

Collaboration Demonstration Project (CDP) Description

The Office of Head Start Collaboration Demonstration Project (CDP) 2019-2020 included thirteen teams of Head Start programs and their local elementary schools who worked together to improve the transition to kindergarten for children and their families. Over the course of one year, teams were encouraged to meet internally on a regular basis and as a large group with support from the Office of Head Start (OHS). As teams worked to achieve their goals, they used research-based strategies and activities that fostered four points of connection. Strategies focused on these four points of connection can help support successful transitions from early learning settings to kindergarten. Below is key research on the four connections and innovative practical examples of successful transition to kindergarten activities.

Collaboration and Connections

Research shows that the transition to kindergarten is an important event in the lives of children and families that can make a difference in their immediate and on-going school success. A collaborative approach to transitions recognizes that positive, high-quality relationships among Head Start leaders, receiving school leaders, educators, families and local community organizations are especially impactful. When these relationships are strong, all work together to offer the continuity, security, and resources that children and families deserve and need to start school feeling confident and ready to learn.

There are four key points of connection that, when strengthened, facilitate effective transitions for children and families as they make the move to kindergarten:

1. **The Program–School Connection**, in which leaders and educators from both settings work to provide children with consistent, supportive transition and learning experiences.
2. **The Family–School Connection**, in which program staff partner with families to support their sustained involvement at the new school.
3. **The Child–School Connection**, in which educators foster children’s familiarity with the new classroom and people they will encounter in kindergarten.
4. **The Community–School Connection**, in which available community resources and organizations spread information about, and provide support for, the transition to kindergarten.

Below, teams involved in the CDP share successful strategies and activities focused on one or more of these points of connection.



Program—School Connection

Key Practices	Key Activities (By State Team)
Educators or administrators align curricula between Head Start and kindergarten.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning program–school alignment (CA)
Educators or administrators share data that will help inform kindergarten teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared assessment information (KS, MN)
Educators or administrators perform joint professional development activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared training calendars (MN) • Shared early literacy training (KS) • Shared reflection on Connections event (OH) • Joint professional development focused on alignment (CA)

California

Activity: Program–School Alignment Activities

During a recent joint professional development event, the CA team planned several alignment activities:

- An overview session with families that included introductions, logistical information, at-a-glance distinctions between Head Start and kindergarten, and strategies to support the transition.
- Kindergarten children were paired with children enrolled in Head Start to act as their “kindergarten expert buddy” and to model and guide the transitioning Head Start children.
- Head Start and kindergarten educators were paired to deliver instruction in different subject areas of the kindergarten environment. Three total rotations were offered, in addition to lunch in the cafeteria.
- Families and children had an opportunity to visit kindergarten classrooms, engage in learning activities, and gain a better overall understanding of how to support their children with the transition process.
- Families received a transition backpack and transition books to read to their children.

Each rotation activity allowed children and families to engage in a hands-on activity that helped them understand school expectations and curriculum. The event included translated materials in families’ home languages, including Spanish, Mandarin, and Vietnamese. Overall, the pilot program received positive feedback from Head Start parents, Head Start educators and staff, kindergarten educators, and school district administrative personnel.

Pomona Unified School District was originally scheduled to host a transition event for early childhood and kindergarten educators and families. Due to the pandemic, Pomona hosted “grab-and-go” stations at specific sites where families could pick up transition backpacks. In addition, Pomona implemented a summer bridge program for rising kindergarteners that was funded through COVID-19 stimulus dollars. The summer program highlights include:

- Paid staff planning days that educators use to prepare their settings before children return.
- A three-week learning program for incoming kindergarteners with their new teacher; M-F, 3.5 hours per day.
- A learning program offered at 8 centers—in 23 classes of 12 children each, for a total of 276 children.
- Priority for children currently enrolled in Head Start who are transitioning to kindergarten in the fall and children with IEPs.

Kansas

Activity: Data Tracking for Continuous Improvement

The Kansas team's primary goal was to ensure that their most vulnerable families and children experience continued success beyond Head Start. To do this, the team developed a system for sharing and tracking data on the overall wellbeing of children throughout their school career.

The team identified unique data points that would be tracked, starting with the 2020-2021 kindergarten cohort. When children transition to kindergarten, the school district will keep track of those from the local Head Start programs. The team planned to gather yearly data on:

- Attendance
 - 3 or more consecutive unexcused absences
 - 5-6 unexcused absences per semester
 - 7 or more unexcused absences per year
 - Tardiness—average number of tardies per year
- Achievement:
 - Fastbridge Composite Score
- Social and Emotional:
 - Social and Academic Behavior Risk Screener (SABRS) through kindergarten and first grade—overall score N/60
 - SABRS second grade through graduation—overall score N/60 and student self-report N/60
- Behavior:
 - Percentage office referrals per month
 - Long-term data collection
 - Average GPA
 - Graduation rate
 - Extra-curricular activity involvement



All data are de-identified and aggregated. Families consent to participate in the data collection, and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for information sharing is signed by Head Start and the school district. Data is used to identify areas of need and drive improvements in program design. This data motivates team collaboration efforts and encourages future support and investment of stakeholders—including legislative support at the state level.

Minnesota

Activity: Info Sharing—Assessment/Screenings

The Minnesota team created a process for sharing data, including assessment and screening results. The team looked at sharing health, dental, and vision follow-up and began conversations about developing a universal preschool application process. The team will collaborate by using the school district reporting form annually in the spring for rising kindergarteners. This information is shared with the child's kindergarten teacher. Head Start shares the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE) with the school upon completion for the child's preschool screening file. Head Start programs and school districts encourage families to participate in the preschool screening. They also track who attended and who still needs to be screened.

Bemidji Area Schools ECFE/SR 4 & Pre-K Checklist Key: F=FULL, S=SPRING

Child's Name _____ Birthdate _____

Reception First Name (ELD 1800 (A.3.7) (3A)) not yet sometimes usually

Names Basic Colors (EOD 3) (2A) (2B)

red orange yellow green blue purple pink
 brown black white grey

Names Basic Shapes (EOD 3) (2A) (2B)

circle square triangle rectangle oval diamond
 heart star

Oral Counting (EOD 3-4) (4A) (2B) (2C) Fall Spring
SPRING GOAL: Count to at least 20

Counting Objects (EOD 3-4) (4A) (2B) (2C) Fall Spring
SPRING GOAL: Count to at least 12

Verbal Number Identification (EOD 3-4) (4A) (2B)

0 5 1 4 2 6 3
 7 9 8 10 12 11

Holds and Uses Writing Instruments Appropriately (PD-HEALTH 4) (P) (7 & 8) (3) not yet sometimes usually

Writes First Name (PD-HEALTH A, LLD 1875 (P), L19) (3A) not yet sometimes usually

Holds and Uses Scissors Appropriately (PD-HEALTH 4) (P) (7 & 8) (3) not yet sometimes usually

Minnesota

Activity: Open Professional Development Planning via Shared Training Calendars

The Bemidji School District and Bemidji Head Start collaborated and offered a Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) training to educators at both sites. The assessment is intended for children from birth through kindergarten and is aligned to the school district's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and kindergarten academic standards. The training was held at the Head Start program's new facility, the Paul Bunyan Preschool Center, and the education support manager from Bemidji Head Start was the trainer.

The multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) specialist and reading coach for Bemidji Area Schools also offered a phonemic awareness training. This training, geared toward early childhood and primary educators, was extended to Bemidji Head Start.



DRDP Training at the Paul Bunyan Center

Kansas

Activity: Shared Professional Development Opportunities

In mid-winter, the Kansas team collaborated on a joint professional development seminar to promote early literacy skills. It included a day-long learning session on phonological awareness and the elements of literacy and oral language development.

Participants reported it was exciting to have an opportunity for Head Start and school district educators to come together, develop new working relationships, share unique perspectives, and gather new teaching tools. The team believed that opportunities to strengthen partnerships would benefit both teachers and students. Participants intend to use similar tools that assist students in successful transition to kindergarten.



Ohio

Activity: Creating an Atmosphere for Successful Collaborations and Transitions via Connections Events

The Ohio team developed the Connections events to build a partnership with community service providers and encourage family, school, and community relationships. Relying on partnerships already established through other district initiatives, the team secured active participation of over 20 community service providers. After hosting each Connections event, the team held a follow-up meeting at the local health department to debrief and evaluate the event. The meeting consisted of three different sessions.

Session 1–All Stakeholders: During this time, all stakeholders were given an opportunity to share their sessions, discuss challenges or successes, and make recommendations for change. This session also focused on relationships, giving the Head Start program and public school an opportunity to discuss referral data and interactions with families during the event.

Session 2–Head Start Teams: This session, which included early childhood teams and the CDP team members, focused on data and logistics. The team looked at attendance rates and collaborated with educators, assistants, and principals on refinement suggestions. Teams shared family surveys they'd collected. Education staff contributed valuable information and family feedback.

Session 3–Collaboration Demonstration Project Team: During this session, members of the CDP team reflected on the previous sessions of the meeting and on the progress of the team's main goal, asking: *Are we where we need to be? What could we do differently? What do families need?*

Data gathered at these follow-up meetings were key to this project's success. Treating all stakeholders, staff, and families with respect was paramount and allowed a welcoming environment that successfully balanced advocacy with inquiry. The follow-up meetings increased collaboration and built relationships with families. This team's original goal was to provide an event for district and Head Start team members, however, it ended as an event that was driven by parent and community relationships. The team fostered those relationships.

California

Activity: Joint Transition Professional Development and Planned Activities

The California team planned a two-day joint professional development event between Garvey School District and Pomona Unified School District. The training included Head Start and kindergarten educators, education managers, directors, and principals. The goal of the training was to increase familiarity with developmentally appropriate practices that support early learners' social and emotional development, vocabulary, and oral language. The training also provided an overview of the preschool curriculum, information about the importance of transition and alignment, and a simulated activity where participants experienced the preschool learning environment. As part of the joint professional development, programs planned additional joint transition activities and continuity between the program and school.



Garvey School District piloted a collaborative approach between their preschool and kindergarten programs. The pilot used an integrated approach to transition that included child development and Head Start staffs, school district personnel (administrators, office managers, staff, home-school community coordinator, and kindergarten educators), kindergarten students, and children and families enrolled in Head Start. The approach focused on:

- Sharing expectations and logistics.
- Relationship building among parents, children, and school personnel.
- Fostering alignment between Head Start and kindergarten.

Planning activities for the transition event included collaboration between early childhood education staff and elementary school personnel, joint professional development for Head Start and kindergarten educators, shared release and planning time for Head Start and kindergarten educators, and outreach to parents. The pilot included two school campuses (Bitely and Dewey), composed of five preschool classrooms. The superintendent encouraged school cabinet members and school district principals to attend the transition events.

Family–School Connection

Key Practices	Key Activities (By State Team)
Collaborating on important family events such as registration or open houses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held shared family conferences (OH) • Held shared home visits and transition visits (MI) • Held collaborative kindergarten round-up events (MN, AK)
Ensuring that Head Start and public school use the same language for family communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted a family survey to review transition activities (AK)
Collaborating on sending home transition information/ learning activities to prepare for kindergarten.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sent preschool (transition) packets home (Pinellas County, FL)

Ohio

Activity: Parent–Teacher Connections

During the Connections transitions events, team members held family–teacher conferences. Instead of typical one-on-one parent–teacher conferences, team members took four parents to each table and greeted and introduced the families there. They assured families that all personal information would remain confidential and individuals could schedule a one-on-one meeting for follow-up questions.

The small groups of parents made further discussion about transitioning to kindergarten easier. The parents seemed pleased that they were not alone in feeling anxious about kindergarten, wondering if their child was ready for it. The educators shared Ohio’s Early Learning and Development Standards, so families understood the team’s goals and accountability. Throughout the prior school year, the educational team had shared and sent home activities, standards, and pictures of activities. However, reviewing them in a group seemed to put parents’ minds at ease about kindergarten expectations.

Michigan

Activity: Parent Transition Conferences

The Michigan team created a collaborative transition form for families and teachers to complete during family–teacher conferences. The form outlines information that would help support children and their families in their next placement. Head Start educators received training on how to engage families in providing information on the transition form, incorporate meaningful data, and learn what information best supports kindergarten teachers. The team decided that a summary page from the child assessment software would be included with the transition form and they developed a plan for Head Start and kindergarten educators to go over the transition forms together in the fall.

The COVID-19 quarantine has added a challenge for face-to-face meetings between Head Start educators and families. Instead, educators have used Zoom, Facetime, and telephones to complete these forms. Due to the quarantine, teachers have also been virtually sending out daily activities for parents to try with their children. As a result, parents have experienced more educational interactions with their children and now have an even stronger understanding of the importance of their role in their child’s education.

Minnesota

Activity: Family Activities and Kindergarten Round-Up

More purposeful, collaborative planning efforts began at the June 2019 OHS and public school collaboration demonstration project meeting. During the June meeting, the team discussed several school-sponsored early childhood events scheduled throughout the school year that Head Start families could attend. These included:

- Buena Vista: Horse-drawn wagon rides
- Santa Night: At the school district site
- Kindergarten Registration: Registration online, immunization forms, bussing sign-up, and Indian Education registration forms
- Cabin Fever Event: Open gym and open swim activities for the family
- Indoor Garage Sale: Geared for babies and kids
- Ready for Kindergarten Event: Kindergarten teachers met children and families in the Paul Bunyan Elementary cafeteria for coffee and conversation
- Wheels Event: A free family event at the local high school featuring all kinds of vehicles with wheels, and even a helicopter

The school district office hosted a collaborative kindergarten transition meeting. The main topic was kindergarten registration, which starts in March. We set a date for the school district staff to come to the Head Start center and register Head Start children. Unfortunately, we cancelled collaborative registration and spring family events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The district's registrar notified the Head Start family support advocate noting the school now accepts screenshots of the kindergarten registration forms. This helps families submit forms if they don't have scanners. Collaboration, communication, and cooperation continue to benefit children enrolled in Head Start and their families. Another strong, positive outcome from this improved communication is the willingness to share waitlists (with parental consent).



Back Row (school district): Rachel Ahmdahl, Janelle Saiger, Hailey Mack, Sonja Rowland. Front Row (Head Start): Keith Bartholomous, Linda Borgheijnck

Alaska

Activity: Strengthen the April Kindergarten Round-Up Event for Families, Providing Greater Consistency of Activities and Expectations Across Schools

All Anchorage School District (ASD) elementary schools are required to hold a kindergarten round-up event in their building during the month of April. Until this year, most events had minimal support from school leadership, and it was up to individual school's kindergarten teachers to plan and host this event. This created inconsistent experiences for families across the district. In the ASD-Head Start partnership classrooms, collaborative teams from early childhood programs and kindergarten co-created comprehensive events. These served as models and springboards for the entire school district's kindergarten round-up events. Preschool and elementary departments then worked together to design and communicate clearly to principals the importance of successful transition practices and expectations regarding the round-up event. Schools across the district embraced this which increased the quality of the event experience for families.

Partnering between Head Start and ASD sparked a rich exchange of successful practices to be shared between the two entities. Working collaboratively on events, such as kindergarten round-up, provided an opportunity to increase the quality of an existing event and scale it up across the entire district.

Alaska

Activity: Development of the Family Transition Kindergarten Survey

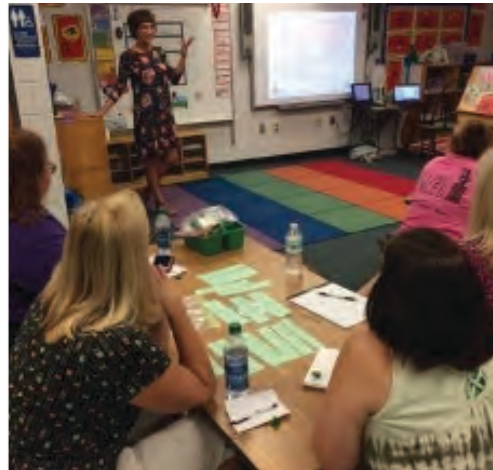
Following the discussion of activities and strategies that were currently in place within the Anchorage School District (ASD) and local Head Start grantees for kindergarten transitioning, the team collaboratively developed the Family Transition Kindergarten Survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather data about which transition activities were accessed by Head Start families and then rate family satisfaction with the overall transitioning experience. Additionally, reviewing the survey results allowed the team to reflect on Head Start participation and satisfaction of this unique group within the larger community of rising kindergartners. With this information, the team could make changes to the fall survey and consider ways to increase Head Start family participation in the current activities. The team could also use the survey and reach out to families to address not only quantitative issues (such as non-participation), but qualitative issues as well (e.g., accessibility, communication, the activity itself).

The team encountered multiple challenges in survey distribution, including system issues, which pushed the survey distribution date months past the fall transition events. Upon post-survey reflection, the team identified the need to find a common language used by schools and Head Start in describing a particular activity (e.g., Family Connection Meeting versus Meet the Teacher—same activity, but different language).

Pinellas County, Florida

Activity: Preschool Packets

In Pinellas County, Florida, the Preschool Kindergarten Partnership (PKP) is a multi-agency workgroup dedicated to helping children transition to kindergarten successfully. The group met monthly to address transition to kindergarten. They developed a plan to disseminate monthly information to all early childhood programs, including Head Start.



PKP partnering agencies hand-delivered information packets to nearly 300 preschool and Head Start programs each month. From November through January, centers sent home information about the enrollment process, transition events, and checklists. All information was available in English and Spanish. By hand-delivering the packets, PKP was able to build relationships with center directors, spread the word about PKP and its mission, and give information to directors that they can, in turn, provide for their families.



Child–School Connection

Key Practices	Key Activities (By State Team)
Helping children experience kindergarten before the transition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head Start visits to kindergartens and from kindergarten educators and administrators (MI)
Helping children build relationships with school teachers, administrators, and classmates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheduled engaging and enriching events that brought together educators, students, and families (KS)
Communicating with children about kindergarten expectations and differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head Start educators discussed with children what a kindergarten day looks like and practiced regular routines, like meals (MI)

Michigan

Activity: Head Start–Public School Visits

The Michigan team established a schedule of visits to the elementary school buildings to support smooth kindergarten transitions. The visits included an art class, music class, gym class, lunch, and library time. Before visits, early childhood educators led discussions with children about what they expected to see or happen, and after visits, they reflected on what happened. During the visit, elementary staff taught a developmentally appropriate lesson to the Head Start children. Early childhood educators took time to help children notice similarities and differences between kindergarten and the Head Start classroom.

Staff from the elementary schools also made visits to the Head Start classrooms. On one visit, the principal came to visit and read a familiar book to the children. Each kindergarten teacher visited the classrooms. On these visits, kindergarten teachers participated in “work time” and moved around, interacting in the children’s play.

Kansas

Activity: Shared Student and Family Engagement Opportunities



The goal of the CDP team was to reach out to families and help them recognize the importance of involvement in their child’s learning. As the team focused on building support systems for students in the classroom, they also hoped to build support systems for families in the community. Families needed to feel heard, understood, engaged, and supported. By building these relationships, the team also built a safety net that can assist and care for families. The

team wanted families to know where to go and who to turn to in uncertain times, and the team wanted the school—Head Start and the school district—to be the place families go when they need help, guidance, and assistance.

In mid-February, the school district invited an early-literacy author to conduct a number of events designed to get children, teachers, and families excited about reading. The author led an assembly for children enrolled in the school district and Head Start. Educators participated with their students in activities ranging from drumming and rhythm exercises to bi-lingual storytelling. Children had a great time watching their educators perform skits and dances while they engaged in important literacy skill-building.

That same evening, the author hosted an event for bilingual families in which he spoke with families and educators about the many ways they can engage children in reading rituals that are fun and relevant. Both district educators and Head Start families participated, receiving resources and forming partnerships focused on preparing their children for a lifetime of learning to read and reading to learn.

Community—School Connection

Key Practices	Key Activities (By State Team)
Building relationships with the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secured a partnership with over 20 community service providers through the Connections program (OH)
Building relationships between the family and the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held a community service providers event at the school (OH)
Sharing community service provider information with families or asking community organizations to share information about kindergarten.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made Public Service Announcements about kindergarten registration (OH) Posted bulletins in community areas, such as directors' offices or libraries (OH) Worked with social services to get information to families (OH)

Ohio

Activity: Build the Relationships First

The team developed the Connections program as an important effort to build a partnership with community service providers and promote family, school, and community relationships. Relying on partnerships already established, the team secured active participation of over 20 community service providers. As the team began building partnerships for the program, they used five principles to guide their collective impact: shared vision, shared measurement, continuous communication, mutually reinforcing activities, and a backbone of support. When the event brought the community service providers into the school in an informative, informal, and non-threatening way, families and caregivers gained greater understanding of services available and, more importantly, how to access those services.

Connections 5 Guiding Principles

1. Shared vision
2. Shared measurement
3. Continuous communication
4. Mutually reinforcing activities
5. Backbone of support

The Connections program was all about relationships. The challenge was to build the relationship first. It was not about bringing families in and lecturing them for 20 minutes about a program that the team thought they needed. It was about listening and relating to each other—whether you were a community service provider, a family member, caregiver, or an educator.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the successful strategies used by the Collaboration Demonstration Project teams and suggested by Head Start. For more best practices, check out the [Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center's Transition to Kindergarten page](#). The webpage also includes resources that support transition practices during virtual learning and distance learning. More information on the work of the CDP teams will be discussed in an upcoming practice implications paper.