Designing a Pre-K/K Transition Program

Entering pre-K and kindergarten is a [major time of transition](#) for children. Ensuring every child is provided with the best possible start to their education is one of the most important goals of early childhood education.

Variables on Pre-K and Kindergarten Enrollment
Young children should be ready to learn when starting school and school systems and community networks should assist in that transition process. However, not all children walk into pre-K and kindergarten equally prepared. Children from different demographic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds will enter pre-K and kindergarten behind their peers.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a large cohort of children that may be experiencing in-person learning for the first time this upcoming school year. Due to facility closures or family risk factors, many young children that would have typically been enrolled in high-quality child care, Head Start, or pre-K programs stayed home this year. Statewide pre-K enrollment in October 2020 was 17% lower than in October 2019. These rates are even higher for Louisiana's Black students (25% reduction in pre-K enrollment) and urban students (18% reduction). While it is difficult to measure the impact of this, communities and school systems should anticipate needing to provide additional support to children entering school this fall. Community networks and school systems should review [trends in enrollment](#) and [LEA- and subgroup-specific data](#) from fall 2020 to best prepare students for the 2021-2022 school year.

Transition Programs
Children who participate in structured high-quality transition processes show improvement in academic achievement, demonstrate more social and emotional competencies, show less behavior disruptions, and develop skills quicker (Powell, et al. 2010 and Ahtola, et al. 2011). Assuring children have access to the best available resources prior to entering pre-K and kindergarten supports children and their families while focusing on maximizing children's holistic development. Communities who understand that school transition is not a 'one size fits all' process, value the process in supporting school readiness for all children. These communities provide a variety of transition activities and/or programs to increase opportunities for all children and families. Communities, families, school systems, and educators can use the following to determine the best approach for designing a transition program.

Sample Programs:
- [Bright from the Start Summer Transition Programs](#) operate during June and July. Both programs, Rising Pre-K and Rising Kindergarten, offer high-quality instruction with a focus on language, literacy and math and are designed to reduce the achievement gap.
- [Early Kindergarten Transition Program](#) is a school-based, family-oriented summer program designed to increase family engagement in school, and improve children's attendance and success in school. Children attend school every morning for three weeks in summer. Parents or caregivers gather twice a week to meet school staff and discuss ways to support their child's learning. Interpreters are hired. Meals are provided. Child Care is offered during parent meeting times.
- [The Kindergarten Readiness Academy](#) is designed to provide students entering kindergarten with continued quality programming prior to kindergarten. Participation in this program focuses on essential kindergarten readiness skills aligned to curriculum.

Virtual Options:
If an in-person transition program is not an option, children and families may benefit from virtual transition activities over the summer. School systems and educators can apply strategies to familiarize children and families with the routines and expectations of pre-K and kindergarten. School systems can utilize ESSER I, ESSER II or ESSER III funds for the following virtual transition activities:

- Distribute transition "toolkits" to incoming pre-K and kindergarten families that might include books, educational games or other supplies;
- Provide logins to families for app-based programs aligned to the tier 1 curriculum;
- Connect with incoming learners allowing children to practice raising their hand or waiting to be called on during a Zoom call. Teachers could also "walk children through a day" at school, using photos or videos to show them areas of the classroom, such as where to hang their backpack, or the routine for picking up lunch.

Funding the Transition Summer Programs
School systems can utilize ESSER I, ESSER II, and/or ESSER III for the following transition activities

Personnel
- Salary, stipends, and benefits for lead teacher and assistant teacher
- Salary, stipends, and benefits for transition/family engagement coordinator

Transition Program
- Transition summer program development costs (e.g., materials, personnel compensation, purchase digital or curriculum program, etc.)
- Transition summer program support (e.g., books, digital subscription(s), promotional costs, recruitment/registration, etc.)
- App-based programs aligned to tier 1 curriculum (e.g., Ready Rosie)
- Materials and supplies
- Operating expenses including COVID-19 related supplies

Family Engagement Expenditures
- Personnel compensation for ongoing family support and network sponsored family events
- Operating expense to coordinate family engagement events, activities and supplies
- Incentives for children and family participation (e.g., books, take-and-make family bags)
- Transportation assistance for families using school system bus or program provider vans (e.g., gas and mileage)