supporting effective transitions. Here are some ways that providers can work together in the community to support families.

- Attend and participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interests of families.
- Help coordinate services for children and families as they transition from one early childhood setting to another, private or public, child care or elementary school.
- Work together with **the Local** Infants and Toddlers Program and **Local School System Child Find Office** to share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities, **including any special health care needs**. Remember *Memorandums of Understanding*, known as MOUs, are a good practice. Form a written partnership agreement as to how programs in the community will work together to support transitions for families and children.

Your local Early Childhood Advisory Council is a great place to meet representatives from all child and family serving agencies. By participating in these meetings, you can learn information about community partners such as **preschool** special education and early intervention services, health services, Judy Centers, or Child Care Resource and Referral Centers. You can also network with organizations and programs to form partnerships to better support your families with transitions. For more information on Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, see the Resource Section.

By working with your community partners and communicating between programs, you can find ways to ensure smooth transitions for children and families.



TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Preparing families is essential as children transition from early childhood programs to a formal school setting and throughout their school age years to support students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. As we already know, fostering a relationship between home and school helps to build relationships with families that support their well-being, sustain strong parent-child relationships, and provide opportunities for ongoing learning and development.

When families are equal partners, students have better attendance, better academic performance, and a more successful pathway into a formal classroom setting. Early childhood programs must be intentional and culturally responsive in their efforts to engage all families, just as schools must be as equally intentional to reach out to early childhood programs to support families in this process.

Children and families may experience the following when transitioning into kindergarten:

- Being the youngest students in a large elementary school
- Riding the bus or walking to school for the first time
- Meeting teachers and peers
- Being responsible for completing homework
- Adjusting to a longer day
- Eating in the cafeteria
- Remembering to bring multiple items to school

To help alleviate the stress of the transition to kindergarten, teachers and providers can:

- Identify the elementary schools in your area for your parents
- Find out about any transition activities at the school or at the library and refer parents
- Bring school system representatives to your program to talk about the transition to kindergarten
- Ask children and families to share their questions and concerns about the transition to kindergarten
- Let children practice being a kindergartener by providing school materials in the dramatic play area
- Organize a field trip to the local school to let children see a kindergarten classroom and the cafeteria

ARTICULATION

Articulation means providing information between early childhood programs. For example, some preschool programs fill out articulation forms for the new Kindergarten teachers. It gives a quick snapshot of the children’s abilities as they enter Kindergarten, helping to prepare the teacher with a little information about the new student.

The following is an articulation form from Howard County that was developed through a collaboration with early care and family providers as well as the local school system.⁴

Learning Progress Form

Child's Name: Last _____ First _____ Date of Birth: _____
 Elementary School* where child will attend Kindergarten (Howard County only): _____
 *Elementary school can be found using school locator at https://hcps2.securesites.net/SchoolLocator/index.jsp
 Child with IEP Child with PSP
 Parent/Guardian #1 Name: Last _____ First _____
 Parent/Guardian #2 Name: Last _____ First _____
 Language(s) Spoken at Home: _____
 Completed by: (Your Name): _____ Date: ____/____/____
 Program Name: _____ Program Phone Number: (____) _____-_____
 Program Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Type of Program: Head Start Child Care Center Family Child Care Private Nursery School Public PreKindergarten
 Parental Consent Form* Signed to release this information? Yes No
 *(File Consent Form with sending program; do not send to receiving school.)
 Learning Styles (please check all that apply):
 Prefers to play: alone with a friend in small groups Is capable of working: independently in a group
 Comments: _____
 The purpose of this form is to articulate the child's progress in preschool and readiness for kindergarten.
 - Identify the child's overall progress within each domain as Satisfactory or Needs Support.
 - Check specific items where the child is Satisfactory.
 - Write a comment for areas that you would like to share additional information.
 - Return completed forms for children attending an HCPSS kindergarten to Early Childhood Programs, Howard County Public School System, 10910 Clankville Pike, Ellicott City, MD 21142.
 Detailed information about the learning domains can be found in Supporting Every Young Learner: Maryland's Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy Birth to Age 8 (http://tinyurl.com/indpedagogy).
 Learning Domain | Progress | Comments
 Social Foundations: The Social Foundations domain focuses on children's personal and social development, including their engagement in learning and interactions with others. It includes:
 Awareness and expression of emotion
 Relationships with adults
 Cooperation with peers
 Listening to others
 Conflict resolution
 Self control
 Persistence
 Working memory
 Problem solving
 Initiative
 Guides/Pedagogy pp. 22, 82-84, Appendix 130-166
 *Items are assessed in the Early Learning Assessment
 HCPSS 5/16



TEACHING AND LEARNING

We all understand how having transition strategies help in the classroom, but how does this impact teaching and learning? When parents have prepared their children for their transitions, whether it is within their daily routine or moving between programs, children will come to school more confident and ready to learn. We can continue this support in the classroom by:

- Giving families opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child’s strengths and challenges relevant to their transitions to and from the program, their daily routine, which can include information about other early care and education settings. This gives the provider an opportunity to give the parent needed information and resources and also helps the parent problem solve if needed.
- Helping parents understand how they can help prepare their child for school. Share information with families about activities and everyday interactions with children that promote school readiness as outlined by the Maryland Early Learning Standards. For more information on Maryland Early Learning Standards, see the Resource Section.
- Providing families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

can help their child memorize it. We also create labels for the child to wear on their shirt with their bus number for the first week of school.

Transitions also occur for students with special needs who may be transitioning to public school for additional supports prior to kindergarten or children that are already in school and attend our before and after care program. It is very important for child care providers, families, and the child’s teacher to communicate about the needs of the child. We often ask our families to inform us of any IEP meetings so that we may also attend and learn what supports the child is receiving at the school level that we may also be able to duplicate in our program. We have found this communication to be extremely beneficial for the child as it helps establish continuity in routines, forms of communication, and strategies or supports to meet their needs. Even though the child may be served in different settings if all the partners are working to help the child (parents, child care teachers, school teachers, doctors or therapists), we see significant developmental gains.

The positive effects we see from these practices include children who are able to transition more easily into a new routine and may even be excited about the change, parents who are at ease knowing the expectations of what comes next, and educators and doctors who are able to help a child make developmental gains by having insights into development in different settings.

- Kid’s Campus Early Learning Center, Calvert County, MD

EDUCATOR VOICE

At the George Washington Carver Judy Center, we provide two different transition events for families. The first transition event involves Prekindergarten 3, Prekindergarten 4, Kindergarten and First Grade. The event is planned in the form of a carnival and all of the children and their families are invited into their rising grade. They are able to explore the classroom and have one-on-one conversations with the teacher to address any concerns or questions they may have. This results in less stress for the parents for the upcoming transition. Families feel that many of their questions have been answered and leave feeling more secure for the coming school year. The families also receive a summer packet with activities to enhance learning over the summer. Local child care programs are also invited to this event.

The second transition event is Kindergarten Transition Night. The students and families are able to come to the school and visit the Kindergarten and first grade teachers. The teachers have materials available for the students to explore and the parents can ask questions regarding their child’s education and upcoming transition.

- Judy Center, St. Mary’s County

EDUCATOR VOICE

Kid’s Campus Early Learning Center supports transitions for children by easing both children and parents into new routines and expectations and by collaborating with the local school system in support of the child.

Strategies used to make this happen include allowing the child to spend time in the new classroom prior to the permanent move. This allows children some time to get to know the teachers in the next room, meet new friends or reacquaint with old ones, and ease into a new environment. It allows the teacher to gain a little more insight into the child’s development or to plan instruction. We provide the parents a transition document that tells them what to expect in the next room. While some rooms have little differences in routines and expectations, others can be quite different. For example, we teach children to drink from a small cup rather than a sippy cup in our two year old room and that is information the parent should know and anticipate prior to the move.

As children move on to kindergarten, we partner with the local school system and take children to a kindergarten visitation day. In advance of the visit, we read books to the children about going to public school, riding the school bus, making new friends, and meeting new teachers. Our goal is to get them excited about their new adventure. We provide kindergarten registration and kindergarten orientation dates to parents in an effort to help remind busy parents about important timelines. This, in turn, helps the school to effectively staff kindergarten rooms rather than hire a teacher at the last minute. On the first day of school, we invite our parents to come and take pictures and see their child off as they ride the school bus to kindergarten. In advance of the first day, we notify parents of the bus number so that they

REFLECTION



Children and families go through transitions every day and they can be challenging. This is an opportunity for us to engage families by asking about and responding to their needs, collaborating with teaching and program staff as well as other community programs, and building relationships between all members of a child’s educational support system – all to ensure a child’s success!

