UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:
A Summary of Evidence and Recommendations for Wyoming

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Introduction

RATIONALE

Change is a constant feature in all of our lives. Early childhood, perhaps more than any other phase of life, is defined by change. Young children ages Birth-8 experience dramatic changes in physical, language, cognitive, social, and emotional development. We understand that the early years are critical because this is the period in life when the brain develops most rapidly and has a high capacity for change (World Health Organization, 2020).

While young children experience enormous changes within themselves, they must also navigate change in their social world as members of families, schools, and communities. Supporting children's health and wellbeing as they experience moments of transition and change allows for the development of healthy brain architecture. This provides the essential foundation for all later learning, and for a healthy and happy life (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2018).

As findings regarding the essential need to support young children and families during times of transition increase, schools and communities must respond with greater intention to ensure children's success. Understanding the evidence-base regarding young children and transitions provides us with the tools necessary to solve problems and improve programs to better meet their needs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive summary of research on transitions and the importance of continuity for young children's healthy development. This resource offers evidence-based recommendations for consideration by state agencies, communities, schools and other entities supporting children and families in Wyoming.

In defining transitions in the early years, it is important to include more than just those formal experiences embedded within systems, such as the transition from home to childcare, a change in family services, or the transition to kindergarten. Transitions are a part of young children's everyday lives as members of families and communities, and children's success during informal transitions also has an impact on their development and learning (Brooker, 2008;

Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Jozwiak et.al., 2016; O'Connor, 2018). This paper will take a holistic view of transitions (Brooker, 2008) and will examine multiple types of transitions impacting young children and families. Because of the significance of the transition to kindergarten in the lives of young children, time will be spent specifically discussing this transition. The paper concludes with strategies to reduce transitions and increase continuity in young children's lives, and offers recommendations for supporting resilience and success during times of transition.

DEFINING TRANSITIONS

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) described a transition as a time when a child's position in the social environment "is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)." Young children's changing roles and identity along with other changes in their experiences during transitions have been found to significantly impact their development (Brooker 2008; Fabian, 2007; Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Fthenakis, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Merry 2007). A better understanding of this process of change has led to the adoption of a developmental model of transition (Pianta, & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). This model rejects the notion of transitions as a one-time event, and embraces the complexities inherent in the change process. It also embraces a more holistic view of transitions that includes the systems and supports in place before, during, and after transitions. The move toward a more holistic understanding of transitions is significant because it shifts the "burden of responsibility for a successful transition (Brooker, 2008, p. 6)" from the child, to everyone who is involved in the transition process.

Understanding the type or direction of the transitions young children experience is also helpful in supporting their success. Vertical transitions most often occur in relation to a child's age, and involve changes between education settings - such as the transition to kindergarten. Horizontal transitions occur every day as children move between formal networks, such as child care or school, and home (Johansson, 2007; Kagan, 1991; O'Connor, 2018). Internal transitions, such as those occurring within the same program (O'Connor, 2018), and life transitions, such as moving, the birth of a sibling, or illness (Mainstone-Cotton, 2020), are also of significant importance in young children's lives. It is also important to note that young children may experience multiple transitions simultaneously, which adds increasing complexity and challenge. The recent closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the disruptive nature of some transitions and the ways young children's transition experiences are impacted by multiple factors in the family, school, and community.

Understanding Transitions

THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

A strong evidence-base describing the impact of transitions on young children has been building over the last 30 years. With significant advances in neuroscience, linkages between children's experiences during transitions and the impact on their developing brains has become increasingly strong. Much of the research has focused on the negative impact of transition on some children and families. However, positive impacts have also been documented. Here are some key findings about how young children experience transitions.

- *Children and families experience transitions differently.*

  "Continuity and discontinuity depend on the people involved. They hinge on children, families, and professionals and on the spaces in which they

interact. In addition, each person's past experiences and individual differences influence any encounter… The relational nature of continuity has an impact on individuals as they move in and out of communities and cultural context and interact with the people, values, and traditions within those contexts (Jozwiak et.al., 2016, p. 14)."

- *Transitions result in a change in identity, which can have a significant impact on young children's development.*

"Children are situated in a social world, and any change in their environment (the settings in which they spend their days) will result in a change of role (the selfhood or identity they have constructed) which may have a significant and long-term impact on their development (Brooker, 2008, p.5)."

- *Transitions can undermine a young child's feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy.*

"Research has identified the ways that transitions can threaten and undermine our sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy, and make us feel insecure and foolish. This may happen to us at any age, even if we have coped successfully with earlier transitions, so we can easily understand the vulnerability of children as their place in the world, and with it their sense of identity, is shaken up as them move from familiar to unfamiliar settings (Brooker, 2008, p.4)."

- *Transitions increase feelings of uncertainty, which can impact young children differently.*

"A calm, regulated child can respond to uncertainty with curiosity and interest, wondering what will happen next and feeling ready for it. For a child who is already anxious, uncertainty may trigger increased amygdala activity and shut down other cognitive processes, like the urge to investigate or experiment, because the uncertainty seems to pose too much of a threat to allow new learning (O'Connor, 2018, p. 27)."

- *Change and separation can increase the developing brain's stress response.*

"Because of the strong and early alarm systems in a young child's brain, young children can see change and separation as a major threat… The same parts of the brain are activated both when a child is distressed because of the absence of a parent and when we feel physical pain (Sunderland, 2016). This can continue in children aged five or sometimes older… We are expecting children to make big transitions… at a time when they are still experiencing separation as a threat and painful experience (O'Connor 2018 as cited in Mainstone-Cotton, 2020)."

- *During transitions, a young child's knowledge and skills may not be clearly visible.*

"… Children's knowledge, skills and abilities [are] not just 'there' in the child, to be identified and assessed, but [are] present in children's social practices, in their meaningful interactions with the world, and in their relationships. Children's ability to demonstrate their knowledge and apply their skills is a function of their social environment, and of their own sense of belonging within that environment. The question to be asked is not 'do they know it or don't they?' but 'are they able to apply their knowledge *in this setting*?', a very different matter (Brooker, 2008, p. 8)."

- *Transitions are a trigger for development and learning.*

"… this innate drive towards the expansion of brain capacity is both stimulated and sustained by the richness and variety of a child's environment, which can not only support the creation of new synapses, but equally importantly prevents the extinction of existing connections, which may occur if they are underused (Bruer, 1999). It is understandable then that an environment which offers the ideal circumstances for small babies to develop their capacities may offer very few new stimuli for children of 3 or 5, who need novel experiences and challenges if they are to extend their thinking along new paths (Brooker, 2008, p. 6)."

- *Children demonstrate skill and competence during times of transition.*

"The breadth of change experienced by children and the ease with which many of them respond to this change, is remarkable. If anything, it should serve as a reminder to adults of the competence of young children as they negotiate an environment different from others they have experienced (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 102)."

- *Well-supported transitions can strengthen children's resilience, resourcefulness, and ability to collaborate.*

  "Well supported transitions serve to strengthen children's resilience and resourcefulness, and enhance their reciprocity, so that they are better equipped for the changing future ahead of them. A successful transition should result in a child who feels strong and competent, and able to handle new experiences with confidence (Brooker, 2008, p. 12)."

FACTORS INFLUENCING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN SETTINGS

The experience of transitions may vary widely across children and families depending on a multitude of factors. As Aline Dunlop (2007) states,

"For some children the winds of change blow fair, for others the passage can be stormy, for others still they drift into the new, and for some they set off on a huge adventure, as explorers in search of something new. It is this very variety of possible experience, including how parents experience their child's transition to school, and the educators working with them that demand that we work together to support children to maximize the opportunities and learning at times of change (p. 156)."

Children's success during transitions is impacted by the following factors.

- The success with which the two settings relate to each other or are similar (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Jozwiak et.al., 2016).
- The extent to which the place the child is transitioning to is open to understanding the child and family's background and experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Jozwiak et.al., 2016).
- The number of supportive links existing between the two settings (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Brooker 2008).
- The level of communication between the two

settings (Little et al., 2016; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

- The ability for the new location to respond flexibly to meet individual children's needs (Nicholson, Perez, & Kurtz, 2019).
- The degree of match or mismatch between the ways in which children think and learn, and the expectations placed upon them (Dunlop, 2007).
- Parents attitudes about the transition (Pianta, 1999, Niesel & Griebel, 2007).
- The child's sense of belonging in the new community (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Fabian, 2007).
- The child's access to warm, affectionate and attuned responses from adults (Nicholson, Perez, & Kurtz, 2019; O'Connor, 2018).
- Whether or not the child has a friend in the new location (Pianta, 1999, Niesel & Griebel, 2007).
- The extent to which the child has opportunities to engage in open-ended learning such as play (Brostrom, 2007; Nicholson et al., 2019; Shonkoff 2020).
- The extent to which the child feels a sense of control and competence in the new setting (Fabian 2007; Shonkoff, 2020).

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING TRANSITIONS

While experiencing transitions is a fact of life for all young children, early childhood experts agree that decreasing the number of transitions a child must navigate is an important goal (Child Care Aware of America, 2015; Jozwiak et.al., 2016). In early childhood, the focus on decreasing transitions is described in terms of continuity and discontinuity. The relational nature of continuity and discontinuity is of particular significance because children's experiences depend on the adults involved in the transition and the ways in which they interact.

"Continuity in early childhood thus applies to developing individuals; their relationships with the adults in their lives as well as to connections between home and school: the programs between which children transition: and to the flow of people, data, and practices across the larger educational system. Throughout, practitioners and policymakers seem to regard continuity as generally desirable, yet it remains difficult to achieve and relatively unexamined (Jozwiak, et al., 2016, p. 14)."

Continuity of Care

Continuity of care describes an effort to achieve continuity in the "flow of a child's experiences in early care and education settings (Jozwiak, et al., 2016, p. 17)." The concept of continuity of care includes structural mechanisms that are built to sustain continuity as well as relationships between children and caregivers. Some structural mechanisms to sustain continuity of care include the primary caregiver model, mixed-age grouping, and the practice of looping. At the relationship level continuity of care is represented in the daily presence of familiar adults, teacher's attention to the details of children's daily lives, intentional support of attachments, recognizing and supporting children's ability to make choices, and maintaining communication between adults. Practices in continuity of care positively impact both young children and the adults who care for them (Jozwiak et.al., 2016).

Continuity also applies to the relationship between the home and the early care and education program as families and teachers build bridges and establish partnerships. This requires the ability to understand and embrace differences while also finding and strengthening commonalities. Understanding, respecting, and building upon the cultural and linguistic practices in the home is a key in establishing continuity. Quality early learning programs also support educators and families as they navigate discontinuities, negotiate conflict, and solve problems together.

Jozwiak, Cahill, and Theilheimer (2016) describe

ways teachers can successfully support continuity and negotiate moments of discontinuity between programs and families using the following strategies.

- Take an inquisitive stance about families.

- Interrupt their own expectations.

- Begin with each family's home as a point of reference.

- Listen and learn to understand.

- Prepare a welcoming and engaging environment.

- Build respectful relationships.

Continuity in systems

There is a need for greater continuity in the systems that support children and families. Efforts to achieve continuity at the system level in states in the U.S. have included the development of statewide early learning standards, quality rating and improvement systems, school readiness initiatives, professional development and degree attainment programs, and data collection systems (Jozwiak, et al., 2016). All stakeholders with a focus on supporting young children and families have an obligation to improve coordination, communication, and alignment to increase continuity for the young children and families they serve.

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS

While decreasing transitions and supporting continuity in children's lives is a priority for healthy development, children will still be called upon to negotiate many transitions. Here are evidence-based strategies for supporting children's transitions between settings.

- Engage in bi-directional communication with families, with an emphasis on programs learning from families (Allingham, 2015; Jozwiak et.al., 2016).

- Establish a relationship with a key adult in the new setting (Allingham, 2015; O'Connor, 2018).

- Provide opportunities to build relationships with peers (Allingham, 2015; Niesel & Griebel, 2007).

- Support the emotional wellbeing of children and adults to develop resilience (Allingham, 2015; Brooker 2008).

- Use flexible, inclusive, and responsive practices to meet the needs of children and families (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

- Give children opportunities for control and ownership during transitions (Fabian, 2007).

- Provide opportunities for open-ended learning to allow children to make meaning from their experiences and demonstrate knowledge in a socially relevant context (Brostrom, 2007; Shonkoff, 2020).

- Carefully observe children's play to gain insight into their questions and ideas, and document their knowledge and skills (Brostrom, 2007; Gronlund, 2013).

- Plan for transitions ahead of time, and support transitions as a process extending over time (Allingham 2015; Brooker, 2008; Little et al., 2016; Mainstone-Cotton, 2020; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

- Build systems of support in programs and communities (Allingham, 2015; Brooker, 2008; O'Connor 2018; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007; Jozwiak et.al., 2016).

The Transition to Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten requires special attention because of its unique status educationally, socially, and politically. The intense focus on the transition to kindergarten is the result of many factors.

- Entry into formal schooling represents a significant social and cultural marker in the development of the child and family (O'Connor 2018; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre 2003).

- Early school adjustment is linked to later school success (Brooker, 2008; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

- The differences between previous schooling experiences and expectations in kindergarten are often dramatic (Brooker, 2008; Dockett and Perry, 2007; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

- School-readiness initiatives, in response to increasing demands on schools, have focused attention and resources on children's attainment of specific skills before kindergarten entry (Brooker 2008; National Education Goals Panel 1991).

- The transition to kindergarten has proven difficult for up to 48% of children, with children from low socioeconomic backgrounds most likely to be negatively impacted (Little et al., 2016; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

- Delayed enrollment, retention, and alternative placements continue to be used for children deemed "not ready", despite the lack of evidence to support such practices (Little et al., 2016; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2000).

- The positive effects of intervention programs for "at risk" children, such as Head Start, fade or 'wash-out' if those children do not receive increased support during the transition to elementary school (Brooker, 2008; Hubbell et al., 1987; Love et al. 1992).

Given these factors, it is understandable that teachers, schools, and communities continue to express concern and focus attention on children who experience challenges in the transition to kindergarten. Understanding the science of early learning can provide insights into why some children struggle, as can deeper understanding of the experiences of kindergarten children.

THE BURDEN OF CHANGE

The dramatic differences between the experience of kindergarten and children's previous experiences in the home or preschool setting have been widely documented (Allingham, 2015; Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Little et al., 2016; Pianta &Kraft-Sayre 2003) These include:

- different academic demands
- different philosophical approaches to learning
- a more complex social environment
- different relationships, social standing, and identity
- a significantly larger and more complex physical environment
- changes in physical routines such as eating, toileting, and hygiene
- increased responsibility for self-care and care of possessions
- different rules, discipline, and reward systems
- increased responsibility for self-regulation and problem-solving
- larger class sizes
- decreased individual contact with an adult
- increased transitions during the day
- less supervision from adults
- less communication between the school and home
- less parent support in day-to-day activities

Of the individuals most directly involved in the transition to kindergarten - teachers, families, and children - young children carry the greatest burden of change (Dockett & Perry, 2007). This is significant because this "developmentally dramatic" (Brooker, 2002) transition "involves changes for children that none of their previous experiences could have prepared them for (Allingham, 2015 p. 11)." This is particularly true when there is great discontinuity between children's social, cultural and linguistic experiences at home and the expectations placed upon them at school (Brooker, 2008). A more successful transition for all children would be possible if adults, particularly teachers and schools, saw it as their obligation to carry more of the burden of change (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Dockett and Perry argue that improving the transition to kindergarten,

> "...cannot be done if the expectation of the most experienced participants – the adults – is that the least experienced participants – the children – will make the great bulk of the change necessary to ensure a successful start to school (p. 103)."

Understanding the enormity of the task children face as they adapt to kindergarten, and the resources they possess to navigate this change, should prompt all of us to consider ways families, schools, and communities can do more to help young children carry the burden of change placed upon them. It also calls into question screening and assessment practices that measure children's knowledge in unfamiliar settings, with unfamiliar adults, in the midst of this complex process of change. This is even more problematic if placement decisions are made based upon assessment results (Little et al., 2016).

> "Like adults, children can be hampered in their ability to think clearly and act competently when they are feeling insecure or vulnerable, and their development may slow down or stop if they remain in this insecure condition for very long. Yet it is often in their first days and weeks in a new setting – in the actual process of transition- that early assessments of them are made (Brooker p. 8)."

CURRENT PRACTICES

The factors affecting children's experiences with transitions and strategies for supporting transitions previously discussed apply equally well to the transition to kindergarten. A few supports are worth mentioning again in the context of the transition to kindergarten given patterns that have been established by schools and communities. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) state,

> "…The most common things that schools do during transition periods are not what parents think would be beneficial to them and their children. Thus, the challenges experienced by children are not addressed by the most common ways schools try to help them. This disconnect between schools' and families' needs is most often a function of the model schools use to guide their transition practices (p. 3)."

Some of the common strategies used by schools to support transitions that may contribute to this disconnect for children and families in Wyoming include the following.

Communication

Well-intentioned schools and communities commonly welcome families and children by offering a great deal of information about the school and/or the expectations of kindergarten teachers. Communication from families to the school is often minimal, and specific to procedural tasks such as registration, lunch sign-up, or availability for meetings. Communication from children if sought or received at all, is rarely used to plan instruction or inform practice. While one-directional communication serves a purpose, it has limited impact upon outcomes for children. Use of bi-directional communication strategies offers opportunities to strengthen essential relationships, build upon children's experiences, and authentically assess children's knowledge. Identifying family strengths and funds of knowledge allows authentic learning partnerships to emerge and provides a solid foundation for children's learning.

Collaboration

A similar approach to communication with early childhood programs is evident in many community-level collaborative efforts to support kindergarten readiness. Often early childhood professionals, including childcare providers and preschool teachers, are positioned as recipients of information on school expectations and skills children need. Tools like readiness checklists are frequently developed, placing the burden of readiness on the shoulders of early childhood professionals rather than all members of the community. Differences in philosophy and pedagogy between schools and early care and education programs also present a hurdle to collaborative efforts. Finding a path forward requires engaging in difficult conversations in order to reconcile differences in philosophy and practice. Both early childhood professionals and kindergarten teachers must recognize and share essential knowledge and effective practices in order to decrease discontinuities in kindergarten student's experience.

Timing

Most common transition practices involve contact with families once school begins. These typically include one-directional communication such as announcements, newsletters, flyers, and in-person events such as back-to-school nights. Transition supports frequently occur at the start of the year and end within the first weeks of school. While children with disabilities and children in Head Start are frequently provided long-term transition planning, this opportunity is not available to all children. For all children to experience a successful transition, the process must include preparation and communication well ahead of time, support during induction, and extended support over months or even years. (Brooker, 2008; Jozwiak et.al., 2016; Little et al., 2016; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

Flexibility

For years an emphasis in education circles has been on teachers establishing clear expectations, schedules, and management practices beginning at the first day of school (Wong & Wong, 2009). This is based on the understanding that children feel safe and learn best in predictable environments. With relation to the transition to kindergarten, this has been interpreted by some to mean that teachers should focus on teaching appropriate behaviors and compliance in the first days and weeks of school. In order to support young children as they transition to kindergarten a more nuanced understanding is required. Children certainly need a predictable and stable environment in order to feel safe and adjust to the new setting. Additionally, children need individualized responses and guidance based upon their understandings and experiences. Kindergarten teachers must have the autonomy to respond flexibly to the needs of specific children within the predictable routines of the day. Expectations of behavior should be clear, and teachers must respond to children's needs and concerns, while focusing on learning rather than compliance supported by rewards or punishment (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz, 2019). Teachers can gain important insights into children that will prove invaluable in supporting their learning during the first days and weeks of school if they focus less time on compliance and "teaching kids about school" and more time listening and carefully observing the children in their classroom.

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS SUPPORTS

The book *Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools* (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003), now in it's seventh printing (2013), is the product of a multi-year project funded by The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) in the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the comprehensive Kindergarten Transition Project, was to develop methods and practices to better support children's transition to kindergarten. Important contributions of the project include the creation of a developmental model of transitions, identification of guiding principles based on evidence, and the design of transition planning tools for use by schools and communities. The 5 guiding principles to support children and families with the transition to kindergarten include.

- *Foster relationships as resources*

  "Supportive, effective relationships with children and with those who work and live with children are resources for child development. When a child is involved in and surrounded by supportive relationships, the transition to kindergarten occurs more smoothly. (p. 10)."

- *Promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten*

  "It is only through linking pre-school and kindergarten teachers in a collaborative partnership and discussing [expectations and experiences for children in preschool and kindergarten] that children's transitions can be supported more effectively. In providing consistency from year to year, programs offer developmentally sensitive transition practices that best support young children. (p. 11)"

- *Focus on family strengths*

  "Approaching families as resources with special strengths, no matter how these are defined or enacted allows schools to build relationships that can be helpful to vulnerable children and families. Families feel encouraged when their interactions with schools are based on their competencies, rather than on their failures (p. 11)."

- *Tailor practices to individual needs*

  "The actual set of transition practices enacted with a given family or classroom must be based on the

needs and strengths of that child, family, teacher, school, and community. This approach is menu-driven – it does not prescribe a list of things to do but instead suggests a number of alternatives that are based on the guiding principles. The approach is designed to be flexibly applied across a wide range of needs and strengths. When a rigid transition program is in place, certain needs are likely to be neglected and some efforts may be wasted, addressing needs that are not there (p. 13)"

- *Form collaborative relationships*
  "Good partnerships and good relationships are not free of conflicts or disagreements… When key players in the transition process adopt a common way of thinking about transition, a common frame of reference within which to resolve disagreements is created (p. 13)."

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre recommend using the principles in evaluating current practices and planning for change. They invite schools and communities to ask the following questions:

- To what extent does a particular transition practice foster relationships?

- Does it lead to a sense of continuity and stability for the child and family moving from preschool to kindergarten?

- Does a practice identify or foster family strengths, or like many assessment practices, does it focus on weaknesses and risk?

- Are the same practices implemented for every family or do professionals tailor these efforts?

- Do professionals work together to form their own collaborative relationships, or are transition practices solely the responsibility or initiative of one group?

Recommendations for Wyoming

Brooker (2008) advocates for adopting a "positive outcomes model" of transitions that,

> "Takes the view not that transitions are a problem to be managed, but that transitions are an important opportunity for learning; not that the transition is a one-off event, but that growing and learning through transitions is a vital and permanent feature of human lives (p. 142)."

To improve the transition experiences of young children in Wyoming, educators and policy makers should consider ways to apply evidence-based practices. To assist with implementation, a list of recommendations are included. These recommendations, framed within the positive outcomes model, include examples of how strategies could look in practice. Schools and communities are encouraged to develop their own practices to support recommendations based on local needs, priorities, and resources.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES MODEL—STRATEGY 1

Mediate discontinuities between phases —Working with schools and settings

Recommendation #1 - Build and strengthen supportive links between settings.

> Example: Establish ongoing bi-directional collaborative partnerships between settings. Value and use information coming from both to design environments and learning opportunities.

Recommendation #2- Adopt a developmental model of transitions as a long-term process. Plan and support transitions over time.

> Example: Develop a "bridging pedagogy" (Brooker 2008) between settings, which is introduced for a period of time prior to the change, and continues for a period of time after the change occurs.

Recommendation #3- Accept greater responsibility for change in each setting.

Example: Whenever possible, adapt environments and practices based on the science of early learning and individual children's needs, rather than expecting children to adapt to program or school requirements.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES MODEL—STRATEGY 2

Support the development of resources for change — Working with children and families

Recommendation #1 – Establish relationships as the foundation to support all transitions.

Example: Identify a "key person" (Brooker, 2008; O'Connor 2018) in each new setting to be the primary point of contact with families and to provide a consistent and secure relationship with the child.

Recommendation #2 – Create learning partnerships based upon family strengths.

Example: Explore the different forms of knowledge children and families demonstrate in the every-day experiences of their family and cultural community. Link this to classroom learning.

Recommendation #3 – Use practices that build resilience in children and families.

Example: Offer open-ended learning experiences each day that build on and support children's interests while promoting feelings of self-mastery and control.

Conclusion

Given the impact transitions can have on young children's development, it is essential that Wyoming educators, policy makers, and other key stakeholders become well versed in the science of early learning.

"Early childhood practice at both the micro and macro levels demands sustained focus on who children are and awareness of the different ways in which each of them learns (Jozwiak et.al., 2016, p. 126)."

A deeper and more nuanced understanding of transitions is also essential. We must embrace practices that take into account the complexity of transitions and the social and cultural contexts in which they occur over time (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). Wyoming early childhood professionals, kindergarten teachers, and school administrators need training and ongoing support in order to provide essential evidence-based prac-

tices in their settings. A particular focus of these efforts should be on improving the transition to kindergarten for all children and families in Wyoming. Decisions impacting young children when they are vulnerable during times of transition must be made based on evidence. When we address young children's immediate needs, and support those who they rely upon most, we ensure the greatest opportunity for their success in the future.

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