



This year, about 10,000 Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) children will transition from preschool into kindergarten. This transition can be challenging for both children and parents, as they adjust to a new environment and meet new expectations. The network of LAUP preschool providers has been encouraged to offer transition supports to families to help ensure a successful transition. This pilot study gives an overview of the types of transition activities a sample of twelve LAUP preschools and four feeder kindergarten programs engaged in. The following findings emerged from interviews with preschool staff and kindergarten teachers:

- All twelve preschools had a transition plan and offered a minimum of four out of six transition activities.
- All but one of the twelve preschools had a relationship with at least one elementary school, allowing for some level of communication and collaboration for transition activities.
- Two of the four kindergarten teachers had a relationship with the current LAUP preschool teachers at their elementary schools.
- Kindergarten teachers identified parent education, particularly parent involvement, as the greatest need among the families they serve.

Background

Transition to kindergarten is one of the first major events in a young child's life, and it sets the stage for the child's elementary school education. Rapid adjustment to kindergarten allows the students to take advantage of learning opportunities. Students who adjust quickly may have higher levels of academic performance than peers who take longer to become comfortable in the kindergarten environment (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). Successful kindergarten transitions begin before the kindergarten school year. The characteristics of a successful kindergarten transition include: a preschool visit to a kindergarten classroom, a kindergarten teacher visiting the preschool classroom, individualized communication between families and schools, and a collaborative approach to transition among the various adults in a child's life (Patton & Wang, 2012).

LAUP has encouraged and assisted preschools in the network to provide kindergarten transition support to children and families. During the 2014 program year, LAUP's Parent Engagement and Resource Specialists (PERS) conducted Transition to Kindergarten workshops for preschool providers, who, in turn, presented the workshop to parents at their site. These workshops included what children are expected to know upon kindergarten entry, tips for parents for a smooth transition, and information and options on choosing an elementary school. Prior to this new program, PERS presented these workshops directly to parents when requested by the preschool providers. PERS, along with Family Support Specialists at designated LAUP preschool sites, have continued to provide transition workshops upon request. In addition, LAUP Quality Support Coaches have guided interested providers on collaborating with local kindergarten programs to develop transition activities. As a result, the types of transition activities can vary greatly from site to site.

All twelve of the preschools had some type of transition plan to help families transition from LAUP to kindergarten.

All of the sites provided information on the local elementary schools, information on the registration dates for school, and support for parents in the enrollment process. Ten of the sites provided one or more transition workshops for parents, and the remaining two sites indicated that these workshops were to be provided by LAUP staff. Eight of the sites led children on visits to kindergarten classrooms, and seven of those sites welcomed the parents on those visits, as well. Seven sites offered all six supports: 1) provide school information, 2) provide information on registration dates, 3) support for parents, 4) provide transition workshops, 5) kindergarten visit for children, and 6) kindergarten visit for parents. Although most of these types of supports, with the exception of visits to kindergarten classrooms, do not require direct communication

with kindergarten programs, a relationship with kindergarten programs allows for the articulation of curriculum and standards.

Figure 1. Types of Kindergarten Transition Supports Provided

	Number of Preschools	Percent of Preschools
Provide school information	12	100%
Provide registration dates	12	100%
Support for parents	12	100%
Provide transition workshops	10	83%
Transition workshop provided by LAUP	2	2%
Kindergarten visit for children	8	67%
Kindergarten visit for parents	7	58%

Eleven of the twelve preschools had a relationship with at least one elementary school; however, the level of involvement among the schools varied.

Only one preschool did not have a relationship with their local elementary school. Three described relationships with multiple schools. One preschool described the relationship with the local elementary school as minimal since they are starting to develop a relationship. While another site reported having a relationship with the elementary school, their preschool and kindergarten teachers did not have any direct communication. On the other hand, another preschool reported that their children often visited the kindergarten class. Six sites indicated that preschool teachers had a relationship with the kindergarten teachers regarding articulation of curriculum and standards. The focus of articulation was on creating and implementing classroom content that bridges preschool and kindergarten in order to provide continuity of instruction that helps children make a successful transition to kindergarten. In addition to articulation, preschool teachers at one of these six sites discussed children’s Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) with kindergarten teachers. More specifically, kindergarten teachers observed children in the preschool and the preschool teachers observed children in kindergarten. This type of connection ensures continuity as well as a smooth transition for children.

Preschools also reported on the relationships before becoming an LAUP site and at the present time. Four reported positive changes since becoming an LAUP site, five reported no change, two reported negative changes, and one was unable to report as the teacher had not been at the site prior to LAUP. The negative change stemmed from the fact that these two sites had had a transition specialist through funding received prior to LAUP’s involvement and that this role no longer exists.

“There wasn’t any [relationship with the school]. Before LAUP, this was just a childcare.”

- Quality Enhancement Preschool Site Provider

Two of the four kindergarten teachers had a relationship with the current LAUP preschool teachers at their elementary school.

One indicated that the LAUP teacher consulted her about which children will be learning in the following year while the other said their relationship was limited to the preschool class transition visit to her kindergarten class, with communication occurring primarily through their principal. Another stated she had a relationship with the previous preschool teacher at her elementary school but does not have a relationship with the current preschool teaching staff. The fourth kindergarten teacher did not have a relationship with the onsite preschool teaching staff. Also, none of the teachers reported having a relationship with any of the local preschools outside of their elementary school.

The kindergarten teachers’ involvement in transition activities was limited. Only one said that the LAUP preschool classes recently visited her class. Another stated that the previous preschool teacher brought her class

over for transition visits; however, the current preschool teacher did not. The remaining two did not participate in transition visits.

Communication regarding curriculum and standards between the kindergarten teachers and the preschool teachers was limited. It occurred at two schools. At one school, teachers shared their matrix that determines what children will be learning throughout the school year with the preschool teacher. However, there was no formal communication. Another communicated information on standards through their principal. The remaining two did not communicate with the preschool teachers regarding curriculum and standards.

The kindergarten teachers identified parent education as the main need among the children and families they serve.

Kindergarten teachers felt it would be helpful for parents to understand that preschool and kindergarten lay the foundation for their children's education and therefore are important. In addition, parents should understand what their children are expected to learn in kindergarten before they start kindergarten. Teachers indicated that parents are often shocked and concerned when they learn about these expectations at the first parent meeting after school has already begun. Lastly, and most important, teachers identified the need to educate parents on the importance of parent involvement in their children's education. This includes being involved in the school, knowing what is occurring and helping their children with their homework. Specifically, one teacher said that parents should guide their child so that he learns the skills and discipline to do his homework. Teachers noted that children whose parents are involved in their children's education are the ones who enter kindergarten better prepared and are successful as they go through school. Similarly, studies show that a major benefit of parent involvement is improved student academic achievement (Loucks, 1992).

"[School Readiness] is based more on the parent and how much time and effort they put into their child's education."

- Kindergarten Teacher

Conclusion

Although the pilot study had the limitation of a small sample of preschool staff and kindergarten teachers, it provides a glimpse of what may be occurring. The interviews with the preschool staff were encouraging, as all reported providing some level of transition supports; however, the interviews with the kindergarten teachers point to loose connections between the preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The kindergarten teacher interviews also underscored the importance of parent involvement in a child's preparedness for kindergarten and future success in school. This finding supports LAUP's philosophy that parents are a child's first teacher and its focus on parent engagement.

Participation in preschool programs has been linked to increased parent involvement in kindergarten and possibly beyond. One study found that preschool programs not only prepare children for transition to kindergarten but also prepare parents. It noted the following three processes by which parents become involved in their child's education (Kreider, 2002):

1. **Leadership.** Leadership and learning opportunities in preschool programs can build parents' confidence in getting involved once their child is in elementary school.
2. **Patterns of Practice.** Routines of parent involvement established in preschool can carry over to kindergarten.
3. **Trusting Relationships.** "Comfort and skills communicating with educators and the educational system can be fostered among parents through meaningful relationships" with preschool staff.

In addition to these processes, the importance of parent involvement in their children's school success should be emphasized and communicated throughout the preschool program (Kreider, 2002). This may encourage parent involvement and facilitate kindergarten transition.

For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.

References

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- Loucks, H. (1992). Increasing family/parent involvement: Ten ideas that work. *NASS Bulletin*, 76(543), 19-23.
- Patton, C. & Wang, J. (2012). *Ready for success: Creating collaborative and thoughtful transitions into kindergarten*. Harvard Family Research Project.

Appendix - Methodology

The Research and Evaluation Unit at LAUP conducted a pilot study to begin to understand the transition activities among the preschools within LAUP's Provider Network and feeder kindergarten programs. Structured interviews were conducted with lead teachers or directors at twelve LAUP preschool sites to learn about their transition activities and relationships with their local kindergarten programs. The twelve preschools are Quality Enhancement (QE) sites under the Child Signature Program (CSP). As part of CSP, these sites receive additional supports, including a Family Support Specialist, and Early Education Expert, who provides intensive coaching support.

Attempts were made to recruit the kindergarten teachers from the elementary schools where these preschool teachers and directors had connections. Due to lack of response, kindergarten teachers were recruited from the school districts that have LAUP preschool programs. Because responses and time were limited, data was collected from four kindergarten teachers, each at different schools, within the same school district. Structured interviews were conducted with the four kindergarten teachers to learn about their relationship and collaborative transition activities with the LAUP preschool at their elementary school. The notes and transcriptions of the interviews were coded for themes using Atlas.ti.

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