



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Early Education and Care



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Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

Ready
Communities

Welcome to Kindergarten!

A Planning Toolkit for Massachusetts' Schools, Families, and Communities



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Ready Communities Guide Introduction

The **Ready Communities Guide** offers information about collaborating with schools, including community-based early childhood programs, and families to develop a community-wide transition plan to kindergarten. In this guide, “**community**” means the staff and leadership of community agencies, businesses, and local philanthropic organizations that serve and support young children and their families.

Community partners may include but are not limited to:

Community & Recreational Programs	Health & Social Services	Business & Philanthropy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s museums • Local libraries • Recreational centers • Cultural organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health centers • Pediatricians • Mental health services • Social support services • Agencies that serve highly mobile families, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » military families; » families experiencing homelessness; » children in foster care; and » families new to the United States. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philanthropic organizations • Local businesses • Nonprofit organizations



Beginning kindergarten is an important milestone for children and their families. For children, it means adapting to a new learning environment, meeting new friends and educators, adjusting to a new schedule, and learning new rules and expectations. Supporting children in the transition is a big job.

Families often have questions and concerns as they prepare their child to start school. It is important for schools, families, and community partners to work together as equal partners in creating a comprehensive transition plan. This plan should incorporate diverse perspectives and voices. Developing, planning, and implementing a community transition plan requires a collective and coordinated effort from all partners.

Research tells us four important things about the transition to school:

- Equitable transition activities support families across income gaps.
- Transitions that help children make new friends, learn how to follow rules, and understand academic expectations in the classroom result in improved social, emotional, and academic outcomes.
- Family engagement plays a key role in the transition to kindergarten and provides children with stability, comfort, and a sense of what to expect.
- Relationships among families, pre-K programs, schools, and community partners are key to effectively coordinating a community-wide plan for supporting transitions to kindergarten.

Community Partners' Role in the Transition to Kindergarten Planning Process

Community partners play a key role in the kindergarten transition journey. They already have trusted partnerships with families and can actively and thoughtfully support the process. Community partners who collaborate with school and community pre-K program educators and leaders bring valuable insights into local early learning systems.

Community partners can contribute to the transition to kindergarten planning and designing processes in unique and meaningful ways that include families' values and the community's priorities. Here are some examples of connections and activities that your agency may already be engaged in:

- Community partners have established relationships with families in the community and may already be collaborating with pre-K programs and schools.
- Community partners have experience engaging children and families in programming. As a result, they offer unique perspectives about the activities, supports, and resources that can and should be included in a comprehensive, community transition plan.
- Community partners often have staff who reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families in the community. The staff may have tremendous knowledge around the families' priorities, their communication preferences, how to connect with families, and cultural considerations when developing the transition plan.

- Community partners may have established culturally sustaining practices that honor and respect diverse cultures. These practices are designed to meet the needs of children and families across historically underserved communities including race, culture, language, ability, gender, family structure, religion, and income.



Community partners who are interested in collaboration can contact their local school district for opportunities and information on how to join the local transition to kindergarten planning team. As part of the planning team, community partners will be:

- invited to participate in meetings to contribute to the transition planning process;
- asked to be involved partners so they can support families' priorities; and
- included in the event planning to share resources and information and help align culturally sustaining practices that respond to the needs of children and families in historically underserved communities.

Community Partner Activities That Support a Positive Kindergarten Experience

Your community organization may already be offering activities for families that would be ideal to include in a comprehensive, coordinated community-wide transition to kindergarten plan. Take a moment to reflect on your agency's services, resources, and activities. Consider what would benefit children and families preparing for kindergarten and which could be added to the community's transition plan.

Here are some examples of what partnerships might offer to support positive experiences for children and families as they enter kindergarten:

- Offer support to reduce stress during transitions. Community mental health agencies might coordinate with schools, including community pre-K programs, to support the social and emotional stress that is common during transitions to new environments or meeting new people.
- During well-child visits or physical exams, discuss the upcoming transition to kindergarten and provide families with information from the local school district.
- Connect with the local **Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE)** program in your community to learn about child development services and resources for families with young children. Invite a CFCE coordinator to a family event your organization may host as part of the transition to kindergarten activities.

- Provide ideas or resources to support the health and safety of the physical school environment. A community business that specializes in structural and environmental safety may help coordinate this service.
- Design events that bring families together across the community. Families could meet with local educators and school leaders to ask questions about kindergarten, the family's role, and how their child will be supported throughout the transition.
- Create a space for families to share thoughts and ideas about programming, services, and resources that help prepare families and children for the transition. Supporting families as leaders in sharing ideas and making decisions helps them advocate for their child as they transition to kindergarten.
- Provide resources and information to families and schools, including community-based early childhood programs and available support services. These support services could include health, mental health, behavioral, and social services; assistance for food, housing, and clothing; and other supports specific to the priorities of families in the community.
- Promote community-building activities and opportunities for community partners to work with families, educators, and school administrators on how to support children to develop skills related to later school success: early language, literacy, self-regulation, and attitudes to learning. Offer activities that align with and reinforce learning goals that families can do at home.
- Offer activities that promote family well-being and support children for kindergarten. Family well-being is an important predictor of school preparedness and success.
- Contribute resources to help keep transition planning and implementation efforts on track.
- Offer activities that support community-wide planning efforts to existing groups. Groups may include faith-based organizations, cultural organizations, museums, or libraries.
- Ask your agency staff to think creatively about what role, beyond planning, your community organization can play in the design and delivery of parts of the local transition to kindergarten plan.
- Partner regularly with **McKinney-Vento Liaisons** to provide transition services and supports that identify and serve children and families who are experiencing homelessness.



Collaborating with Families and Schools

As a community organization, agency, business, or nonprofit, you have systems, resources, and structures that can support building strong school-family-community partnerships. If you are new to collaborating with schools, families, and other community partners, it is important to remember relationships are at the heart of any successful partnership. These partnerships can take many forms, depending on the needs and preferences of families, pre-K programs, school districts, and the resources available in the local community.

Families

Families are essential partners who contribute to the culture, values, and priorities of the local community. By engaging families, you can learn about specific ways your organization can best support successful transitions and positive school experiences.

These resources can support you and your staff to engage with families and build strong school-family-community partnerships:

- **Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework for Prenatal Through Young Adulthood Family Engagement in Massachusetts**

This framework provides five guiding principles reflecting the system's culture and values toward family engagement and four elements of practice to enhance your interactions and conversations with families.

- **Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals**

The companion materials to the Family Engagement Framework support partnerships between families, schools, and communities. Explore the fundamentals of partnerships in the Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals [downloadable document](#) and in the [online module series](#).

Community organizations play a vital role in supporting families experiencing homelessness, migration, or transition as they prepare for kindergarten. By providing stability, resources, and intentional engagement, organizations can help ensure a smoother start to school. Here are key strategies:

- Create early learning opportunities by offering preschool programs, playgroups, or literacy workshops for young children.
- Provide transportation support by offering bus passes, gas cards, or shuttle services to help families attend school enrollment events.
- Facilitate social connections by organizing parent meet-and-greet events or peer support groups for families new to the community.
- Pair families with mentors or liaisons—trained volunteers or staff who can guide them through the school transition process.
- Partner with healthcare providers to offer on-site physicals, immunization clinics, and vision screenings.



- Provide mental health resources by offering counseling services or referrals to trauma-informed care for children and families.
- Ensure access to nutrition programs by connecting families with school meal programs, food pantries, and community kitchens.
- Engage cultural brokers or family liaisons who understand the unique needs and experiences of families who are migrant, homeless and/or newcomers.

These individuals can help bridge communication gaps, provide culturally responsive guidance, and build trust between families and schools, ensuring families feel welcomed and supported throughout the transition.

Schools

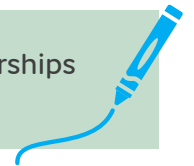
Building relationships with local school leaders and educators, including community pre-K programs, helps connect community services and resources to the school culture. Understanding the school climate and its efforts to support children and families fosters open communication and creates opportunities for partnership. By learning about the school's transition to kindergarten process, community partners can play a key role in creating a positive and supportive first-time school experience for young children.

Consider these ideas for partnering with schools:

- Build relationships with local school leaders and educators and pre-K programs, including family child care providers.
- Ask local schools, pre-K programs, family child care educators, and kindergarten educators for information that can help you and your staff learn about the transition to kindergarten. Also ask how community organizations can support the experience for children and families.
- Host events for educators of young children. Use the events to explore the resources you offer for families and children and the services they may find helpful as they transition their child to kindergarten.
- Connect schools with community health organizations to learn about the services they offer and how they may benefit families and children preparing to transition to kindergarten.
- Meet with school leaders and pre-K directors to find out how your agency can partner with them in their transition to kindergarten activities.

- Invite school administrators and pre-K and kindergarten educators to your agency to speak about the transition to kindergarten and what families can expect.
- Offer to help with outreach and messaging about transition to kindergarten events and information through your email and mailing lists.
- Co-host kindergarten readiness and registration events with community service providers that families may interact with regularly, such as food banks and community health providers.

The voices and diverse perspectives that come from school-family-community partnerships support planning for the transition between pre-K and kindergarten for **all** children.



Assess Your Agency's Capacity to Support the Transition to Kindergarten

Collaborate with schools and families as part of the transition to kindergarten team to complete the **Transition to Kindergarten Planning Team: Self-Assessment**. This assessment will evaluate the current community capacity and resources to support the transition to kindergarten for all children and families.

The Transition to Kindergarten Self-Assessment Template for Planning Teams asks questions about:

- school transition activities;
- collaboration across the community;
- family partnerships;
- professional development; and
- using data for continuous improvement.

The **Transition to Kindergarten Planning Team: Self-Assessment** will help identify:

- strengths of the local transition to kindergarten planning team, schools, and community;
- areas that need improvement; and
- where support from consultants or other district planning groups is needed.



Community partners will collaborate with members of the planning team and agency staff to complete the self-assessment. They can then use the results to reflect on their strengths and what they can offer in the local transition to kindergarten process.

The local transition to kindergarten planning team can also organize information from the self-assessment into categories. This strategy will help them see both duplication and continuity and address issues of equity or barriers for families. The results will inform planning, activities, and next steps to creating a seamless path to kindergarten.

Success Story—Boston Public Schools Countdown to Kindergarten

Great work is happening in Massachusetts around partnerships and collaborations toward the successful transition to kindergarten. Here is information from the Boston Public Schools about their successful partnership initiative, Countdown to Kindergarten:

Countdown to Kindergarten (C2K) is a partnership initiative among the Boston Public Schools (BPS), the City of Boston, and many community organizations. This initiative works to provide a positive and supportive transition to BPS kindergarten (K0, K1, or K2) for students and their families who live in Boston.

The initiative offers free family-child play to learn in groups. It also provides school-readiness tips and opportunities and hosts various workshops, events, and other school-readiness activities. C2K engages families, educators, and the community to support pre-K opportunities. It also supports the successful transition to kindergarten.

C2K thrives because of its long-standing partners, to name just a few:

- Families of our students
- Boston Children’s Museum
- Vital Village Networks
- Boston Children’s Hospital
- Boston Public Library
- First Teacher
- Boston Public Health Commission
- Discovery Museum
- The Basics
- The Office of Early Childhood at City Hall


As integral partners, families collaborate with us to design, implement, staff, and evaluate programs for outcomes and deliverables.

C2K programs and activities make up a continuum of services that support families from birth through kindergarten entry. The initiative connects and provides resources to families in the city to BPS. This approach ensures families register for BPS and universal pre-K opportunities.

For additional information, contact us at 617-635-9288, visit the C2K Facebook page, or visit the website: www.countdowntokindergarten.org.

Take the initiative to build school-family-community partnerships with a shared goal of a successful transition to kindergarten for **all** children in Massachusetts.

For additional information and/or resources on the transition to kindergarten, please reach out to the Early Learning Team at achievement@mass.gov.



Partnerships are powerful!
Schools and families need
community partnerships
to thrive.

For access to the complete set of guides and tools, go to <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/>.





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