

Partnering with Families to Improve Education Transitions for Students

Transitions are periods of time when a student is transitioning to a different school, a different level in their education, or between the school and the community. Transitions often mean new buildings, new teachers, new classmates and new expectations for students. Transitions are often challenging for students, school personnel and families. When schools work together with families to provide structures and supports through these times, however, negative effects can be minimized and transitions can be positive experiences for students and families.

Unfortunately, research indicates that many transition efforts aimed at involving families and communities occur only after the school year has begun and do not take into account the needs of specific children or families (Early, Pianta, Taylor, and Cox, 2001). Furthermore, family involvement typically declines as children get older. Involving families and communities during transition periods can help develop relationships and lead to increased involvement following the transition period in the older grades (Norman, J.M., 1999). Involving families, communities and students in transition planning is particularly important for students with special needs. IDEA requires transition planning including post-secondary awareness activities and initial planning for transition to begin no later than age 14 for students with disabilities. Student, family and community collaboration in transition planning has been linked to positive outcomes including higher graduation rates for these students (Michaels & Ferrara, 2005).

Example Action Steps:

Transitioning to Kindergarten

Before the school year begins:

- Invite families to visit the kindergarten in the spring of their child's last year of pre-school.
- Place fliers in common places in the community to invite families whose children may not be in pre-school to tour the kindergarten.
- Make periodic contact with the children themselves to begin to develop relationships before kindergarten begins.
- Prepare and disseminate summer reading and other literary activities to families for the summer prior to before the beginning of kindergarten.
- Schedule meetings between families and teachers before the start of kindergarten to discuss teacher and family expectations.
- Make periodic contact with the families of pre-school age children via a telephone call or face-to-face, to begin sharing information about the child and their routines, and their school setting.
- Invite teachers in local pre-schools to participate in professional development opportunities with kindergarten teachers.
- Visit the homes of kindergarteners before and after school has begun.
- Provide information to parents on the transition to kindergarten, including kindergarten registration guidelines, kindergarten options in the community, information on specific schools once placements have been made, and health and nutrition information to ensure that children enter school healthy.
- Create strong relationships with teachers at feeder preschools to facilitate transition.

Early in the school year:

- Partner with local parent organizations to inform new parents how they can become involved in the new school.
- Utilize willing current kindergarten family members to mentor the family members of incoming kindergarteners.
- Refer families of struggling students to community resources, such as counseling, if needed.
- Facilitate support groups for parents while their student is transitioning.

Transitioning to Middle School

Before the school year begins:

- Invite families to visit the middle school in the spring of their child's last year in elementary school.
- Schedule meetings between families, students and teachers to discuss family, student and teacher expectations.
- Invite families to planning meetings to give input on their child's class schedule.
- Send out an orientation packet to families and students in the spring before students begin at the middle school which includes information about rules, policies, sample curriculum and materials needed in the middle school.
- Collaborate with elementary teachers to prepare and disseminate a summer reading list for students and families.
- Identify feeder schools and develop close relationships with the teachers and administrators who have had the students in prior grades or classes.
- Provide families with a list of community resources, such as summer programs which may help their children be better prepared for middle school in the spring before the transition.

Early in the school year:

- Host a family orientation night where current family members, teachers, administrators meet with families to discuss how to be involved in education at the middle school.
- Utilize willing current middle school families to mentor families during the transition.
- Refer families of struggling students to community resources such as counseling, if needed.

Transitioning to High School

Before the school year begins:

- Identify feeder schools and develop close relationships with the teachers and administrators.
- Work with middle school teachers and administrators to develop the transition program.
- Schedule a day for families to tour the new school with students in the spring before the school transition.
- Schedule a day for families and students to meet with their new teachers, principals and guidance counselors.
- Collaborate with the middle school teachers and staff to prepare homework assignments for the summer.
- Invite families to planning meetings to give input on their student's class schedule, being sure that students and families understand the options and long-term effects of class selections.
- Invite families to spend a day at the high school so they can be more familiar with the experiences their child will face.

- Contact families by telephone or a home visit before and after the student transitions to the high school.
- Send out an orientation packet to families and students in the spring before students begin at the high school which includes information about rules, policies, sample curriculum and materials needed in the high school.
- Provide families with a list of community resource, such as summer programs which may help their children be better prepared for high school in the spring before the transition.

Early in the school year:

- Use current high school family members to mentor incoming family members.
- Use current high students to mentor incoming students.
- Host a family orientation night where current teachers and administrators meet with families to discuss how to be involved in education at the high school.

Transitioning out of High School

Before students leave high school:

- Invite past graduates back to the school to discuss their experiences. Invite families to meet with the past graduates, too.
- Pair students with community mentors who have similar interests.
- Include both students and families in transition planning and transition-related IEP meetings.
- Meet with students and families each year to discuss if students are on track to graduate and the post-graduation opportunities that are available.
- Provide basic information to families and students about the college entrance process, ACT/SAT preparation, financial aid and course selection.
- Provide information to students and families regarding the skills that are necessary to succeed in college and independent living.
- Assign interactive homework regarding college admissions and career opportunities that engages students with family members.
- Create family support groups which allow family members to voice their concerns about their child's transition out of high school.
- Work with local universities, community colleges and trade schools to set up information sessions and tours for students and families.
- Invite representatives from local businesses, universities, community colleges and trade schools to the school for a post-high school employment and college fair.
- Work with local businesses to provide volunteer, job shadowing and internship opportunities for students.
- Host workshops that help students and families to fill out such forms as the FAFSA, college applications, scholarship forms and job applications.
- Refer families and students to community resources when needed.

After students leave high school:

- Contact recent graduates to check on their progress after they have left high school.
- Host college and career nights after hours at the school and invite high school alumni.

Resources:

Transition Guides for Families

The Ohio Department of Education has created Web pages for families to help their children through difficult school transitions. The Web pages are currently available at the following links:

Transition to Kindergarten:

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1507&ContentID=35575&Content=51934>

Transition to Middle School:

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1516&ContentID=35577&Content=51800>

Transition to High School:

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1520&ContentID=35580&Content=51798>

The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families

This document, created by the Harvard Family Research Project, provides a review of current research to involve families in the transition to kindergarten. The document provides a review of promising practices and offers strategies. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/the-transition-to-kindergarten-a-review-of-current-research-and-promising-practices-to-involve-families>

Reengaging Families at the Secondary Level

This is a professional development program which offers strategies on how to engage families in middle schools, including strategies for engaging families to improve transitions (Norman, J.M., 1999).

<http://www.itv.scetv.org/PDFfiles/reengagingparents.pdf#search=%22engaging%20parents%20in%20college%20planning%22>

Supporting the Dynamic Development of Youth with Disabilities During Transition: A Guide for Families

This document, created by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, is a guide for families of youth with disabilities during secondary transition. <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1432>

Websites

- Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids - Ohio <http://www.sparkohio.org/>
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, Transition Resources for Families http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/transition_adulthood/Pages/forparents.aspx
- National College Transitions Network, Promising Practices <http://www.collegetransition.org/promising/practice.html>

Sources:

Boethel, M. (2004) *Readiness: School, Family, and Community Connections*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Bohan-Baker, M. & Little, P. (2004). *The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project

Christie, K. & Zinth, K. (2008). *Ensuring Transitions from the Middle Grades to High School*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Early, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Taylor, L. C., & Cox, M. J. (2001). *Transition practices: Findings from a national survey of kindergarten teachers*. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(3), 199–206.

Michaels, C. & Ferrara, Denise (2005). *Promoting Post-School Success for All: The Role of Collaboration in Person Centered Transition Planning*. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* 16(4), 287-313.,

Norman, J. M. (1999). *Parent Engagement for Middle Schools, Professional Development for School Trainers*. Carnegie Corporation of New York, Middle Grades School State Policy Initiative with the South Carolina Department of Education and School Improvement Council Assistance.