



Research Summary

on Transition Practices in Early Childhood

RESEARCHERS from the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC)¹ summarized nine research studies on transition practices in early childhood.² Here is what the researchers learned from their review of these studies conducted on transition.

How were transition practices defined and implemented?

Transitions practices were defined and implemented differently across the nine studies. A single, agreed-upon definition of transition practices does not exist in the research literature. However, some of the most widely mentioned transition practices across studies included teaching children skills they needed in the next environment, communicating and coordinating transition supports between sending and receiving programs, and hosting transition activities such as program visits or open house events.

What types of settings were involved in the transitions?

Most of the studies examined transition practices from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. Some studies also followed children as they transitioned to first and second grade. No studies addressed transition practices for children birth to three years of age or children who transitioned at age 3 to pre-kindergarten settings.

What were the characteristics of the children who participated in the research on transitions?

The studies included samples of children that ranged from 18 to 283 children. Several studies included a focus on children with disabilities or children at risk for disabilities.

¹ Cooperative agreement, PR Award # H324V020003, US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2003-2009).

² These studies relied primarily on correlational research designs. This means that the existing research can provide information about specific factors that may be related to transition practices, but it provides little evidence about which practices work best, for whom, and under what conditions.

What factors were associated with positive transition outcomes?

Several broad conclusions can be drawn from a review of the existing research:

For children with developmental delays, a close, positive relationship between a teacher and a child as a part of the transition process was associated with improved cognitive skills.

For typically developing children, a close, positive relationship between a teacher and a child as a part of the transition process was associated with improved cognitive skills, better social relationships, and fewer behavior problems.

For all children, (1) a good match between sending and receiving programs was associated with more successful transitions and (2) teaching skills that children will need in the next educational setting prior to transition was associated with better adjustment and increased learning and development in the new setting.

Bottomline on the effectiveness of transition practices

Research has found that several transition practices such as establishing positive teacher-child relationships and coordinating transition supports between sending and receiving programs were associated with better adjustment and increased learning in the new setting for young child with and without developmental delays.