

### Transition to Kindergarten

*Entry to school represents a major threshold in a child's life. It marks an important transition into the formal education system at a critical age in early child development. Whether the child has remained at home until starting school or has participated in preschool programs, planning entry to school can support his or her long-term success. It can have a positive influence on a child's lifelong attitude towards school and on the child's development of literacy and numeracy skills.*<sup>25</sup>

In *Successful Kindergarten Transition* (2003), Robert Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre, present a developmental model of transition which focuses on the relationships between the child, educator, family, and community across time.<sup>26</sup> According to Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, the following practices can help ensure successful transition to kindergarten:

- Foster relationships as resources.
- Promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten.
- Focus on family strengths.
- Tailor practices to individual needs.
- Form collaborative relationships.<sup>27</sup>

It is impossible to provide a “one size fits all” model to guide a school’s transition process. There are many models across the province, and each school’s decision is shaped by its community, policy for staggered entry, and registration procedures. It would be helpful to consult the Ministry of Education resource document, *Planning Entry to School* (2003), for more information and samples of models from school boards across the province.

However, it should be noted that the transition is not a one-time event. It is a process that begins by planning with relevant partners and takes place over time.

### Questions to consider when planning entry to school:

- Who needs to be involved in the planning? (Administrator, administrative assistant, childcare, parent?)
- What needs to be communicated and by when? (Define process for registration, including dates and times.)
- What will be the process for gathering information about the children before they enter school?
- What strategies will be used to communicate information?
- What do parents want to know? What are the key messages?
- What events will be planned? Who should be involved? What is the best time to hold these events so families can attend?
- What resources will be needed?
- What will be the format for the events?
- When will placement occur, how and when will parents be informed?

### Questions to consider when planning kindergarten registration:

For some families, kindergarten registration is the first introduction to the school and to the school system. It may be the first introduction to the school system in Canada for others. It is a significant event for families, as well as for the children. It is important for the school to make all families feel welcome and to establish a foundation for a positive relationship.

- When will registration occur?
- What time is best for parents? (Will there be appointments or a first-come, first-serve approach?)
- Who will be involved in the actual registration process?
- Will kindergarten educators need to be released? Will translators be needed?
- Who will greet the parents?

- What documents will parents need to bring with them and how will this be communicated?
- What information will be available for parents? What will need to be translated?
- What else will occur at this time? (Health screening, hearing assessments, gathering developmental history information?)
- Who else needs to receive information about registration? (Child cares, parenting programs, agencies involved with children with special needs?)
- Where will registration take place and how can this space be made inviting for families?
- What activities will be available for the children? (Will there be an area for children to enjoy kindergarten type activities, such as looking at books, doing puzzles, drawing, etc.?)
- Will there be refreshments?
- What will parents and children take home with them? (A principal of a small school has his picture taken with each child to be sent home with their starting date letter. Another school creates a bag of materials, including a book, paper, plastic models, and magnetic letters.)

### **Planning for Children with Special Needs**

One of the first steps when planning for the entry of children with special needs is to communicate with childcare centres, programs, and agencies which are involved with the children and their families. It is important to register the children and gather as much pertinent information as possible. It is especially critical to attend to the questions, concerns, and goals of families for their children. In this way, the school and the classroom educator can prepare a plan, even before the first day, to meet the needs of the child. There could be safety issues, a need for assistive devices, and particular learning goals that may have to be addressed before school begins. As well, parents may need support.

### **Kindergarten Orientation**

A spring orientation session is a popular event to prepare kindergarten families for the transition to school in the fall, and to share information well ahead of time.

Questions to consider when planning a spring orientation include the following:

- What format will be most engaging for the school community? Format choices may include: question and answer, meeting in small groups, visual presentations with photos or video of children engaged

## **Thinking It Through**

- How do families see themselves reflected in the school/in my classroom?
- How effective is the school's plan for transition to kindergarten? What needs to be changed or improved?
- How effectively do I communicate with parents? What might be improved?
- Do I believe that the school needs to be 'ready' for the child? If so, what is the evidence that my classroom and the school is 'ready' for the child?
- Which partnerships need to be fostered or strengthened?
- How does my school promote parent involvement? What are some areas that might be developed?

in kindergarten activities, or organized activities related to kindergarten programming.

- Will the event include a social component?
- What questions do you anticipate that parents will have about kindergarten? How will these be communicated and answered?
- Will the orientation include a tour of the classrooms and the school?

Some schools provide hands-on sessions for families through partnering with the Learning Partnership's Welcome to Kindergarten Program. Information is available on The Learning Partnership website. [www.thelearningpartnership.ca](http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca).

The following is a list of strategies to promote parent, family, and community engagement at your school's kindergarten orientation:

- To maximize parent participation, consider calling families to remind them of the date and time, (perhaps this could be done by parent volunteers).
- Eliminate barriers for parents to attend the session by adjusting the orientation to meet the needs of the community. (Some communities may need to have the orientation in the evening. Providing childcare or including younger children in the session may increase participation and make families feel more welcome, as would providing transport to the school and back from community centres or places of worship, etc. Families may appreciate having translators or translated materials available.)
- Invite the local public librarian to attend to offer information about children's programming and help families apply for library cards.
- Invite the supervisor from the local childcare or preschool to attend to share information with families and help families make the transition more seamless from preschool to school.

- Invite a Public Health Nurse to attend to distribute Nippissing Developmental Screens (NDDS) and answer questions about child development.
- Invite preschool and/or school board speech and language pathologists to attend to answer questions, or informally screen children if appropriate.
- Invite local Ontario Early Years or other community parenting supports to attend to share information with families.

### Visits to Kindergarten Class

It is helpful for children and their families to visit the kindergarten classroom before the first day of school in September. These visits may be planned during kindergarten orientation or towards the end of the school year. With creative planning, some schools manage to invite all families to see the classroom in action. Planning also needs to include children from childcare centres whose parents may not be able to visit.

Many educators like to connect with children personally before the first day, either by phone or by mail. The educator may ask the children to bring a memento on their first day (a photo of their family, or something with their name on it) or tell the children what they might do or see on day one. (For example, one educator wrote that her pet birds would be visiting.)

### "Ready" for School: School Readiness and Transition to Kindergarten

Some researchers have explored whether a child's readiness for kindergarten is a contributing factor to a successful transition to school. "Readiness for school learning is distinguished from skill performance. It can be a meaningful approach to describe a suite of cognitive and social skills, knowledge and dispositions, and personal experiences that children bring when they enter Grade 1." <sup>28</sup>

While it is important to consider whether the child is ready, it is also important to determine if the school is ready to receive the early learner. In the article “Ready or Not, Here we Come: What it Means to be a Ready School” (2007), Dowker, Schweinhart, and Daniel-Echols share the concept of a “ready school” and outline strategies to ensure that a school is “ready” to welcome the kindergarten children into its classrooms. The following analysis, provided by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (2006), provides questions to determine the readiness of the school:

- Does the principal communicate a clear vision for the school - a vision that is committed to the success of every child?
- Are parents of incoming children contacted about registration and school entry three or more months before the start of school?
- Do kindergarten educators communicate with preschool/childcare staff about children and curriculum on an ongoing basis?
- Do classrooms have a variety of manipulative materials and supplies for art, building, dramatic play, and hands-on learning?
- Are procedures in place for monitoring the implementation of all instructional materials/methods?
- Does the school promote community linkages by making, and following up on, appropriate referrals of children and families to social services and health agencies?
- Do classroom activities provide accurate, practical, and respectful information regarding peoples’ cultural backgrounds and experiences?
- Does the school employ improvement strategies that are based on assessment of the quality of the classroom, as well as children’s progress?<sup>29</sup>

### Learning at home

*“The foundations of language and literacy development begin to be established at birth and continue to be built through interaction and communication with adults and other children at home, in child care, in the community and at school.”<sup>30</sup>*

Learning begins at birth. While learning experiences vary from home to home, all families influence the development of their young learners. When children enter the school system, they are introduced to a second sphere of influence. Two-way communication and collaboration between these two worlds supports and extends young children’s growth and development. By connecting the school with Ontario Early Years Centres, Family Literacy Centres, and other parenting supports that promote early learning, kindergarten educators can increase the points of contact for families and their access to information and resources.

Learning at home can be supported in a number of ways. Information about what is happening at school can be used to develop a plan to extend learning at home, and take-home activities can be provided.

### Making a Plan

As part of the formal process of communicating about a child’s progress, there is an opportunity to talk about how the child is being supported at school, and to agree on ways that the child might also be supported at home. Informally, educators may seek parent input on the learning strategies used in the home to try and build consistency between home and school.

It must be remembered that many parents lead busy, demanding, stressful lives. Consideration must be given to how much extra may be expected from them. See Appendices 6 and 7 for suggested connections.

## Conclusion

This resource *Thinking It Through: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Classroom* has been written to support a play-based, child-centered curriculum for young learners. Each chapter has been developed to reflect an important aspect of the successful implementation of this curriculum and to make certain that high expectations are an important aspect of that planning. The research behind the theories forming the basis of this resource are current and considered to be the most effective way to provide a strong beginning to kindergarten learners.