



The Kindergarten Transition:

Creating a New Model

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The entry into kindergarten is a key transition for young children and has lasting consequences for their learning, social development, and success in school over time. Despite how common this important transition is, it can bring with it many challenges for families and children alike. For example, in a [recent study](#) by the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy, teachers reported that about half of children experience classroom difficulties, such as staying organized or making friends, during the transition to kindergarten.

Both long-standing (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) and newly developed frameworks (Erlich et al., 2021) for improving the kindergarten transition focus on the importance of developing connections. In their groundbreaking work on the transition, Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) focused on connections among and between teachers, other school personnel, families, peers, neighborhoods, and, of course, the transitioning child as critical relationships for successful transitions. Their model suggests that the presence of positive, sustained connections across the transition can ensure that it is a successful experience.

Strong connections can induce positive experiences for children in a number of ways. For example, having strong connections between families, schools, and communities can increase alignment of expectations across the home, preschool, and elementary school environments. Stronger connections can also foster better communication among adults which can lead to faster attention to problems as they occur. Lastly, stronger connections can lead to children experiencing more positive interactions with the adults and peers they engage with during the transition.



Although parents and schools often recognize the importance of the kindergarten transition and of the necessary connections for their child's success, implementing policies and practices to support children and families during this time is challenging. Research shows that many preschools and elementary schools implement practices such as hosting family events before and after the start of kindergarten, as well as sending communication home to parents (Little et al., 2016). However, schools face numerous barriers, including funding and time constraints, that prevent them from implementing more comprehensive transition practices that would build stronger connections, and ultimately, ease the transition to kindergarten (Purtell et al., 2020).

Given these constraints, researchers at the Crane Center developed the Kindergarten Transition Intervention (KTI), a new model to support the kindergarten transition.

This model, based on the framework developed by Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta and elaborated on by Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (2003), focuses on developing six specific connections starting in children's last year in preschool and continuing through their first six months in kindergarten. Specific practices were suggested for strengthening each connection; however, the model is also designed to be flexible so that it can be implemented in ways that are most beneficial for each family and school. For example, if a school hosts an annual open house for entering kindergartners near the beginning of the school year, the relevant KTI activities can be included in that event rather than adding a separate event to the calendar.



Theory of Change

Kindergarten Transition



Transition-Supporting Connections



Enhanced Child Outcomes

<i>Type of Connection</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Child-Parent Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Support for Learning • Parent Use of Home Activities • Parent-Child Relationship
Parent-Teacher Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent-Initiated Engagement • Parent Relationship with Teacher • Parent Trust
Child-Peer Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Social Status • Child Friendship Quality • Child Prosocial Classroom Behaviors
Parent-Community Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Support for Learning • Parent Use of Home Activities • Parent-Child Relationship
Teacher-Parent Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Social Status • Child Friendship Quality • Child Prosocial Classroom Behaviors
Child-Teacher Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in Transition Activities • Readiness for K Transition • Social Contact with Other Parents

<i>Benefits</i>
Gains in Academic and Social-Behavioral Skills during Preschool
Improved Adjustment to Kindergarten and School Readiness
Elevated Longitudinal Academic and Social-Behavioral Trajectories



Kindergarten Transition Intervention

A new model to support the kindergarten transition through six connection points

The model is based on the framework developed by Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta and elaborated on by Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (2003). Specific practices are suggested and were used by a kindergarten transition coordinator, but the model is intended to be flexible in order to allow for practices that best work for each family and school, with or without a transition coordinator.



Child-Parent Connections

1. **Provide home learning materials** (i.e., books and activity kits) for parents to use with their children.
2. **Support families in their use of home learning materials** by discussing barriers and adaptations.
3. **Encourage family participation** in home learning activities.
4. **Provide families with information on the developmental level of children.**
5. **Establish strong connections within families.**



Parent-Teacher Connections

1. **Conduct family needs assessment** during the first home visit.
2. **Ask parents about or encourage involvement in upcoming school and classroom events** at each home visit.
3. **Help parents develop a packet of information on their child** to share with the kindergarten teacher.
4. **Conduct an in-home parent orientation** after preschool and before kindergarten start to help parents understand kindergarten enrollment and engagement.
5. **Discuss transition issues with families** during the fall of kindergarten.



Child-Peer Connections

1. **Discuss with parents the importance of peer connections** both within and outside of school.
2. **Provide learning materials** designed to support the discussion of peer relationships and potential issues.
3. **Provide parents with resources and information** to use if peer relationship issues arise.
4. **Establish peer connections within the preschool class.**
5. **Establish peer connections outside of school.**
6. **Establish connections with peers who will be in kindergarten.**
7. **Establish preschool peer connections with kindergarten peers.**
8. **Coordinate group-based peer connections.**



Parent-Community Connections

1. **Share the kindergarten curriculum and expectations** with parents before the start of the year.
2. **Connect families to community resources** such as libraries and health centers.
3. **Spread awareness** of ways to develop community connections.
4. **Build useful policies** related to transition.
5. **Foster inter-school collaboration** about programs and classroom practices.
6. **Identify and communicate curriculum and community expectations** for children.
7. **Create inter-school connections** about a specific child.
8. **Establish policy coordination** through inter-agency connections.
9. **Establish inter-agency connections.**



Teacher-Parent Connections

1. **Contact families during the first few days** of preschool and kindergarten.
2. **Maintain periodic contact** with the family.
3. **Conduct regular family meetings** at schools.
4. **Create newsletters and resource materials.**



Child-Teacher Connections

1. **Talk to parents about the importance of teacher-child connections.**
2. **Provide parents with learning materials** designed to promote children's communication with adults.
3. **Establish a connection** between the preschool child and kindergarten teacher.
4. **Create a connection** between the child and the kindergarten using specific school functions.
5. **Have children practice kindergarten rituals** in preschool.
6. **Incorporate preschool activities** into the kindergarten year.
7. **Encourage preschool teachers to stay in touch with former students.**
8. **Encourage kindergarten support staff to visit preschool children.**

THE ROLE OF TRANSITION COORDINATORS

KTI is designed to be a comprehensive model for improving the transition to kindergarten. It can be used by schools – who can implement intentional strategies to welcome incoming kindergartens – as well as by preschools or early education systems as they “sendoff” their outgoing preschoolers. Ideally, educational partners will work together across the spectrum of learning and bridge the divide between early learning and K-12 education, though in practice kindergarten transition activities may be more heavily emphasized by early childhood systems because of the barriers and incentives facing schools.

Central to the model and to making meaningful partnerships more feasible is the role of a transition coordinator to act as a hub and facilitator to help teachers, administrators, and families partake in intervention practices.

The primary goal of transition coordinators is to strengthen the six connections specified by the intervention in order to improve the experiences of children, families, and teachers during the kindergarten transition. As such, they work closely both with teachers and parents to complete intervention activities.



INTENTIONAL PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES

KTI also focuses on incorporating events and activities throughout the preschool year to help children and families develop knowledge, comfort, and connections that will enable a successful transition to kindergarten. To build connections with families, teachers – with support from their transition coordinator – send home personalized newsletters and hold transition-focused family events. Additionally, transition coordinators identify and connect families whose children will be transitioning to the same kindergarten classroom, to enable connection-building among these children and families during the summer prior to kindergarten.

There are also a number of preschool-based activities that focus more directly on children and their connections. For example, transition coordinators help preschool teachers implement 10 kindergarten success lessons in the spring prior to the transition. These lessons often include reading a book about kindergarten experiences, completing a related activity, and engaging children in a discussion about what kindergarten will be like. Additionally, transition coordinators help set up visits between preschools and elementary schools. These can include field trips, virtual visits, or some combination of both.



SUPPORTS AT HOME

To further support connection-building, KTI has a home-based component, which involves transition coordinators conducting nine home visits (approximately one every other month) with families. The first visit is at the start of the preschool year and the last is in the middle of the kindergarten year. Each visit has a particular theme, and all six connections are covered at least once throughout the home visit sequences. The first visit focuses on building rapport between the transition coordinator and the family and conducting a needs assessment so that the transition coordinator can tailor future visits to be most helpful to families. Throughout the home visits, transition coordinators provide content related to the targeted connections and to the transition and provide families with an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns that they have about their child's transition. Additionally, families receive home learning activities designed to strengthen parent-child connections as well as align children's learning environments across home and school. In the latter visits, transition coordinators check in with families about how the transition is actually going and provide resources to help families adjust to the kindergarten environment.



TESTING THE MODEL

In recent years, Crane Center researchers have been testing the KTI model in public pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and private preschool classrooms in 28 school districts across Ohio.

Specifically, the researchers have been comparing the experiences of children and families who receive both the classroom-based and home-based components of KTI to those who received the classroom-based components only, as well as to families and children who received the standard transition practices of their preschools and elementary schools only. Although study on the full impacts of the program on children's transitions is still underway, early evidence shows that the program does increase preschool teachers' perceptions of parental involvement, suggesting that stronger connections are being formed (Purtell et al., 2022). Stay tuned for more results in the future!



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Crane Center for Early Childhood Research & Policy

The Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy, in The Ohio State University’s College of Education and Human Ecology, is a multidisciplinary research center dedicated to conducting high-quality research that improves children’s learning and development at home, in school, and in the community. Our vision is to be a driving force in the intersection of research, policy, and practice, as it relates to children’s well-being. Crane Center research briefs aim to provide research and insights on issues of pressing concern.





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