

TRANSITION

Transitions into preschool and from preschool into elementary school are important milestones for children and their families. Like other major changes, these transitions can cause children and families to experience many strong emotions such as excitement, anxiety, fear, and/or hope. To lessen the stress for all of those concerned, including teachers, it is important to prepare children and families for the upcoming changes. Strong transition efforts targeting family involvement can lead to positive teacher morale, family support and satisfaction, a great reputation for the program in the community, and improved child outcomes. Additional information can be found in the [Essential Practices for Successful Child Transitions](#).

Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) create and implement plans that transition families both into and out of the program. The GSRP transition plan should be an extension of a unique, community-wide effort. An effective transition planning committee has representatives from all early childhood stakeholder groups including families, the Intermediate School District (ISD) early childhood contact (ECC), GSRP classrooms, Head Start, Center- and Home-Based early care and education providers, Early On®, special education, kindergarten teachers, elementary/public school academy administrators, the local Great Start Collaborative, and a representative from the local Great Start Resource Center. The languages and cultures of the community should also be reflected in the team membership. Community transition plans should be evidence-based with a focus on responsive relationships, coordination, and continuity between environments. The transition period is viewed as a reciprocal process for all partners, rather than an event that happens to a child; acknowledging “ready” children, “ready” schools, and “ready” communities (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman and Cox, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2001).

Whether transitioning families into or out of GSRP, connections are purposefully created as resources for children: family-school connections, child-school connections, peer connections, and community connections. The appropriate committee within the ISD GSRP Advisory Structure is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the development of a plan for transitions into and out of GSRP. This may be the School Readiness Advisory Committee, or another committee determined by the ISD. Ideally, an ISD GSRP team member is identified to serve as the facilitator for transition plan work. This individual ensures transitions are a regular agenda item, including dialogue and collaboration to generate ideas for carrying out transition activities, creating and monitoring a timeline for transition activities, and evaluating and revising the transition plan as needed. The plan features activities that support children and their families as they move into prekindergarten and from prekindergarten into kindergarten. The plan should differentiate between “orientation to school” and “transition to school,” and respect the different perspectives and expectations of families and children.

Transition into GSRP

Children enter GSRP having experienced varying services and environments: home, Early On®, or possibly another early education and care setting. Key to transition is establishing frequent, open, and honest communication between program staff and

family members. Successful strategies for establishing positive communication begin with staff eliciting, valuing, and using information from families about the enrolled child.

Families, like children, come to GSRP with different circumstances and experiences. Programs should develop strategies to communicate with all families. Some families may work two jobs or a night shift, cannot read or speak English, share custody of a child, and/or have had poor school experiences themselves. Meaningful information and opportunities should be provided to families based on their expressed interests and needs. Refer to the [Family Engagement](#) section of this manual for more information.

Before school begins, an initial home visit and an orientation opportunity for the child and family helps staff and families begin to get to know each other and build trust. This continues throughout the year as formal and informal occasions are utilized to strengthen responsive relationships between all involved. This includes drop off/pick up times, email, texts, notes or phone calls, family events, home visits, and family conferences.

Written information should be positive and useful. The family handbook must include a program overview, school calendar, contact information, and policies regarding attendance, weather, illness, medication, conflict-resolution, emergencies, confidentiality, and grievances. It must also be written in a manner that is understood by families.

A high-quality GSRP employs many strategies to engage families as decision-makers in all facets of the program. Staff members begin this during the very first contact by asking families what information they would like to know about the program. A one-page explanation of the role of the local GSRP Family Participation Group, how often it meets, the support available to families who serve, and the work typically done, might help families to feel comfortable who would otherwise think special skills are required for participation. For confident and active participation, family participation group work should begin with an orientation on topics such as membership, organizational structure, and responsibility.

Transition into Kindergarten from GSRP

GSRP staff members are instrumental to the development of plans that ease the transition of children and families from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Kindergarten transition activities with children should include casual discussions about the differences between prekindergarten and kindergarten, reading of books about going to kindergarten, and possibly taking a fieldtrip to a kindergarten classroom with children and families. Another option is to have a kindergarten teacher visit the GSRP classroom, assist in a large group activity by sharing a book or a song, and relating it to books or songs that may be similar to what children will experience in the kindergarten classroom. Teachers could make a photo book of the classroom, kindergarten teachers, principal, other staff, and other rooms that may be a new part of their school experience (such as the music room).

Staff may plan to assist the transition of families by connecting with other families who have already made the transition from GSRP to kindergarten, in the format of

a panel discussion with past families. They can also support families to create a visual record of the ending celebration of GSRP and provide pictures to each family.

Kindergarten transition activities for GSRP staff may include participation on the local GSRP Family Participation Group, transition committee, or being a part of an Individual Education Program (IEP) Team as a child transitions into kindergarten. GSRP teaching teams may meet with the receiving kindergarten teachers individually or in a regional event where the focus is data sharing to discuss developmental profiles. GSRP staff members are responsible for reviewing children's records to determine what information will be copied and forwarded once a request for records is received. All teaching teams will utilize the final home visit/family conference to individualize transitioning for a child and family. This may include supporting a family in the first few months of kindergarten. Staff may provide families a summer activity guide/calendar that includes information about what the kindergarten experience will be like.

Two Year Kindergarten Sequence: Retention Kindergarten

GSRP exists to ensure enrolled children have a successful transition into, and experience in, kindergarten. Children are entitled to kindergarten when they meet the age eligibility criteria set by the Michigan Legislature. Kindergarten is designed to be a one-school-year program before first grade. There is no "grade" in Michigan titled Developmental Kindergarten, Beginkergarten, Young 5s, etc.

When staff and families begin the transition process into kindergarten, a family meeting should take place to sum up the year, discuss transition, and address the aggregate results of the ongoing child assessment tool used in the program. This leads into an opportunity to discuss horizontal alignment within the GSRP and vertical alignment between GSRP and kindergarten. For more information on alignment see the [Curriculum](#) section of this manual.

Additional discussion should include the research history showing that delay of school entry, placement in extra-year programs, and retention are generally detrimental to a child's overall school success. Families should be objectively informed regarding their rights when enrolling children into kindergarten. [STILL Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement](#) is a position statement on this issue developed by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE) and endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).