

Transitioning to kindergarten

The transition from preschool to kindergarten is an important time for children and families. Many children may have problems adjusting to elementary schools with different teaching styles, structures, and philosophies.¹

Research has found that positive transitions are associated with better academic and social outcomes, as well as higher levels of participation and enjoyment in school.^{2,3,4} Children at risk for difficult transitions have many of the same characteristics as children at risk for poor school performance. Since kindergarten sets the stage for later schooling, it is fundamental that children experience a smooth transition.⁵



What is continuity?

Continuity is a crucial aspect for successful transitions to kindergarten. Continuity is fostered in two ways: by bridging gaps between different styles of programs and by ensuring there is alignment between key elements, such as developmentally appropriate instruction, family involvement, and support services.¹

There are multiple barriers that can disrupt continuity depending on the context, but a common element across successful efforts is parent involvement.

Continuity in CPC P-3

The Child-Parent Center preschool to 3rd grade (CPC P-3) model provides an important exemplar for school-wide continuity. The program is implemented within a public school system, allowing for increased integration of the key principles like program structure, instruction, and family services. One of the major goals of the CPC P-3 is to enhance parent involvement and increase family participation in school activities.

A longitudinal study of CPCs found that participation in the extended early childhood intervention, from preschool into the primary grades, significantly added to the positive effect of preschool interventions.⁶ Extended interventions can enhance developmental continuity by offering educational and family support services during the sensitive time of transition to formal schooling. They may also encourage school stability by integrating services and encouraging parent involvement.

“At the beginning of the year, the first week of kindergarten in the lunchroom is always interesting, with a lot of scared kids in a new environment. We had all of our early learning staff who had worked with our CPC students last year come down and help us out. Seeing the warm, familiar faces really soothed everyone in there. It was probably our best start ever in the kindergarten lunchroom, and I attribute that to our CPC programming. The kids knew the staff and felt that this was their school, and this made the transition easier for all of us.”

— Scott Peters
Principal

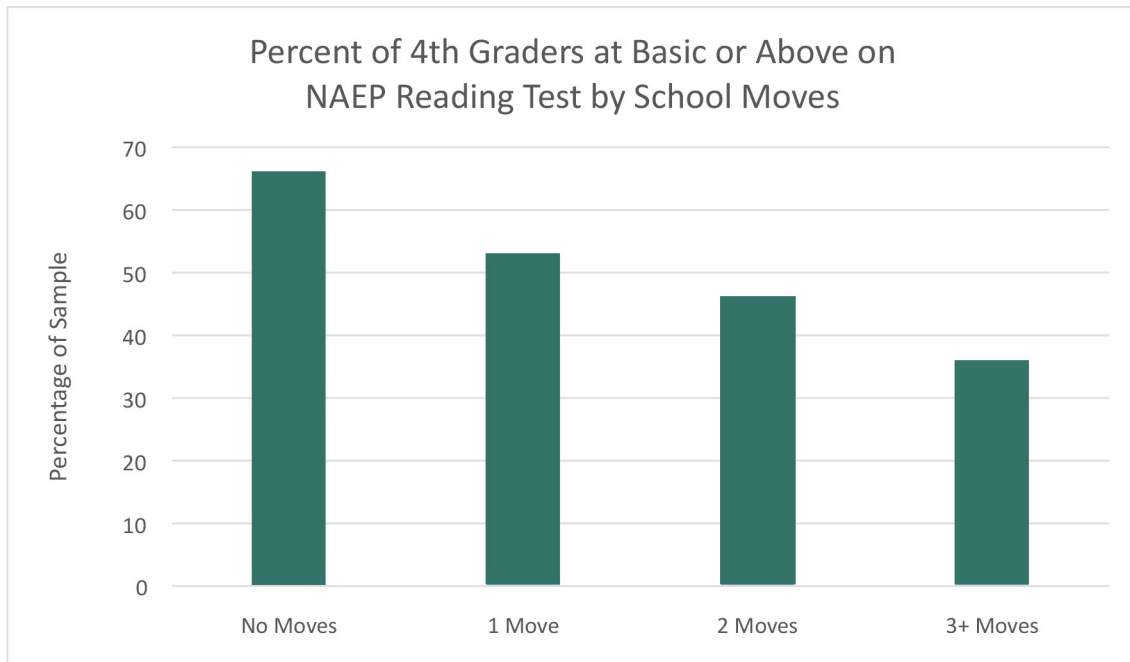
Promoting continuity and stability

Preschool programs have a unique advantage over other early childhood education programs because they are already linked with an elementary school and may even be located within the same building. A major barrier to capitalizing on preschool programs' potential to promote school-wide continuity is school mobility, when students change schools for reasons other than grade promotion.

Parents who chose to send their child to a preschool program may not intend to keep their child at the same elementary school or it may not be within their neighborhood boundaries. In order to prevent school mobility and foster continuity during the kindergarten transition, efforts must be made at multiple levels — the school district, the individual school, and within classrooms.

A stable school environment promotes year-to-year continuity by limiting mobility of students in the program. The impacts of this are twofold: first, the negative impacts of mobility are eliminated, and second, the longer a student stays in the CPC P-3 program, the bigger the gains.

CPC P-3 promotes stability through several policies and procedures. Students are ensured continued enrollment through at least 3rd grade in the program. Additionally the program encourages maintaining small class sizes and implements attendance incentives. Stability is also nurtured through parent involvement programs. Evidence suggests that the transition from preschool to kindergarten is easier for children when they and their families have an existing connection to the school, and therefore co-location — locating the preschool in or near the elementary school — and coordination can familiarize preschool students and their families with the kindergarten staff and location.



References

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