P-3 Needs Assessment & Action Planning

Strong P-3 systems are a key strategy to promote positive student outcomes and foster children's growth and development throughout the early years.

Efforts targeted to building P-3 systems are based on a robust body of research supporting the notion that quality early learning experiences promote long-term student achievement, reduce the need for more costly remediation later in a student's education, and ultimately provide the foundational academic and social-emotional skills that are critical for lifelong success. As a result, a focus on building a continuum of learning experiences that bridges early learning and the early grades has become a major focus of researchers and education leaders alike. School Readiness Consulting (SRC) partners to facilitate these efforts in districts through the following P-3 Needs Assessment and Action Planning process -- focused on providing support for school and district leadership to build and strengthen P-3 systems.

OVERVIEW OF P-3 NEEDS ASSESSMENT & ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

1

Needs Assessment

2

Learning Tour

3

Promising Practices & Action Plan

Phase 1 – Needs Assessment

The goal of the Needs Assessment phase is to support school and district leaders in reflecting on existing practices and policies. In order to do so, district and school leaders complete a comprehensive needs assessment focused on evidence of best practice across three key areas of P-3 systems building: 1) Strengthening the P-3 Pipeline; 2) Improving Program Quality; and 3) Increasing System-wide Impact. As a result of this process, leaders are guided in evaluating where the district's current efforts land on a spectrum of development – from the beginning stages of "getting started" to "business as usual" – and identifying areas of potential growth to inform future planning.

Phase 2 – Learning Tour

The Learning Tour phase adds an important aspect of further collecting information and triangulating insights related to implementation of P-3 education initiatives in districts and schools. Learning Tours include a number of targeted site visits, classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups, each designed to gather information from various key stakeholders and deepen leaders' understanding of the current context at every level of policy and practice, from classroom to building-wide to district offices.

Phase 3 – Promising Practices & Action Plan

This last phase involves an exploration and high-level review of the latest research and promising practices in other communities that have implemented comprehensive P-3 systems. In this phase, district and school leaders have access to an inventory of effective strategies, innovations, and lessons learned in P-3 work to inform development of an action plan. The final and most critical task supports leaders in bringing together information and analysis from the previous phases to design a district or school-wide action plan to strengthen and expand P-3 systems.

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The initial needs assessment lays out anchor questions and potential evidence of best practice across three key areas of P-3 systems building: 1) Strengthening the P-3 Pipeline, 2) Improving Program Quality, 3) Increasing System-wide Impact. With the assessment, district and school leaders are supported in reflecting on practices and policies – from the beginning stages of "getting started" to "business as usual" – to ultimately identify areas of potential growth and inform future planning. After leaders complete the needs assessment, a plan is created with goals that will 'build the bridge' to the action planning template.

Organization Of The Assessment

STRENGTHENING THE P-3 PIPELINE	IMPROVING PROGRAM QUALITY	INCREASING SYSTEM-WIDE IMPACT
• Alignment • Transitions • Enrollment data collection • Family engagement	• Equity-focused decision-making • Instructional leadership/change management • Curriculum-instruction-assessment cycle • Professional learning	• Program delivery options • Funding • Connecting with communities • Strategic direction and evaluation

Sample: Needs Assessment

The following samples highlight elements of the "Transitions" strand as a part of the "Strengthening the Pipeline" area. The samples were added to provide a brief illustration of the type of guidance provided to leaders engaging in the P-3 Needs Assessment & Action Planning Process.

Area and Topic	Getting Started	Putting the Pieces Together	Business as Usual
Strengthening the P-3 Pipeline: Transitions	☑ We have determined the important stakeholders in transition work (schools, community based early learning programs, libraries, families) ☑ Our team has a transition team assembled ☑ We have had one transition activity (i.e. fair, kickoff, roundup, camps etc.) for families entering kindergarten	☑ Our transition team meets regularly ☑ We regularly conduct shared professional development (between community based and public school educators) ☑ We have supports school intra visits to both our kindergarten programs and to community based early programs ☐ We have multiple transition activities that help families and children entering kindergarten and rising to each grade through third become familiar with new expectations. ☐ Strategies are in place to support families of DLL's about transitions and kindergarten expectations	☑ We have a transition plan in place ☐ MOU's or other agreements are in place to ensure shared professional development (between community based and public school educators) ☐ We have a process and a policy around intra visits to both our kindergarten programs and to community based early programs ☐ We have policies to support multiple transition activities for families entering kindergarten and rising to each grade through third ☐ Policies support the strategies in place to support families of DLL's about transitions and kindergarten expectations

2. LEARNING TOUR

The purpose of a Learning Tour is to delve more deeply into areas identified from the initial needs assessment, triangulate information, and develop a clear understanding of interest, capacity, and core considerations for implementing new or enhanced educational programming. Learning Tours include targeted focus groups and interviews, classroom observations, and data collection efforts. Each element of the Learning Tour is designed to gather information from key stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, families, community providers, etc.) to deepen school or district leaders' understanding of the current context at every level of policy and practice from classroom to building-wide to district offices. In this phase, guidance is provided to leaders in order to effectively implement a Learning Tour and collect and analyze key information in order to determine common themes, capture needs and priorities, and identify gaps and opportunities for next step.

Sample: Learning Tour

Focus Groups

The purpose of a focus group is to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders engaged in educating young children. A focus group protocol is provided to leaders that explains the purpose, introduces the process, and offers a specialized set of questions developed for various groups (e.g., families, teachers, and principals).

EXAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR TRANSITIONS

FOR DISTRICT LEADERS
- What policies or practices are in place to support kindergarten transition?
- What are the most important elements of successful kindergarten transition?

FOR PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS
- What information do you have about families and children before they start kindergarten each year?
- What connections does your school have with community providers to support transition?

FOR FAMILIES
- How were you involved in your child's transition to kindergarten?
- What information did you have about Kindergarten expectations before school started?

Classroom Walkthrough

A classroom walkthrough provides the opportunity for leaders to conduct a comprehensive review of the physical environments, teacher-child interactions, and instructional practices impacting the learning experiences for young children. Comprehensive templates are provided to leaders to support the collection of information via classroom observations.

CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH CHECKLIST FOR TRANSITIONS

- ☐ Smooth transitions between daily events
- ☐ Teacher effectively guides individual children who need extra support during the transitions
- ☐ During transitions, all children are actively engaged, including children who are waiting for the next activity
- ☐ Advanced notice is given prior to transitions
- ☐ Materials management and clean up procedures are reinforced in order to promote independence

Additional Data Elements

Additional data collected can support school and district leaders in gaining a deeper understanding of important contextual information to strengthen P-3 policies and practices. Leaders are provided with lists of potential data sources to support identification and collection of key data elements to inform decision-making and planning.

LIST OF DATA ELEMENTS FOR TRANSITION POLICIES & PRACTICES

- Transition team descriptions (members and affiliations)
- Examples of formal transition plans
- Examples of current transition-focused activities
- Child-focused
- Family-focused
- Teacher-focused (pre K and kindergarten)
- Community-focused
- Written policy statements related to transitions and pre K – K connections
- Examples of District ESSA plans addressing transitions and pre K-K connections

3. PROMISING PRACTICES & ACTION PLAN

Promising Practices offers guidance related to the three key areas of P-3 systems building and each of the twelve underlying elements as outlined in the Needs Assessment. This part of the process provides leaders with an overview of the latest research and short case studies highlighting promising practices in other communities that have implemented comprehensive P-3 policies and practices. School and district leaders can pull from the identified strategies, innovations, and lessons learned from existing research and other communities to inform future action planning.

Sample: Promising Practices

Transitions Matter

Kindergarten marks a child's entry into formal schooling, and performance in kindergarten paves the way for future academic success or failure. The relation between children's performance during early elementary school and their later academic achievement has been well documented. However, not all children are prepared for the adjustment to a new setting that often includes more structure, unfamiliar teachers and peers, and increased expectations for following directions, demonstrating academic skills, and working independently. As a result, successful transition depends to some degree on the amount of discontinuity children have to negotiate.

Strategies for Effective Transitions

Engage children, families, schools and communities in preparing for both the academic and social/behavioral expectations that exist along the early learning continuum.

Position transitions as an ongoing process that is coordinated, individualized, and intentionally focused on aligning children's experiences across preschool and kindergarten settings. What constitutes effective transitions has also moved away from the earlier notion of a single-point-in-time project comprised of one or two low-intensity activities when children start kindergarten.

Plan and implement effective transitions utilizing a collaborative approach that actively involves all key stakeholders and focuses on aligning and coordinating children's experiences across preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Keep in mind the value of fostering relationships as resources, promoting continuity from preschool to kindergarten, focusing on family strengths, tailoring practices to individual needs and forming collaborative partnerships.

Stories Of Promising Practices

Highline Public Schools, Washington

Excerpts from: Final Capstone Poster Session, PK-3 Executive Leadership Institute, University of Washington

In 2013-14, the Highline School district convened a group of district educators, early learning center staff, and community agencies to assess transition practices across the district and community. Results revealed a need for better coordination of existing efforts across sectors, more focused efforts to engage families, and increased attention to creating more alignment and continuity across levels of learning. As a result, the district developed a multi-level approach to focus on efforts at the regional, district, school-based, and center-based levels.

Region-wide efforts

Focused on developing regional champions for the work by developing clear and consistent messaging and convening school board members from neighboring districts.

District-wide efforts

Involved a survey of all families with incoming kindergarteners designed to gather information on the transition-related experiences they had prior to starting to kindergarten.

School-based efforts

Included implementation of one or more transition strategies based on school context, such as data reviews, family teacher conferences, kindergarten teacher visits to preschool programs, and fostering inter-school collaboration.

Center-based efforts

Strategies were implemented to build alignment between early learning providers and elementary schools, such as data sharing, alignment of learning goals, and joint professional development.

Designing an effective action plan can help district and school leaders actualize their vision for P-3 work. Using a backward design process, this critical part of the phase supports leaders in developing a clear agenda and set of next steps, and plan by keeping the "end in mind." In Stage 1, leaders clarify their desired results by specifying a goal and the strategies and steps to attaining it. Stage 2 focuses on factors to consider for implementation of the plan – ways to evaluate progress, resources or supports that need to be put in place to meet identified goals and a realistic timeline for completion.

Sample: Action Plan

STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS

Goal	Strategies and Action Steps
Establish Effective Transition Practices	**Assemble a transition team.** This may include: • Determining stakeholders in the transition process (school staff and community partners, community early learning programs, parents). • Organizing, at different times of the day, transition-planning information meetings to recruit team members. • Selecting a diversity of stakeholders that represent the family, school and community populations. • Facilitating an initial transition team orientation meeting to discuss time commitment and expectations for transition team participation. **Develop a master transition plan.** This may include: • Building relational supports between families/children/kindergarten teachers as well as between community early learning program leadership and school staff. • Fostering alignments between settings (i.e. routines, rules, home visits, early learning standards etc.). • Determining a variety of transition activities for families entering kindergarten (fair, round ups, kickoff, camps etc.) that can be offered over a specified time period. • Creating a process and developing multiple strategies for ongoing information sharing with all stakeholders. • Evaluating plan effectiveness.

STAGE 2 – IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Metrics for Evaluating Progress Towards Goal	Resources Needed	Timeline
• A majority of the transition team members represented the cultural, linguistic, racial and economic makeup of the families, school staff and community members. • Number of transition planning meetings facilitated. • Number of different information sharing strategies. • Number of times transition information was shared. • Number of transition activities offered to families entering kindergarten.	• Dedicated meeting time for transition team members. • Funds or donations of materials and supplies to host a variety of transition activities. • Volunteers to help plan, prepare and staff transition events. • Printed transition materials for families and community stakeholders.	• Begins in fall of new school year and ends in month following kindergarten entry

WORK WITH US

Children are at the center of what we do.

Through our partnerships, School Readiness Consulting integrates our expertise in strategic thinking, best practice and evaluation to transform early learning and affirm the right of all children to thrive. We work to promote equitable early learning experiences that support each child's success, leading to a better world.

We impact the lives of young children

and the adults who support them by partnering with states, cities, school districts, non-profit organizations, and foundations in pursuit of improving school readiness. By working at the intersection of three critical areas - evaluation, practice and systems – we bring the context, leverage, and influence to develop innovative solutions that build our partners' capacity to support high-quality early learning. Our comprehensive approach integrates our commitment to social justice and our expertise across practice, strategy, and evaluation to build equitable systems for young children, birth through third grade.

Our team has supported P-3 efforts

throughout the nation. Our experiences working with states, school districts, charter schools, child care and family child care, and Head Start programs allow us to align priorities of stakeholders, language being used to create systems, and the strategic and practical action items that improve early learning for children birth through third grade.

Contact our team to learn more

about how we support leaders through the process of needs assessments, learning tours, action planning, resulting in a comprehensive and actionable strategy for P-3 in your district or school.

Contact:
Lindsey Allard Agnamba, Executive Director
allard@schoolreadinessconsulting.com
1-877-447-0327 x700

www.schoolreadinessconsulting.com

SCHOOL READINESS CONSULTING
www.schoolreadinessconsulting.com