



Chicago Public Schools  
Office of Early Childhood Education

# EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS



## TRANSITION Change With Continuity A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Everything must change, nothing stays the same.” So goes an old song. Change is always occurring. Without it how would we flourish?*

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Transition – the period that bridges one stage with the next – is difficult for most of us. It is often a time of ambivalence. While we may be eager to greet the new experiences life holds in store for us, we are often reluctant to let go of the past and unsure of or anxious about the future.

Transition from a preschool program, whether it be in a day care or public school setting, requires us to focus our attention on the children, the parents and ourselves.

**The Children** – According to Sharon Lynn Kagan, “Transitions are those activities that support the principle of continuity for young children . . .” Children need the support of program staff to ease their anxieties about leaving a familiar environment for an unfamiliar one. As teachers, we have a responsibility to facilitate that change so children will have:

- continuity with earlier educational experiences.
- increased motivation for new experiences.
- enhanced self-esteem.
- expanded relations with other children and adults.
- a greater sense of trust between teachers and children.

**The Parents** – The role of parents in their children’s preschool experience is paramount to the children’s success. Parents, too, have developed strong bonds with the teacher, with other parents, and with the children. It is important for staff to recognize the parents’ feelings and concerns about their own, as well as their children’s transitions. Helping them address those feelings and reassuring them that the door is always open will help parents gain:

- increased confidence about their children’s success in a new environment.
- improved self-confidence in their ability to communicate with and to effectively influence the educational system.
- a continuing commitment with involvement in their children’s education.
- a greater knowledge of and appreciation for their children’s teachers.

**Ourselves** – As teachers, we have experienced the pain of saying goodbye to the children at the end of the school year as they move on to kindergarten or into the public schools. Bidding goodbye to the children and their parents is never easy. We must recognize and deal with our own ambivalence and anxieties before we can begin to plan for the children and parents.

Transition is an ongoing process that requires the involvement of both the prekindergarten and kindergarten staff. This handbook is intended to assist classroom staff in developing a plan for the transition of the children from one program to another. It is not a transition plan, but rather a guide to facilitate planning.

*Careful planning will have the following results: children, parents, and staff looking forward with eager anticipation and renewed commitment to success as they begin a new school year.*

## PREPARATION FOR TRANSITION

*When addressing the issue of transition from preschool to kindergarten, of primary concern is the concept of change. Classroom staff, in both preschool and kindergarten, needs to do numerous things to prepare preschoolers for a smooth transition. Part of facilitating this transition requires effective and ongoing communication between children, teachers, teacher assistants, parents, auxiliary staff, and administrators. It is understandable that teachers may find this process somewhat challenging, in that communication can sometimes be difficult. However, effective communication is essential to the process. With that in mind, this section of the handbook will present suggestions for preparing for transition.*

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### **A. Staff Communication**

At the beginning of the program year, all staff involved in the transition process needs to meet to discuss transition issues and develop a plan. Whether the kindergarten program is in the same or in a different building, the importance of effective communication among all staff involved in the transition process cannot be overemphasized. The issues discussed below should provide a framework for a meaningful discussion and should also facilitate developing a transition plan.

#### **1. Transition**

- a. Transitions for young children are those activities that support the principle of continuity for them as they move from one stage in their lives to another.
- b. Discussion should focus on what transition means for a particular group of children recognizing that this will change from year to year. This information should be used to determine how transitions will be facilitated for the current group.
- c. All concerns relative to effecting a smooth transition for children should be identified and addressed.
- d. In developing a transition plan, the process herein defined should be followed. The issues involved must be clear to everyone and the responsibilities for implementing the transition plan need to be delegated. It is important that communication and cooperation be ongoing throughout the year.

#### **2. Early Childhood Philosophy**

- a. A developmentally appropriate curriculum that provides for all areas of a child's development through an integrated approach should be followed in both preschool and kindergarten.
- b. Children should be provided with a program of experiences in a nurturing and supportive environment which promotes self-esteem and enhances the children's physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, personal, and creative development.

### **3. Similarities/Differences in Programs**

- a. Preschool and kindergarten programs are similar in that, children in both programs are learning by exploring their environment, interacting with adults and other children, and using concrete materials as they participate in activities that are relevant to their own experiences and culture.
- b. Primarily, the programs differ relative to class size, adult-child ratio, and schedules. Preschools generally have fewer students and a larger adult-child ratio. Schedules also tend to be more flexible.
- c. Program similarities and differences need to be identified and discussed.

### **4. Continuity of Experiences**

- a. A successful transition plan should provide for a continuity of experiences through developmentally appropriate curricula for preschool and kindergarten children.
- b. Earlier educational experiences of preschoolers should provide a foundation for kindergarten curriculum planning.

### **5. Teacher Expectations**

- a. As children move from preschool to kindergarten, it is important that they know what is expected from them. Knowing what is expected adds to their self-confidence, encourages their attempt(s) to try new activities, and facilitates continuity in their development.
- b. Communication among staff relative to their programs should provide kindergarten staff with sufficient information about the children whereby their expectations will be realistic.

### **6. Sharing Student Information**

- a. Planning to meet children's individual needs and curriculum planning in general will be facilitated if the following information is discussed:
  - The Child Assessment Profile (CAP), CC.Net, and other assessment information
  - Health Records
  - Special Needs
  - Learning Style
    - Personality Traits
  - Peer Interactions
- b. Sharing student information is a crucial part of the transition process. Kindergarten teachers will then be aware of children's accomplishments, strengths, and past experiences.

## **B. Parent Communication**

Parents are directly involved in all preschool activities. It is important that staff involved with transitions understand that parent involvement will change when children go to kindergarten. Staff should discuss what needs to be done to support parents in their own, as well as their child's, transitions. Communication with parents is essential for a smooth transition. Parents need to be made aware of expectations and goals, and be given the opportunity to express their concerns.

### **1. Parent Meetings**

- a. Meetings with preschool and/or kindergarten staff should be scheduled for parents to discuss the following:
  - Transition Process
  - Effects of Transition on Child's Social/Emotional Well-Being
  - Effects of Transition on the Parents Well-Being
  - Kindergarten Selection
  - Parent Involvement/Preschool vs. Kindergarten
- b. Parents can be invited to attend a general kindergarten orientation meeting in the spring.

### **2. Newsletters**

- a. Newsletters are another way of communicating with parents. If possible, newsletters should be written in the child's home language.
- b. Effective newsletters may include tips for parents on easing the transition, and should provide information about the kindergarten program.

### **3. Classroom Visits**

- a. Visiting the kindergarten classroom can give parents firsthand information about the kindergarten program. Visits also provide an opportunity for parents to meet their child's teacher.
- b. Visits should be scheduled by the kindergarten teacher.

### **4. Parent Involvement**

- a. Parents should be encouraged to volunteer in the kindergarten classroom. Volunteering may begin prior to their child entering the program.
- b. Parents promote a positive attitude in their children by participating in the educational program.

### **C. Field/Support Staff Communication**

Preschool support staff provides essential services to classroom staff, parents, and children. During the transition process their assistance is invaluable relative to communicating with parents, staff, and sharing needed information. It is helpful to invite them to participate in parent meetings. The preschool social worker, nurse, and their assistants play an important role in the transition process. They can share the following information:

- Health Compliance Information (*Nurse/Health Assistant*)
- Options Programs/Special Programs (*Social Worker/Resource Personnel*)
- School Support Personnel (*Social Worker/Social Service Assistant*)
- School Organizations/Resources (*Resource Personnel*)
- Community Resources (*Social Worker*)
- Review of Individualized Education Plan (*Classroom Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher and Appropriate Staff*)

## TEACHER-CHILD ACTIVITIES

*The following activities are designed by Early Childhood staff to facilitate the transition for children going to kindergarten from a preschool experience in Head Start, Preschool for All (formally State Prekindergarten) Child-Parent Centers, and other child care programs. These developmentally appropriate activities were chosen to encompass the curriculum for an entire year. They should ease the process of transition for preschool-aged children to the next grade level. They are designed to be incorporated as “best practices” in the early childhood programs, with an emphasis on the social and emotional needs of the young child.*

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### Ongoing Activities

Preschool children will visit the kindergarten room throughout the year and participate in different transition activities with the kindergarten children. The following are activities that may be shared together with the children, parents, and staff from both grade levels.

- Use age appropriate children’s literature, child dictated stories, and have kindergarten children read to preschool children during circle time.
- Exchange favorite songs, stories, rhymes, and games with each other.
- Encourage the exchange of shared group writing between preschool and kindergarten like a pen pal exchange.
- Provide opportunities for preschool and kindergarten children to participate in circle time together. Kindergarten children can teach songs that are used as part of the kindergarten curriculum.
- Have both classrooms celebrate and share special days together, e.g., **holiday and cultural celebrations, assembly programs, 100th Day of School celebration, Math Day, Pajama Day, Teddy Bear Day, Color Days, Sock Hop, Week of the Young Child, Gardening Week, etc.**
- Shared prekindergarten and kindergarten field trips.
- Shared walking trips around the neighborhood, e.g., library, fire station, grocery store, etc.
- Encourage prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms to share Virtual Pre-K and Virtual K experiences.

### End-of-the-Year Activities

These activities are most appropriate for the months of May and June, when transitions are imminent and preschool teachers discuss transitions with the children.

- Use brainstorming activities and ask, *“What do you think you will do in kindergarten?”* Chart their responses. Then visit the kindergarten room and ask, *“What did we learn*

*about the things we will do in kindergarten?”* Chart the new responses and discuss the two charts with the children. (K-W-L)

K – What we KNOW

W – What we WANT to know

L – What we LEARNED

- Allow opportunities for preschool children to design an invitation for specific activities and dictate a message inviting the kindergarten teacher to visit and meet the children.
- Document a visit to the kindergarten classroom, take photos, and use dictated stories or drawings to stimulate later discussions.
- Ask the children to talk about the changes they experienced as they were growing up such as drinking milk from a bottle then a cup, their first tooth, first day in preschool, etc. Draw a mural that illustrates the changes.
- Set up the dramatic play area for the preschool children to role play experiences they may have in kindergarten.
- Take the children on a tour of the school’s office, gym, lunchroom, library, “big” bathroom, etc., and introduce them to important staff members.
- Take children to the Science Fair, Book Fair, assemblies and other events that take place in the main building.
- Have a “Meet the Principal Day/Time” for the children at the end of May or beginning of June.

### **Shared End-of-the-Year Activities**

During the months of May and June, teachers can plan activities to expose preschool children to the kindergarten experience.

- Allow opportunities for preschool children to spend time in kindergarten classrooms. Activities may include: language experiences, stories, center time, etc.
- Schedule a “Big Buddy” lunch for the preschool children with the kindergarten class in the “big” lunchroom.
- Provide opportunities for kindergarten children to make gifts for incoming preschool children.
- Plan an end-of-the-year picnic or field trip with children from both grades. Parents can also be asked to participate in this event.
- Kindergarten sponsors a “tea” as a bridging ceremony for the preschool children coming to kindergarten with the principal.
- Create a transition ceremony for preschoolers in which the kindergarten students welcome prekindergarten students to kindergarten.

## **Extended Activities**

These activities are initiated at the end of the preschool year and are carried over to the kindergarten school year.

- Make an individual or group yearbook that may include dictated stories and pictures to be placed in the kindergarten library. Change the name of this book to reflect memories from the year in preschool, also to be moved to the kindergarten library with the children.
- Provide opportunities for preschool children to make pictures for the kindergarten teacher to display on the walls for their first day of school. This will help provide incoming children with a feeling of familiarity with the new classroom environment.
- Encourage kindergarten children to prepare and present legacies, e.g., pictures, books, sculptures, etc., to the preschool children. Items will be left in the kindergarten room for their arrival.

## **Kindergarten Entry Activities**

Kindergarten teachers may use these activities to ease the beginning of the year anxieties.

- Create class murals that include images of self-portraits, meeting new friends, favorite school activities, etc., that may be displayed on the classroom walls.
- Make t-shirts for the exiting preschoolers to wear on their first day of kindergarten.
- Prepare a “personal letter” or something special for each child who will enter kindergarten on the first day of school in the fall.
- Make books available for incoming children that were composed by the former kindergarten class.
- Maintain a visual display of the number of days the class has been together. On the tenth day, have a celebration. *Variation:* Have a special treat every tenth day and place a special decal or star to represent that day on the visual display.
- Allow the children to bring their favorite item in their new classroom for the first few weeks. Have the children describe their item during sharing time.
- Make a bulletin board of pictures of the incoming children.
- Post family pictures in the new classroom.
- Create a “friendship chain” on which the children either place a decoration or a picture of themselves.
- Use books to discuss socialization, anxiety, and some of the new emotions children will experience when dealing with transactions.

## TEACHER-PARENT ACTIVITIES

*It is important for teachers and parents to work in unison to provide a smooth transition from one learning environment to another. When parents are involved in the transitional process, it enables them to make important and appropriate decisions regarding their children's adjustment to different learning situations. With mutual and ongoing levels of communication, the fundamental building blocks can ensure that confident, positive, and successful learning experiences are provided.*

*The following activities are designed to create an environment where teachers and parents can freely discuss the growth and potential of individual children.*

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### **Ongoing Activities**

Parents and teachers should work as partners in the daily education process.

- Plan parent orientation for parents of prekindergarten and kindergarten students.
- Invite preschool parents to volunteer in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms.
- Keep parents informed of classroom activities with monthly newsletters.
- Conduct workshops with parents on strengthening the bond between themselves and their children. Workshop topics may include a description of transitional activities and why they are important.
- Schedule Virtual Pre-K and Virtual K workshops for parents.

### **End-of-the-Year Activities**

These activities can be fun ways to introduce the kindergarten environment and to extend the learning experiences throughout the summer.

- Create colorful flyers or posters announcing e.g., “Kindergarten Round-Up” announcing a special day for parents and students to learn about kindergarten. This may include dates, times, and specific requirements for enrollment. School success indicators should also be discussed such as the importance of breakfast each morning, reading to your child every day, a regular bed time, etc.
- Invite parents to visit the school and tour the building to see the library, gym, lunchroom, etc.
- Invite parents to tour the kindergarten classroom during which an overview of the requirements for kindergarten children is presented. Schools may choose to make this a pre-registration session. Children can also be included in this activity.
- Develop an art exhibit for the parents and the school utilizing creations of both kindergarten and preschool children. A reception may follow for parents and teachers. (Week of the Young Child activity)

- Invite parents to visit the kindergarten classroom with the children.
- Take a class photo and give each child a copy.
- Provide the parents with a list of activities to do with their children over the summer, e.g., a library card application, a summer reading list, a list of free days to area museums, library, story times, reading to children, etc.

### **Kindergarten Entry Activities**

Kindergarten teachers may find that these activities will help both parents and children during the transitional process.

- Prepare a welcome to kindergarten letter.
- Conduct a parent orientation/Open House. This will give the teacher an opportunity to explain kindergarten expectations, why good attendance is important, parental involvement, homework, etc.
- Invite parents to stay for extended times during the day until their child becomes accustomed to the new classroom.
- Create resources within the lending library to help parents deal with transactions.
- Display materials that are familiar to the children, e.g., a scrapbook, class photo, etc.

## RESOURCES

### TEACHER RESOURCES

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## WEB SITES

Keyword entries:

kindergarten; kindergarten transition activities; preschool to kindergarten transition activities