

OEL Newsletter

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Transitions to Kindergarten

Spring is here, and schools and families are already busy planning for the next school year. September will be an especially significant time for children entering kindergarten from prekindergarten programs, community organizations, and homes. For children and their families, the transition to kindergarten is a time of great change. Building relationships, partnering and collaboration are extremely important to facilitate the transition of prekindergarten students to kindergarten.



The State Education Department has developed a tool for school districts to use, called *The New York State Education Department's Tool to Assess the Effectiveness of Transitions from Prekindergarten to Kindergarten*. (The tool can be found on the [Office of Early Learning website](#).) Districts can use this tool as a self-assessment to determine how well-prepared they are to successfully incorporate new kindergarteners into the K-12 system. These findings can be used to inform schools to develop and monitor the effectiveness of their transition plans and take actions to improve practices.

Transition tips for educators (at classroom, building, and district levels) and families can be found on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter issue. Please reflect on what practices may be beneficial to the children and families you serve. Page 4, *Transition Tips for Families*, could be reproduced and sent home with children who will be attending kindergarten next year.

Inside this issue:

<i>Spring Reading Suggestions</i>	2
<i>Transition Tips for Educators</i>	3
<i>Transition Tips for Families</i>	4
<i>Screening Overview</i>	5-6
<i>Multipurpose Supplies for the Pre-K Classroom</i>	7-8

Resources for Early Childhood Leaders and Teachers

The New York State Association for the Education of Young Children and the New York State Head Start Collaboration Office released briefs that provide research-based guidance on key practices that support children in Prekindergarten through Grade 3. The first five briefs cover the following topics: Leadership, Environment, Curriculum, Interaction, and Assessment. The next brief will focus on Family Engagement. The briefs may be downloaded from the New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council website at www.nysecac.org.

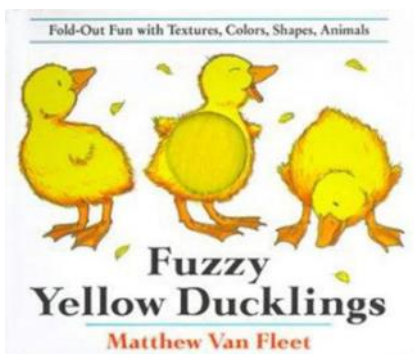


Brief #5 describes the effective use of appropriate assessments in high quality classrooms. It includes strategies for teachers and leaders. Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In this newsletter issue we will provide an overview of screening, one form of assessment to be used in early childhood settings. Please review these resources and reflect on them when planning for the next school year.

Spring Reading Suggestions

Young children enjoy and benefit from an adult reading to them. When you read to children, you are developing their language and literacy skills – children acquire new vocabulary, hear how language functions in different contexts, observe concepts of print, and establish an interest in reading. While you are reading to children, engage in meaningful conversations about the book. Ask them not only questions about what is happening in the book, but also if they enjoyed the book and why. Tell children about a connection you have to the text. Encourage them to talk with their peers about what you have read.

This spring, take a walk to your local library and find some new books to enjoy. Here are some books to read with children, along with suggested activities to enhance learning:



Infant/Toddler (Birth-3years)

Fuzzy Yellow Ducklings by Matthew Van Fleet

- Sort additional objects in multiple ways (by color, shape, etc.)
- Identify vocabulary (textures, colors, shapes, animals)
- Fingerprint with textured paints to reinforce vocabulary
~ Mix materials such as salt, coffee grounds, oatmeal, or sand with paint to achieve different textures

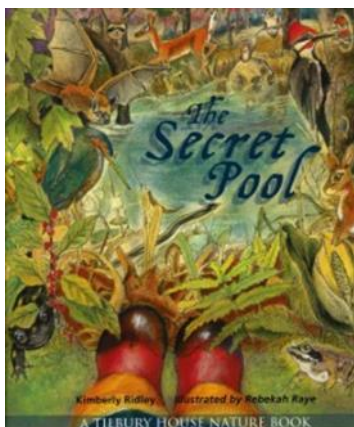
Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert



Preschool (3-5 years)

Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert

- Collect pictures of colorful plants and graph by color, type of plant, etc.
- Trace and cut flower shapes; paint or color the flowers; glue seeds, stems, leaves
- Plant a rainbow garden
~ Use bulbs and seeds; discuss what things plants need to grow; tend the garden and track plants' growth



Primary (Grades K-3)

The Secret Pool by Kimberly Ridley

- Go outside and explore; draw and/or write about the plants and animals observed
- Research the life cycles of other animals; compare and contrast
- Recreate an ecosystem in the classroom, using real materials and organisms or art supplies
- Take a [virtual tour](#) of a vernal pool or visit one in your area (they can be found throughout our state—even in NYC!)

Transition Tips for Educators

How can kindergarten teachers and school district leaders support transitions?

- Create a shared vision among all staff that the mission is to serve all students as a continuum from prekindergarten through grade 12.
- Include prekindergarten staff in curriculum planning and professional development opportunities.
- Conduct outreach efforts to establish relationships with feeder schools and programs.
 - * Create and maintain a list of contacts for ease of communication.
 - * Visit programs; meet and learn about incoming kindergarteners.
 - * Host meetings for early childhood program directors and teachers to discuss transition plans.
- Acquire assessment information from early childhood programs to establish students' strengths and prepare to serve students' needs.
- Reach out to local organizations (e.g., libraries; housing authorities; adult education and job training providers; churches; social service organizations) that serve families to ensure that families with children who are not enrolled in prekindergarten programs receive information about kindergarten registration.
- Ensure communications from the district are reciprocal and support the culture, home languages and reading levels for the families of incoming students.
- Hold orientation meetings for children and families prior to the beginning of the school year.
- Provide opportunities for families of entering kindergarteners to meet and begin forming relationships.
- Offer parent workshops and encourage the school's parent organization to include incoming kindergarten families in planning.
- Most importantly, remember that parents are their children's first teachers and include ways that they can contribute to the discussion of their children's social and academic progress.

How can teachers and leaders in early childhood programs support transitions?

- Provide orientations for children transitioning from home to early childhood programs.
- Reach out to school districts; invite them to visit your program.
- For providers that are not co-located in a school building where kindergarten will be held, take children on a class trip to visit the elementary school.
- Arrange to meet with local providers of prekindergarten and preschool programs to discuss preparing children for kindergarten and beyond.
- Read books to students about kindergarten throughout the year.
- Ensure communications from the program are reciprocal and support the culture, home languages and reading levels for the families of students.
- Invite parents to visit the program and participate in events.
- Most importantly, remember that parents are their children's first teachers and include ways that they can contribute to the discussion of their children's social and academic progress.

Transition Tips for Families

What can families do to support children's transitions to kindergarten?

Children benefit from having families who help to guide them through the transition from home and early childhood programs to kindergarten. Some recommended activities are:

- * Visit the school before the first day of kindergarten.
- * Become familiar with the school, starting with the main office and kindergarten classrooms. Meet teachers, secretaries, custodians and the principal.
- * Attend parent/family orientations, meetings and workshops to learn about your child's new school.
- * Ask about the resources available to you and your child through the school and community agencies.
- * Join the school's parent group, sometimes called a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or Parent Teacher Association (PTA).
- * Think about what you can bring to a team of parents and teachers, and volunteer to help in a way that makes you feel comfortable.



- * Meet parents of children who will also attend your child's school. Start or participate in groups where the children can get to know one another.
- * Establish daily family practices and schedules that are similar to school routines.
- * Provide your child access to print materials at home. For example, take out a library card and make frequent visits with your child.
- * Read books about school with your child.

- * Know what your child needs to know and assist them in their transition.
- * Become your child's advocate and ensure their needs are being met.
- * Remember, you are your child's most important teacher.



SCREENING OVERVIEW

While it is only April, our office can guess that you are already thinking about next school year. We wanted to provide readers with an overview of screening as you prepare for next year. In fact, your school may be conducting screenings within the next few months. In New York State, each school district must conduct a screening for all new entrants. Establishing a screening process for early childhood classrooms is important since the majority of new entrants to a district are students entering prekindergarten or kindergarten.

For the purposes of [Part 117](#) of the Commissioner's Regulations, screening is the use of a brief procedure designed to provide information that allows the district to distinguish from the general population those children who fit into one or more of these three categories: possibly gifted, suspected of having a disability, and possibly limited English proficient. Please note that this screening is only performed once during a school year and should not be confused with universal screening within a Response to Intervention (RtI) model that may be performed three times per year.

Similarly, the National Research Council defines screening as "the use of a brief procedure or instrument designed to identify, from within a large population of children, those who may need further assessment to verify developmental and/or health risks."¹ Screenings do not typically provide diagnostic information. For example, vision and hearing screenings are generally conducted on children right after they are born. The information obtained from a vision screening will indicate that a child's vision is within a normal range or that further evaluation is needed. The results from a vision screening would typically not provide enough information for a medical diagnosis. The child may need to see a specialist, who would perform additional assessments to determine if there is truly a vision problem, the cause of the problem, treatment, etc.

Screenings in early childhood settings serve the same purpose. The goal of screening is to identify potential issues so that, if needed, proper supports and services can be put into place to ensure children's success. Some scenarios are listed below.

Screening for:	Results show:	Further evaluation may be completed by:	Potential outcomes:
Motor development	Not within normal range	Occupational Therapist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child receives occupational therapy services • Teacher, with suggestions from specialist, provides supports in classroom and monitors student progress
Cognitive skills	Within normal range	Classroom teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child continues to meet developmental benchmarks • Teacher has concerns, provides supports in classroom, and monitors student progress
Cognitive skills	Not within normal range	Classroom teacher School psychologist Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child participates in a gifted and talented program • Teacher provides individualized instruction to meet student needs and monitors progress

¹ National Research Council. (2008). *Early childhood assessment: Why, what and how*. Snow, C.E., & Van Hemel, S.B. (Eds.). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

SCREENING OVERVIEW

When planning for the future, it would be helpful to reflect on these points regarding screening:

- Screening is intended to identify children who may need further assessment.
 - When needed, there should always be referrals for further assessment.
- Screening instruments must be valid and reliable.
- Staff administering screenings should be sufficiently trained.
- Screening results, alone, do not provide enough information to determine children’s strengths and needs.
- Screening results should not be used to:
 - diagnose children as having special needs.
 - preclude children from participating in a program.
 - evaluate program effectiveness.²

FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

- Screening
- Developmental Baseline
- Progress Monitoring
- Summative Assessment

Screening is just one form of assessment that may be used in early childhood settings. The [Universal Prekindergarten regulations](#) state that “school districts shall establish a process for assessing the developmental baseline and progress of all children participating in the program.” Districts are also responsible for reporting “annually the percentage of prekindergarten children making significant gains in language, cognitive and social skills” and may use summative assessments to determine such gains. Assessment tools should be: developmentally appropriate; aligned with standards and curricula; and valid and reliable. Valid tools accurately measure what they are intended to measure. Reliable tools provide similar results when administered as a re-test to the same student or provide similar results with similar student cohorts.³

Assessment is essentially collecting information and determining students’ strengths and needs. The use of appropriate assessments is an important component of the teaching and learning process. How does a teacher address the needs of children without identifying their needs? How does a director plan professional development for teachers without establishing where support is needed? Teachers should utilize data to inform their instruction and better meet the needs of students. Leaders should use data to evaluate program effectiveness and better support teachers and children. Assessments in early childhood settings look different from older students taking written exams, but the information obtained from formal and informal assessments is required for effective teaching and student success.

² National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003). *Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8. Position statement with expanded resources*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

³ Snow, K. (2011). *Developing kindergarten readiness and other large-scale assessment systems*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from the National Association for the Education of Young Children website: <http://www.naeyc.org/resources/research/kreadinessassessment>

Multipurpose Supplies for the Prekindergarten Classroom

Are you developing a materials wish list for next year? Here are some supplies that could be used at more than one center in your classroom and suggestions of how they might be used.

Weekly Advertisements
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Office (ads from various stores) • Blocks/Construction Company (hardware and home supply store ads) • Supermarket/Store (grocery ads, coupons)
Art Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use printed pictures and text in a creative way
Math Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify shapes, numbers, etc. • Counting and cardinality • Sort objects
Literacy/Writing Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify letters, numerals, etc. • Use pictures to illustrate writing • Find pictures with a given initial sound

Play Food
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restaurant/Kitchen • Supermarket/Store
Math Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counting and cardinality • Understand simple patterns
Science Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe and categorize objects based on properties • Relate foods to healthy habits
Literacy/Writing Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore word relationships and increase vocabulary • Find objects with a given initial sound

Rubber Stamps and Stamp Pads
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Office • Office • Library
Art Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a variety of mediums to create visual art
Math Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplicate and extend simple patterns • Identify and describe shapes • Counting and cardinality • Sort objects
Literacy/Writing Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter recognition • Differentiate letters from numerals • Illustrate writing

Calendars (all sizes)
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Office • Office • Library • Restaurant/Kitchen
Circle Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become familiar with days of the week and months of the year
Math Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify numbers • Counting and cardinality
Literacy/Writing Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify letters, numerals, etc.

(continued on page 8)



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The Office of Early Learning (OEL) is responsible for a wide range of educational programs and works closely with parents, early care and education agencies, schools and state agencies to coordinate programs and resources with the goal of making New York’s early learning system as comprehensive and seamless as possible. The OEL is tasked with implementing over \$750 million per year in State grants for prekindergarten programs with the goal of providing high-quality programs for early learners to all children.

For more information and helpful resources, please visit our website at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/>

Multipurpose Supplies for the Prekindergarten Classroom, continued

Cash Register and Play Money
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Office • Restaurant/Kitchen • Supermarket/Store
Math Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counting and Cardinality • Algebraic Thinking (understand addition as adding to/subtraction as taking from) • Sort objects
Social Studies Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a basic understanding of economic concepts
Literacy/Writing Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore word relationships and increase vocabulary • Differentiate letters from numerals

Aprons
Dramatic Play Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blocks/Construction Company • Supermarket/Store • Restaurant/Kitchen
Art Center
Sand/Water Table
Science Center
Cooking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect clothing • Store tools
Literacy Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreate, retell, or develop stories with storytelling aprons (an example can be found here)