

Transition Supports

PDG B-5 Needs Assessment

State Advisory Council Workgroup – June 12, 2019

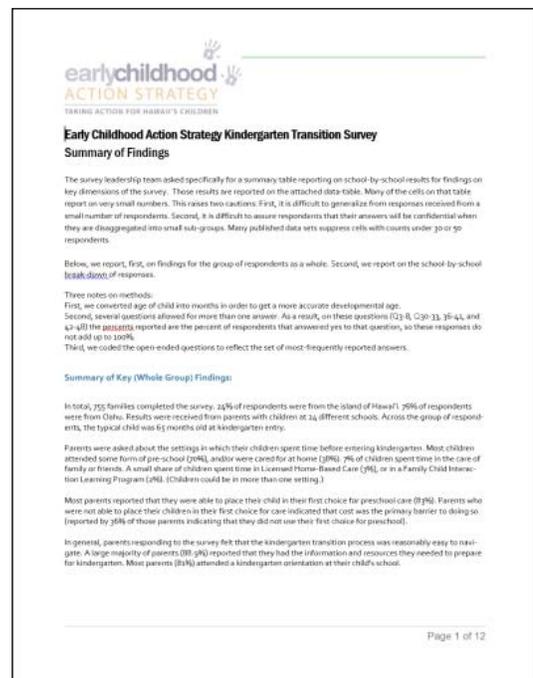
At present there are few known assessments of the two sorts of transitions that are the focus for this grant: kindergarten entry, and early intervention (EI) services to special education. Most of what is known appears to come from anecdotal accounts or work done more than a decade ago. There is one recent study that provides a window into children’s and families’ experiences transitioning into public kindergarten classrooms (Early Childhood Action Strategy 2016). For the transition from EI to DOE special education, we must go back to 2008 to find the most recent systematic assessment of families’ experiences. The two studies are summarized below.

Kindergarten Entry

The *Early Childhood Action Strategy Kindergarten Transition Survey* (Early Childhood Action Strategy 2016) reports on the findings of a survey of parents of children who were kindergarteners in DOE public schools during the 2015-2016 school year (N=755). Respondents were recruited via a snowball sampling method (i.e., located by convenience) from 24 elementary schools spanning four of the fifteen complex areas on the islands of O‘ahu (24%) and Hawai‘i (76%). Because the sample was not random, the findings are not generalizable and must be interpreted with extreme caution. Slightly more than half of parents surveyed had previously experienced the transition to kindergarten with another older child. For others this was their first experience.

Overall, parents believe that they experienced a successful transition. Fully 82% felt that their children adjusted well (rated 4 or 5 on 5-point scale), and 87% felt their family adjusted well. Regretfully, the survey does not probe further to learn on what bases parents evaluate their or their child’s adjustment. Neither does it reveal anything about the 13–18% of families and children who did not adjust well (rated 3 or below).

Such positive assessments could be due to the availability of transition supports intended to achieve this very outcome. Evidence from the survey offers some support for this view. Nine out of ten parents believe that they had needed information and resources to prepare their child and family for kindergarten, and the same proportion claim they had been given information about what their child



would be learning there. Nearly as many report that they attended a transition orientation where they could learn about the transition process and their child's upcoming kindergarten experience (others didn't attend, most commonly due to scheduling conflicts). Aside from that question, the survey provides little opportunity to assess where parents received information from, but they do appear to be very satisfied with what they had learned prior to kindergarten entry:

- 83% of parents were aware that they could register early for kindergarten;
- 87% knew what to expect and what materials were needed to register;
- 96% found the registration process easy to understand; and
- 88% had a clear understanding of child's kindergarten schedule.

Given the apparently smooth and successful transition experiences parents describe, one might reasonably wonder whether this was an optimistic bunch with few concerns about the transition from the outset. The survey included items to gauge whether or not children and their families had various types of concerns prior to kindergarten entry. The most common concerns about the transition into kindergarten attributed to children were social (i.e., making friends; 41%), adjusting to new people, surroundings, school size, etc. (23%), and separation from family and friends (14%). For parents, the most common were social (34%), adjusting to new people, surroundings, school size, etc. (24%), and before/after-school care (15%).

It is widely held that attending preschool or another form of child care before entering kindergarten will ease a child's transition, and some settings may prepare them better than others. Unfortunately, this survey does not permit such comparisons. It does indicate that the vast majority of children in this survey (70%) attended a child care center prior to entering kindergarten while small numbers attended licensed home-based care (3%) or a family-child interaction learning (FCIL) program (2%). A large percentage of children stayed home (38%) or received family, friend, or neighbor (FFN) care (7%), however, because respondents could select more than one type of care, these figures do not definitively say how many children *never* received care from a licensed provider.

The ECAS report asks a number of interesting and important questions of parents about the transition to kindergarten, however, it is hamstrung by a non-representative sample that limits its generalizability. No survey response rate is given in the report and the methods of recruitment are not discussed. Future analyses, in addition to striving for greater generalizability, should break down results by various groups of interest, including those who have and have not experienced kindergarten entry more than once and the type of care children received prior to kindergarten. To assess the effects of transitions supports (e.g., on perceptions of successful transitions), a control group of families that do not receive supports is needed.

Part C to Part B

The most recent known assessment of transitions from early intervention services (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act [IDEA]) to public preschool special education (Part B, Section 619 of IDEA) was conducted over a decade ago (Hawai'i 3–5 Transition Task Force 2008). Originating

from a State legislative mandate “to study the feasibility of expanding Hawai‘i’s Early Intervention Section to continue services for children ages 3-5 years,” the survey sought to identify strengths and weaknesses in the transition of all children into DOE preschool special education programs. The task force authoring the report was convened by the Department of Health and included representatives from a wide range of state agencies and offices, community organizations, early childhood service providers, legislators, and parents. EI never did expand beyond 3-year-olds but the Task Force’s assessment continues to provide the only known systematic analysis of this transition point for children and families in Hawai‘i. While much of the report is focused on families’ experiences and attitudes related to either EI or special education, this review will be limited to those aspects related most directly to transitions between them.



The survey was distributed to teachers in DOE special education classrooms who in turn sent them home with families of children age 3-4. Of the 2,600 questionnaires distributed, 17.7% (459) were returned, including 337 from parents whose children had transitioned from Part C to Part B. Most of the non-response is due to survey packets not being sent home with parents (27% of teachers sent surveys home). Of those parents who did receive a packet, 64% completed and returned them. Lacking further data on which teachers distributed surveys, it is impossible to evaluate the generalizability of the survey’s findings with much confidence. Respondents represent just over one-third of the 1,300 DOE preschool special education students.

Overall, respondents who had transitioned into special education programs felt some initial apprehension but were later satisfied with and felt positive about their child’s transition experience. The apprehension is apparent among the 30% of parents (and 53% of parents of children with autism) who, prior to transition, preferred that their child remain in EI rather than entering a Part B preschool. The report suggests that this may be attributed in part to a lack of understanding about the benefits of inclusion, implying a need for greater information to support these families through transition. After transition, the percentage that wanted their child to continue in EI was cut nearly in half (16% overall, 29% for parents of children with autism).

Among the transition supports for families in this move to preschool special education are an early intervention “transition conference” and a DOE Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. The results show that parents hold positive views about both. 81% attended an EI transition conference and found it helpful (4% did not find it helpful; 10% did not attend), and 86% attended an IEP meeting and felt that their family’s ideas were heard (they were not asked if the IEP meeting was helpful). Families of children with autism report lower rates of attending an EI transition conference *and* finding it helpful (74%) in comparison with families of those with developmental delays (84%) and speech-language problems (90%). Other evidence of successful transition supports include:

- 75% of parents visited the preschool in advance (10% knew they could but did not visit), compared with 69% of those who did not have EI services;
- 95% found the explanation of the DOE evaluation report helpful;
- 79% felt welcomed by DOE staff (however, 100% of those who did not receive EI services felt welcomed).

Missing from this analysis are families and children who did not make the Part C-to-Part B transition, either due to ineligibility or opting out. A strength of the study is its use of a comparison group—DOE special education students who did not receive early intervention services—to assess the effects of EI and the transition to special education preschool. However, it is not possible to untangle the effects of EI from the effects of transition supports (or various types of transition supports) without appropriate control groups. This may be a useful starting point for future analyses of early childhood transitions.

Some Questions to Consider

1. What supports are available to children and families as they transition into kindergarten? How aware of these supports are families and how useful do they find them to be?
2. What supports are available to programs and schools to insure smooth transitions and greater alignment between ECE settings and kindergarten entry? How effective do ECE providers find these supports to be?
3. What measurable indicators currently exist that can be used to assess successful transitions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these indicators? What are the most important gaps in data or research regarding transition supports?
4. How much interagency collaboration currently exists to achieve successful transitions? What policies and practices are in place that either support or hinder interagency collaboration?

References

- Early Childhood Action Strategy. 2016. *Early Childhood Action Strategy Kindergarten Transition Survey: Summary of Findings*. Honolulu, HI: Early Childhood Action Strategy. Retrieved from <https://hawaiiactionstrategy.org/s/K-Transition-Survey-Summary-Findings.docx>.
- Hawai'i 3–5 Transition Task Force. 2008. *Hawai'i 3–5 Transition Task Force Report 2008*. Honolulu, HI: Department of Health, Family Health Services Division. Available at https://health.hawaii.gov/eis/files/2013/05/hawaii3_5transitiontaskforcereportmay2008.pdf.