
References for this Brief

UCLA Mental Health in Schools publications:
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Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families
Frequently Asked Questions About Transition
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Appendix B Transitions for:
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Effective Practice Briefs funded through the Hawai'i State Improvement Grant (SIG)

The Hawai'i State Improvement Grant (SIG) is charged with improving systems providing early intervention, educational, and transitional services, through an innovative personnel development program supported by coordinated policy, procedure and practice interventions. Ultimately, the Department of Education (DOE) believes that this strategy will lead to significant gains in in-school and post-school outcomes for children with disabilities. The State Improvement Plan is an integral part of the overall DOE system improvement efforts and the vision of the State Board of Education for meeting the needs of all children so that they attain high performance standards. The Hawai'i State Improvement Grant is a collaborative effort of the Hawai'i State Department of Education and the University Center on Excellence/Center on Disability Studies, College of Education at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, along with numerous other partners concerned with the education of children with disabilities in the State of Hawai'i.

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Effective Practices Brief



Another Quality Publication Produced by the Center on Disability Studies, COE University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Supporting All Students to Achieve High Standards

Creating Successful Transitions for Students

Tips for School Personnel

Review of the Research
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Purpose

This Brief offers an overview of the benefits of transition programs, highlighting keys to creating and sustaining successful transition programs, touching on the developmental needs of the various stages and ages of transitions and identifying what we are doing here in Hawaii to address transitions.

Overview

Families face points of transition with their children from the moment they know they are having a baby! Transition is a part of life. Some transitions more than others, hold tremendous change and emotion for families and children. Schools are realizing that in order to ensure the greatest level of success for students, attention must be given to supporting students and families through the various transitions. Transitions range from those within a single day, from grade to grade, from special education settings to general education, from restrictive to least restrictive settings, or the changing of school communities. All students benefit from an increased awareness and focus on support through transitions, including students with special needs who may require well thought out, proactive planning to ensure successful change. Oftentimes the little bit of "extra" time, support, skill building, and attention is all any student needs to stabilize and flourish in their new environment.

Creating successful transitions

Research shows that school-based policies committed to transitions create environments conducive to positive supports for transitions. These policies might include time allotted to teachers, staff and administrators for planning and implementing transition services, use of school facilities for programs before and after school hours, staff meetings open to agencies providing services on campus, office space for a volunteer coordinator of transition programs, program materials created and disseminated, and shared responsibility or integrated outreach to families, students, and community volunteers.

Specific components to creating successful transition programs include:

- Using your stakeholder/community planning council
(*ie: your CSSS cadre or Quality Assurance Team process*)
- Identifying the most pressing issues
(*Where are the gaps in your school transitions, where are kids falling through the gaps in the day or through the year*)
- Assessing your resources and needs
(*ie: complete school wide transition survey is available on line at <http://smph.psych.ucla.edu>*)
- Organizing creative and focused community involvement
(*ie: through workgroups with goals, accountabilities and timelines*)
- Accessing developmentally appropriate supports and services
(*ie: based on ages and needs of students with tandem supports to parents*)
- Offering a variety of ways for parental supports and involvement
(*ie: on campus and at home opportunities for involvement*)
- Demonstrating ownership for transition program success at the school level
(*ie: administrative support for faculty and staff investment in programs*)
- Implementing a process for creating, sustaining, evaluating, and improving programs and services from year to year
(*ie: your CSSS cadre or Quality Assurance Team process*)
- Ensuring tiered and overlapping phases to transition interventions
(*including broad focus [prevention/level 1], more personalized services [early on-set/level 2-3], and intensive personalized services [system of care/level 4-5]*)

Remaining culturally sensitive to the needs of families and students can facilitate communication throughout the process and help build partnerships between the school, families, and the community based on trust and mutual respect.

Transitions happen daily and throughout the school year. A school that has a well-developed transition program for all students, including those with disabilities will provide transitional supports at the levels of:

- **Prevention (level 1)** general and broad reaching supports to all students in easing a transition (good morning welcomes, student/parent nights at new middle school)
- **Early-Onset (level 2-3)** more specific and personalized assistance (outreach from school special interest clubs, buddies or ambassadors, parent-to-parent outreach, specific assistance to military students and families)
- **System of Care (level 4-5)** continued personal contact with a smaller group requiring more intensive transitional supports (parenting classes for select families, school-based counselors focused supports, small groups for student supports)

High intensity points for transition supports

Different kids require different levels of supports in various areas of their school lives. For example, some students may move easily through their day but have great difficulty beginning a new grade, or starting a new school in the middle of the year.

The transition to middle school is often the most difficult transition for students, internal changes and environmental changes bring increased expectations and responsibilities at school, more teachers, more homework, greater social pressures and higher skills waiting to be developed.

Specific points of transition include:

- **Early childhood/readiness-to-learn transitions to kindergarten**
The statewide STEPS system is in place to support children and families as they transition into kindergarten, programs of this kind show national results of increased achievement, social adjustment, and grade retention.
- **Transitions into and out of special education programs**
Supports to students often include staying in general education classrooms or on more traditional post-secondary educational tracks with extra and specific supports for success.
- **New student transitions**
Programs that show the greatest success have a high component of parent involvement and support with parents serving on planning committees, volunteering, sharing their expertise, and receiving parenting classes and supports (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1999.) The Joint Venture program developed by the DOE and the military has had some success with supporting military students and families through increased teacher training and awareness.
- **Grade-to-grade transitions or articulations**
Programs show success with peer-to-peer support and school-based supports to reduce stress and anxiety associated with new developmental tasks and expectations on students.
- **Elementary-to-middle school transitions**
Supports must target developmental issues of great physical, emotional, moral and intellectual growth and change, and help students with lowering anxiety, negotiating multiple classrooms, teachers, and peer relationship changes in school settings that are oftentimes larger than elementary environments.
- **Middle school-to-high school transitions**
Programs with high counseling, academic and mentoring components tend to show the greatest impact for grade level retention, graduation, reduced criminal/delinquent behavior and reduced teen pregnancy rates.
- **High school-to-post secondary or work/life transitions**
Transitions that focus on vocational training and life skills for all students with group counseling and increased self-awareness and career awareness for students with Learning Disabilities were reported as successful. Students with disabilities do best with skills in self-determination, self-advocacy, and career development, so that they receive the services, accommodations, and technology supports that will allow them to achieve to their level of ability. Once in post-secondary educational settings, these students do best where there are mechanisms of support management to aid them in managing their educational and health support services.

Summary

A successful and effective transition program is everybody's responsibility. Schools must take the lead in evaluating the needs of their students and families, assess where their current programs and services have gaps, and then build a stakeholder/community planning council to design and implement transition programs at various levels of support from prevention through system of care. It is important to plan early to allow time for changes and have a back-up plan because even the most carefully thought out transition plans can go wrong. Students do best when all key players collaborate to continually support the students' needs through transition stages and beyond. Developmentally appropriate supports and services must be the corner stone of transition programs that have strong parental supports and involvement with a broad base of well-coordinated and creative use of community resources including agencies, volunteers, college and university interns, peer-to-peer and older student supports. Remaining culturally sensitive to the needs of families and students can facilitate communication throughout the process and help build partnerships between the school, families, and the community based on trust and mutual respect. The impact of well-conceived and implemented transition programs benefit students and families across the spectrum of k-12 education.