

# Supporting Successful Transitions to Kindergarten:

Research Based Strategies for Bridging Early  
Childhood Programs and Elementary Schools



June 1, 2007



Building on Family Strengths - June 2007



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# 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



# Overview of Presentation

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



# What is the Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten Project (T2K)?

- A federally funded project designed to strengthen mental health and transition supports provided by Head Start and elementary schools



# 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



# Phase 1: Building a Strong Mental Health Foundation

- Training for the Head Start staff: Children's Mental Health & Transition Best Practices
- Technical assistance to Head Start management team re: strengthening mental health component (via improved mental health strategic planning, mental health consultation, etc.)
- Personal and program plans for strengthening mental health services
- Follow up and support in Year 2



# Phase 2: Enhanced Transition Support

## Year 1: Identify current transition practices--strengths and challenges

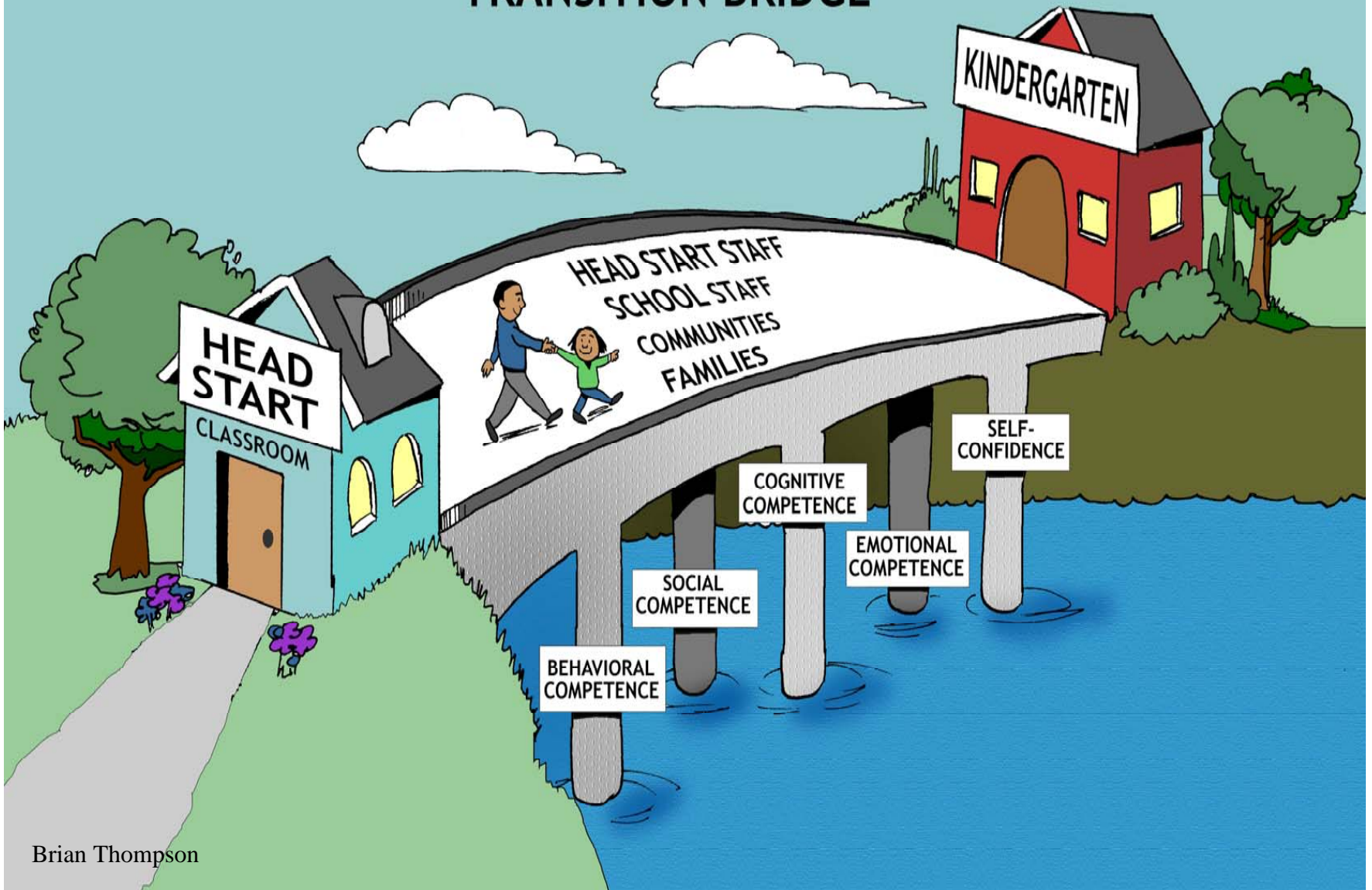
- Gather information from Head Start staff and parents
- Follow selected children from Head Start into kindergarten

## Year 2: Implement improvements in transition practices

- Facilitate Head Start-Receiving School relationships & policy
- Identified at-risk 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



# What is Transition?

- *"A rite of passage" that "sets the tone and direction of a child's school career" (Pianta & Cox, 1999, p. xvii)*
- *"Kindergarten is a context in which children draw important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in a way that children and families have: (1) a positive view of the school; and (2) children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners. (Bailey, 1999, p. xv)*



In other words:

"It's a BIG DEAL"

.....Jerome Kagan, 1999



# Transition: A Parent's Perspective

- Concerns about transition
- Differences in Head Start vs. elementary school
- What helped? Head Start? Schools?
- What advice would you give?



# Why is Transition Important?

- Good Early Childhood Mental Health → **Fewer Problems Transitioning to Kindergarten**
- **Fewer Problems Transitioning to Kindergarten** → **Fewer Problems in School**
- Fewer Problems in School → Better Chance of Long-Term Success
- YET: A survey of 3,600 K teachers found that 48% of children had **moderate or severe problems with transition**



# What is Different About Kindergarten? For Children? For Parents?

Consider:

- Physical Environments
- Learning Environments & Curriculum
- Number and Expectations of Adults
- Peers & Peer Interactions
- Role and Involvement of Parents



# What Does Research Tell us About Transition "Best Practices" for Families, Schools, and Early Childhood Programs?



# Principles of Effective Transition Supports

1. View transition as a continuous, year-long process
2. Build relationships, communicate, and collaborate across settings (home, school, Head Start),
3. Promote continuity across settings
4. Involve and prepare parents
5. Prepare children, building needed competencies.

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)



# Principle #1: Start Early, Work Continuously

## Key Transition Activities

- Raise topic of transition, kindergarten readiness in meetings with parents early in the year
- Set up transition calendars and events with schools in the Fall for the upcoming Spring
- Identify children at risk for transition problems early in the Head Start year and build support



## Principle #2: Build Relationships, Communicate & Collaborate

*"Programs [that support transition] may focus on developing children's knowledge, understanding, and skills, but successful transition programs have as their key function, a commitment to facilitating positive social interactions and relationships"*



# Building Head Start (HS)-School Relationships

## Key Transition Activities

- 1. Make sure HS staff learn key information about school system, registration process, etc.**
- 2. Make sure HS staff meet with K teachers at least annually for formal and informal sharing of information about all children (in addition to IEP meetings)**
- 3. Provide timely written information to schools about all children, ideally including work samples and child's picture**
- 4. Provide HS teacher name and contact information to K teachers**



# Principle #3: Build Continuity Across Home, School, and Head Start Settings

- Continuity and familiarity in curricula, programs, schedules, routines, activities
- Continuity in **expectations** of what will happen



# Supporting Continuity Key Transition Activities

1. K teachers and HS teachers know each other's programs, curricula, activities
  - Use some of the same songs, books and activities in both settings
  - Visit each others' classes to get ideas and information
  - Administrators initiate and support opportunities for teachers to meet and talk about programs, process, activities, etc.
2. Make sure Kindergarten teachers know which children are entering from a Head Start program, and should receive information from the Head Start program well before the start of the school year.



# Supporting Continuity

## Key Transition Activities

3. Support parents and teachers to gradually increase level of structure and expectations of independence
4. Support K teachers to incorporate Developmentally Appropriate Practices and individualization
5. Help parents start to do activities that mirror Kindergarten routines, etc. (see parent involvement)



# Supporting Continuity: Key Transition Activities

6. Work with parents to make sure all children are enrolled before the end of the HS year
7. Align expectations: How is HS different from kindergarten?
  - Help parents know what to expect when their child starts kindergarten
  - Help children know what to expect when they start kindergarten



# What Do Children Need to Know— Different Expectations

- According to children:
  - The rules
  - Whether I'll have friends there
  - Whether it will be scary
  - How to write their name and count to 10
- According to parents:
  - To listen to/obey the teacher
  - To separate from mom/dad
  - How to interact with other adults (e.g., "be polite")
- According to K teachers:
  - How to interact/play with peers
  - How to follow directions
  - Work independently
  - Share the teacher's attention with others



# Supporting Continuity: Key Transition Activities

## 8. Practice and discuss what kindergarten will be like (with children):

- Talk to the child about what may be different in kindergarten, the schedule, the routine
- Read books about transition (see handout)
- Identify any friends who will be in the kindergarten classroom with your child.
- Make sure the child knows teacher's name and has met teacher.
- Have "kindergarten practice week" in HS class
- Have children write (dictate) letters to the kindergarten teacher about themselves and their Head Start experience



# Supporting Continuity: Key Transition Activities

## 9. Discuss what kindergarten will be like with Parents:

- Invite K teacher to speak to parent meeting
- Invite (former or current) HS parents with children in kindergarten to speak to parents
- Bring information from the school to home visits
- Talk with parents about differences between HS and school environment



# Principle #4: Parent Involvement

- In transition preparation
- In supporting child to be school-ready and transition-ready
- In ongoing support of child's learning



# Supporting Parent Involvement: Key Transition Activities

1. Find a way to help all families have a **personal contact with the school** (preferably with the child's teacher) that is low-stress, before school starts.
2. **Help families find information:** Use the "Ready for School To-Do List"
3. **Help with registration**
4. **Have HS staff attend K round-ups, orientation, and encourage parent and child attendance**



# Supporting Parent Involvement: Key Transition Activities

**5. Help families get support** from other families, make connections with other parents whose children are entering the same school or class.

**6. Address cultural and personal issues** that families may have around transition to schools.

**Make sure you know:**

- Parents' history and experiences in school
- What parents expect school to be like for their child
- What role parents expect to have in their child's school
- Talk about how parents can be involved in their child's school



# Supporting Parent Involvement: Key Transition Activities

7. **Provide “take home” activities** for parents that they can do with their child (school year and summer) (handout)
8. **Help parents understand** what is developmentally appropriate for a kindergartener (handout)
9. **Empower parents** to advocate for themselves and their children



# Principle #5: Prepare Children

- To have needed school competencies
- To be reduce anxiety and promote self-confidence in making transition



# Children Who Make Successful Transitions (e.g., are "School Ready") Have:

- 1. Emotional Competence:** ability to regulate emotions, express emotions appropriately, manage anger, frustration, fear, have empathy for others
- 2. Social Competence:** ability to get along with other children and adults, develop friendships, have positive relationships, negotiate social challenges (teasing, bullying)
- 3. Behavioral Competence:** ability to concentrate, stay on-task, control behavior (no hitting, fighting)
- 4. Cognitive Competencies:** ability to problem solve, understand consequences, understand instructions
- 5. Self-Confidence:** feeling secure in themselves, safe, proud of accomplishments



# Parents & Teachers Supporting Children: Key Transition Activities

- Ongoing developmental support provided by Head Start
- Identification and individualized planning for children needing additional transition support ("at risk")
- Required work for children with identified special needs



# Individualized Transition Plans

- Tool for supporting children at risk for poor transition (see handout)



# Individual Plans for School Success

- Tool for supporting children at risk for poor transition (see handout)
- Encourages caregivers to:
  - Identify child's strengths and areas for extra support
  - Encourage and support child/family strengths
- Assists 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



# Principles of Effective Transition Supports, Summary

1. **View transition as a continuous, year long process**
2. **Build relationships, communicate, and collaborate across settings (home, school, Head Start)**
3. **Promote continuity across settings**
4. **Involve and prepare parents**
5. **Prepare children, building needed competencies.**

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)



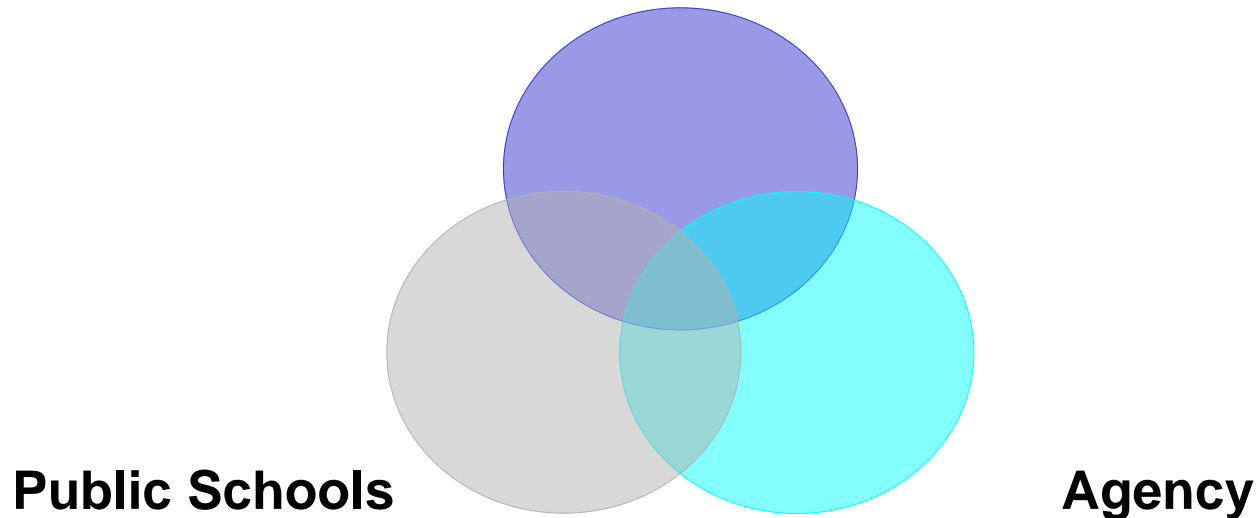
# Phase II T2K Intervention: Implementing Enhanced Transition Supports

- Informed by Head Start parent, Head Start staff, and kindergarten teacher interviews
- Applied transition to kindergarten best practices to existing practice and policy



# Levels of Intervention

## Individual Child and Family Network



# Enhanced Transition Supports

Informed by interviews with Head Start parents post-transition, who told us:

- They need more basic information about kindergarten - logistics, expectations
- Transition activities should be scheduled at more flexible times
- They would like more contact with school and kindergarten teacher before school starts
- Schools were intimidating, not as helpful or communicative as Head Start



# Enhanced Transition Supports

Informed by interviews with Head Start staff, who told us:

- They need a better understanding of the transition roles and responsibilities within their program
- They provide information for the kindergarten teachers, but it does not always reach the kindergarten
- They would like to have more communication with K teachers - about children, curricula, expectations
- That they feel their knowledge not is not always valued



# Enhanced Transition Supports

Informed by interview with K teachers, who told us:

- Many kindergarten teachers never receive information from Head Start, or they receive it very late in the year
- They would like more opportunities to communicate with Head Start teachers
- They would like to meet parents before the start of school
- They would like more information about children before the beginning of the year
- Some of them do fear "labeling" children and want to 'make their own impression'



# Focus of Enhanced Transition Supports Intervention:

- Assist Head Start program with incorporating transition best practices into existing transition practices (see Matrix)
- Support staff in developing individual transition teams for each family
- Encourage Head Start program to develop working relationships with local school districts—face to face with key principals





Portland, Oregon

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Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health



Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education



# Evaluation

- Collected qualitative information about changes in program practices and policy
- Pre-post quantitative survey of staff knowledge of MH and Transition best practices
- Followed identified children through kindergarten, collecting interview data from parents, Head Start teachers, and K teachers
- Data currently being collected & analyzed

