

Engaging Families in the Transition to Kindergarten

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series

[Music]

Narrator: Learning to transition from one thing to another is an important skill for young children to achieve and can make a difference in success in school. It starts with small things, like transitioning from play to clean-up or inside to outside. It might mean a transition from home to an early childhood program, or moving from one classroom to another. For Head Start children, like all children, one of the most important transitions is going to kindergarten.

Christine Patton: The transition to kindergarten is a major event in children's lives and it's associated with a range of emotion, including joy, excitement, uncertainty, and fear about the unknown. These emotions are experienced by everyone involved, including families; and families likely need to be guided through the transition as much as children do.

Narrator: Laguna Pueblo is a close-knit community just west of Albuquerque, New Mexico. As part of its parent, family, and community engagement efforts, Laguna's Head Start Center of Excellence works hard to help smooth the transition process.

Teacher 1: Your next word is "we" – w-e.

Dr. Anthony Fairbanks: We just take a holistic approach to everything that we do here within Laguna. We have all of our curriculum aligned. We have all of our school system aligned with the Head Start.

Narrator: Laguna Head Start prepares their children and families in a number of ways. For example, those children about to graduate make visits to a nearby elementary school to meet future school mates and get a firsthand look at this brand new world. The kids eat lunch with kindergarten big brothers and sisters.

Teacher 1: We're going to go on a little chalk walk.

Narrator: And get to do fun activities. They have a blast. Parents and families play an important role in the transition process.

Christine: Research has shown that when parents are involved in their children's transitions, children are happier and more self-confident when they get to kindergarten, and that helps them become better learners.

Narrator: Laguna engages families throughout the child's last year in the program.

Liz Martinez: It's an ongoing process that begins from the beginning of the year. There are several different opportunities for parents to participate in that transition. Through parent-teacher conferences, talk to parents about how you're child's accomplishing their goals and how that will help prepare them for kindergarten. We have something called a kindergarten showcase where we invite all of the schools to come and have an opportunity to meet the parents.

Woman 1: So when kindergarteners come in, they'll be in two new rooms.

Ruth Kie: Our purpose is to make children and their families ready for kindergarten. The way our program works is that we also have that same question to the schools. Are you ready for our children and families?

Narrator: Parents have the opportunity to talk to representatives of the area's four schools to learn about their philosophies and practices.

Woman 2: We have been tracking the way children learn nowadays; okay? So at Laguna Elementary School, we have spent a lot of time, especially the last three years and this year, in redeveloping our teachers.

Teacher 2: The kids are active in their learning; it's not me standing up there saying, "A, A, B, B. Come on, guys, come on." It's the kids who are doing it. It's the kids who are working together to do their learning, and that makes it more fun for them. It makes it more interactive and they get excited.

Narrator: They get answers from administrators and teachers to their questions about what the school's expectations are.

Woman 3: So what we do is we get them ready, 'cause these are the benchmarks right here for the kindergarten.

Narrator: What their child's day will be like.

Teacher 2: This is our daily schedule – our a.m. schedule

Narrator: And how crucial their role as parents is to their child's success.

Teacher 2: The school day doesn't end with me. Once that bell rings at 3, I send them home back to you and then you begin that learning.

[Music]

Narrator: Parent, family, and community engagement makes a difference.

Christine: When early childhood programs, schools, communities, and families all work together in collaboration to transition children to kindergarten, they're all better equipped with the information and skills they need to make that transition successful.