

Supporting Children and Families in the Transition to Kindergarten: Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten



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- Today's Presenters:
 - Mary Dallas Allen, M.S.W.
 - Research & Training Center on Family Support & Children's Mental Health, Portland State University, Graduate School of Social Work
 - Jessica Abel
 - Portland State University, Graduate School of Social Work



The Transition to Kindergarten (T2K) Research Team

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Overview of Presentation

- Summary of T2K Research Project
- Review transition to kindergarten best practices
- Discuss process for implementing transition intervention





Goals:

Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten Project (T2K)

- Develop organizational capacity to promote children's social-emotional development and address mental health needs.
- Design and evaluate an intervention to improve transition from Head Start to Kindergarten, with a focus on children with challenging behaviors.
- Review the evidence base for mental health consultation.





Transforming Transitions: Project Description

Two-phase project for supporting children's school readiness by focusing on children's mental health & successful transition to school

- Phase 1: Capacity Building
- Phase 2: Enhanced Transition Supports





Transition to Kindergarten Partners

- 2 Head Start Programs located in the Pacific Northwest
- Local School Districts, including elementary school principals and kindergarten teachers
- Educational Service Districts
- Local Advisory Board



Phase 1: Supporting the Organization

- Training for the Head Start staff during the first year of the intervention
- Collaboration with the Head Start management team for contracting, strategic planning, etc.
- Personal and program plans for strengthening mental health services
- Follow up and support in the following year

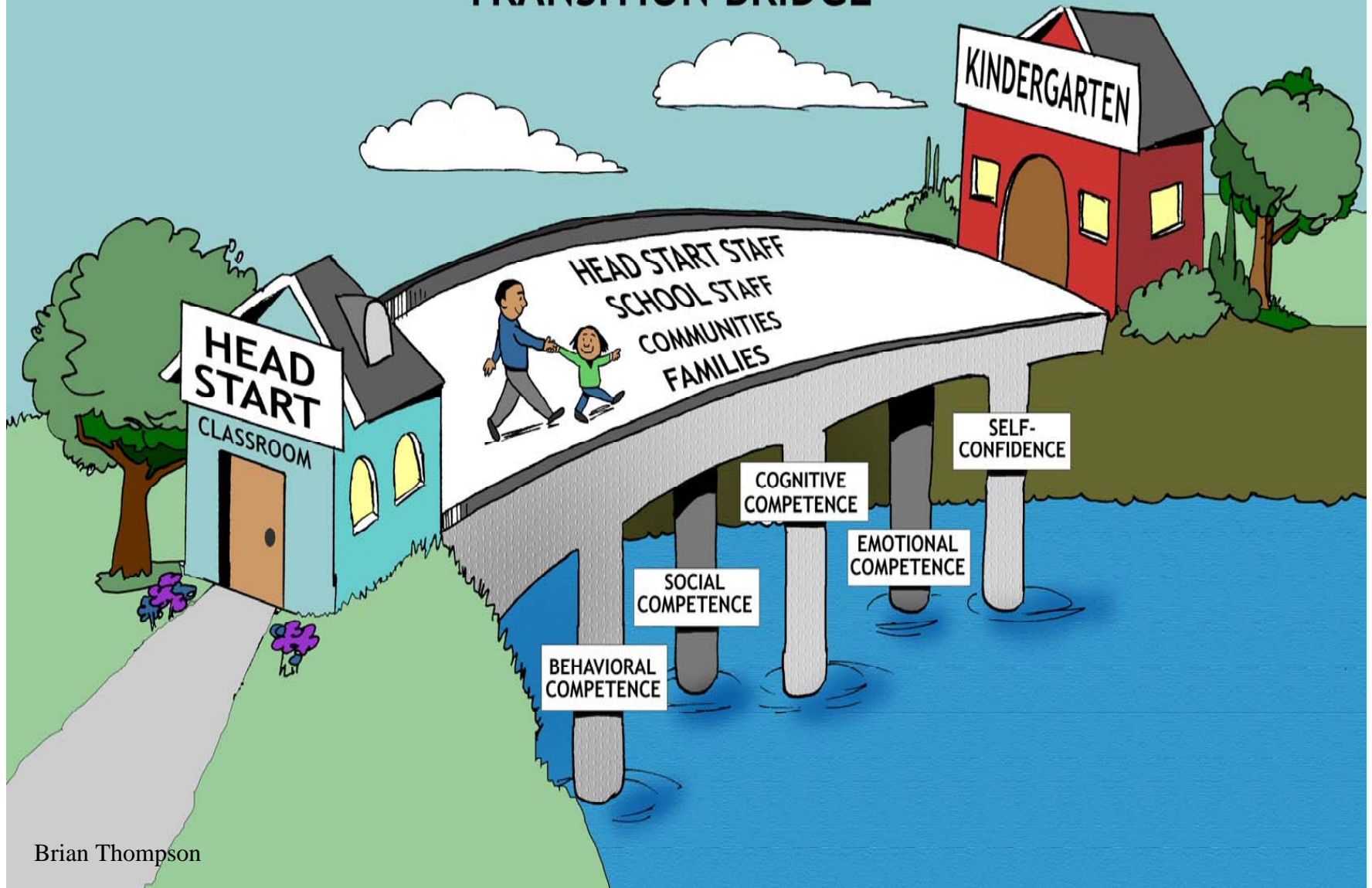


Phase 2: Enhanced Transition Supports for Head Start

- Year 1: Identify current transition practices and areas of strengths and challenges
 - Gather information from Head Start staff and parents
 - Follow selected children from Head Start into kindergarten
- Year 2: Implement enhanced transition supports for children with challenging behavior
 - Children & families receive enhanced transition supports developed based on information from Year 1
 - Follow children & families from Head Start to kindergarten



TRANSITION BRIDGE



Brian Thompson



Phase II: Implementation

Enhanced Transition Supports

- Based on transition to kindergarten best practices
- Informed by Head Start parent, Head Start staff, and kindergarten teacher interviews
- Culturally sensitive and family friendly





Enhanced Transition Supports: Based on best practices

- Build relationships as resources
- Promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten
- Identify and incorporate family strengths
- Address individual needs
- Develop collaborative relationships

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)





Enhanced Transition Supports: Informed by Head Start parent interviews

- Parents need basic information about kindergarten
- Parents would like for activities to be scheduled at more flexible times
- Parents like it when a kindergarten teacher visits their child at Head Start





Enhanced Transition Supports: Informed by Head Start staff interviews

- Head Start staff need a clear understanding of the transition roles and responsibilities within their program
- Head Start staff prepare information for the kindergarten teachers, but it does not always reach the kindergarten
- Many Head Start teachers invite kindergarten teachers to visit Head Start
- Many Head Start teachers attend Kindergarten Roundup with parents



Enhanced Transition Supports: Informed by kindergarten teacher interviews

- Many kindergarten teachers never receive information from Head Start, or they receive it very late in the year
- Kindergarten teachers would like to meet Head Start teachers
- Kindergarten teachers would like to meet parents before the start of school
- Kindergarten teachers would like more information about children before the beginning of the year





Enhanced Transition Supports: Strategies to address cultural diversity

- **Verbal & Non-verbal communication strategies to be inclusive of the many multi-lingual staff & families**
- **Increase awareness of impact of researchers' own culture (to reduce stereotypes & value judgments)**



Focus of Enhanced Transition Supports Intervention:

- Assist Head Start program with incorporating transition best practices into existing transition practices
- Support staff in developing individual transition teams for each family
- Encourage Head Start program to develop working relationships with local school districts



Intervention:
Transforming Transitions to
Kindergarten
using Enhanced Transition Supports



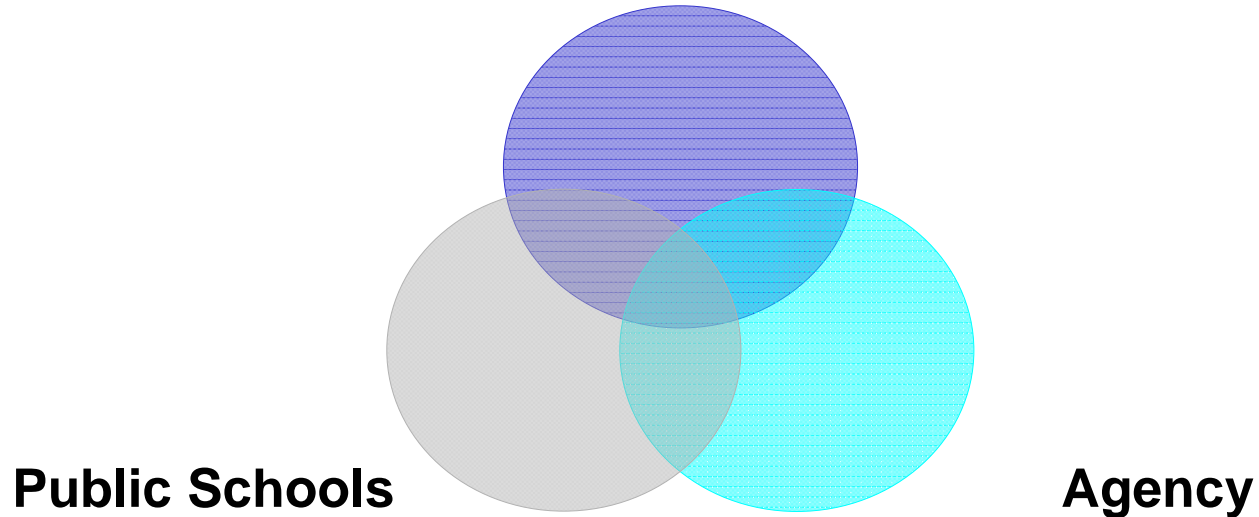
Role of the Transition Facilitator

- Orient teachers and staff to the project and their roles
- Facilitate parent orientation to the project
- Coordinate and monitor the development of individual transition plans for each child
- Facilitate communication between families and elementary schools
- Work with staff, parents, and local schools to develop inter-agency agreements



Levels of Intervention

Individual Child and Family Network



The Nitty-Gritty: Components of Intervention

- Workgroup
- Teachers' referrals
- Teacher training
- Parent workshops
- Individual Plans
- Involving school districts



Transitions Workgroup

- Began with a Transitions Workgroup
 - Key Head Start teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and T2K project representatives developed ideas and timeline



Teacher Referrals

- Teachers referred children for project who:
 - Were not receiving other special supports (such as ESD services)
 - Had social/emotional concerns
 - Had life circumstances that may put them at risk of a less smooth transition to kindergarten





Challenges for Transitioning to Kindergarten

- Challenges specific to these children at risk in transition to kindergarten:
 - Kindergarten classrooms are larger
 - Larger adult-to-student ratio
 - Different philosophy about nurturing classroom/attention to individual issues
 - Parents must be proactive in public school in a different way than at Head Start





Head Start Teacher Training

- Teacher training focused on:
 - Developing an individual plan for each selected child
 - Thinking about ways to incorporate transition activities into class throughout school year
 - Training ongoing throughout the school year, with just one or two group trainings and many individual check-ins with teachers



Parent Workshops

- **Parents Preparing for School Success**
 - Workshops once a month for parents/caregivers of selected children
 - Themes around ideas of transitions, how to navigate school systems and advocate for children
 - Space for connecting with other parents in similar circumstances



Individual Plans for School Success

- Encourage caregivers to:
 - identify child's strengths and areas for extra support
 - encourage and support child/family strengths
- Assist caregivers and Head Start staff to:
 - Identify important adults in child's life and create a Transition Team
 - Develop a timeline of transition activities for Transition Team to accomplish



The bridge between school districts and Head Start...

- Transitions Planning Committee developed with Head Start administrators, teachers, parents, and local kindergarten teachers and public school representatives
- Assessments of current transitions practices
- Discussion of making these practices smoother and better for all parties
- Development of an inter-agency agreement is in the works



Issues of Diversity

- Nontraditional families
- Families from other countries of origin
- Language and literacy considerations



What has worked well

- Teachers have liked the individualized plans for success and some teachers plan to use them with most of their students
- Workshops as a place for connecting and sharing information/concerns
- “Getting the ball rolling” with transitions earlier in the school year



Challenges

- Hectic schedules and different sites for teachers makes communication hard and many questions arise
- Not clearly explained to teachers; a work-in-progress
- Didn't get started soon enough in school year with individual plans
- Attendance of parent workshops is low





Portland, Oregon

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