

Voices from the Field

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This Practice Brief is the sixteenth in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of research and promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at ncase@ecetta.info.

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The Significance of Summer Transition Programs for Kindergarten Readiness

Research indicates that a smooth transition can positively impact a child's academic and social-emotional development.¹ Various strategies to facilitate this transition, including summer transition programs, have gained attention for their potential to mitigate the challenges children may face when entering kindergarten. This brief explores the importance of summer transition programs in preparing children for kindergarten as well as system-level approaches to programming.

The Importance of Summer Transition Programs

Academic Preparation

Summer transition programs offer structured learning experiences that help children develop essential academic skills needed for kindergarten, such as letter recognition, counting, and basic literacy

and numeracy.² Programs that incorporate developmentally appropriate activities for promoting early literacy and numeracy skills provide children with a solid foundation for academic success. Many transition programs incorporate language-rich activities such as storytelling, rhyming games, and vocabulary-building exercises throughout the day. These educational building blocks aid in a successful transition to kindergarten.

1 Kauerz, K., & Schaper, A. (2021). Transition to kindergarten: Findings from recent research. Education Commission of the States and National P-3 Center. https://nationalp-3center.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transition-to-K_Recent-Research_2021.pdf

2 Schulting, A. B., Malone, P. S., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6), 860–871. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2757260/>

Social and Emotional Development

Transitioning to kindergarten can be an emotionally challenging experience for young children as they adapt to new environments, routines, and peers. Summer transition programs provide opportunities for children to develop social skills, build relationships with peers, and practice essential behaviors such as sharing, taking turns, and following instructions. By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, these programs help children feel more confident and prepared for the social aspects of kindergarten.³

Familiarization with School Environment

Summer transition programs allow children to become familiar with the physical layout of the school, classroom routines, and key personnel such as teachers and administrators. Children are more likely to demonstrate kindergarten readiness when their parents and caregivers know more about kindergarten expectations.⁴ These programs provide a structured and gradual introduction to the school environment, helping alleviate anxiety and promoting a smoother transition to kindergarten.⁵

Parental Engagement and Support

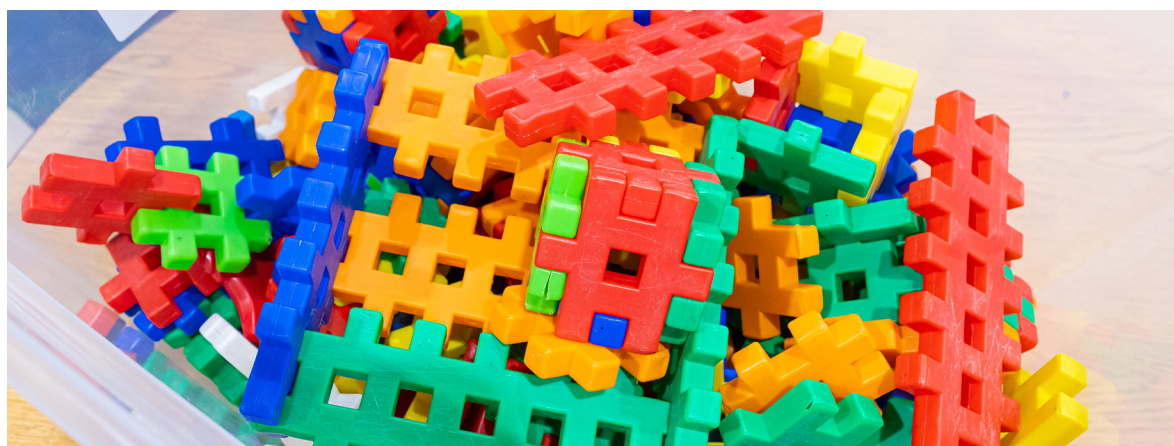
Summer transition programs often involve parents or caregivers in various activities and

workshops to support their child's kindergarten transition. Through parent education sessions, families gain valuable insights into kindergarten expectations, strategies for supporting their child's learning at home, and resources available within the school and community. Enhanced parental engagement fosters collaboration between home and school, strengthening the overall support system for children as they transition to kindergarten.^{6,7}

System-Level Approaches

Many states have developed resources to support the transition to kindergarten practices and strategies. The following state examples are system-level approaches using explicit goals, strategy documents, and supports. Policy recommendations are in the Education Commission of the States Policy Guide [State Policies to Enhance Transitions Into Kindergarten](#).

Alabama. [Born Ready](#) is an initiative of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, focused on supporting parents' understanding of the importance of early brain development and high-quality early care and education. The website provides tips and activities for different age ranges, including ages 4-5+, explaining what the child is learning.



- LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A., Downer, J., & Pianta, R. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment in kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(1), 124–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.06.001>
- Fan, X., D'Amico, L.K., Kilburn, J., Jones, A., Richard, C., Zollars, L., Garrett, S., & Johnston, D. (2023). Perspectives of parents and caregivers on kindergarten readiness: A focus on the impact of a summer transition program. *IJEC*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-023-00378-7>
- Griebling, S., & Gilbert, J. (2020). Examining the value of a summer kindergarten transitioning program for children, families, and schools. *School Community Journal*, 30(1). <https://www.adi.org/journal/2020ss/GrieblingGilbertSS2020.pdf>
- Morrison-Gutman, L., & McLoyd, V. C. (2000). Parents' management of their children's education within the home, at school, and in the community: An examination of African American families living in poverty. *The Urban Review*, 34(1), 1–22. https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/43877/11256_2004_Article_222479.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Puccioni, J. (2015). Parents' conceptions of school readiness, transition practices, and children's academic achievement trajectories. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108, 130–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.850399>

Florida. [Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Programs](#) are free, high-quality education programs intended to prepare 4-year-olds for kindergarten. A toolkit was designed to provide a timeline of suggested activities for districts, schools, child care providers, and parents.

Illinois. The Kindergarten Transition Advisory Committee created a [2018 report](#) on successful kindergarten transition practices to help inform the creation of legislation. The cross-sector committee's report identified factors critical to a successful kindergarten transition and the policy levers that could be used to support these factors.

Kentucky. The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood created [Kentucky's Transition to Kindergarten Plan](#) as part of its Early Childhood Strategic Plan. The plan outlines guiding principles and best practices for transitions, including desired outcomes and strategies for children, families, schools/programs, and the community/state.

West Virginia. The [Early Childhood Transition Steering Committee](#) has developed resources and products to help local communities support the transition of young children and their families from one program to another.

Spotlight on Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Summer Transition Program

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning implements the Summer Transition Program through its Rising Pre-K and Rising Kindergarten initiatives. The Rising Pre-K program supports children who are age eligible to attend Georgia's Pre-K program for the upcoming school year and whose native home language is Spanish.⁸ The Rising Kindergarten program is intended for children entering kindergarten, focusing on those who either did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or those who attended part of the academic year but need additional support. Children spend 6.5 hours per day over 23 instructional days in small classes with two teachers engaged

in developmentally appropriate activities, supporting their educational and social skills. The programs also include transition coaches in schools to assist with program recruitment and lead adult workshops and family engagement activities. Additional special populations, such as dual language learners with home languages other than Spanish and students with special needs, are included in pilot classroom initiatives within both programs.⁹

Spotlight on Oregon Kids in Transition to School Program

The Kids in Transition to School (KITS) program, established in Lane County, Oregon, collaborates with 12 school districts and community organizations to provide learning opportunities for incoming kindergarten students. Originally founded to serve vulnerable children in the child welfare system and those exiting early childhood early intervention programs, the program has since expanded to include all student populations. Priority is given to children who have not previously attended a preschool program, English language learners, and children with special needs.

This strengths-based program utilizes a three-pronged strategy for engagement, which encompasses:

- » School readiness groups for students, which include 24 two-hour sessions that span 6–8 weeks and are designed to develop literacy, numeracy, self-regulation, and social skills
- » Coaching, training, and technical assistance for educators, including a focus on social emotional learning
- » Facilitated virtual and in-person parent workshops and parental engagement activities

Given the area's significant Latino population, the program incorporates bilingual and bicultural adaptations and provides simultaneous translation services for parent engagement and training events.^{10,11}

8 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (n.d.). Summer Transition Program Frequently Asked Questions. https://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/STP_FAQ.pdf

9 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2024). STP Directors Training. https://www.decal.ga.gov/Video/2024-04-18_STPNewDirectorTraining.mp4

10 Pears, K. & Scheidt, D. (2024, July 8). Personal communication [Personal interview].

11 Kids in Transition to School. (n.d.). Summer Preparation for K. <https://kidsintransitiontoschool.org/kits-program/>



Conclusion

Summer transition programs play a vital role in preparing children for kindergarten by addressing academic, social, emotional, and familial needs. By providing structured learning experiences, fostering social connections, familiarizing children with the school environment and expectations, and engaging parents in the transition process, these programs contribute to smoother transitions and better outcomes for children as they embark on their kindergarten journey. Investing in summer transition programs can yield long-term benefits by promoting school readiness and setting a solid foundation for social and academic success.

Spotlight on Hawaii State Department of Education Kindergarten Summer Start Program

Hawaii's Kindergarten Summer Start program introduces kindergarten to rising Pre-K students. Operated across the state, elementary schools can opt into the program to create a learning bridge for incoming students. The three-week initiative is held at the student's expected elementary school and is geared towards students with limited Pre-K experience. Focusing on varying academic and social concepts, the program introduces students to skills that are beneficial for a smooth transition to kindergarten. These school-based programs also often provide parent engagement activities to enhance the learning experience and better connect families to the classroom.^{12, 13}

¹² Salcedo, A. (2023). Kindergarten Summer Start Programs Help Prepare Youngest Learners for School. Hawaii State Department of Education. <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/Young-learners,-families,-educators-benefit-from-kindergarten-summer-start-programs.aspx>

¹³ Hawaii State Department of Education. (2024). Summer Learning 2024. <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/SpecializedPrograms/SummerSchool/Pages/Summer-Learning.aspx>

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