

# Supporting the Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten



Transitioning from preschool to kindergarten can be exciting yet overwhelming for students with disabilities and their families. Students encounter many adjustments: larger classes, new friends, new teachers, and in some cases, longer school days. For these reasons, this transition requires careful planning and consideration to ensure a smooth adjustment.

As an administrator, you have the honor and responsibility of welcoming all students into your school each year. Students in particular need of a welcome are those coming from an assistive or inclusive preschool setting or with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Family Support Plan (IFSP). These students and their families may bring with them a more complete picture of their child's strengths and unique learning needs. By empowering them from the start, you are building a home and school partnership that will positively impact the student's learning for years to come.



This tip sheet focuses on five areas of focus for a successful transition from preschool to kindergarten and what administrators can do to help support families, students, and teachers.

## Area 1: Collaborative Relationships

Start planning the transition well in advance and involve parents, early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, therapists, and any other relevant stakeholders. Regular communication and collaboration among all parties are essential.

The expert on the child's unique needs is his/her parent/guardian. The expert on ways to best serve the child is the teacher. By working together, you are building a cohesive unit with the common goal of best serving the child by bringing together experts across the board.

Encourage family engagement and involvement in the transition process by providing information, resources, and opportunities for collaboration. Respect families' expertise and perspectives regarding their child's strengths, preferences, and support needs.

Foster collaboration among educators, service providers, and families to ensure a coordinated approach to the transition process. Encourage regular communication, team meetings, and collaboration to address individual student needs and monitor progress.

Establish effective communication strategies among parents, educators, and service providers to ensure continuity of support. Share relevant information about the student's strengths, preferences, and challenges to facilitate a smooth transition.

## Area 2: Continuity of Services, Supports & Strategies

Allocate resources and personnel to support the transition process effectively. Ensure that students with special needs have access to necessary accommodations, support services, and assistive technology devices during the transition period and beyond.

Offer professional development opportunities for teachers and staff focused on understanding the unique needs of students with special needs and implementing effective transition practices.

Use social stories, visual schedules, and other visual supports to help the student understand and navigate the transition process. These tools can clarify expectations, reduce anxiety, and promote independence. Maintaining what is already established during the preschool years ensures that the student continues to receive the support that he or she needs.

## Area 3: Proactive Approach

Develop clear and well-defined transition procedures for students with special needs entering kindergarten. Outline roles and responsibilities for teachers, support staff, and administrators involved in the transition process.

Gradually expose the student to the kindergarten environment before the official start date. Arrange visits to the kindergarten classroom, meet the teacher, and familiarize the student with the new routines, layout, and expectations.

Plan transition activities that promote socialization and peer interactions. Organize school visits to help the student build relationships and feel more comfortable in the new setting. Have faculty and staff from the new setting visit the student in their current setting.



## Areas of focus

to see how the faculty, staff, and the student use strategies (e.g., visual supports, schedules, reinforcement systems, social stories, etc.) to be successful. Plan how those tools will be transferred to the receiving faculty and staff in the new setting and how training will occur to ensure student success will continue.

Create an inclusive environment in the kindergarten classroom that promotes acceptance, understanding, and respect for diversity. Encourage peer support and foster a sense of belonging for all students, including those with special needs. Utilize the same supports that were successful in the early childhood setting in the kindergarten setting.

Establish effective communication strategies among parents, educators, and service providers to ensure continuity of support. Share relevant information about the student's strengths, preferences, and challenges to facilitate a smooth transition.

### Area 4: A Focus on Strengths

Recognize and celebrate the student's strengths, achievements and milestones throughout the transition process. Positive reinforcement and encouragement can boost the student's confidence and motivation as they navigate this important transition in their educational journey. Acknowledge their progress, resilience, and contributions to the school community, and provide positive reinforcement and encouragement.

Utilize a strengths-based approach to plan for the transition. Identify the supports that the student is using that work well and aid in his/her success. Modify and adapt those supports to reflect new schedules, expectations, and activities in which the student will participate when visiting or when entering the kindergarten classroom.



### Area 5: Individual Plans

Develop an Individualized Transition Plan for the student, outlining specific goals, strategies, and accommodations needed during the transition period. Tailor the plan to the student's unique needs and strengths.

Monitor the progress of students with special needs during the transition process and make adjustments to their support plans as needed. In collaboration with the special education teacher, regularly review IEPs and transition plans to ensure they are aligned with the student's evolving needs and goals.

Evaluate the effectiveness of transition practices and procedures on an ongoing basis. Solicit feedback from stakeholders, including educators, families, and students, and use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and refinement in future transition cycles.

**By implementing these tips, school administrators can play a crucial role in facilitating a smooth and successful transition for students with special needs from early childhood to kindergarten.**



| GUIDING TOOLS AND TRAINING MODULES |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tip sheet                          | <p><b>Preschool Bridging Framework</b>, <a href="https://bit.ly/3x1Xnrd">https://bit.ly/3x1Xnrd</a></p> <p>This document is designed as a tool for educators to receive a fuller picture of the student they are receiving. It can be completed during the intake IEP meeting or parents/guardians can be asked to fill it out after enrolling their child.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| TRIAD Course*                      | <p><b>Building Rapport: A Reinforcement-Based Approach</b>, <a href="https://bit.ly/3UzqrPx">https://bit.ly/3UzqrPx</a></p> <p>This framework allows space for the parent/guardian to outline the child's strengths and challenge areas as well as preferred learning styles. Questions are asked regarding child behavior as well as current supports to help boost engagement. The parent/guardian can expound upon time on task and levels of independence.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Course                             | <p><b>Social Narratives</b>, <a href="https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/social-narratives">https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/social-narratives</a></p> <p>Social narratives are an evidence-based practice used to increase predictability for a child by describing a new or uncertain event. This module includes a social narrative that describes what to expect when moving from preschool to elementary school. There are prompts provided to show where you can personalize it for the student and his/her new school. It can be read with the child as many times as he/she needs, and it can be brought with him/her on the first day of school.</p> <p><i>The resources and opinions shared have not been vetted by the Tennessee Department of Education and are not an endorsement on the quality or content of these materials or any vendor.</i></p> |
| TRIAD Course*                      | <p><b>Early Childhood Schedules</b>, <a href="https://bit.ly/4cl7irA">https://bit.ly/4cl7irA</a></p> <p>This series will teach the importance of class schedules and different tools to use throughout your school day to enhance structure in your classroom.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

\*To access a free TRIAD course, first register for an account or log in to an existing account at [triad.vkclearing.org](http://triad.vkclearing.org). Then click on a link above to launch.



- ❑ **TRIAD** provides interactive training and consultation for administrators, teachers, paraeducators, school psychologists, and other professionals serving Tennessee students, including autistic students, in Pre-K-12 school settings. [Triad.vumc.org/schools](https://Triad.vumc.org/schools)
- ❑ **AnLar** is an education management and consulting firm with extensive early childhood and early childhood special education experience. AnLar provides ongoing technical assistance to Tennessee school districts to support meaningful access to preschool for young children with disabilities. [tn-tan.tnedu.gov/support-services/preschool](https://tn-tan.tnedu.gov/support-services/preschool)

Check out these resources to support the transition of students with special needs from early childhood to kindergarten:

- ❑ **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**  
[exceptionalchildren.org](https://exceptionalchildren.org)
- ❑ **National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)**  
[naesp.org](https://naesp.org)
- ❑ **Division for Early Childhood (DEC)**  
[dec-sped.org](https://dec-sped.org)
- ❑ **National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)**  
[intensiveintervention.org](https://intensiveintervention.org)
- ❑ **Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)**  
[parentcenterhub.org](https://parentcenterhub.org)

Many state and local education agencies offer guidance, resources, and training opportunities for administrators on supporting students with special needs during transitions. Administrators can reach out to their state or local education departments for information specific to their region.

By leveraging these resources and collaborating with stakeholders, school administrators can effectively support the transition of students with special needs from early childhood to kindergarten and promote their success in the new educational setting.