Ensuring equity for families with young children: Transition to school programs in Sydney, Inner West
This report was commissioned by New South Wales Department of Community Services, 
Families First South West Sydney.

Research for the report was undertaken by 
Healthy Childhood Research Group (HCRG) 
Social Justice Social Change Research Centre 
University of Western Sydney

Healthy Childhood Research Group 

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Jacqueline Hayden 
Project Managers: Katey De Giaia and Fay Hadley 
Research Assistant: Sonya Neufeld

Report developed by 
Jacqueline Hayden 
Katey De Giaia 
Fay Hadley

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The Healthy Childhood Research Group was formed in 1998 and currently operates within the Centre for Social Justice and Social Change. The HCRG engages in research relating to the health and well being of children, families and communities. A major focus is analyses and promotion of healthy environments for families with children who are under school age and for families who may not have access to information, assistance and/or networks which support child rearing activities. While marginalised and/or special groups have been a target of much of the research activity to date, the HCRG is committed to universality in program and service delivery. Further information can be found at www.healthychildhood.org
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Executive summary

The Healthy Childhood Research Group was commissioned by Families First, Inner West to investigate current transition to school programs in Sydney, Inner West area.

The following premises underlie this research:

1. Transition to school is a key event in the lives of young children and their families.
2. Transition programs can play a significant role in facilitating the child's feelings of security and readiness to learn.
3. Transition programs can have long-term effects on families' attitudes towards schools and on their sense of participation and relationship with the school.
4. Transition to school programs can cross sectoral barriers and become a vehicle for communication, relationships and networking between schools, early childhood settings and other community support services.

The commissioners of the research provided nine questions. These included:

1. What are the perceived strengths and benefits of current transition programs?
2. What strategies are recommended to enhance current programs?
3. What key strategies are needed for successful outcomes for children, families and schools?
4. Which 'systems' or processes currently support the development and implementation of transition programs?
5. Which current systems or processes impede the development and implementation of transition programs?
6. Which systems or processes within early childhood services support the development and implementation of transition programs?
7. Which systems or processes in early childhood services impede the development and implementation of transition programs?
8. What knowledge, skills and attitudes do families and children need to enter the school community? What strategies can be used to enhance these components of readiness?
9. What supports and/or resources are useful for transition to school programs?

Observations, interviews, focus group discussions and reviews of existing programs and policies were used to address the research questions. Twenty-seven services and over one hundred respondents took part in the study. This included staff in early childhood services and schools, Schools as Community Centre coordinators, supported playgroup leaders, parents and other family members, principals, directors and children.

Findings identified the following:

1. Strengths and benefits were identified for families, children and staff in both school and early childhood settings.
2. Strategies identified for enhancing current programs included developing relationships and networks between and amongst key stakeholders, listening to the children, enhancing the role of the family throughout the transition program and ensuring that all facets of the program meet community needs.
3. Communication was identified as the key strategy for successful outcomes for children, families and schools. Communication needs to occur amongst key stakeholders.
4. Supports for the development and implementation of transition to school programs included support for the kindergarten teacher, autonomy within program development and the availability of support services attached to the school.
5. Processes which hinder the development and implementation of transition programs included financial constraints, low staffing resources, the inability to meet the needs of individual children and difficulty associated with meeting family needs.
6. Processes which support the transition to school program within early childhood services included the need for directors, teachers and family members to be supportive of the program.
7. Processes identified as constraints for the transition to school program within early childhood services included service access to schools, a lack of flexibility in programming from the schools and availability of parents' family members.
8. Readiness for school can be categorised into five components. These components are best addressed through shared responsibility of early childhood settings, schools and families.

9. Participants identified the importance of translators/interpreters as an important resource for CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) families. Other supportive resources include cross-sector sharing of information, tapping into existing support structures (parent committees, etc.), use of videos which discuss the school practices and culture, amendments to the standardised enrolment form and the development of standards for all programs.

Seven guiding questions are offered as a framework for the enhancement and/or the development of effective transition to school programs that meet the needs of all stakeholders. Four additional recommendations are provided.

It is strongly recommended that a series of “transition modules” be developed as a base for program development. Schools can pick and choose appropriate modules for their context and can adapt modules for changing situations.
Background

Effective transition to school programs have long-term benefits which extend beyond the first weeks, indeed the first years, of school (Dockett & Perry, 2001a).

Research has shown that families are especially amenable to receiving information and to engaging in programs during the transition to school period. This stage of family life is highly conducive to the development of long-term social networks, feelings of inclusion and good school/family relationships. Parents who have trust relationships and who feel part of the “school community” are more likely to handle stress situations in positive ways and to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours towards their children. Children, in turn, are more likely to demonstrate positive responses to group situations (Planta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999). Conversely, negative experiences during early stages of school life can have deleterious effects on the attitudes of children and families which affect behaviours long into the future.

This project builds upon previous research undertaken by the Healthy Childhood Research Group including the development of strategies for health promotion activities in early childhood settings/services. Health promotion for young children is associated with the dissemination of information for families and the facilitation of linkages between families and community agencies, including the development or restructuring of new services to meet families’ changing needs. See (Hayden, De Gioia, Fraser, & Hadley, 2003; Hayden, De Gioia, & Hadley, 2003; Hayden, Fraser, & Macdonald, 2001; Hayden & Macdonald, 2001; Hayden & Macdonald, 2000; Hayden, Macdonald, & Fraser, 2001a, 2001b; Hayden, Macdonald, Fraser, & De Gioia, 2001).

The project also builds on research studies conducted in NSW and elsewhere which identify sustainable outcomes from transition programs over and above “smoothing” the way for children attending school for the first time.

The findings from this project prove that transition to school programs can be health promoting for children, families and staff.
Review of the literature on transition to school programs

Beginning formal schooling has been acknowledged as a significant event in the early lives of young children. Transition to school programs involve children and their families in activities during the year immediately prior to school to assist them in getting ready. This process involves much more than addressing some social and cognitive skills.

The transition process which takes place during the first stages of school attendance has been shown to impact on the child’s (and families’) long-term attitudes towards and potential for positive functioning throughout the school life (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999). Transition to school programs also have the potential to decrease social alienation, address long-term attitudes towards school and authority, develop sustainable networks for children and their families and create a healthy school environment (Coleman, 1988; Lero, 2000; Nicholson, Tually, & Vimpani, 2000).

An ecological model of transition

Transition to school can be viewed as an ecological system involving four interacting sub-systems or levels for analyses (Figure 1). These are:

1) The child and family (microsystem);
2) The setting into which the child proceeds (mesosystem);
3) The system and structures which dictate policy and practices within the setting (exosystem);
4) The public/community attitudes and notions about the setting (macrosystem) (adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

This focus on interactions allows for consideration of the ways that environments and settings support the child’s school experience and vice versa. Attitudes and practices from the home will affect what the child brings to the setting. In turn the way the setting receives and interacts with the child and the home will influence current and future outcomes for the child and the setting. The systems such as teacher supports, resource allocations, a culture of family involvement and other components of school functioning will affect the setting and, in turn, the child and family. Finally, community attitudes such as the perspective of the setting as an intrinsic part of the community vs. the perception of conflicting values within the school affects all levels of the ecology and outcomes for the child and the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Dockett & Perry, 2001a).

Effective transition to school programs are thus associated with school attempts to address families’ individual and cultural differences by ensuring the inclusion of all families and children and by working towards continuity with other community agents, especially early childhood programs which “feed” the schools (National Education Goals Panel, 1999; Ramsey & Ramey, 1995).

The ecological model provides a framework for looking beyond checklists of readiness skills as the focus of transition programs. This framework illustrates the critical nature of relationships between the child, the family, the school and the community. All are significant players in the smooth transition of children into school (Pianta et al., 1999).

Relationships and social networks as goals for transition programs

Social networks constitute a significant component of health and wellbeing. A social network incorporates elements of mutual trust and respect and facilitates asking for and receiving support and assistance around particular issues. Families who form networks or trusting relationships with other families have been shown to interact in more positive ways with their children (Hayden, De Gioia, Fraser et al., 2003; Hayden, De Gioia, & Hadley, 2003). The stage of family life when young children are entering formal schooling for the first time has been shown to be a significant window for the development of long-standing relationships and networks (Jang & Mangione, 1994).

Relationships refer to opportunities to work together for common goals and to develop feelings of trust and equity between families and staff. Positive
relationships between the home and school environment correlates to children’s learning outcomes (Jang & Mangione, 1994).

Thus effective transition to school programs move beyond orientation for children and incorporate facilitation of relationships and networking for all players (children, families and staff (Mangione & Speth, 1998). The nature of the interactions between families and schools are powerful predictors of school success for children (Planta & Cox, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Planta, 1998).

**The concept of readiness**

Readiness programs reflect a concept of children, their learning processes and the value of interventions at key stages.

Some philosophical approaches look at the child as a biological entity and thus do not deal with context or family members when developing ready-for-school activities. Other theories reflect the belief that a child can be shaped by environmental factors and focus on ‘training’ and repetition to condition the child for school experiences.

More currently, researchers have been promoting the value of a constructivist/interactionist approach to school transition programs. The constructivist view is that assessment of individual ‘readiness to learn’ needs to take into account the ecological context of that individual and the setting into which the child is going. The concept of ‘readiness’ is thus constructed according to the conditions and needs of each situation (Graue, 1992; Melsels, 1999). This theory coincides with an interactionist perspective which focuses on each school’s capacity to meet individual needs of the students, families and staff. This view suggests that long-term educational success depends upon the emergence of a reciprocal relationship between school, child and family with the teacher acting as a mentor for the relationship (Melsels, 1999). Readiness refers to the ability of the child, the family and the setting to begin to build this relationship.

Thus any readiness program needs to incorporate the opportunity for family/teacher/child interactions to occur. These interactions are effective when they occur over time, rather than on a single occasion.

**Models of transition programs**

The constructivist/interactionist approach to school readiness has been reflected in some world-renowned model programs.

For example, *Head Start* in the USA claims that school readiness programs need to have two (interacting) goals. These are, 1) to facilitate the development of children’s competencies; and 2) to enhance family competencies. *In Head Start* programs, families and communities play an integral role in program definition, content and operation. The program goes beyond facilitating the development of children’s competencies, to incorporate enhancement of family competencies. Successful efforts to reform and improve schools are often marked by the integration of parents and family members as well as community members on school governing and policy boards (Planta & Cox, 1999).

Another model program is the *Effective Transition to School Programs* in New South Wales. This program identifies eight targets for effective transition programs. These include:

- The *knowledge* children need to have in order to start school.
- Elements of *social adjustment* required in the transition to school.
- *Specific skills* children need to master.
- *Dispositions* conducive to a successful start to school.
- The *rules* of school.
- *Physical* aspects of starting school.
- *Family* issues.
- The nature of the *educational environment* within school.

*Effective Transition to School Programs* recommend the following components for successful programs:

- Establish positive relationships between the children, parents and educators.
- Facilitate each child’s development as a capable learner.
- Differentiate between “orientation-to-school” and “transition-to-school” programs.
- Draw upon dedicated funding and resources.
- Involve a range of stakeholders.
- Plan well and evaluate effectively.
- Be flexible and responsive.
- Base programs on mutual trust and respect.
- Rely on reciprocal communication among participants.
- Take into account contextual aspects of community and of individual families and children within that community (Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Dockett, Perry, & Howard, 2000; Dockett, Perry, Howard, Whitten, & Cusack, 2002; Dockett, Perry, & Tracey, 1997; Perry, Dockett, & Howard, 2000; Perry, Dockett, & Tracey, 1998).
Methodology

This project built upon the constructivist/interactionist approach to school readiness and incorporated the research findings and guidelines identified in earlier studies.

Twenty-seven services took part in the study. These included 9 Primary Schools, 10 Early Childhood Services, five Good Beginnings supported playgroups and three Schools-as-Community-Centres. All services were located in the Inner West of Sydney except for one service in the South West Sydney area (Appendix 1 identifies links between participating schools, centres and others).

Aims

The aims of this study were:

1. To assess the strengths and benefits of current transition programs for children entering into public primary schools in the Marrickville Council area and Glebe and Wiley Park Public School.

2. To raise awareness of relevant issues and strategies with teachers from which will emerge a set of guidelines to assist teaching and administration staff in schools and early childhood services.

Specific research questions provided by the commissioners of the study were:

1) What are the strengths and benefits of current transition programs?

2) What strategies could be recommended to enhance current programs?

3) What key strategies need to be in place for successful outcomes for children, families and schools?

4) What systems do schools have to support the development and implementation of transition programs?

5) What systems do schools have in place that impedes the development and implementation of transition programs?

6) What systems do early childhood services have to support the development and implementation of transition programs?

7) What systems do early childhood services have in place that impedes the development and implementation of transition programs?

8) What knowledge, skills and attitudes do families and children need to enter the school community?

9) What supports and/or resources are useful for transition to school programs?

Processes

The research team used observations, interviews, focus group discussions and reviews of existing programs and policies to address the research questions. Staff in early childhood services and schools, Schools as Community Centre coordinators, supported playgroup leaders, parents and other family members, principals, directors and children were invited to participate in the information gathering phases of the project. Table 1 shows the number of participants who agreed to participate in interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

All data was transcribed and analysed with the assistance of QSR N4, a qualitative data analysis software program. QSR N4 effectively handles the data in relation to coding, analyses and extracting findings. This program enables all data to be coded at both a base level (participants details) and by the categories that occur as the data is coded. Various searches of the coded data can then be performed by the program to aid in analysis of the data. These

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Participants in the project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained early childhood staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrained early childhood staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers' Aides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported Playgroup Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School as Community Centres Coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (attending early childhood services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (attending schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members (including parents, and others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1 Early childhood services is an inclusive term used to describe preschool and child care centres.
2 Systems is used here to describe external components or processes which impact on the transition to school program.
3 See Appendix 2 for a detailed description of research methodology used for this project.
searches include searching for patterns within the data, searching text and data theorizing (Gahan & Hannibal, 1999; Hiner, 2000; Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd, 1997).

A workshop for staff from early childhood services and schools was held to discuss preliminary data analysis and to identify the components required for children and families to be ready for school.

Focus groups were held for family members to discuss previous findings and add family perspectives where needed.
Findings

The findings reported herein should be read in conjunction with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (1997), Transition to school for young children with special learning needs: Guidelines for families, early childhood services and schools. NSW Department of Education and Training.

The research questions were addressed as follows:

1. What are the perceived strengths and benefits of current transition programs?

The strengths and benefits of the current transition programs were identified according to beneficiaries. These are children, families and staff in early childhood services (including supported playgroups and Schools as Community Centres) and teachers in the schools. Project participants identified the following benefits:

Benefits for children

Staff in the school and early childhood setting identified the importance of transition to school programs to provide children with feelings of familiarity and security within the school environment. Parents also acknowledged that children benefit from developing an understanding of school routines, feeling comfortable within the school environment and the opportunity to meet their future teacher.

Children identified that they benefit from the opportunity to develop friendships with other children who will be attending the same school, including older children they may see in the playground.

... Transition to school programs familiarise children with the environment, the teachers and all the bigger children (Early Childhood Service D, Trained Teacher, 5-5).

Because it is good to familiarise them with the school surroundings ... it has helped my child understand and get used to school teachers ... facilities, etc. It has helped him adapt faster and become less reluctant to go to school (School A, Parent 5, 9-10).

The children learn certain social norms that they will experience when they get to school, so I think that’s a huge thing. And also, the separation from parents, which can be a real issue for kindergarten teachers. So, I would say the most important part of the process is enabling the children to deal with the social aspects of school (School E, Teacher’s Aide, 8-8).

I was only little and I had a friend who came to school with me, and that made it better (School D, Child 1, 2-2).

It helps knowing that my sister was here to help look after me (School D, Child 2, 11-11).

When we were coming here from my other school, all the kids that were coming here came with the teachers and we stayed for a tiny bit, so we could get used to school and meet the other kids (School D, Child 3, 2-2).

Benefits for families

School staff described that the benefits for families include a feeling of being welcome in the school environment and alleviation of anxiety about school readiness and requirements including school expectations and routines.

Family members identified the benefit of developing relationships and networks within the schools with key school staff and with other families sharing the experience. Families are able to share information pertinent to their child with school staff and develop an understanding of the importance of their role in the school environment.

Parents need assistance with the transition process just as much as the kids in order to facilitate a smooth and/or confident process (School D, Parent 2, 5-5).

... The best part of [the transition to school program] was getting familiar with the school and being comfortable with the teacher (School E, Parent, 5-5).

It provided a positive bridge between [the] school and preschool so parents and children could prepare for it [starting school] in an informed and quite comfortable manner. [Family members] know where important things were; who key people were and could concentrate on our children’s needs, which I think would also assist the teachers (School D, Parent, 4-4).

Benefits for staff in the school setting

School staff believed that the transition to school program provided them with the opportunity to gauge children’s potential abilities and to identify children with special needs. School staff also identified the potential to develop relationships with families which would be beneficial in the following year.

You hope you start to build up trust, information swapping, learn what their goals are and how they think their child will cope (School D, Teacher, 10-10).

The transition program is why we are here, it has meant that the teacher knows our daughter’s name, that our daughter is familiar with the environment, she has lots of friends and because of all that, she’s so much more confident (School E, Parent, 3, 7-7).

This area is well-serviced by schools, so it is quite competitive with numbers ... this year because of the transition ... it gave the children and parents a more
An ‘add on’ effect of transition to school programs was noted by some.

... We have the opportunity of early intervention. If we identify a child having some kind of learning difficulty or disability ... it is very important to have the parents involved in that and it is important to get in early (School I, Principal; 9-9).

We get knowledge of what the families are going through, we can talk to them about what the children are going to learn and find out what their expectations are (School F, Principal; 9-9).

Transition to school programs can provide an opportunity for children from non-English speaking backgrounds to enhance their English skills (School I, Parent; 5-5).

Benefits for the early childhood and school settings

Staff in the early childhood setting described benefits of working with schools to form relationships which are supportive to families. Successful relationships resulted in mutual familiarity of each setting. This allowed staff to empathise and support children dealing with the change.

Everyone can get involved and it develops a strong community feeling among us. Parents come on the visits with us and it gives them a chance to know the teachers and the schools and we work together (Early Childhood Service, Centre B, Teacher, 16-16).

2. What strategies are recommended to enhance current programs?

Responses were categorised as follows. Strategies for:

(a) Developing relationships and networks.

(b) Listening to the voices of children.

(c) Enhancing the role of the family.

(d) Program implementation.

(a) Strategies for developing relationships and networks

• Improve the communication between early childhood services and schools to develop sustainable relationships so they have the ability to develop and maintain transition to school programs, which reflect the children and families in the community.

• Develop two-way relationships. Have schools visiting the early childhood services to speak with children and families before they start school.

• Offer opportunities for families to network amongst each other on a regular basis.

• Establish key family members in the school who can act as interpreters for families who do not speak English. They can be utilised as a resource when running meetings, individual parent/teacher interviews and in distributing written material from the school.

• Allow opportunities for families to develop meaningful networks with other families (especially CALD families).

A good practice would be to include the local childcare, preschool and playgroups in the planning of the programs, so that their knowledge can be passed onto the schools (Schools as Community Centre B, Coordinator, 4-6).

I think that the relationship with the preschool is very important, that the teachers get to meet the preschool [staff] and maybe visit, etc. I think also, that if you have close contact with your preschool, it will help with enrolments in your school. It begins the relationship with the parents earlier (School B, Principal, 15-15).

We are not connected to our preschools; we need to increase the networking between us (School F, Principal, 16-17).

[We would all benefit from] some sort of handover procedure (parent, childcare) that is done in a personal way: Maybe in the form of a portfolio, about the child’s strengths and weaknesses, etc. Some parents feel that when these handovers are not done, the child is starting from scratch again, in terms of what that child is capable of, styles of learning, etc. A handover would avoid these issues (Schools as Community Centre B, Coordinator, 4-6).

Next time we will have to look at some way of making the program more informal and encouraging relationships with parents. Less information...just more opportunity to talk to each other (Schools as Community Centre C, Coordinator, 20-20).

Everyone needs to get involved together. They need to mix the groups around and kind of push us along a bit so people get involved (School E, Parent 7, 8-8).

The families already know their kids, their needs, likes, dislikes, what they need to feel comfortable, their capabilities and strengths, etc. If there is some way of passing this on, it would be good for teachers and it would make it easier for the children to make their transition (Schools as Community Centre B, Coordinator, 4-6).
(b) Strategies for listening to the voices of children

Early childhood staff and family members noted the importance of children discussing their feelings about transition to school.

- Provide opportunities for children to ask questions and discuss fears they may have about school.

I need to make sure that I listen to each child individually ... (Early Childhood Service K, Teacher, 12-12).

I try to talk to my child; give him 'words' to use in situations (School A, Parent, 25-25).

I draw a plan/map at home so my child can remember [and not worry about getting lost], ‘Here is the teacher’s room, how many trees between the classroom and the toilet?’ Things like that (School F, Parent through interpreter, 15-16).

(c) Strategies for enhancing families roles

Family members suggested a number of strategies which could benefit the transition to school program. These were:

- Taking their child to the school when picking up/dropping off siblings and/or friends.
- Attending special events at the school (fetes, open days, etc).
- Attending a playgroup at the school (if one is available).
- Attending parks and other locations where children from the school might gather and play.
- Taking children into the community around the school building.
- Drawing a map of the school and discussing where the child's room is, where there are toilets and other locations of important sites.

I take my children (twins) to the school grounds for practice on the weekends and familiarise them with the location to make it less dramatic for them (Early Childhood Service B, Parent, 13-13).

I visited the school with [my] child, talked about it, [we] bought her uniform together and made lots of effort to go to the classroom as much as possible (Early Childhood Service A, Parent, 13-13).

We play at the school park regularly to get used to the environment, play equipment, etc. (Early Childhood Service C, Parent, 14-14).

(d) Strategies for program implementation

The following strategies were identified by parents, early childhood and primary school staff for enhancing the implementation of transition programs:

- Programs should commence at the beginning of term 4.
- Offer a weeklong experience towards the end of term 4.
- Provide regular access to school resources, such as the library and computer room.
- Highlight the importance of the program for all children, including children who have older siblings already at school.
- Offer family members the opportunity to initially attend the program with their children, then slowly reduce this so that children learn that their family members will not be at school all the time.
- Consider where the program is held. Children should be allowed to visit the actual room they will be attending.
- If the teacher will change the following year, have the ‘real’ kindergarten teacher deliver the program or have this person as a regular visitor to the program.
- Develop a buddy system whereby children are supported by their older peers for the first month of school.
- Adapt the program to reflect the needs of the children in the community for each year.
- Provide space for program operation for the children alongside a separate meeting area for the parents to facilitate networking.
- Repeat the program throughout the week to allow all families to attend.
- Continue the transition program into Term One for family members. This will increase relationships and networking opportunities for families.

![Chart: Perceived importance of collaboration for transition to school programs between educational settings](image)
At our school, the person who ran the supportive play session then went with the children to the classroom. So all the relationships were formed as we went through the year and the children's transition was really simple (Playgroup A, Coordinator, 13-14).

I would like to have a core program maybe only of one or two sessions, maybe more. Then (we would implement) modules based on the surveys from that year (School D, Principal, 12-13).

I would like to have the transition program on two levels. I would run it as long as it was needed, maybe Term Four and Term One. We have a lot of transient children so we don't always (capture them all) in Term Four (School D, Principal, 12-13).

We ran sessions for the parents on literacy and numeracy. We got the numbers we wanted because we had invited parents and interpreters to the meetings. We had more than we could manage (School D, Principal, 6-6).

3. What key strategies are needed for successful outcomes for children, families and schools?

Communication was identified as the key strategy needed for successful outcomes for children, families and schools. Findings emphasised the need for communication across settings and between groups of people.

(a) Communication between educational settings

Findings showed that early childhood staff valued the process of sharing information and collaborating about the transition program more highly than did primary school staff. All early childhood participants interviewed identified collaboration between centre and school as essential. Only 22% of the school staff identified this as an important component of the transition to school program.

... We have a good bond with the school, can be open with the school ... we exchange information between the pre-school and the school so that there's not a big gap of information (Early Childhood Service C, Director, 25-25).

We've been into the classrooms at the primary school and seen their world. I think it would be good to see them do the same - come into our world and see what we do. In this way teachers will see that the kids are going in with so many complex understandings. It's important for them to see them in their context (Early Childhood Service B, Teacher, 20-21).

(b) Communication between families and the school

All early childhood staff interviewed identified the importance of communication with families as part of the transition to school program.

School has often been seen as off-bounds: You dropped the child off and that was that. Whereas now, it's starting to change. Parents are starting to learn more about it and an open-door policy seems to be developing. But some still seem to feel like parents are in the way (Early Childhood Service D, Director, 14-14).

It is important for teachers to tell parents about their child's progress; who their friends are; any problems, etc. (School K, Parent, 5-5).

Parents/families are (mostly) vitally interested and want to be involved and should be ... If any problems do arise parents can help resolve them (School K, Parent, 10-10).

Teachers can help me to know the developmental milestones needed for my child to be ready for a more independent school environment (School D, Parent, 5-5)

It will depend on each family, level of education, level of commitment, you need to empower these people, but in such a way that they don't feel that they are threatened. I tell the parents that they are the important person in the child's life, we are just teaching them maths and all those subjects. You are the one who looks after your child, nurtures them and it is important that you are included in your child's assessment process. They should tell us their child's strengths, etc. (School G, Teacher 2, 4-4).

They (parents) know what their kids needs are better than we do, especially if we've only just met them and they've come into the program. They know both the cognitive or the learning needs as well as the social needs of their children. But also, I think it sets up a learning community that can be fostered and developed throughout the child's education, not just in the first or their pre-schooling years but right throughout their education. I think when parents have more involvement in their children's education, both the child and the family or the community feels ownership over that (School E, Teachers' Aide, 19-19).

Some primary teachers saw themselves as the 'expert' whose role it is to 'educate' parents.

I had a parent who considered herself more knowledgeable and would try and take over and would say this is the way you should do it, etc. That could be stressful at times and I dealt with it by
putting her in her place. Her attitude hindered her son’s work, which was a shame. It resolved itself eventually because I got to the child and he liked that someone could keep his mum in her place (School A, Kindergarten Teacher, 18-19).

While this was not a common sentiment, it does exist and calls upon the need for schools to debate and articulate their philosophy about teacher/family relationships. The sentiment reflected by this statement is likely to alienate the family and could have long-term outcomes on their attitudes towards school and teachers.

More commonly teachers commented on the family’s role in their child’s education and/or referred to the importance of ‘empowering’ parents to play an active part.

Making sure that parents from pre-school are getting the right information so they’re comfortable with the process as well (especially because some are first-time school children so they don’t know what to expect). Probably giving them a little bit of empowerment as well. Making sure that they’re on the same wavelength with us, so that together, we can make the children have a better transition to school. Also getting their fears out, so they’re not so alienated by the whole school experience – ultimately, getting them together and involved because it builds a good rapport (Early Childhood Service A, Teacher 2, 12-17).

(c) Communication between families and children

Parents discussed the importance of instilling a positive attitude within their children about school and saw the transition to school program as a support for this.

Let children know school is fun, to make friends [and offer] loads of praise even if the child has made mistakes (School C, Parent, 12-12).

Me and my husband need to be able to talk to my daughter about preparing for school and practising those things at home. Ultimately the responsibility is with me, but I see the [program] as being a great support (Early Childhood Service A, Parent, 7-7).

The activities and discussions held at childcare are reinforced by those held at home. Childcare cannot be responsible for all the preparation that needs to take place, eg, learning to tie shoe laces, wearing in new shoes, meeting teachers, etc. (School B, Parent, 9-9).

I talk to my mum about school and what we did when I went home (School D, Child 14, 5-5).

(d) Communication between children

Parents and children perceived older children as a support to the transition program.

My sister gets me to write all the alphabet and she gets me to write the numbers. Yeah, I think these are important for me to know for big school (Centre A, Child 1, 11-12).

My other kids who are already at school keep teaching my youngest son about school: about how good and exciting it is (School A, Parent, 17-17).

Our friends have older children and we involved our children in their school activities (School C, Parent, 14-14).

(e) Communication between families

Family members identified being involved in the transition to school program as beneficial. They believed it provided an opportunity to meet with other families who had children the same age and discuss their children. Another factor, which was highlighted by families, was that peers who were more fluent in English could support families from non-English speaking backgrounds.

... we would meet and have coffee and talk about what the children were learning and how to help at home (School I. Parent. 11-11).

Language is an issue – I talk to a friend and she talks to the teacher for me (School I. Parent. 4-4).

4. Which ‘systems’ or processes currently support the development and implementation of transition programs?

Processes identified by schools as being supportive to the development and implementation of transition programs include:

(a) providing support to the kindergarten teacher;

(b) allowing autonomy in the development of the program;

(c) having services attached to schools which support transition programs (e.g., Schools as Community Centres and Supported Playgroups).

(a) Providing support to the kindergarten teacher

Effectiveness of transition programs was correlated to real and perceived support for the kindergarten teacher, especially support from higher management. Support was demonstrated by ensuring that the kindergarten teacher(s) could be available for the program, providing compensation for teachers for the time needed to operate the transition program and
making available teacher aides and other actions which demonstrate that the school values the transition program and is willing to provide resources to this program. These supports were seen to encourage motivation and commitment from the kindergarten teachers.

In my experience, the programs have been quite simple to organise and get going, as long as you have kindergarten teachers who are open to it ... and [who] realise the benefits of the program and are willing to put in the time because they know that it will help them next year (School B, Principal, 13-14).

(b) Autonomy in the development of the program

Primary school teachers and aides described a need for autonomy in developing the program for the children and families which reflected their needs. Comments reflected a need to take into consideration different levels at which the children will enter the program based on their personal experiences.

The need not to focus on the content of the program too much so that it becomes overly prescriptive was also addressed. One Principal supported the need for autonomy in the program development. He stated,

I think it is really important if it is done in the right way... I think we ruin some of the good things that are happening because someone comes in and says this is how you have to do it (School G, Deputy Principal, 15-16).

Our program came about because a child had [behavioural] problems ... It was exceptionally structured and that worked very well for those children (School F, Teacher's Aide, 8-8).

[Our] program was designed to get these children who hadn't experienced pre-school education; to get them ready for kindergarten. We concentrated on sound rather than cognition skills (School E, Teacher’s Aide, 2-3).

We start with nursery rhymes that we hope most of the kids are familiar with ... some kids with ethnic backgrounds are not as familiar with the nursery rhymes (School G, Teacher 1, 2-2).

(c) Services attached to the schools which support transition programs

Services which operated transition programs and were attached to the school were identified as being particularly supportive for schools. (These included Schools as Community Centres and supportive playgroups).

The community centre has made a big difference to us ... (School I, Principal, 12-12).

The community centre is fantastic because they are approachable and know all the resources available. A lot of parents are comfortable to go over [there]. It is not threatening (School B, Principal, 16-16).

[The transition program] comes out of the playgroup program. Families are very involved in that as it is a supportive playgroup (parents are there all the time) and the four year olds are targeted from that for the Ready-for-School program (School E, Principal, 5-6).

5. Which current systems or processes impede the development and implementation of transition programs?

Impediments to the development and implementation of the transition to school program were identified as:

(a) Financial constraints

(b) Low staffing resources

(c) The inability to meet the needs of individual children, and

(d) Difficulties in meeting family needs.

(a) Financial constraints

All Principals and primary school staff agreed that transition programs could be more effective if funding allowed for increased resource allocations.

Constraints of program: not enough funding. I had to buy resources out of my own pocket and turn up to work an hour early to set up the classroom (School A, Kindergarten Teacher 1, 23-23).

At the moment we are running our own program with no additional resources. I feel that I am letting them [staff] down, because I cannot always get the meetings with the playgroup and assist in some of the planning issues with the Kindergarten Teacher for the transition program. The Deputy is going to try and be involved this year, but she has a class and will have restrictions on her availability. The major frustration is the resource of teachers, the [material resources are] not the problem (School G, Principal, 12-12).

(b) Staffing resources

Primary school staff and Principals identified the need to view the operation of transition programs as being external to a 'normal' teaching load. Thus extra relief teaching is needed.

If you are going to run it, it must be run properly with the necessary staff. We just don't have the staff to do it. I don't want people to come along who have already enrolled children in the school and say this is not organised, etc. and probably scare them away. The impact on the kindergarten teacher, when it is
one teacher without any help, it is too much. We have 33 Kindergarten children this year between a straight Kindergarten and a K-1 (School C, Principal, 3-3).

(c) Ability to meet the needs of individual children

Staff expressed issues with catering for particular individual needs of groups. CALD children and families required the translation and interpreting of information.

In this area we have schools that have children that come from non-English speaking backgrounds and we don’t have the resources to do what we would like (School C, Principal, 4-4).

(d) Ability to meet the needs of families

School staff identified the reduced capacity to cater to families with different needs. Currently, programs operate during school hours which means many working family members are unable to attend. Family members also highlighted difficulty with attendance due to access of care for younger siblings.

We quite often see the grandparents, but not the parents due to work commitments (School F, Teacher 2, 20-21).

If they want me to stay for a meeting there needs to be childcare for the meeting (School F, Parent Focus Group, 3-3).

6. Which systems or processes within early childhood services support the development and implementation of transition programs?

Early childhood specialists identified the following needs for effective participation in transition programs:

(a) A supportive Director who understands the importance of transition and who is willing and able to develop relationships with the local schools (Principal & teachers).

(b) Supportive teachers who are willing and able to operate a transition program and develop school information packages for families.

(c) Supportive family members who are involved in the program. Involvement can mean many things: that they read the literature; they attend meetings; and/or that they participate fully in program activities.

7. Which systems or processes in early childhood services impede the development and implementation of transition programs?

Early childhood service staff identified impediments to implementing transition programs as:

(a) Limited access to schools

(b) Limited access to parents, and

(c) Lack of flexibility in programming.

(a) Limited access to schools

Many early childhood staff expressed a desire for increased participation in the planning of transition programs for children in their centres. They felt they had much to offer the schools in this regard. There was a general perception that it was the early childhood setting staff who needed to be proactive in developing relationships with the schools. More mutuality in making contact would be valued

(b) Limited access to parents

Work commitments were seen to prevent family members from attending transition programs with their children.

(c) Flexibility in programming

Frequently part-time children lose the opportunity to attend school transition programs because programs are scheduled on certain days only. More flexibility by the schools would overcome this problem.

It is difficult to work with schools, but we are slowly getting more response from schools, we just keep pestering them every year. Last year we had a break through, we sent the children that were going to the local school on an excursion to the school (Early Childhood Service K, Director, 5-5).

It seems that we are the ones who have to ring up and do the visits. Schools need to do more (Early Childhood Service A, Director, 7-7).

It is so difficult these days to get any parents involved. They are always working and so busy and don’t have the time – (Early Childhood Service F, Director, 5-5).

[It can be a] burden for busy families [...] to attend information sessions] (Parent, Early Childhood Service F, 10-10).

We have children coming into groups – a Monday/Tuesday group and a Thursday/Friday group so it would be better if both groups had equal access to utilising the school facilities because each group has done different things at this point (Early Childhood Service C, Director, 13-13).
8. What knowledge, skills and attitudes do families and children need to enter the school community? What strategies can be used to enhance these components of readiness?

Participants in the study offered the components listed below. Participants emphasised that no list of readiness can be definitive. The importance of each component listed here will depend upon conditions within the school itself (teacher attitudes and resources available), the characteristics of the community, the characteristics of the families in any one year and the needs and issues which arise at the time of the transition program. The components identified as readiness goals include:

(a) Level of social/emotional maturity in children
(b) Skill development in children
(c) Reciprocal understanding of family roles and school expectations
(d) Issues identified by children, and

Component 1: Level of social/emotional maturity in children

Social/emotional maturity is defined as the ability to adjust to the new school environment; to have positive feelings associated with starting school; and the ability to begin to form relationships with teachers and other children starting school.

Component 2: Skill development in children

Learning skills include all areas of a child’s development. Beyond cognitive areas such as pre-literate and pre-numeracy experiences, learning skills encompass:

- the child’s comfort level in a new environment;
- the child’s ability to use play in constructive ways;
- the child’s ability to work cooperatively in groups;
- the child’s ability to self-help in basic areas;
- the child’s ability to socialise; and
- the child’s ability to form positive, cooperative relationships with adults.

Component 3: Reciprocal understanding of family roles and school expectations

The school has a responsibility to communicate their expectations of families as partners in educating their children. However, the communication should not be overly prescriptive. A major component of successful transition involves making families feel comfortable enough to pass on their own concerns, ideas and to provide information about their expectations of the school.

Over and above these components, participants identified the need to pay attention to issues that children are dealing with at the time of transition and to individual community characteristics.

Component 4: Issues identified by children

Each cohort of children will bring new issues to the transition process. These need to be incorporated into the program. Children will identify issues that are important to them at the time of transition. This might include worries about friends, concern over finding the toilet, uncertainty about how to ask for items, worries about bullying from older children or other items.

Component 5: Community characteristics

School communities change as families move in and out, staff change and the context of the external community changes. For this reason, a transition program may not be transferable from one school to another, or from one year to another within the same school.

The role of the school

The following strategies were identified by study participants:

Strategies for enhancing social/emotional maturity

The school can:

- Hold a transition program that allows children to spend time at the school both with and without their parents present.
- Help children foster relationships with the teachers they will have when they start Kindergarten (wherever possible).
- Orient children to the school environment (eg, toilets, library, canteen, playground, the kindergarten room). This should occur over time and be repeated so familiarity is developed.
- Provide opportunities for the children to mix and play together in the school environment to help foster friendships.
- Provide children with a buddy who will help them when they start school (eg, in this project a successful strategy was using year 5 children who will then be in year 6 when the children start school). This study also found that providing each Kindergarten child with a photo of the child and their buddy aiced the friendship.
Read each child's portfolio from the early childhood service (if applicable).

Provide information to families about how to support their child to cope with the change and separation.

Provide a short video of the school.

Respect the parent/carer/child's request to be with friends.

Strategies for enhancing learning skills of the child

The school can:

- Provide information to families about the importance of learning through play.
- Provide opportunities for families to meet in cultural groups for discussion on expectations.
- Provide transition programs at different times of the day.
- Develop familiarity with the school environment, eg: ensure children know where to hang bags, where desks are located, how to form queues, etc.
- Develop a mentor system whereby older children model to younger children expected school behaviours.

Strategies for enhancing reciprocal understanding of family roles and school expectations

The school can:

- Provide all families with an information booklet at the beginning of the transition program that outlines the school’s program, routines and expectations of children and families. For example, behaviour/discipline, excursions, curriculum, kindergarten specific information.
- Provide an information booklet to the early childhood services, which includes the importance of transition programs.
- Ensure the transition program includes the processes of school, eg, lunch, going to the toilet, playing in the playground, etc.
- Invite families to participate in the transition program.
- Emphasise the importance of parents being involved in the transition to school program and ongoing school life.
- Organise family networks, eg, provide a cup of coffee for parents to debrief and have some current kindergarten parents there. In this study the use of parents who speak English and another language was seen to be a positive and useful way for CALD families to feel included and able to discuss issues.
- Ensure staff are available to speak to families before their child starts school.
- Provide opportunities for professional development for parents, eg, reading values.

Strategies for dealing with child identified issues

The school can:

- Model and encourage questions from children during the transition program.
- Provide small-group discussion opportunities to unpack age fears/issues.
- Ensure the buddies are able to help their child discuss fears/issues.

Strategies for assessing and dealing with community characteristics

The school can:

- Provide opportunities for families to attend information sessions and assess their needs (in languages other then English where necessary).
- Visit the early childhood services and other appropriate organisations (eg, health clinics, playgroups, community liaison officer, ethnic radios/newspapers, places of worship) to obtain information about the local families and their needs/issues.
- Evaluate current transition programs yearly and adapt them as required.
- Utilise existing families to help develop understanding of the community and new enrolments.

The role of the early childhood service

The following strategies were identified by study participants:

Strategies for enhancing social/emotional maturity

The early childhood service can:

- Take small groups of children on regular visits to the school.
- Display photos of the school, their new friends, teachers, etc. in the service.
Be familiar with where the children are going to school.

Be familiar with the school's routines.

Provide families with a portfolio that can be passed onto the school.

Utilise small group discussions and drama activities to unpack the school environment.

Watch the school videos and discuss these with the children.

**Strategies for enhancing learning skills of the child**

The early childhood service can:

- Hold information sessions with families on the use of learning through play and explanations of other classroom activities.
- Have children practise skills such as eating their own lunch, going to the toilet by themselves, recognising their name and following instructions.
- Have small-group discussions with children about the routines at school, an older school child can participate in these discussions, if possible.
- Provide increased number of opportunities for children to work in small groups cooperatively with minimal help for the teachers.

**Strategies for enhancing reciprocal understanding of family roles and school expectations**

The early childhood service can:

- Hold an information event where families have the opportunities to speak to local principals.
- Work with families to communicate with schools any concerns or additional needs their child may have.

**Strategies for dealing with child identified issues**

The early childhood service can:

- Model and encourage children to ask questions.
- Provide small-group discussion opportunities to unpack fears/issues.
- Discuss/pass on children's fears to families and school.

**Strategies for assessing and dealing with community characteristics**

The early childhood service can:

- Provide information to the schools about children who will be attending kindergarten, e.g., portfolios, and cultural backgrounds.
- Encourage families to visit and speak to school about their issues/needs.

**The role of the family**

The following strategies were identified by study participants:

**Strategies for enhancing social/emotional maturity**

The family can:

- Attend the transition program with their child.
- Become familiar and learn names of other children going to school with their child.
- Speak positively about going to school.
- Discuss what will happen at school with their child, especially new routines such as drop off/pick up.
- Share their child's portfolio with the school.
- Go past the school regularly and discuss what will happen when they go to school.
- Watch the school video and discuss it with their child.
- Share with the school their children's fears and peer experiences.
- Find out which children will be going to the same school and invite them around to play.

**Strategies for enhancing learning skills of the child**

The family can:

- Attend information sessions and read written handouts provided (it is assumed that these would be offered at flexible times and with interpreters to meet the needs of families within each particular community).
- Reinforce responsibility skills, e.g., packing away, unwrapping own lunch, looking after own belongings, etc.
- Buy lunch boxes, bags and school uniforms early so children can practise their skills.
- Take the child to places where they can interact with other children, e.g., to the park, playgroup, friends and relatives.
Role-play and discuss with the child how to ask for help when they are at school.

Strategies for enhancing reciprocal understanding of family roles and school expectations

The family can:

- Gather information through reading and talking to people (school admin, teachers, other parents).
- Make appointments to speak to the child’s teacher before they start school and provide them with any special information about their child/family.
- Attend parent information sessions.
- Join appropriate committees when the child starts school.
- Meet with other families.
- Talk to the child about the school – their rules and processes before they start school.

Strategies for dealing with child identified issues

The family can:

- Model and encourage the child to ask questions.
- Provide the child with strategies for dealing with issues.
- Set scenarios (role playing) and work through outcomes.
- Communicate issues to the school.

Strategies for assessing and dealing with community characteristics

The family can:

- Share information with the school, eg. cultural activities, language issues, learning difficulties.
- Attend information sessions at the school and provide feedback about the transition program.

9. What supports and/or resources are useful for transition to school programs?

Participants identified the following list as useful resources to support transition programs:

- Translators/interpreters for children and families whose first language is not English. NOTE: Many participants preferred to use families and children in the school to help support the transition program.
- Cross-sector sharing, eg. combined in-services with kindergarten and early childhood staff regarding curriculum commonalities and differences. Schools and services visiting each other to understand the environment, developing sustainable networks between the two sectors.
- Making use of existing family support groups and activities, eg. the P & C could provide networking and support to new families.
- A video about the school which shows the classroom, toilets, playground, etc. This would be particularly helpful for families from non-English speaking backgrounds. Amending the Department of Education and Training standard enrolment form as follows:

(a) include information about families,
(b) include questions about the child’s previous experience in group care,
(c) include family interests and skills.

- Development of generic standards for transition programs for all schools which can be adapted for each school situation.

We went to the preschool room at the childcare centre, looked at their programs and what they were doing with the children and watched the children. We designed the program so there was not a big gap between what the preschool was covering and what we would be covering in Kindergarten. We looked at what we could do to avoid the gap (School A, Kindergarten Teacher 1, 13-15).

... Transition benefits all children. I don’t think we should just be focusing on the children that are not in a preschool or long day care setting... that child will benefit in different ways to other children. Children who have not had any formal education experience will benefit in other ways; from structured activities, social interaction, getting an idea of big school, etc. (Schools as Community Centre A, Coordinator, 19-18).

The families that have children already at school and a younger sibling getting ready to go are different. These parents know the routine. For first-time parents, they can be anxious about where to send their child, etc. It is a big change for them, so they need to get a lot of contact with us (Early Childhood Service I, Director, 11-11).

Mostly we did floor activities allowing the children to explore the classroom, home corner, etc. There was some work (phonics) put on the table for them. The preschool children would do the table tasks but the non-preschool children just seemed to explore lego, duplo and home corner, etc. (School D, Kindergarten Teacher, 2-3).

I don’t think you can put a blanket setting for everyone, you have to look at the community and work out what is required. (School G, Deputy Principal, 15-18).
NOTE: Communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse families and children

This issue was identified by participants as one needing consideration and support. Suggestions for addressing this issue include:

- Encourage the child to point & gesture and make sure the teacher is familiar with these signs.
- Have cards/pictures in the classroom that can be used for communicating to the teacher and to the child.
- Suggest that parents learn some key words in English and that they teach these to their child.
- Supply the teacher with some key words in the home language.
- Form parent networks: have a parent representative who speaks the home language interpret for the family.
- Suggest that family members watch Playschool or Sesame Street with their child to learn basic words.

- Provide a video of the school to CALD families with key words, eg toilet, classroom, etc.
- Ensure information (eg, newsletters, notes for meetings) is written in simple language.
- Ensure information for meetings emphasises the value of the meeting for both parents and children.
- For schools where there are large numbers of families with the same home language, hold meetings in these languages.

... it would be good to learn more basic keywords (School A, Parent, 12-12).

We don’t have a big problem with transition. Our main problem is with the non-English Speaking Background children so we have two Teachers that come in two days a week to help with those children (School G, Deputy Principal, 14-16).

My son can do it [ask questions and follow directions] in Arabic but not English. My son could not ask to go to the toilet so he soiled himself and was very upset. At [the transition to school program] it would be good to learn more basic keywords (School A, Parent, 8-8).
Discussion

While there are specific readiness items which will assist children in making a smooth transition to school, effective transition programs encompass more than this.

The benefits of transition programs are far-reaching for all stakeholders. Transition programs are an entry point for the development of positive relationships with families that could last for several years. They provide an opportunity for schools to become informed about the external community. This allows them to provide support to all families and assists with curriculum development and school activities at all levels.

Early childhood services have identified a willingness to work closely with schools to assist with transfer of information about the school. Early childhood services provide good vehicles for school outreach and information dissemination. They stated a desire for closer relations with schools.

Families expressed appreciation of information coming from schools about transition. Families could benefit from vehicles which allow them to provide information, express ideas or concerns and/or network with other families and staff about transition issues.

No one transition to school program will be applicable to all schools or situations. Nor will one program necessarily suit the characteristics of the families and school community from one year to the next. Rather than a set program, a set of questions can be used to develop transition programs for each situation. These questions are provided on page 25.

Special needs groups: The benefits of transition to school programs for all children have been clearly established by this study. The study identified that there are 4 broad categories of families who benefit from transition programs. These are

- Families with CALD backgrounds
- Families who have never used early childhood services.
- Families who have used early childhood services.
- Families who have had older siblings attending school in previous years.

The needs and thus, the content and process of transition programs, will differ for each of these groups. In one school, for example, the transition program has been developed as a series of modules. Teachers can implement the activities and processes for different modules according to the families entering the program each year. This approach is family/child driven and highly recommended for effective transition programs.

All participants identified the need for resources (time and funds) as a major support for transition programs. Effective programs require the time from teachers to access families, liaise with community agencies and to develop and implement activities. Administration resources and consumables such as print materials are also part of an effective transition program. It was suggested that a special transition budget item could be transferred to the schools from the NSW Department of Education and Training for this purpose.
Recommendations

1. Principals and staff in early years of primary school be given orientation about the benefits, components and strategies for transition programs along with the opportunity to develop individual programs based on their school needs (a transition strategic planning day).

2. The Guiding Questions be used to develop an individualised transition program for each school (see below).

3. Transition programs be developed in each school based on a module format*. These are basic components which can be enhanced and/or changed each year to accommodate changing situations and families. Each module should address one of the features of the transition program:

   - Social emotional/maturity of the children undertaking the program
   - Learning skills of the children
   - Clarity of family roles and expectations
   - Clarity of school expectations

   - Issues which focus on needs and anxieties of children
   - Incorporation of particular characteristics of the school community
   - Partnerships with all stakeholders.

4. Teachers involved in transition to school programs be given release time to meet with early childhood teachers in their communities in order to jointly plan appropriate activities for families in transition.

5. A ‘transition’ item should be identified within school budgets

* A standardised kit of modules can be produced along with instructions on how to adapt the kit for each school/situation.

Guiding questions

These questions can guide the development of modules for transition programs and/or can be used to adapt standardised modules to meet needs of individual schools.

The questions are based on the components of an effective transition to school program.
Guiding questions for the development of transition programs in schools

1. Do you have a self-assessment tool for assessing the social/emotional level of children coming to the school?
   - Have you liaised with other services for information on children and families?
   - Have you developed some activities and exercises to assist with the enhanced socio-emotional development of children?
   - Have you identified a way to communicate these activities in non-threatening ways to parents and/or other caretakers?
   - Have you identified some modelling exercises or other face-to-face means for enhancing social/emotional maturity of children?
   - Do you have a plan for specific children who are less efficient in this area?

2. Do you have a self-assessment tool for assessing the learning skills of children coming to the school?
   - Have you liaised with other services for information on children and families?
   - Have you developed some activities and exercises to assist with enhanced learning skills of children?
   - Have you identified a way to communicate these activities in non-threatening ways to parents and/or other caretakers?
   - Have you identified some modelling exercises or other face-to-face means for enhancing learning skills of children?
   - Do you have a plan for specific children who are less efficient in this area?

3. Do you have the means to clarify school expectations of families?
   - Have you organised a variety of communication methods for parents who may be used to dealing with print and/or unable to make face-to-face contact?
   - Do you have clearly stated expectations for families?
   - Do you have a plan to articulate these to all families, including those from CALD backgrounds and those who may not arrive at transition orientation days?
   - Have you sought parental input when developing the expectations to ensure that they are clear and non-threatening in their tone?
   - Do you have a vehicle for families to communicate with you about their own concerns and expectations?

4. Do you have the means to clarify family expectations of schools?
   - Have you organised a variety of communication methods for parents who may be used to dealing with print and/or unable to make face-to-face contact?
   - Do you have clearly stated expectations for families?
   - Do you have a plan to articulate these to all families, including those from CALD backgrounds and those who may not arrive at transition orientation days?
   - Have you sought parental input when developing the expectations to ensure that they are clear and non-threatening in their tone?
   - Do you have a vehicle for families to communicate with you about their own concerns and expectations?

5. Have you organised a system for gathering information from children about their concerns (and/or from their parents)?
   - Have you organised a system whereby children's concerns can be discussed in groups or one-on-one with a teacher?
   - Have you organised a system for communicating with families about children's concerns and asking them about concerns?

6. Do you have a system in place for assessing characteristics and concerns of families in your school community?
   - Have you organised a system for ongoing communication with surrounding early childhood services?
   - Do you have a vehicle for discussing ways to deal with concerns and/or special characteristics of families and children in the community?

7. Do you have a system in place for developing partnerships?
   - Have you organised a system for linking into other community agencies which outreach to children not accessing early childhood services prior to school?
Appendix 1

Service/ School Linkages

Dulwich Hill Public School

Good Beginnings Supported Playgroup
Children’s Centre

Deborah Little

Glebe Public School

Glebe Schools as Community Centres

Amigos Children’s Centre
Broughton St Kindergarten
Capricorn Kindergarten
SDN Forrest Lodge
Hilda Bouler Kindergarten
KU Laurel Tree House
Magic Pudding Child Care Centre
Toddler Junction Occasional Care Centre

Lewisham Public School

Good Beginnings Supported Playgroup

Marrickville Public School

Addison Road Children’s Centre
Globe Wilkins Kindergarten

These linkages were determined through a snowball process; conversations with the identified schools and early childhood service providers and Marrickville Council Family Development Officer.
## Appendix 2

### Research processes and outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCESSES</th>
<th>OUTCOMES AND COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>October/November 2002</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics approval secured</td>
<td>Ethics approval was secured through the University of Western Sydney.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact with early childhood services and Good Beginnings to invite participation</td>
<td>Following a telephone call to service Directors and Coordinators, letters were sent to services inviting participation of families, children and staff in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and questionnaires</td>
<td>Interviews were conducted with families, staff and children who had been involved in transition to school programs in early childhood services. Questionnaires which reflected interview questions were also left with services for families to complete who could not arrange a time for interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approval secured</td>
<td>Ethics approval secured through the Department of Education and Training to approach schools to be involved in the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with Good Beginnings Coordinator</td>
<td>Meeting to determine most appropriate approach to seek information from families who accessed Good Beginnings programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February - June 2003</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact with 9 schools and 3 schools as community centres</td>
<td>Following a telephone call to Principals and Coordinators, letters were sent to school staff to invite their participation in an interview. Letters for participation and attached questionnaires were also sent for families in schools who had attended transition programs but had not had the opportunity to be involved in the study prior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Interviews continued with early childhood staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group held</td>
<td>A Focus Group was held with families who had accessed Good Beginnings at Lewisham.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preliminary data analysis</td>
<td>Data was input into QSR N6. Benefits of transition programs and components of a successful transition program were identified.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop held with key early childhood service staff and school staff.</td>
<td>Workshop provided feedback from preliminary findings and worked through capacity building exercises between services and schools which linked together in each area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Further data analysis</td>
<td>Workshop data was entered into QSR N6.</td>
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<td>Correspondence to workshop invites</td>
<td>An overview of the workshop was sent to all those invited to participate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family member focus groups held</td>
<td>Family member focus groups were held in three schools to validate identified components of transition to school programs from preliminary data analysis, including workshop data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correspondence to family focus group participants</td>
<td>A summary of findings from the focus group was sent to those involved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final data analysis</td>
<td>Data from family focus groups was input into N6 and a final analysis was completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final report compiled</td>
<td>Final report was completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correspondence to all schools and services</td>
<td>A summary of the project was sent to all early childhood services, Good Beginnings Schools as Community Centres and schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissemination of findings</td>
<td>Presentation of findings to key stakeholders.</td>
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* A qualitative data analysis computer software program.
## Appendix 3

### Current Transition Programs

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<th>EC F</th>
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Please note services EC E, EC G, EC H & SH chose not to participate in the study

EC = early childhood service; S = school; SACC = schools as community centre

*Information collected from written programs provided by and field notes from interviews with schools and early childhood services.*
References


Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd. (1997). QSR NUD*IST (2nd ed.). La Trobe University, Victoria: Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd.
