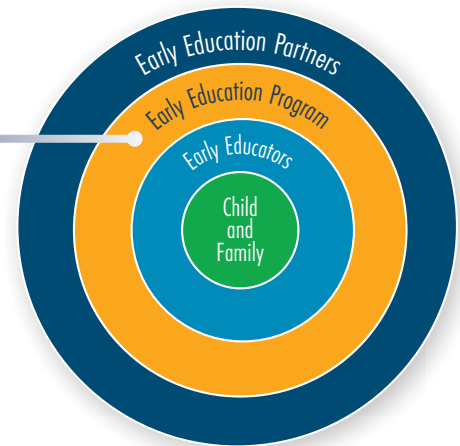


SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS: Program Policies and Practices



A Collaborative Approach to Transition

The transition from home to an early education program, or from one program to another, is a major event in children's lives. Moving from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment can be exciting but also challenging for young children and their families. Program policies and practices can facilitate smooth transitions and a sense of continuity for children and families across old and new settings.

Program leaders play a pivotal role in establishing policies and practices that lay the foundation for effective transition services. Collaboration between all partners involved in the process is key. Partners include families, staff, and other early education programs and elementary schools. Program leaders serve as the bridge between all partners to ensure ongoing communication and collaboration.

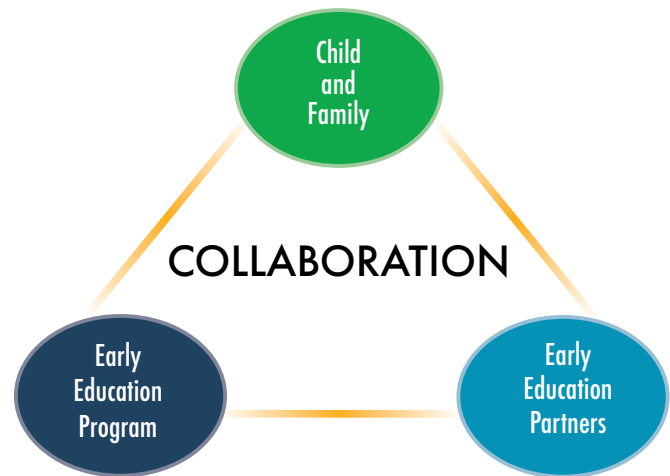
Program leaders may ask:

- What kinds of policies and practices foster a collaborative approach to transition?
- How can we strengthen transition services through continuous improvement?
- How can we ensure that all staff are prepared to offer children and families effective support through transitions?

This brief guides directors, managers, and specialists in establishing program policies and practices that promote a collaborative approach to transition. This includes transitions into and out of your program and between program options (e.g., home-based to center-based). The focus of this brief is on policies and practices related to partnering with families. Information on collaboration with other early education programs and elementary schools can be found in *Supporting Transitions: Working with Early Education Partners*.

Research indicates that effective transition services include practices that are:

- Centered on children and families
- Individualized to address children's and families' diverse backgrounds, development, strengths, and needs
- Dedicated to promoting continuity within and across early education settings
- Focused on creating and maintaining collaboration between families, programs, and early education partners
- Aligned with individual program goals and Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)



A collaborative approach to transition facilitates continuity in children's lives. It creates a sense of predictability and a connection to their past experiences. Working together provides families the information and support they need to prepare their children for the transition.

Extensive research indicates that positive transition experiences are associated with:

- Increased family engagement during kindergarten
- Enhanced social skills in children
- Higher academic performance in math, language, and literacy in kindergarten and beyond

Most transition research is focused on transition into kindergarten. However, effective transition practices will support and foster continuity across all settings. This includes transitions from home to Early Head Start, Early Head Start to Head Start or child care, or from Head Start to kindergarten.

Core Values Guide Effective Transition Services

Effective transition services begin with core values. These underlie the importance of building responsive, collaborative relationships with children, families, and partners in the community. Core values help programs develop policies that reflect their beliefs and philosophy.

Core values that guide effective transition practices include:

- Collaborative, responsive relationships with families
- Ongoing communication with families, program staff, and other stakeholders
- Respect for diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, strengths, and needs of children and families
- Positive, supportive adult-child relationships as foundations for children's learning and development
- Continuity between home and the early education setting and between settings
- Competent, well-prepared staff to implement transition practices
- Continuous improvement of transition services through self-assessment and professional development

Such values provide the basis for high quality transition services that are supportive of all families and children in Head Start. Many of these core values are reflected in the [*Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework*](#) (PFCE Framework).

Planning Effective Transition Services

Well-planned, comprehensive, and integrated transition services maximize program support for all children, families, and staff. Careful planning is essential for smooth transitions. This is true when working with individual families (see *Supporting Transitions: Early Educators Partnering with Families*) or when establishing policies and practices that involve Head Start service areas or systems.

When families are valued and know what to expect, they feel better prepared to engage in their children's learning. Offering a wide variety of opportunities for families to participate in transition activities contributes to positive long-term outcomes for children.

Forming a Transition Team

Begin your planning process by forming a transition team. Inclusive, diverse teams offer different viewpoints and engage stakeholders. They include program management, family members, direct service staff representatives, early education partners, and community stakeholders. Diverse teams include members from the cultural and linguistic backgrounds represented in your community. Transition teams work together to develop and assess transition services that respond to the backgrounds, strengths, and needs of children and families.

Transition teams engage in continuous improvement efforts by:

- Linking transition services with program goals and HSPPS
- Establishing program policies to support transition
- Preparing and engaging staff
- Reviewing and improving transition policies and services regularly

Linking Transition Services

Transition services are most effective when built into your program's five-year planning goals and aligned with your school-readiness goals. All transition practices in your program options (i.e., center-based, home-based, family child care, locally-designed variation) must comply with the HSPPS Part 1302 Subpart G—Transition Services. Your transition services must address all families enrolled in all program options, including pregnant mothers in Early Head Start.



Summary of Transition Services in the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

The HSPPS list the mandatory regulations all Head Start grantees must follow. The director and managers ensure their program's transition services comply with the standards.

A list of regulations that specifically address transition services requirements for grantees is found in [Part 1302 Subpart G—Transition Services](#).

Key transition services standards require programs to:

§1302.70 Transitions from Early Head Start

- Collaborate with parents to implement strategies and practices that support successful transition out of Early Head Start
- Begin transition planning six months before the child's third birthday to meet the needs of the child and family
- Collaborate with Head Start to maximize the transition of eligible children into Head Start
- Provide additional transition services for children with an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)

§1302.71 Transitions from Head Start to kindergarten

- Collaborate with parents to support the successful transition of their children into kindergarten
- Collaborate with local education agencies and kindergarten teachers to support children's successful transition into kindergarten

- Implement strategies and activities in the Head Start learning environment to promote successful transition into kindergarten
- Provide additional transition services for children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

§1302.72 Transitions between programs

- Undertake efforts to support effective transition into other Early Head Start and Head Start programs for children and families moving out of the community, including homeless families and foster children
- Undertake strategies and activities to support families who have decided to transition their child to other early education and pre-kindergarten programs
- Make efforts to support transition of children and families in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) moving out of the community to other MSHS, Early Head Start, or Head Start programs

Other transition-related standards can be found in [Part 1302 Subpart F—Additional Services for Children with Disabilities](#) and in [§1302.82\(b\) Family partnership services for enrolled pregnant women](#).

Establishing Transition Policies and Practices

Program policies describe how your program will carry out transition practices. For example, a common policy is “all families will receive a home visit prior to their first day in the program.” Transition policies reflect the program’s core values related to transition and inform decisions about practice. Policies include guidance about how the program will establish partnerships with families and collaborate with sending and receiving programs. Policies also address how programs can support children and families as they transition from one program option to another within your program.

Transition practices are the daily interactions and activities informed by program policies that support children’s transition into and out of your program. They are implemented by teachers, caregivers, home visitors, and family service workers. Working with a team, program leaders establish policies that lay the foundation for collaborative transition practices.

Policies to Support All Transitions

This brief focuses on developing policies and practices to support transition into and out of your program. However, the information and recommendations apply to developing policies that extend to all types of transitions, including:

- Transitions into your program (whether the child transitions from home or another program)
- Transitions out of your program (whether the child transitions to another early education program or elementary school)
- Transitions within your program (whether the child transitions from one age-group to another or between program options)

Policies and Practices for Partnering with Families

Collaboration with families provides continuity as children transition from home to an early education program or from one program (or program option) to the next. When families are valued and know what to expect, they feel better prepared to engage in their children’s learning. Offering a wide variety of opportunities for families to participate in transition activities contributes to positive long-term outcomes for children.

Effective transition policies and practices include:

- Communication Policies—How information is gathered from and shared with families, including families who don’t speak English, using interpreters and translators when necessary. Practices include:
 - > in-person communication about the child during home visits and parent conferences
 - > informal communication during daily conversations, via telephone calls, handwritten notes, and text messages (when requested by family)
 - > written formal communication via letters and emails
 - > family meetings, training events, and social gatherings
 - > written materials (translated into the languages spoken by enrolled families) such as handouts, bulletin boards, websites, and social media posts

- Collaboration Policies—How families and staff can work together to support children during transition. Practices include:
 - > involve family service workers to support families in writing goals using the family partnership process
 - > provide formal and informal ways for children and families to become familiar with the new program and staff, such as classroom visits and family fun nights
- Individualization Policies—How staff can support families and children with unique backgrounds, strengths, and needs during transition. This includes families who are recent immigrants or refugees, experiencing homelessness, fostering children, or those who have children with disabilities or other special needs. Practices include:
 - > ensure transition services are culturally and linguistically appropriate by consulting with a person familiar with the family’s culture and language (see [Cultural Backgrounders](#) on the ECLKC website)
 - > co-create individualized transition plans that include developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate activities for home and program use
 - > use knowledge of child development and children’s individual background, development, strengths, and needs to ensure transition services are responsive
 - > provide staff with professional development related to working with families with unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives
 - > share information with families on their rights under federal and state laws, including rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ones related to bilingual education services



Using Policies to Guide Transition Practices at Las Cruces Head Start

Let's see how Las Cruces Head Start staff use transition policies and practices to partner with the Sanchez family . . .

Teachers Jada and Alex learned the Sanchez family is unexpectedly moving to a new town where Carlos, the father, found a job. Reyna, the mother, is enrolling in a nursing program. The family will need full-day child care for their three sons. The Sanchez's twins, Ricardo and Raymond, are in Jada and Alex's Head Start class. Arturo, the toddler, is enrolled in the Early Head Start home-based option.

This is the first time Jada and Alex have worked with a family transitioning into an early education program outside of Head Start. They set up a meeting with Lydia, Arturo's home visitor, and Clara, the family service worker, to discuss how to best support the children and family. They knew that supporting continuity for children and families during transition from one education setting to another is critical. They also understood the importance of working together to help the family prepare for this unpredicted, major transition. They began the meeting by reviewing their program's relevant transition policies.

The first policy, "Developing Transition Plans," outlined the requirements for creating individual child transition plans with families. The policy requires that early education staff partner with families to discuss what families can do at home to ease the transition. It also requires that they plan classroom experiences to help prepare the child. The policy emphasizes creating transition plans that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. Together, the group reflected on how this change may affect each of the children in the Sanchez family based on their age, development, and personal characteristics. Then they brainstormed ideas to share with Carlos and Reyna that would support them as a family.

The second policy they reviewed, "Transitions Out of Head Start," addressed the process of assisting families in locating an appropriate placement. It outlined how to coordinate with the new early education program or elementary school and how to transfer relevant confidential child records. The group discussed information the Sanchez family needs to find an early childhood program as required by the HSPPS. They also reviewed the standards on obtaining written parental consent to share children's records.

The teachers met with the Sanchez's to co-create a transition plan for each twin following policy guidelines. At Arturo's next home visit, Lydia and Reyna discussed how the transition would affect him. Together they created a transition plan specific to his age and development. Each transition plan included things the family would do at home to ease their transition. The teachers included activities they would do in the classroom (see *Supporting Transitions: Early Educators Partnering with Families* for information on collaborating with families and developing individual transition plans). They also provided information on child care resources in the new town and had the family sign transfer-of-records consent forms. Later, Clara also shared information with the family on how they could continue to be involved in the education of their sons, since they had been valued, active volunteers and Policy Council members at Las Cruces Head Start.

What's happening here?

The teachers, home visitor, and family service worker:

- Recognized the value of continuity of care for the boys and their family
- Met together to review their program's transition policies to guide their practice
- Worked together to provide unified, coordinated support for the family
- Co-created individual transition plans with the family for each child
- Provided information on child care resources in the new town
- Had the family sign transfer-of-records consent forms
- Discussed how the family could continue to be involved in the education of their sons

Assessing Transition Services to Ensure Continuous Improvement

Assessing your program's existing transition policies and practices provides important information on how well your transition services support children and families. It also informs your program's continuous improvement efforts. Ongoing assessment of your program's transition services identifies strengths as well as opportunities for improvement.

When assessing your transition services:

- Provide a variety of ways for families and staff to share their opinions and ideas on transition services—for example, distributing surveys, holding focus groups, and having informal conversations to determine the quality of your current services (see [Family Engagement in Transitions: Transitions to Kindergarten](#)).
- Review data from your program's self-assessment to identify where transition services are comprehensive and where there may be gaps
- Consider community assessment data. For example, are the transition needs of ALL families being met, including recent immigrants or refugee families, who may not be familiar with American culture or education system? What about families who speak languages other than English who need interpreters and translated written materials?
- Examine child assessment data to find out where children may need additional support in skills required for successful transition. For example, does aggregated child assessment data show that children demonstrate age-appropriate language and cognitive and self-regulation skills?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing transition-related professional development opportunities or plan to develop such opportunities
- Develop a plan to improve transition services based on your findings

Assessing Transition Services at Las Cruces Head Start

Let's see how the Las Cruces transition team assesses transition services in their program . . .

Las Cruces Head Start is a large grantee that operates Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, Early Head Start, and State Child Care programs. The program also works collaboratively with school districts, early intervention, special education, and other agencies that provide early care and education, including a homeless shelter. Transitions into, out of, and between program options are daily practice in this busy agency!

Claudia, the director, and the education, family engagement, and ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance) managers formed a transition team to assess the effectiveness of and improve their transition services. This collaborative team includes past and current families as well as direct service staff and individuals from other early education programs, elementary schools, and community stakeholders.

Carlos and Reyna attended the first meeting, which included other families. Families were asked what worked well when they transitioned into and out of the program. Reyna shared that what really helped was when the teachers visited them and got to know her twin boys before they started. The teachers invited the family to bring some familiar items from their culture to the classroom. Classroom signs were written in Spanish—their home language—as well as in English. Other families shared that teachers had discussed activities they could do to help their children prepare for the new program. For example, they visited the classroom and read books about going to school to their older toddlers and preschoolers. A grandmother shared how her grandson's Early Head Start teacher helped her find a full-day Head Start program near her work. And a father liked a “Goodbye Head Start, Hello Kindergarten” book the teachers made with his daughter.

Claudia and the managers learned that families valued the staff partnering with them, being responsive to children's and family's individual strengths and needs, and being culturally and linguistically sensitive. Based on what they learned, the transition team created a list of “core values” to guide their program practices and to ensure they remain child- and family-centered. At their next meeting, the team will assess whether their transition services meet the 2016 HSPPS requirements. They will also use the PFCE Framework to see how their transition policies and practices align with family engagement in transition.

What's happening here?

The transition team at Las Cruces Head Start:

- Included a diverse membership of family, staff, and early education, school district, and community representatives
- Asked families for feedback on their transition experiences in the program
- Co-created a list of core values to ensure transitions are child- and family-centered
- Decided to compare their transition services to the 2016 HSPPS as well as the PFCE Framework at their next meeting

Preparing and Engaging Staff

A program's ability to provide successful transition services depends on having staff who are well-prepared. They must understand child development and how it impacts transition and carry-out research-based transition practices effectively. Consider providing professional development that highlights transition policies and practices and provides a forum for discussing sensitive issues.

Topics might include:

- Factors that promote successful transition and those that make transition more challenging for children and families
- How children's developmental characteristics affect their transition experiences and response (for example, consider the role of social and emotional skills, language and cognitive development, temperament, and culture)
- The importance of responsive relationships, how to establish them with children and their families, and how they benefit children during transitions
- Specific considerations when working with children who are dual language learners, new to this country, experiencing homelessness, or living with foster families
- Transition requirements and families' rights as guided by IDEA and HSPPS 1302.61(2), 1302.63(b), and 1302.7

As you plan transition-related professional development, consider:

- Including families as co-creators and/or co-presenters
- Providing staff release time to visit other early education and kindergarten programs to learn about similarities and differences between programs and how they can prepare children and families for transition
- Supporting staff in understanding and coping with their own emotions during the transition process

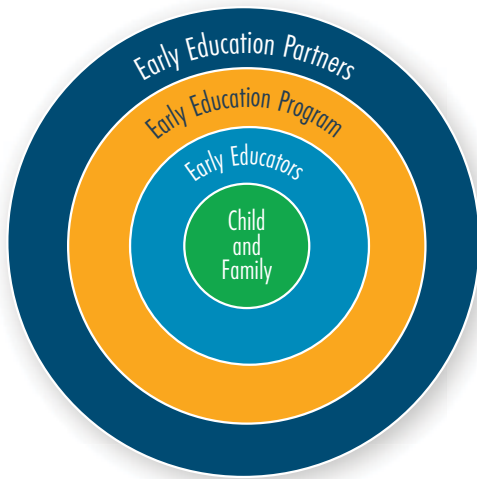


Putting It All Together

A collaborative approach to transition fosters continuity across learning settings. It provides children and families with the information and support they need during transition. Planning effective transition services begins by forming a diverse team of individuals in various roles in and outside the program. Effective transition policies and practices are based on core values of collaboration and ongoing communication between families, program staff, and early education partners. Program leadership establishes policies and practices which promote ongoing communication with families, collaboration with all partners, and individualization of services to address children's and families' diverse backgrounds, strengths, and needs. Ongoing assessment of your program's transition policies and practices contributes to continuous improvement. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities for staff at all levels ensures that programs have the capacity to deliver well-planned, collaborative transition services that lead to seamless, successful transitions for children and families.

Where to Learn More

Transition Briefs in This Series



SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS:

Using Child Development as a Guide

Early Educators Partnering with Families

Program Policies and Practices

Working with Early Education Partners

Resources

Cultural Backgrounders

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/cultural-backgrounders-various-refugee-cultural-groups-new-united-states>

Engaging Families in the Transition to Kindergarten (video)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/engaging-families-transition-kindergarten>

Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rtp-transition-to-kindergarten.pdf>

Foundations of Transition for Young Children (video)

<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/resources/videos/foundations-of-transition>

Interactive Homelessness Lessons – Lesson 4: Enrollment

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/family/homelessness/hmls/enrollment/enrollment_intro.html#purpose

Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE Framework)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/pfce-interactive-framework>

Planning for the Transition to Kindergarten: Why it Matters and How to Promote Success

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/transition-brief.pdf>

Policy Advisory: The Law Governing Transition of Young Children

http://community.fpg.unc.edu/sites/community.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/Handout/CONNECT-Handout-2-9_0.pdf

Six Essential Program Practices: Continuity of Care

<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/program-infanttoddler-care-pitc-six-essential-program-practices-relationship-based-care>

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Considerations When Planning Transition Services at the Program Level

Program leaders and management can use this resource, in conjunction with this brief (*Supporting Transitions: Program Policies and Practices*), to review their current transition services and strengthen transition practices for all children and families (see HSPPS Part 1302 Subpart G—Transition Services).

Instructions: Think about each question, record examples of what you do, and rate your progress in implementing transition services in each area based on the descriptions below. If you rate your practice as “building” or “progressing,” write a plan to strengthen the practice in the space below the corresponding table.

Building (B): None or minimal transition services occur in this area. Transition services are not included in program policies or goals, and are not monitored or assessed. Transition services may not be in full compliance with the HSPPS.

Progressing (P): Transition services are in place and meet the HSPPS. Program goals and policies may not include transition services.

Innovating (I): Transition services go beyond minimum HSPPS. Program goals include transition services. Transition policies are written. Assessment of transition services show they are effective and provide families with continuity of care when families enter and leave the program.

Children

How well does your program facilitate smooth transitions for all children by implementing practices that:	Examples of the practices you use:	B	P	I
Prepare children for transitions out of their previous setting into your setting (e.g., home to Early Head Start/Head Start center)?				
Prepare children for transitions within your program (e.g., from one classroom to another, from one program option to another)?				
Prepare children for transitions out of your setting into another early education setting (e.g., Early Head Start to Head Start, Head Start to kindergarten)?				
Use child-level outcomes data to develop strategies that foster individual children's confidence, with a focus on social and emotional development and approaches to learning?				
Are individualized for each child's cultural and linguistic needs, developmental levels, and disability status by providing additional and timely support for children with unique needs?				

Plan to strengthen practice(s):

Families

How well does your program facilitate smooth transitions for all families by implementing practices that:	Examples of the practices you use:	B	P	I
Use the family partnership process to help families write transition goals for their children and themselves?				
Partner with families to understand how their children experience transition, and how they can provide them with both academic and social and emotional support during transitions?				
Account for current and changing family circumstances (e.g., homelessness, unemployment, migrant work) that impact transition planning at both the family and program level?				
Use family partnership progress data to identify strengths that will support individual families in the transition process?				

Plan to strengthen practice(s):

Staff

How well does your program support staff in facilitating smooth transitions for all children and families by implementing practices that:	Examples of the practices you use:	B	P	I
Individualize support for children by using developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate curriculum that aligns with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework?				
Familiarize staff with the PFCE Framework and the role of positive, goal-oriented relationships in the transition process?				
Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for staff to learn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how children’s development influences their responses to transition; and • how to individualize transition plans for all children, including those with disabilities? 				
Offer staff dedicated time to reflect and receive feedback from their supervisor or the education manager on the emotional aspects of transition for themselves (e.g., how to cope with the loss, indifference, or celebration experienced as children and families move on)?				
Convene multi-disciplinary teams (e.g., health, child development, family services, transportation, etc.) to share data and discuss the transition process for individual families?				

Plan to strengthen practice(s):

Program

How well does your program leadership link core values, policies, and practices that will:	Examples of the practices you use:	B	P	I
Facilitate successful transition for all children and families moving into and out of your program?				
Foster a collaborative approach to transition with families, staff, and early education programs?				
Strengthen transition services through continuous improvement?				
Ensure staff are prepared to support children and families through transitions effectively?				

Plan to strengthen practice(s):