
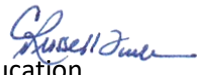


STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood 
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education 

DATE: May 24, 2021

SUBJECT: Transition to Kindergarten for Fall 2021

As the kindergarten registration and transition process continues for fall 2021 it is important to address the following factors that are likely to have varying impacts on children and the skills and behaviors they will exhibit when entering kindergarten.

- All children and families have experienced disruptions of life and daily routines during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- Many children may have experienced higher levels of stress or anxiety during this time.
- Children who were attending preschool or childcare are likely to have missed going to school, being with their teachers and peers, and/or seeing friends.
- Children and families may have experienced trauma related to family illness or death, job loss, food/housing insecurity, and/or generalized anxiety.
- Children of essential workers may have been separated from regular caregivers.
- Children learning multiple languages may have experienced changes in the amount of exposure they had to these languages.
- Some children may have had teachers who were able to continue relationships and support learning at home during this time, while other children may not. Teachers may have had different approaches to support learning at home.
- Families' ability to support learning at home may have been impacted by competing demands, other stressors, and/or lack of Internet access.

The law regarding kindergarten eligibility and policies regarding serving kindergarten-eligible children in state-funded early care and education programs remain the same. It is important to keep in mind that all young children entering kindergarten will have experienced disruptions to the experiences anticipated prior to their entry to kindergarten. The practice of retaining children who are age eligible for kindergarten in preschool should only be considered for very unique and extenuating circumstances.

Key Components of Successful Transitions

In order to address these factors and meet the needs of children and families, school districts and communities should consider the key components of successful transitions: pre-transition activities, collaboration, making it happen/core activities, and establishing a timeline. Usual practices related to kindergarten transitions will need to be adjusted. While many districts and early childhood programs have adjusted transition and registration processes, continued careful thought and planning will be needed to support the transition process for children, families, and teachers.

Pre-transition Activities

- Consider what type of surveys and/or self-assessment processes might be used to assess how districts are meeting the needs of children, families, and teachers.
- Consider how summer learning opportunities might be employed to support the transition process.
- Develop a kindergarten transition team that includes preschool teachers, Head Start, kindergarten teachers, community members, and families to plan innovative and responsive approaches to transition.

Collaboration

- Consider how local agencies and resources can support the transition to kindergarten as children and families cope with the challenges of the pandemic and begin the transition to more in-person activities.
- Look to local philanthropy, grant opportunities, and/or emergency funding or programs to bolster supports for children and families.
- Partner with districts and community child care providers in order to coordinate the provision of care and education to meet the needs of families and children.
- Develop professional learning opportunities to help prepare school and child care staff to support children during the transition to kindergarten.

Making it Happen/Core Activities

- Prioritize high-impact strategies that have buy-in from those involved.
- Develop a process to gain information about children's learning and development, which may include the use of family-completed developmental screenings (e.g., completing the Ages and Stages Questionnaires via the Sparkler app) and/or sharing of information across providers.
- Consider how to leverage existing resources and expand existing channels for communicating with various stakeholders.
- Look to innovative approaches and/or new funding (e.g., ARP ESSER) and supports available in response to this public health emergency.
- Ensure that school and child care staff have resources to address trauma, challenging behaviors, executive function skills, and other tools to foster positive transitions.

Establishing a Timeline

- Rethink how the transition process is supported during this time with careful planning and efficiency.
- Create a clear timeline and sequence for activities to support children and families over the summer and into the beginning of the school year.
- Consider what adjustments might be necessary given changing circumstances.

Guiding Principles

The same guiding principles set forth in [*Transitioning to Kindergarten: the Why, What and How of this Important Milestone for Connecticut Students*](#) should be applied under the current circumstances.

- Collaborative, responsive, and trusting relationships with families.
- Ongoing communication with all stakeholders- including families, program staff, and others.
- Respect for diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds and experiences, strengths, and needs of children and families.
- Positive relationships between adults and children as foundations for children's learning and development.
- Competent and knowledgeable staff to implement transition practices.

Conclusion

Collaboration and communication will be crucial throughout the process of planning for transition to kindergarten in fall 2021. A priority is to communicate quickly and clearly with teachers and families about the importance of this transition and the planning the district is doing related to meeting the needs of all entering kindergarteners. This communication should clearly advise against retaining children in preschool and kindergarten unless there are unique circumstances that require careful consideration.

Districts and child care programs should consider how they can leverage existing resources, as well as emergency funding, to support children and families through the summer and into the fall.

The Connecticut State Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood will continue to share resources and support districts and communities in this important work. We encourage partnerships between local education agencies and community-based programs and agencies to ensure that all children can experience a smooth transition to kindergarten.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact Andrea Brinnel, Education Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education at andrea.brinnel@ct.gov or Michelle Levy, Education Consultant, Office of Early Childhood at michelle.levy@ct.gov.