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## Preparing Incoming Kindergarteners and Parents for the Transition into Kindergarten

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Preparing Incoming Kindergarteners and Parents for the Transition into Kindergarten

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Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Education

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### Abstract

The move into kindergarten is a critical transition for kindergarten students and their parents as the transition can impact the child's academics journey through school. It is essential that preschool and elementary schools prepare families for the transition. This action research project studies the question: how can schools make the transition into kindergarten smoother for both incoming kindergarteners and their parents? The researcher reviewed data from the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment of 26 kindergarten students and also conducted a parent survey to determine how schools can better prepare students and parents during the move into kindergarten. The study found the transition practices that focus on building positive relationships between families and schools and increasing communication between preschool and kindergarten educators can lead to successful transitions for kindergarten students and parents.

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### Preparing Incoming Kindergarteners and Parents for the Transition into Kindergarten

Kindergarten is considered to be one of the most important years in a child's academic career. In fact, the transition into kindergarten is considered to be a big milestone for both families and children (Malsch, Green, & Kothari, 2011). It is a time where students are learning how to navigate their new role as a student and what it means to acclimate to a school environment (Eisenhower, Taylor, & Baker, 2016). Entering kindergarten, students need to adjust to the high behavior and academic expectations in this new environment, expectations that can be overwhelming to many kindergarten students (Dail & McGee, 2008). This transition into kindergarten can be pivotal in predicting children's success throughout their academic career (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Shulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005 as cited in Malsch, Green, and Kothari, 2011). For many students, kindergarten is the first formal schooling experience they have encountered. Others may have had prior school experiences such as preschool, head start, or daycare. Regardless of prior schooling experience, students come into kindergarten with a wide range of abilities, making it challenging for kindergarten educators who are required to teach and meet certain standards in their classrooms (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Parents can also be influential in setting the tone for the transition into kindergarten for their child (Harper, 2016) A parent's assumptions, perceptions and expectations can greatly impact a child's perception of school. If a parent has a negative attitude about school from past schooling experiences, that perception can negatively impact how a child transitions into school. It is important that schools consider the parent's role in the transition plan by providing a sense of belonging in the school environment. As schools prepare to welcome incoming kindergartners and their families, it is important for educators to establish relationships with the families prior to the start of the school year (Pianta and Walsh, 1996 as cited in Pianta, Cox, Taylor, and Early,

1999). The home-school relationship can help ease the transition into kindergarten for both students and parents.

This paper will explore the question: how can schools make the transition into kindergarten smoother for both incoming kindergarteners and their parents? This action research will review literature that defines kindergarten readiness and discuss best transition practices. It will describe how family engagement and community outreach can impact the transition process for students. The paper will then include an action research that will analyze data from a kindergarten readiness assessment given at the beginning of the kindergarten school year and a parent survey given to kindergarten families. The findings from the data and research will be used to create a transition plan for incoming kindergarten students and their families.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Kindergarten Readiness**

The term Kindergarten Readiness, also referred to as School Readiness, came as a result of the Goal 2000. Goal 2000, also known as the Educate America Act, encouraged states to create and implement standards and assessments by providing states with funding and grant opportunities (Superfine, 2005). In the Goal 2000 Act, politicians outlined eight goals to improve education in the United States. The first goal was that all children were to start school ready to learn (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1994). This goal prompted early childhood educators and policymakers to carefully analyze school readiness and articulate what a school-ready child would consist of. According to the National Educational Goals Panel, kindergarten readiness was initially defined by looking at a child's physical development, social and emotional development, cognitive development, and language

development (Williams & Lerner, 2019). However, the panel found that while a child's skill level contributes greatly to kindergarten readiness, kindergarten readiness is much more than checking skills off a list. Kindergarten readiness also involves relationships and support from schools, families, and the community (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). To ensure that an incoming kindergartener was school ready, many states started to work on creating ready schools that supported each child with reinforcement from the community, family, and school.

### **Ready Schools**

In 2004, a school readiness pilot project was funded by Annie E. Casey Foundation to help early childhood programs and schools address the issue of school readiness in the school systems. Several states participated in this project including Indiana, Connecticut, Oregon, and West Virginia (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). During this program, schools were asked to form teams consisting of parents, educators, and community members to take the Ready School Assessment. This assessment focused on eight areas including leadership, teacher support, curriculum, environment, assessing progress, transition, diversity, and family involvement (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). After evaluating progress, the team would analyze the findings and brainstorm ideas on strategies to improve the transition into kindergarten. The researchers found that most ready schools in Indiana needed improvement in communication and knowledge of curriculum across grade levels, family connections, and community involvement.

### **Knowledge of Curriculum**

With higher academic expectations in kindergarten, it is important for preschool and kindergarten teachers to understand what their colleagues are teaching in their classrooms to ensure that the curricula build off each other. Roughly, 12% of elementary schools have a

kindergarten curriculum that builds off of preschool programs and less than 25% of schools have a joint training with early childhood staff and kindergarten teachers (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). To help encourage communication and collaboration between Early Childhood Programs and kindergarten teachers, preschool and kindergarten teachers are encouraged to visit classrooms to have a better understanding of curriculum and expectations in the different school settings. In a survey conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning, researchers found that preschool teachers were more likely to visit a kindergarten classroom than a kindergarten teacher was to visit a preschool classroom (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). Whereas many kindergarten teachers do visit preschool classrooms, it is more challenging for them because of different barriers such as class lists coming out late or unfamiliarity with area preschools.

### **Family Connections**

During this transition into school, it is vital that schools walk alongside families and support them through this exciting transition into a child's school career. In a recent study, parents were asked to identify experiences during the transition process (Mcintyre, Eckert, Fiese, Digennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). A study was given to 132 parents asking families about the family perspective of the kindergarten transition, specifically looking at what parents wanted, what parents had, and what concerns parents had throughout the transition process. The survey showed that families wanted to be involved in the transition process. Families wanted to visit the classroom, get information about the kindergarten teacher, have a transition meeting to discuss student specific needs, and learn about the academic and behavioral expectations of kindergarten. The study found that although many families wanted to be involved in the transition process, parents may need guidance on the most effective approach to support their child during the



transition. It is important that schools empower parents who want to be involved in the transition process by providing them with the necessary information, guidance, and support to ease anxiety during this transition into kindergarten.

Schools can help during this transition time by establishing positive relationships prior to the start of the year. Some schools have events prior to the start of the school year to get to know families and establish a positive relationship such as hosting a light supper and having activities for families to do together (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). These activities also provide an opportunity for families to meet the kindergarten teachers and familiarize themselves with the school, resulting in a smoother transition. These events can help ease the worries of students and families and help them feel familiar with the school setting.

### **Transition Practices**

To ease the transition for families and children, researchers have encouraged schools and families to take proactive steps to prepare children for school. In a study conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning, a survey was sent out to 10,000 kindergarten teachers that asked questions on 21 transition practices and fifteen barriers (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). The questions asked teachers to rank the transition activities based on activities they do, activities they think are a good idea, and what they believe are the biggest barriers to the transition activities. The study found commonly used practices among kindergarten teachers typically occurred after the school year started. These practices included talking with the parents, letter homes, and open houses. The least commonly used practices were ones that typically happened before school and these included home visits, calling children, and visiting preschools. These least commonly used transition practices were likely because the class

list was generated too late, involved too much time, or the practices happened during the summer and were unpaid

### **Community Outreach**

Community can play a key role in the transition into kindergarten. The community can help rally around schools to help support families in the transition. In Pittsburgh Public Schools, a program was created called Ready Freddy Program (University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 2012). This program was intended to improve school readiness by engaging parents and community partners in the process. The program creates a team that is referred to as the transition team. The transition team consists of parents, schools, and community members. This team works together to plan outreach events to help families with the transition into kindergarten, starting with registration and ending with the first day of school. When this program first started, 75% of eligible children were not enrolled in kindergarten. (University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 2012). In order to increase enrollment, the transition team created activities and events to help raise awareness in the community. After one year, the enrollment tripled in kindergarten. After the success of this program, many schools have now implemented a transition team model similar to the Ready Freddy program. The transition into kindergarten does not just require families and schools in order to ensure a successful transition into kindergarten, but also requires the community.

The community can be a great resource to provide support to families and students prior to the start of the school year. Places such as hospitals, libraries, and mental health consultants can provide families with a plethora of knowledge and support prior to the start of kindergarten. The community can not only provide information and support to families, but it also can provide great resources to teachers and schools to support the transition.

## **Kindergarten Readiness Assessment**

In 2017, a law was passed in the state of Michigan requiring all students entering kindergarten or similar programs such as young fives or developmental kindergarten to be given the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, beginning August 2018 (Michigan Congress and Senate, 2017). The purpose of this assessment was to identify areas that the Early Childhood programs in Michigan were successful and areas of improvement. According to the Ready for Kindergarten website, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is defined as “a developmentally appropriate assessment tool designed to measure school readiness of incoming kindergarteners across four domains” (Ready For Kindergarten: What is the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, n.d.). This test looks at four developmental areas: language and literacy, mathematics, social foundations, and physical well-being and motor development. The assessment uses a mixture of observations, performance tasks, and selected response to assess children’s developmental domain. The performance tasks and selected response items are usually done in a one-on-one setting with a teacher. The observations are normally done in the daily setting, but often require teachers to plan ahead to look for certain items. For example, a teacher might need to plan a task such as a craft to observe students sharing items. After the data is collected, student preparedness is determined by scores given in three readiness categories: emerging, approaching, and demonstrating. Those who are approaching or emerging readiness may require supports or interventions to help them be successful in kindergarten.

## **Methods**

To answer the question of how educators can better prepare students and families for the transition into kindergarten, this study consisted of two parts. The first part used data from the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, a test required to be given to all incoming kindergarten-

aged students in the State of Michigan at the start of the school year. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment was exempt from the Institutional Review Board. The second part used data from a parent survey that analyzed the parents' point of view of the transition of the child into kindergarten.

The participants of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment included 26 students from Innocademy Allegan Campus combined from the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year. These students are a mix of males and females who have participated in prior schooling and those who have not had any previous schooling. The researcher will look at the data collected from the past two years to get a greater understanding of the school readiness for Innocademy Allegan Campus' incoming kindergarteners. The researcher will use this information to put supports in place for incoming families and their children. The researcher will look at the number of students who are in the developing, approaching and emerging categories and compare students who went to preschool or had prior schooling to those who had little to none. The researcher will also look at scores of the four developmental domains for the students and look for areas of strengths and weaknesses of incoming kindergarteners to develop supports for those students.

To determine how to support parents during the transition, the researcher sent a parent survey to families of the current kindergarten classes at the Innocademy District. The participants of this survey will include approximately 50 parents of kindergarten students. Because this survey was not set in a school setting, the researcher gained approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to sending the survey. In this survey, the researcher asked questions for parents to reflect on how they felt their kindergarten student transitioned into kindergarten and what supports for both the student and the parents found effective during the transition. The questions involved rating the child's and parent's transition to kindergarten, prior

schooling, supports that helped their child and parents, and also inquired about parent workshop and topics they would want to learn more about with regards to kindergarten. With this survey, the researcher will use this information to help create a transition support plan for parents.

## **Findings**

### **Data Analysis**

To answer the question of how educators can support incoming kindergarten students and parents in the transition to kindergarten, the researcher used data from the kindergarten readiness assessment and a parent survey to determine areas for educators to support incoming kindergarteners and their families.

The kindergarten readiness assessment was given to a total of twenty-six kindergarten students in the 2018-2019 school year and the 2019-2020 school year. Each of these students were given a ranking on how ready the student was for kindergarten utilizing the four domains of development. In order to be considered *demonstrating* skills, a kindergarten student must score an average of 270 using the four domains.

**Table 1**

*Ranking of kindergarten readiness of incoming kindergarteners*

	<b>Demonstrating</b>	<b>Approaching</b>	<b>Emerging</b>
<b>N</b>	1	16	9
<b>Missing</b>	15	0	7
<b>Mean</b>	277	265	252
<b>Median</b>	277	265	253
<b>Mode</b>	277	268	256
<b>Minimum</b>	277	258	246
<b>Maximum</b>	277	269	257

Table 1 shows the rankings of these twenty-six students. One student was considered to be *demonstrating* kindergarten readiness skills in all areas. This student’s average score was 277. Sixteen students were *approaching* kindergarten readiness skills. The average score for these students was a 265. The highest *approaching* score was 269 and the lowest score was 265. Nine students had scores within the emerging category. The average score for the *emerging* ranking was a 252. The highest *emerging* score was 257, and the lowest was 246. The researcher noticed that many students entering kindergarten at Innocademy Allegan Campus were considered in the *approaching* category. Most of the students in this category had prior schooling with the exception of 4 students. The nine students who were classified as *emerging* had no prior schooling experiences or were considered English language learners.

To dig deeper, the researcher analyzed the four domains in the kindergarten readiness assessment as seen in Table 2. Upon initial exploration, the researcher noticed that students scored high on the language and literacy piece of the assessment. The language and literacy piece

consisted of short response, performance tasks, and observation. Students were asked to identify letters and sounds, point to nouns and verbs, write a word and their name, and answer comprehension questions. In addition, the teacher observed if the students were able to have conversations with peers and adults with multiple exchanges. The average score in language and literacy was 266. The lowest score was 242. The highest score was 293.

Mathematics and physical wellbeing scored an average of 260. The questions in mathematics were a combination of selected response and performance tasks. Students have to subitize, rote count, count objects, and match shapes. The lowest score was 241 in math. The highest score in mathematics was 290. Physical wellbeing questions consisted solely on observations. Students were asked to cut on a line, write, use scissors, hop, and walk in a crowded space. Students who scored lower in this area had difficulty with using scissors and with pencil grip. The lowest score was 241 and the highest score was 275.

Interestingly, social foundations were an area that many students coming into Innocademy Allegan Campus were unprepared. The average score was 258. The questions in the social foundations section of the tests were observational. The observations involved noticing student response to emotion, asking for help in challenging situations, sharing a need with an adult, waiting to take turns, following multi-step directions, approaching new tasks, working through distractions, engaging in pretend play, sharing materials, demonstrating curiosity, and following classroom rules. The lowest score was 241 and the highest score was 283.

**Table 2**

*Scores of the four developmental domains assessed by Kindergarten Readiness Assessment*

Descriptives				
	Language and Literacy	Social Foundations	Mathematics	Physical Well Being
N	26	26	26	26
Mean	266	258	260	260
Median	266	255	258	260
Mode	272	255	254	260
Range	51	42	49	34
Minimum	242	241	241	241
Maximum	293	283	290	275

In addition to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, a parent survey was also conducted. This survey was sent out to approximately fifty families in the three Innovative Education School District to the three current kindergarten classes. Out of the approximate fifty families, nine families chose to participate. Three of those families had a child who was their first in kindergarten. Eight of the parents stated that their child had attended a preschool or Headstart program. Six parents stated that their child attended a Young Fives or other developmental kindergarten program. When parents were asked how they would rate their child’s transition into kindergarten, the average rate was 8.22 out of 10. Parents stated that Young Fives and meeting the teacher at the open house was the most helpful in preparing their child for kindergarten. According to Table 3, when asked what parents thought would help their child in the transition, responses consisted of having play groups, having their child do young fives, being better prepared in preschool, and shorter days or fewer days per week.



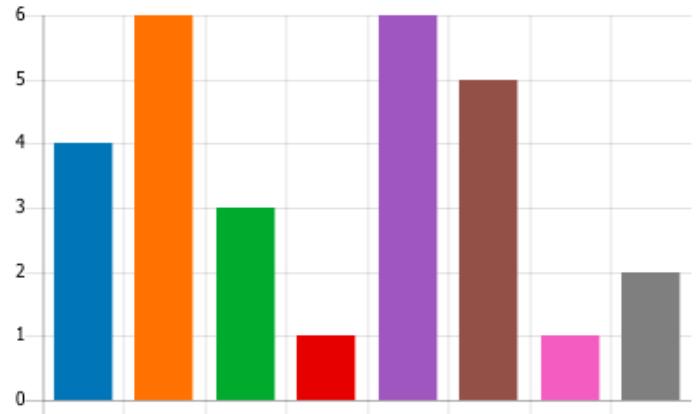
**Table 3**

*Parent Responses to what helped their child in the transition into kindergarten*

6. What do you think helped your child with the transition to kindergarten? Click all that apply

[More Details](#)

● Preschool	4
● Young Fives	6
● Play groups	3
● Kindergarten Round up	1
● Meeting Teacher at Open house	6
● Having friend(s) in class	5
● Having Older Siblings in class	1
● Other	2



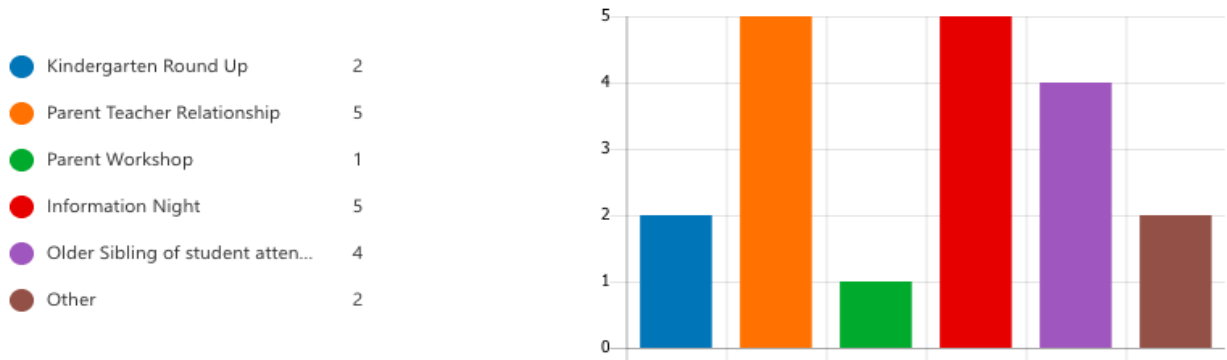
When parents were asked how prepared they felt as parents during the transition into kindergarten, the average score was 8.56. Parents felt that the parent-teacher relationship and information nights helped them through the transition. According to Table 4, when asked what would have helped parents in the transition, parents responses included communication between preschool and Headstart on areas to work on with their child, a way to get questions answered, and talking with teachers about their child’s needs.

**Table 4**

*Parent responses to what helped parents during the child’s transition into kindergarten*

10. What helped you, as a parent or guardian, with your child’s transition into kindergarten? Click all that apply

[More Details](#)



Parents were also asked about the likelihood of their attending a parent workshop if it were offered prior to school starting. Four parents marked that they would be likely to attend. Three marked that they would be somewhat likely to attend. Two marked that they would be somewhat unlikely to attend. Those that marked unlikely stated that their reason for not attending would be because of another child having already attended kindergarten or they would rather get information via email or flyer and could email if they had further questions. When asked about topics that parents would want to learn more information about, many suggested that they would want to learn more about the kindergarten curriculum.

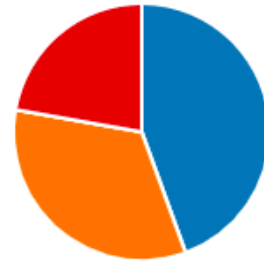
**Table 5**

*Parent responses to the question on if the parent would attend a parent workshop if offered*

13. If a parent workshop was offered prior to the start of kindergarten, how likely would you have attended?

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Very likely	4
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Somewhat likely	3
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Neither likely nor unlikely	0
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Somewhat unlikely	2
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Very unlikely	0



## Discussion

### Summary of Major Findings

The study’s purpose was to determine how we can best support kindergarteners and parents during the transition into kindergarten. When analyzing the Kindergarten Readiness assessment data, the researcher noted that many students are coming into Innocademy Allegan Campus in the *approaching* readiness category. This is likely due to the high population of low socioeconomic backgrounds of the students and families at Innocademy Allegan Campus. There were nine students who were considered to be emerging readiness. When researching further, these nine students are students who did not have any prior schooling and kindergarten was the student’s first exposure to a school environment. The student who was in the *demonstrating* category had been to preschool and a young fives program prior to starting school. When

looking at the four domains of development, the researcher noted that language and literacy was an area of strength whereas social foundations was an area of growth for Innocademy Allegan Campus. The students who generally scored the lowest scores in all domains were English language learners or came to school with little to no prior schooling. Those with higher scores in all domains either had preschool or young fives or had autism. Similar to findings from the study by Clark and Zygmunt-Fillwalk, this study showed the importance of collaboration between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers. (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). By using data from the kindergarten readiness assessment, both the preschool teacher and kindergarten teacher can help each other determine ways to support children in all domains and to ensure that the curriculum is building off each other during the move to kindergarten.

When analyzing the parent surveys, the researcher noted that most parents felt that their child came into kindergarten prepared and ready. In general, communication between schools and families seemed to be important to parents in the transition process. Surprisingly, six families suggest that young fives seemed to prepare their child for kindergarten more than preschool did. This could be due to Young Fives follows similar standards to kindergarten at a much slower pace. In addition, families felt that meeting teachers at the open house were more beneficial than kindergarten round up. Families stressed that the parent teacher relationship was important in the transition to kindergarten, a value that was evident in the data collected. Many parents stated that they would attend a workshop on expectations and kindergarten curriculum. This study added to the studies from the study conducted by McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, Digennaro, and Wildenger that parents are seeking to be involved in the process of the move into kindergarten through positive parent-teacher relationships (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, Digennaro, & Wildenger, 2007).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has potential for limitations. One limitation of the study may be that the parent survey was sent to different kindergarten classes in the district. The parent survey was sent to several schools who use differing approaches and have access to different resources. For example, Innocademy Homestead campus has a preschool and a young fives program at their school. Because the Homestead campus offers those programs, many of those families take advantage of those resources. In addition, the demographics of the two schools are different, a factor that also can have an impact on the study.

**Further Study**

To further this study, the researcher could continue this study through analysis of the results of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment each school year to continue to notice patterns of incoming students at Innocademy Allegan Campus. Using this data, the researcher can better create transition practices to better support the incoming students. In addition, the researcher could also continue to send out the parent survey and collect data to ensure that families are supported throughout this important transition.

**Transition Plan**

By using the data from the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and the Parent Survey as well as the review of literature, the researcher has created a transition plan for Innocademy Allegan Campus. The first step in this plan is to create a transition team. This team will consist of members of the community, staff, and parents. The purpose of this team is to create events that encourage families of incoming kindergarteners to get to know the school and staff. The team will work on planning and implementing these events and will also reach out to the families

with kindergarten aged students. In addition to the events planned by the transition team, a kindergarten spring open house for families who are interested in Innocademy Allegan Campus. This open house will include a parent meeting where school expectations and kindergarten curriculum will be discussed. Following the parent meeting, families will have the chance to explore the school grounds by participating in developmentally appropriate activities throughout the school. A round up will also be held. Parents will sign up for a time slot to have a one-on-one meeting with the kindergarten teacher to discuss concerns and student needs and will be followed up with a readiness screener. At the end of summer, kindergartners will have the option to come for half days prior to the start of the school year to participate in a Kinder Camp. The Kinder Camp will focus on acquainting self with school, practicing some routines and expectations, and meeting new classmates and teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The move into kindergarten proves to be very important. It is important for schools to develop a transition plan that prepares both the student and the parents. In the transition plan schools create, the plan should focus on ensuring a positive relationship with families and building a sense of belonging within the school. Schools can help build positive relationships and create a sense of belonging through school tours, parent workshops, activity nights prior to the start of school, home visits, and meet the teacher events. Offering transition activities can ensure that families feel a sense of belonging in the school environment and ease any worries that they may have.

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