Promoting Transitions from Early Care and Education to Kindergarten

The transition from Pre-K to kindergarten is a significant and sometimes overwhelming process for both children and parents. The traditional public school setting differs significantly from early learning and home environments. Smooth transitions require connections between parents and schools and between Pre-K and kindergarten teachers and classrooms.

Transitional practices that support young children and families as they begin their K-12 education can range from offering visits to kindergarten classrooms to facilitating communication between child care providers and kindergarten teachers to aligning school readiness standards and desired outcomes between early education systems and the K-12 system. It is important that communities provide resources to support children, families and educators in the transition to kindergarten.

City leaders and elected officials are well positioned to promote a variety of transitional practices to ensure that more children enter school ready to succeed when they enter school.

WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Support transition planning among all early learning stakeholders, including elementary school and Pre-K staff, families and social service and family support agencies.** Elected officials can use their influence and convening power to bring together diverse stakeholders to plan aligned, complementary transition activities across the various systems that serve children and families. In Hartford, Conn., the Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children has convened a Transition to Kindergarten Taskforce to implement citywide practices that ensure that children and families are supported as they register for kindergarten and begin attending public school.

  The Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children has also convened numerous forums throughout the city bringing together parents, school administrators, kindergarten teachers and early care and education providers to address a variety of issues related to promoting alignment between instructional practices and curricula as children move from child care to kindergarten.

- **Facilitate communication and collaboration between early learning providers and elementary schools.** Often early care and education providers in a community are not well connected to local elementary schools and their staff. City leaders can bring these two fields together in a variety of ways to facilitate collaboration and communication among them.

  In Hartford, Conn., the city has developed a uniform report card that is shared between Pre-K providers and kindergarten teachers that provides child-specific information on incoming kindergartners. In coordination with schools, other communities have sponsored events with both Pre-K and kindergarten teachers after students have been assigned kindergarten classrooms.
Teachers share information about what the students have learned in Pre-K, what they will be expected to learn in kindergarten, and pertinent information about individual students.

- Provide supports to parents and caregivers to ensure that their children are school-ready.

City leaders can build partnerships and direct resources toward policy and programming that supports parents and caregivers in helping their children develop the skills they need to enter kindergarten. Some communities have developed an informal curriculum that parents can use to structure activities in the year prior to school entry to help students enter school ready to succeed. Other communities have developed programs during the summer preceding kindergarten for children who have not experienced formal, center-based education.

In Saint Paul, Minn., the Blast Off to Kindergarten program offers monthly activities that support language and cognitive development in the year prior to school entry, along with a backpack of school supplies and preview activities (such as a bus ride and classroom experience) meant to ease the transition into school.

CITIES IN ACTION

**Pittsburgh, Pa.**

Pittsburg has implemented a program called Ready Freddy, which tripled enrollment in the first year of implementation. There are many resources on their website, including links to other cities modeling their work. They have branded their program with a mascot - a frog - and use him in all marketing and communications about transition to kindergarten. The core elements of the Ready Freddy program are:

- **Transition Teams:** These teams identify incoming kindergarteners in the community, register children for kindergarten and plan activities that bring children, parents and teachers together. Teams may be made up of teachers, early education professionals, principals, community agencies and parents.
- **Kindergarten Clubs:** A six-session curriculum for families held in the summer to provide familiarity with school, especially targeted to children who have not attended Pre-K.
- **Parent Engagement**
- **Attendance**
- **Welcoming Schools**

**Durham, N.C.**

Durham has based their Transition to Kindergarten program on the Ready Freddy program. They created Ready Eddy, a baby bull, for their mascot. They use Ready Eddy in all outreach efforts, materials and events. As a part of their outreach, they host at least four events:

- Popsicles in the Park (or other type of “meet and greet”) in early spring.
- Kindergarten Registration Event in mid-late spring.
- Kindergarten Parent Night in the spring
- Kindergarten Kick-Off Event on the first day of school in the fall.

**Boston, Mass.**

Countdown to Kindergarten provides information and support to parents and children. It is a yearlong process that begins in October of the year before the child enters kindergarten. The first step is visiting and choosing schools. Parents are supported with a checklist that helps them know what questions to ask as they look at schools. The next step is registration. Parents are supported with a registration checklist of all the documents they will need to register. After families receive their school assignments, they visit their new school at a welcome session to meet staff and other families.
In the months before school starts they can pick up a free Kindergarten Readiness Kit and participate in events for kindergarteners and their families, including neighborhood days and a citywide celebration. Parents are supported with ideas for how to help their children get ready. Outreach is done in several ways, including Play to Learn Playgroups held in schools, early learning centers and community centers around the city.

**Longmont, Colo.**
Longmont is in the early stages of creating a transition to kindergarten program. To develop their program, the City of Longmont’s early childhood agency, Bright EYES, held a workshop on transitions to kindergarten with Pre-K teachers and school district administrators. Bright EYES created a packet of 23 elements of transition to kindergarten culled from similar programs in other cities. In small groups, participants pursued all the options and discussed which top three items they thought should be included in a Longmont Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit. As a large group they narrowed the 23 options down to 13 tools that will be included in Longmont’s toolkit. Following the meeting, a task force was assigned to fully develop the toolkit to help children, parents, and Pre-K and kindergarten teachers prepare for transition. The task force will include parents, Pre-K providers and administrators and kindergarten teachers.