

Making the Most of a Critical Transition

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS
INITIATIVE

Made possible by Indiana's Preschool Development Grant
Powered by Early Learning Indiana





THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS

While the first day of kindergarten is a significant milestone for young children, it can come with a slew of emotions and jitters for them and their families. Along with feelings of nervous excitement, children arrive at kindergarten with a variety of previous learning experiences and structures. For some children, the kindergarten classroom represents their first learning environment away from home, relatives and friends. Others are used to early learning programs that typically offer a nurturing environment with a focus on holistic child development and more time for unstructured, interest-based play.

In the kindergarten setting, higher student-to-teacher ratios lead to less opportunity for one-on-one attention and more emphasis on independence and interaction with large groups. The focus of child-to-teacher interactions shifts from building physical and social-emotional skills to academic progress. Overall, there is less “choice time” as children’s days become more structured and centered around academic curriculum and core subject areas. Families must also acclimate to a new routine and less consistent opportunities to remain apprised of their child’s activities. Parents accustomed to real-time updates through daily reports from their early learning provider and frequent engagement with teachers at drop-off and pick-up times may feel less connected to their child’s academic progress and unsure of how to best support it.

For children who experience social and economic risks, the adjustment to an elementary school environment can be even more significant. Without a foundation of essential skills and supports, many of these children begin their K-12 journey already at a disadvantage. Tasked with the responsibility of helping all students reach the same level of success, kindergarten teachers can face a stressful situation as they try to close the gap between at-risk children and their peers, often creating feelings of frustration and failure for the child that are difficult to overcome.

Effective kindergarten transitions can set the tone for success in K-12 and beyond. When transition supports are identified and implemented early enough, kids experience less stress upon entering kindergarten and can better manage the uncertainty of a new environment. As an emphasis on kindergarten transitions and readiness grows across the country, communities are taking note of the increasing body of evidence that suggests effective transitions can combat the “fade-out effect” and greatly benefit at-risk children.¹ For example, a 2005 National Institute of Health study found that greater numbers of transition activities were associated with academic gains throughout the year as measured by standardized tests. Gains were greatest for children from low- and middle-income families.²

Recognizing the need to ensure their youngest citizens start school equipped with the building blocks to succeed, cities and states have begun crafting and implementing innovative approaches to strengthening the connective experience between early learning and the beginning of kindergarten.



¹ Bohan-Baker, M. and Little, P. M.D. (2002). The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families. Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from: <https://globalfrp.org/Archive>

² Schulting, A.B., Malone, P.S., and Dodge, K.A. (2005). The Effect of School-Based Kindergarten Transition Policies and Practices on Child Academic Outcomes. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2757260/>

INDIANA'S PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



The Kindergarten Transitions initiative was supported by Indiana's Preschool Development Grant as part of a significant effort by the state to evaluate and fortify the birth-to-five system. Recognizing that effective transitions are an important part of kindergarten readiness, Indiana sought to identify leading strategies and practices occurring throughout the state and across the nation that could be readily replicated in Hoosier communities.

To do this, the state partnered with Early Learning Indiana (ELI) to:

- Conduct a national review of state- and community-level practices for effective kindergarten transitions
- Uncover promising and innovative practices happening within Indiana
- Identify replicable strategies and package them into a framework that could be deployed locally by K-12 districts, ECE providers, and other involved community stakeholders
- Implement the replication model across the state





A GROUNDING IN RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

To ensure the Kindergarten Transitions initiative was grounded in research and best practices, ELI reviewed national studies and publications on effective transitions and identified exemplary transition models in place in different states. Within this growing body of evidence, key trends emerged. Increased transition activities are linked to academic gains. The greatest gains being experienced by children from low- and middle-income families who experience social and economic risks and enter school behind their peers. Additionally, these transition activities consistently lead to increased parent-initiated school involvement during kindergarten.³ Another study pointed to a higher occurrence of low-impact practices, such as sending brochures home, rather than effective, high-intensity practices, like arranging pre-K student visits or allowing for joint planning time between pre-K and kindergarten teachers. The same study found that schools located in districts serving large numbers of low-income students were less likely to provide kindergarten transition activities compared to wealthier schools, meaning that students and families who might benefit most from transition activities are the least likely to receive them.⁴

As ELI assessed this preponderance of national research, two key pieces of evidence informed the development of an approach to replication in Indiana. Effective transition practices outlined in Rimm-Kaufman's 2000 publication, *An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research*, provided myriad practical recommendations for state and local efforts, such as beginning these efforts a year before kindergarten, offering opportunities for ECE and K-12 educators and administrators to connect, and providing timely information and a menu of activities, with appropriate intensity, to meet and address the needs of unique children and families.⁵

³ Schulting, A.B., Malone, P.S., and Dodge, K.A. (2005). The Effect of School-Based Kindergarten Transition Policies and Practices on Child Academic Outcomes. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2757260/>

⁴ Little, M., Cohen-Vogel, L., Curran, C. (2016). Facilitating the Transition to Kindergarten: What ECLS-K Data Tell Us about School Practices Then and Now. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858416655766>

⁵ Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Pianta, R. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21 (5), 491-511.

Additionally, Head Start's evidence-based and intentional kindergarten transition practices also heavily influenced this process. These practices include: establishing school readiness goals with parent involvement; regularly aggregating and analyzing child level assessment data; providing early learning coaching to program staff; and providing ongoing communication with local schools and other agencies receiving Head Start children to align services.⁶

To align with and supplement research, ELI sought to identify a range of leading state- and local-level practices through a national landscape review. This review process uncovered several noteworthy trends and takeaways:

- States are increasingly taking a leadership role in kindergarten transition efforts in various ways, including instituting policies, providing funding, and creating community frameworks and resources.
- K-12 districts are also becoming more engaged in these efforts, reaching out to form partnerships and offering joint professional development opportunities to drive more effective transition programming.
- Communities, of all sizes, are launching collaborative initiatives to support more effective transitions, with cities like Boston, Pittsburgh, Louisville and Portland leading the way through innovative partnerships and programming.
- Technology is increasingly being used to support kindergarten transition programs, whether through standardized transition tools and assessment forms or leveraging digital apps to engage families.



While the specifics of the efforts vary, they collectively confirm the growing national attention and focus on the issue of transitions.

⁶ Head Start Website: School Readiness: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-approach-school-readiness-overview>

AN INVENTORY OF PROMISING PRACTICES

National research indicates kindergarten transition practices should begin a full year before kindergarten and incorporate a range of low- and high-intensity, culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate activities to address the needs of diverse children and families.⁷ Through the course of ELI's research, a number of leading practices were identified that could be adopted across the state.



Practices for Supporting Children and Families

- Establish a signature annual transition campaign and engage community partners to activate in different ways
- Send parent- and child-focused transition packets to homes of rising kindergarteners with information on what to expect and how to prepare, as well as a calendar of transition activities
- Leverage digital tools, like Vroom, to send readiness tips, learning activities and ideas for families
- Equip parents with transition resources and at-home assessment tools to build familiarity and skills
- Create a parent ambassador program where veteran parents can network with incoming families through open houses, school tours and online forums
- Initiate community-based round-ups or back-to-school events in neighborhoods with culturally focused features
- Host simulated kindergarten experiences with child and family programming
- Initiate targeted interventions, like readiness camps, for at-risk children and families
- Arrange time for incoming children to visit kindergarten classrooms and interact with teachers
- Encourage kindergarten teachers to visit pre-k classrooms to meet children and discuss what they can expect in kindergarten
- Have kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with incoming children and families
- Offer shortened days for kindergarteners during their first week to ease the transition
- Issue first-day experience reports and host more frequent conferences or parent updates during first semester, considering digital options.

⁷ Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Pianta, R. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21 (5), 491-511.



Leading Efforts for Building Teacher Connections

- Hold annual kindergarten open house(s) for pre-K teachers and administrators to review readiness criteria and preview transition plans and activities
- Institute teacher-to-teacher conferences for pre-K and kindergarten staff to collaborate
- Leverage ESSA funds to establish joint planning and professional development opportunities
- Create professional development opportunities for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to shadow one another and building understanding
- Convene teachers for ongoing data reviews, alignment planning and environmental standards
- Implement virtual collaboration tools and professional learning communities to foster organic connections



Strategies for Strengthening Leadership

- Create transition teams and liaisons within K-12 to lead planning and coordination with pre-K programs and teachers
- Support executive leadership programming and professional development
- Establish common transition processes and supports including forms, readiness skills and indicators, and data-sharing methodology
- Convene administrators for ongoing data reviews, alignment planning and environmental standards
- Offer specialized assessment training for ECE and K-12 teachers and administrators to ensure deep understanding of methodology and assessment





HIGHLIGHTED EFFORTS UNDERWAY WITHIN INDIANA

To align with and supplement national research, Early Learning Indiana sought to uncover promising practices happening in Indiana districts and schools, early learning programs and community organizations through a prize competition. The Strong Start for Kindergarten Prize encouraged applicants to share innovative ideas that help children move effectively from their early years into kindergarten classrooms. Winners were eligible for grants ranging from \$5,000-\$25,000.

ELI's goals were to secure at least 50 submissions representing a mix of K-12 school districts, early learning providers, and nonprofit community organizations, and to award at least three prizes with representation across those three audiences. The objective was to find high-impact transition efforts that both incorporate nationally recognized best practices and could be replicated across the state.

ELI promoted the competition, which ran from July 17 to September 6, by:

- Tapping into a paid marketing list to better reach K-12 superintendents, elementary school principals and grant writers
- Partnering with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to reach more than 1,000 K-12 district leaders, as well as with United Way organizations and the Indiana Philanthropy Alliance to engage their local community members
- Utilizing existing relationships with early childhood partners, including child care resource and referral agencies, statewide coalitions, and networking groups
- Writing a guest blog post for the Indiana Association of School Principals
- Hosting a Facebook Live session that discussed competition criteria and nationally recognized best practices

ELI received 55 submissions from 23 school districts, 23 early learning providers and nine nonprofit community organizations, representing 24 Indiana counties.

A team of seven ELI staff members and an IDOE early learning specialist rated the submissions on a scale of 1 to 5 across five scoring domains:

- **Comprehensiveness:** the extent to which the program combined one or more of the kindergarten transition best practices outlined in national research and the prize competition background information
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which the program articulated goals and demonstrated measurable outcomes
- **Replicability:** the extent to which the program and/or cited efforts could be packaged and shared for replication in other Indiana communities
- **Scalability:** the extent to which the program could be scaled into a broader statewide effort
- **Innovation:** representation of innovative programming or tactics used

Submissions

Project Goal: Secure at least 50 submissions representing a mix of K-12 districts, early learning providers and/or non-profit community organizations.



55 submissions received

- 23 school districts
- 23 early learning providers
- 9 non-profit community organizations



Representation around the state

- 24 counties



The team reviewed and completed 156 submission evaluations; eight submissions were disqualified due to lack of evaluable content. ELI selected nine award recipients representing eight Indiana counties – three K-12 school districts, four early learning providers and two nonprofit community organizations. The impressive winning submissions incorporated a range of national best practices. In total, ELI awarded \$100,000 in grants to the following recipients:

School City of Hobart (Hobart, Lake County) – \$25,000

The School City of Hobart's Building Brickies program provides parent education and support, playgroups, developmental screenings, and referrals to early intervention and community resources, as well as thoughtful kindergarten placements and transitions. The School City of Hobart's Early Learning Center serves as a hub for a cohort of local preschool teachers, care providers, kindergarten teachers and the ELC principal to collaborate and share data, helping families find high-quality care and early intervention services and creating smooth transitions for children into kindergarten.

United Way of Allen County (Fort Wayne, Allen County) – \$15,000

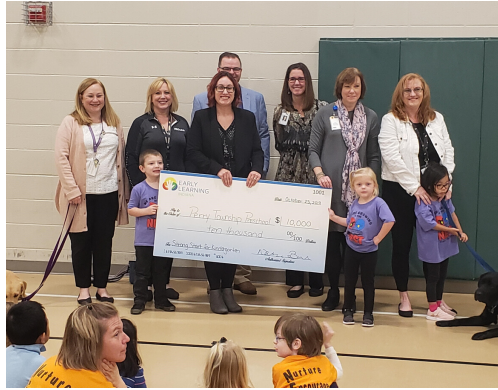
United Way of Allen County's Comprehensive Kindergarten Countdown is a free program that offers four weeks of high-quality instruction and activities to build the readiness skills of incoming kindergarten students. The program offers free breakfast and lunch to ensure all families can access and benefit from the program, and materials in English, Spanish and Burmese help welcome newcomer populations. The United Way has also piloted a formal program for data sharing through 3rd grade that they hope to scale to serve more children and families.

Portage Township YMCA (Portage, Porter County) – \$10,000

The Portage Township YMCA collaborates with the Portage Township Schools to establish a pipeline where information about social trends, performance data and teacher-to-teacher engagement flows between preschool and kindergarten teachers. The YMCA also uses the Y-USA Kindergarten Transition Toolkit, created with the National Center for Families Learning, which includes best practices, training videos and documents for the YMCA, and surveys and engagement activities for families in English and Spanish.

United Way of Porter County (Valparaiso, Porter County) – \$10,000

United Way of Porter County's Full Steam Ahead school readiness program is a high-quality early learning experience that builds on the foundations of science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) to help children succeed. The program is designed for 4- and 5-year-olds and is a collaboration among the United Way, Parents as Teachers of Porter County, Portage Township Schools and Valparaiso Community Schools.



Pace Community Action Agency (Vincennes, Knox County) – \$10,000

Pace Community Action Agency operates as a Head Start and Early Head Start program and provides services in Knox, Daviess, Greene and Sullivan counties to children birth to age 5 and their families. Kindergarten transition activities include field trips to schools and referrals to Jumpstart programs as needed. The agency has formal collaborative agreements with each primary school in its service area to ease transitions. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers are able to discuss areas of concern for students entering kindergarten.

Lewis Cass Schools (Walton, Cass County) – \$10,000

Lewis Cass Schools opened the Lewis Cass Little Kings Preschool in 2018 to help provide quality preschool education in rural Cass County. The preschool director and elementary school principal collaborate on a regular basis, sharing data and helping transition students with IEPs. Transition activities include events like Kindergarten Kickoff and Kindergarten Roundup, as well as intentional outreach to promote preschool and kindergarten to families with no previous early learning experience.

Perry Township Schools (Indianapolis, Marion County) – \$10,000

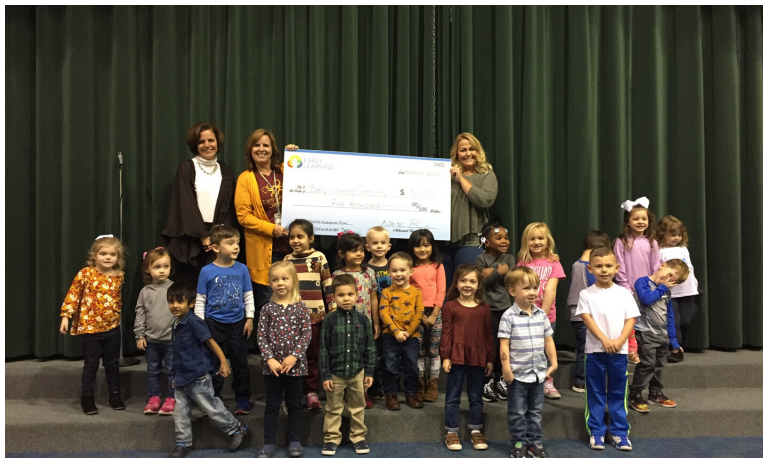
Perry Township Schools Early Childhood Academy is a district-wide program supported by Title 1 funding, grants and tuition that focuses on ensuring smooth and successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten and fostering ongoing family engagement. The Jumpstart Kindergarten serves incoming kindergarten students at four dedicated township kindergarten centers. Transition activities include outreach to families, assessments, data sharing and a walking field trip. Preschool and kindergarten teachers each receive two paid days per year to observe each other's classrooms and debrief together.

Johnson County Learning Center (Greenwood, Johnson County) – \$5,000

The Johnson County Learning Center (JCLC) is a nonprofit early childhood program that serves children ages 3 to 5 in Edinburgh, Franklin and Greenwood school districts. A yearly transition engagement calendar includes activities involving children, families, JCLC teachers, JCLC leadership, district kindergarten teachers, district leadership and community partners. JCLC staff meet with district principals and superintendents each year to discuss kindergarten standards, curriculum and expectations.

Indiana University Campus Children's Center (Bloomington, Monroe County) – \$5,000

One of three Indiana University child care centers, the Campus Children's Center cares for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years. The center encourages participation with local school fairs and roundups for individual districts and creates opportunities to discuss family concerns during pre-K conferences. Preschool teachers facilitate meetings between families who have transitioned to kindergarten in the last few years, mentor families and families in pre-K. Families also receive suggestions of stories to read with their children that help explore common fears about entering kindergarten.



Early Learning Indiana celebrated Strong Start for Kindergarten Prize recipients through traditional and social media outlets, partner promotion, and local community events. These events, which garnered media attention, created opportunities for the winners' high-impact programs to be recognized locally and to amplify Indiana's efforts to improve kindergarten transition statewide.



ESTABLISHING A REPLICATION MODEL FOR INDIANA

Inspired by research and promising practices present in Indiana and the broader nation, Early Learning Indiana sought to establish a model for expanding leading efforts to a greater number of Hoosier communities. Recognizing the need for a balanced approach, one that provides a consistent way of thinking about transitions while allowing for unique and locally driven implementation, ELI developed a transition framework to guide state and community-level planning efforts.

Central to the framework are six key principles:

- Communities view kindergarten readiness as a priority.
- K-12 and ECE share accountability.
- Planning efforts involve people closest to the work.
- Families are engaged through activities that vary in approach and intensity.
- At-risk children receive specialized supports.
- Data drives action and improvement.



Each of these principles are detailed below, along with supporting recommendations for state and local-level practice and exemplary models in place across Indiana and beyond. [To explore this topic in greater depth, please refer to the “Learn more about promising practices” resource at the end of this white paper.](#)



COMMUNITIES VIEW KINDERGARTEN READINESS AS A PRIORITY.

There must be cross-sector, community-wide engagement and responsibility for children being prepared for their first day of kindergarten.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Provide statewide readiness frameworks. • Encourage broad community engagement in kindergarten transition plan requirements. • Incentivize locally driven solutions and innovation.	• Identify a local champion, such as an elected official, to start the conversation and build engagement. • Establish a cross-functional transition team and engage a range of partners to support outreach campaigns, events and programs. • Include families throughout program design and execution to build engagement and ensure cultural appropriateness.

Best Practice Highlights:

- Boston’s Countdown to Kindergarten has been co-sponsored by the mayor since 1999 and engages a range of public and private partners. The program provides wrap-around, comprehensive supports to families starting school for the first time.
- West Virginia code requires counties to have transition plans, and the West Virginia Board of Education’s Ready, Set, Go! School Readiness Framework equips communities with a consistent approach to engagement.
- Oregon’s Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership & Innovation Grant allows for local ideation and innovation. The program gives six regional early learning hubs considerable discretion in implementing approaches to support successful kindergarten transitions, engage families as partners in children’s learning and development, and provide shared professional development opportunities.



K-12 AND ECE SHARE ACCOUNTABILITY.

Leaders need to collaborate and commit to shared ownership for facilitating effective transitions.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Build clarity around readiness responsibility and develop shared indicators. • Encourage transition plans for children enrolled in public pre-K programs and establish incentives or requirements for collaboration between ECE and K-12. • Provide guidance for use of ESSA funds to support kindergarten transitions.	• Create partnerships between ECE providers and K-12 administrators to discuss transition efforts and build shared responsibility for transitions.
Best Practice Highlights: • Various state laws established K-12 districts as the lead and responsible party for effective kindergarten transitions (e.g., Washington’s WaKIDS program). • California’s Governor’s State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care created a robust implementation guide to support K-12 buy-in. The guide was collaboratively developed by early childhood education experts, administrators and kindergarten teachers, DOE staff, and other national readiness experts. • Illinois’s 2017 ESSA plan includes transition goals across grades, including kindergarten. New Jersey requires school boards to develop a process for collaborating with preschool-third grade administrators in the district. The state also recently published a set of guidelines to define P-3 appropriate practices. • Minnesota’s P-3 Leadership Series develops elementary school principals into P-3 administrators through a year-long program delivered through online modules and in-person meetings.	



PLANNING EFFORTS INVOLVE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO THE WORK.

Pre-K and kindergarten teachers must communicate, collaborate and ideate to address issues and uncover opportunities.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Provide joint professional development opportunities for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to plan and assess transition efforts and introduce forums where they can communicate and ideate. • Establish guidelines for P-3 appropriate practices and strengthen the vertical integration through standards alignment.	• Create programs or partnerships that allow pre-K and kindergarten teachers to be exposed to each other's practices and environments. • Establish opportunities for teachers to meet with incoming students, their families and their pre-K teachers to deepen readiness and support individual needs.

Best Practice Highlights:

- Various state codes require communities to offer an opportunity for pre-K and kindergarten providers and teachers to meet at least once per year to plan.
- Several states have aligned standards and practices across the pre-K to third grade continuum to create continuity, promote developmentally appropriate practices and produce a gradual progression. Rich professional development is offered in parallel (e.g. New Jersey's High Quality Kindergarten Today).
- Chicago's Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition Project (PKTP) is a teacher-co-designed, community-wide approach to strengthening early education transitions. The program engages preschool and kindergarten teachers at all community-based centers and elementary schools.



FAMILIES ARE ENGAGED THROUGH ACTIVITIES THAT VARY IN APPROACH AND INTENSITY.

Families and community stakeholders should engage in planning efforts to ensure programs are culturally sensitive and address a range of specific needs. Programming must begin a full year before kindergarten and continue through the school year.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Establish statewide resources, materials and assets for all audience types. • Provide family engagement frameworks and drive local adoption. • Support schools serving at-risk students to deploy high-intensity interventions.	• Develop signature awareness campaigns or programs and forge partnerships to extend reach and expand activities. • Deploy new technologies to reach families. • Partner with families and community leaders to design customized activations in hard-to-reach neighborhoods or groups.

Best Practice Highlights:

- Boston Children’s Museum kindergarten readiness exhibit features typical stations and settings found in kindergarten classrooms. Visiting children and families can practice basic kindergarten routines and receive key information.
- West Virginia offers a “Ready Families” framework and toolkit that suggests different means to engage and educate families on their role in supporting kindergarten transitions.
- Pittsburgh Public Schools’ Ready Freddy community-wide program uses a number of different ways to engage families in preparing for kindergarten, including kindergarten kickoff events and family-to-family tours.
- Georgia’s Bright From the Start website offers families a variety of different resources and tools to support kindergarten readiness.
- Prosper Waco’s kindergarten readiness work group recently launched the Vroom app to provide parents in the Texas community with suggested daily activities to help their children prepare for kindergarten.



AT-RISK CHILDREN RECEIVE SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS.

From transition camps to parent programming, communities deploy the most intensive supports for at-risk child populations to prepare and address skill gaps.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Encourage support for specific at-risk populations to receive additional programming. • Establish guidance and incentives for K-12 to deploy high-intensity programming for at-risk and vulnerable audiences. • Support implementations of standard policies and procedures for transitioning children with IEPs.	• Deploy the most intensive supports to prepare and address skill gaps for at-risk child populations. • Establish practices for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to coordinate at-risk transitions. In Greenbrier County (West Virginia), public pre-K teachers conduct two home visits and meet with kindergarten teachers to review transition reports for at-risk students. Reports include assessment scores, strengths, skill development efforts and narratives.

Best Practice Highlights:

- In Greenbrier County (WV), public pre-K teachers conduct two home visits and meet with kindergarten teachers to review kindergarten transition reports for at-risk students. Reports include assessment scores, strengths, skill development efforts and narratives.
- Georgia funds a six-week academic program for at-risk children who did not attend public pre-K or Head Start. Curriculum focuses on oral language, literacy and numeracy. Children benefit from individualized learning plans.
- P-3 Schools Project in Portland, Oregon funds eight full-time P-3 coordinators in high-need schools across the county.
- Multnomah County (OR) offers an Early Kindergarten Transition program in Title I schools. The program requires families to attend two meetings per week.



DATA DRIVES ACTION AND IMPROVEMENT.

Communities are increasingly looking to data to understand the current state, identify opportunities and strengthen practices.

State-level opportunities	Community-based practices
• Establish standard readiness assessments with supporting data transfer tools. • Provide mechanisms for individualized information and data sharing for incoming kindergarteners. • Offer joint professional development opportunities on use and collection practices. • Encourage definition of common data points and data-sharing methodology.	• Foster dialogue between K-12 and ECE leaders and teachers to plan and evaluate transition and readiness efforts.
Best Practice Highlights: • Somerville Public Schools (MA) developed the Kindergarten Entry Skills Inventory which houses data on baseline skills assessments and how students are growing in relation to their baseline. The tool is used to identify and support children who might benefit from additional pre-kindergarten programming. • West Virginia code requires counties to have a system for transferring assessment, data between pre-K and kindergarten systems. • Georgia established a statewide data system that follows a child from preschool to college. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers are jointly trained in standards, assessment and the use and collection of data to improve practice. • New Jersey requires school boards to establish methods for the sharing of information about individual children between pre-K and kindergarten teachers. • Colorado launched a statewide program, required for all public preschool and special education programs, which promotes the use of ongoing, observation-based assessment in early care and education settings. Though not required, 98% of all Colorado Head Start programs utilize the program. According to stakeholders, a key benefit of the program has been the ability to more effectively engage state legislators using data. Information compiled is shared with the Colorado General Assembly on an annual basis.	



INDIANA'S STRONG START COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Indiana, with support from Early Learning Indiana, seeks to build recognition for the importance of kindergarten transition and incentivize use of the established framework to scaffold transition efforts across the state. Positioned as a competitive grant opportunity, the Strong Start Community grant provides towns and cities throughout Indiana with the opportunity to expand local kindergarten transition practices. Through an application process and supported by Preschool Development Grant funds, a total of 15 Indiana communities will be awarded grants of up to \$25,000 to adopt and begin creating local implementation plans to improve kindergarten transitions.

All Indiana communities are eligible to apply for the grants. Successful submissions must include a letter of intent from an executive champion at a lead organization such as a K-12 district or board, United Way, or community foundation. Additionally, applicants must submit two letters of support from other members of the community planning team to demonstrate cross-sector participation and partnership between public and private entities. These letters can be from an elected official, early learning provider representative (either school or community-based), local early learning coalition leaders, chamber or local economic development group leaders, community or business partner, or families. By applying to this grant, communities agree to utilize criteria, informed by the national landscape review and local high-impact practices, that embody the identified key principles, outlined below.

Community participation

- Key stakeholder representation within transition team including (at minimum): early learning providers, K-12 district leadership, kindergarten teachers, community organizations and/or elected leaders, and families
- Formalized public and private partnership(s) forged in support of plan

Shared ownership between early childhood providers and K-12 stakeholders

- Joint participation by ECE and K-12 stakeholders in planning process with presence of jointly and separately owned deliverables explicitly stated in plan

Teacher engagement

- At least one opportunity for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to shadow each other's learning environments
- At least one joint professional development offering for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to learn, discuss and plan

Child and Family Readiness Supports

- At least 75% of incoming children and families engaged in meaningful activities
- Identification of at least one at-risk population and targeting at least one high-impact engagement activity
- Involvement of families in the planning and execution of efforts

Data utilization

- Conduct cross-functional discussion with stakeholders around readiness data at least once per year
- At least one best practice, data-driven strategy incorporated into local plan around readiness data

In December 2019, 15 communities will be awarded grants to begin to build and execute implementation plans in 2020 and 2021. Early Learning Indiana will support the planning process by convening the communities to provide templates, resources, best practice findings, and other tools for monitoring progress.

The Strong Start Community grant is the first step in a broader effort to drive stronger kindergarten readiness across the state. Communities that pledge to establish and execute transitions plans that align with the criteria will be able to work toward designation as a Strong Start Community, signaling a commitment to providing children with the best possible start in elementary school and spurring other cities and towns to follow suit.



FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIANA

Like many other states, Indiana's focus on kindergarten readiness is growing, with the Board of Education recently passing Kindergarten Readiness Indicators (KRI) as a means of assessing Pre-K students participating in the state's On My Way pre-K (OMWPK) subsidy program. Building on this, along with the research and Strong Start Community grant initiative, the following additional strategies are recommended:

- Leverage Strong Start Community grantees as pilot sites for future kindergarten readiness initiatives.
- Establish guidelines for P-3 appropriate practices. Support with robust professional development opportunities for pre-k and kindergarten teachers and administrators.
- Establish guidance and incentives for K-12 to deploy high-intensity programming for at-risk and vulnerable audiences. Support implementation of standard policies and procedures for transitioning children with IEPs.
- Encourage definition of common data points and data-sharing methodology. Invest in new technology-driven solutions to support.
- Support transition plans for children participating in OMWPK, including individualized information and data sharing. Establish incentives or requirements for collaboration between ECE and K-12.
- Consider further grant opportunities to support communities and districts in piloting innovative approaches and high-intensity programming for at-risk children and families.
- Offer leadership development opportunities for administrators to build P-3 pathway understanding and expertise.
- Encourage virtual collaboration tools and professional learning communities for kindergarten and pre-K teachers and administrators.
- Launch a statewide kindergarten readiness campaign to build state and local-level awareness and support for school readiness. Support with high-impact regional partnerships and events.
- Expand kindergarten readiness and transition-related resources on the Brighter Futures Indiana website. Incorporate new tools for sharing readiness resources, two-way engagement and connecting families with local resources.

Learn more about Promising Practices

For individuals who want to explore local- and state-level practices that informed the Kindergarten Transitions initiative recommendations, visit the resources listed below.

California:

- Education Commission of the States Website, 50 State Comparison: State Kindergarten-Through-Third-Grade Policies (2018).
- Transitional Kindergarten Implementation Guide: A Resource for California Public School District Administrators and Teachers (2013).

Massachusetts:

- Education Commission of the States Website, 50 State Comparison: State Kindergarten-Through-Third-Grade Policies (2018).

Boston:

- Fleming, N. (2016) 4 Innovative, Local Programs Smooth Kindergarten Transitions.
- PDG State Technical Assistance Report: Smoothing Out the Bumps of Transitioning to Kindergarten.

West Virginia:

- Education Commission of the States Website, 50 State Comparison: State Kindergarten-Through-Third-Grade Policies (2018).
- PDG State Technical Assistance Report: Smoothing Out the Bumps of Transitioning to Kindergarten.
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