Transitioning to Kindergarten:
The Why, What, and How of this
Important Milestone for Connecticut Students

Connecticut State Department of Education
and the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

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Introduction

This transition guidance document will tell you:
- why transitions are important;
- what the key components of a successful transition are; and
- how to implement a transition plan effectively.

The document includes helpful information and resources on managing transitions, supports for district and school leaders, and guidance on how to effectively leverage resources. It includes a process to help guide the school community through the transition planning and implementation process.

Guide to the Document

Critical transitions happen throughout a student's life. They occur for infants and toddlers, from home to school, between schools and grades; from pre-K to K, elementary to middle, and middle to secondary. This document is designed to provide a road map to help district and school leaders enter into an intentional, comprehensive process to improve transitions for children moving from early childhood settings into school and through their early elementary years in partnership with the early childhood community, families, staff, and other community stakeholders. Positive early childhood transitions set the stage for children and families for the rest of their school experiences. Some users of this guide will already be engaged in these early childhood transition activities and will find new resources to improve and expand upon their process. For those just beginning these conversations, the guide lays out the "why, what, and how" of the transition process and provides resources to make transitions effective for children, families, staff, and schools. The "why" provides information and research to help bring partners to the table as part of this important work. The "what" lays out the key components of the work that can make transition planning effective. Finally, the "how" identifies activities that districts and schools can adopt in the short-, medium- and long-term, and provides resources to help jumpstart those efforts.

Section 1: Why Are Transitions Important?

A child's transition from home to an early education program, from one program to another, or from an early childhood program to a new school can be an exciting but stressful time. This major event of moving from a familiar place to an unfamiliar one can be challenging for both young children and their families. For schools, creating new relationships can also be challenging if they are limited in their resources, training, and capacity to interact with families. Effective planning and implementation of a transition plan, in addition to effective program policies and practices, can ease this transition, no matter what setting a child is moving to or from. This document is meant to provide resources and ideas to school and district leaders in order to ease the transition process from early education settings to kindergarten for children and families in a way that creates a meaningful experience with the school community.

The focus on this transition process is not a random choice – in fact, extensive research indicates that positive transition experiences are associated with increased family engagement during kindergarten, enhanced social skills in children, and higher academic performance in math, language, and literacy in kindergarten and beyond. A focus on the transition experience can also help ensure that all children receive the supports they need to be successful, including early intervention, language supports, wraparound services and other resources.

Research Shows Transition Activities Lead to Gains in Academic Achievement
In a 2005 study on the effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes, researchers established a link between the number of transition activities that schools facilitated prior to or near the beginning of kindergarten and larger gains in student academic achievement by the end of the year. This effect was strongest for students from low- and middle-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

Positive Link Between Pre-K Transition Activities and K Teachers' Perceptions of Students
Another study focused on pre-K programs found a positive association between the number of transition activities practiced by pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers' later perceptions of student skills, especially among low-income students. In this study, the kindergarten teachers rated as having more positive social competencies and fewer problem behaviors when they attended pre-kindergarten where more transition activities were implemented.

Economic Benefits Outweigh Costs of Early Education Programs
Lastly, a 2017 study by the Bureau of Economic Research quantifies the value and benefits of a widely implemented early childhood program targeting disadvantaged families, finding that long-term economic benefits greatly outweigh the costs of comprehensive programs for children from pre-kindergarten through third grade. Other studies have found similar outcomes.

Five Core Values that Guide Effective Transition Practices

- Collaborative, responsive, and trusting **relationships with families.**

- Ongoing **communication** with all stakeholders- including families, program staff, and others.

- **Respect** for diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds and experiences, strengths, and needs of children and families.

- Positive **relationships** between **adults and children** as foundations for children's learning and development.

- Competent, **knowledgeable staff** to implement transition practices.

Section 2: What Are the Key Components of Successful Transitions?

As schools work to ensure successful transitions for children and families, there are a series of actions they can take to create and continuously improve all transitions for children from early childhood into school and through third grade. These transition activities may differ based on the community, reflecting the values and resources available. Finally, it is important to remember that at the base of each of these activities should be an underlying goal of relationship-building between schools and families; personal connections are the foundation for successful transitions. As schools and districts design activities, the key components to include are:

- Pre-transition activities
- Collaboration
- Making it happen
- Establishing a timeline

Pre-transition activities

Before engaging families in transition activities, districts should complete a self-assessment in order to gauge their starting place in the work and resources that are already available. Pre-transition activities could include:

- Identify a self-assessment tool that meets the needs of the district. See below, or the following include various levels of complexity: [New York State's Tool to Assess the Effectiveness of Transitions from Prekindergarten To Kindergarten](), [Massachusetts self-assessment tool](), or [Illinois Birth Through Third Grade Self-Assessment and Action Planning Guide]().
- Create or expand summer programs to give children a school experience. (e.g., [First 5 Kern]()).
- Identify and convene local providers ([Stamford, Connecticut, example]())
- Revisit existing transition plans to evaluate whether and how they meet core values and current needs.
- Hold a spring or summer kindergarten summit (e.g., [Transition and Alignment Summit Guide](), [Summit Planning Resources](), [Effective Transitions to Enhance School readiness PowerPoint]()).
- Develop a list of questions to identify existing transition practices and supports for children moving from early childhood programs into school, and for students moving between kindergarten, first, second and third grades. The answers to these questions should be used to develop action plans.

Listening to Families, Children, and Kindergarten Teachers

- What is the school already doing to ensure that children and families have a successful transition? Is the school ready?
- What kind of communication exists between the Pre-K programs, other early learning center based programs, and the school? How can local community organizations/partners participate in the process?
- What do kindergarten teachers see as the need?
- What do families of this year's kindergarten students have to say about the transition process? What worked? What could be better?

Source: [Georgia Department of Education]()

Developing a Kindergarten Transition Team

The Kindergarten Transition Team is typically convened by the school leadership and is a collaborative partnership that may include:

- School administrators and staff (e.g., principal or designee, kindergarten teachers, Title I staff, counselors, family engagement professionals)
- Pre-k school transition coach
- Head Start
- Faith-based early Transition Team is typically convened by the school learning programs
- Family child care
- Home visiting programs (e.g., Parents as Teachers, the Nurturing Program)
- Agencies (e.g., library, universities)
- Community leaders (e.g., city or county council members)
- PTA or PTO

Source: [Georgia Department of Education](#)

Collaboration

Collaboration between all partners involved in the process is crucial.
- Partners include families, staff, and other early education programs and elementary schools. Program leaders are the bridge between all partners, ensuring ongoing communication and collaboration.
- The goal of collaboration is to maximize collective impact – need to think what the school or district already has in place for young children and their families and how it can be made better.
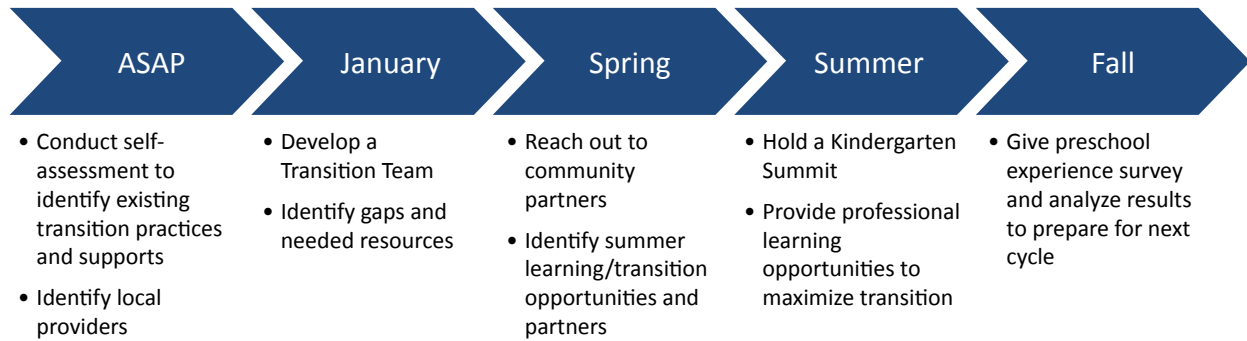
Core activities

A set of core activities are needed to *make it happen.*
- Family and community partnership: reach out early and often to families, early childhood providers, and community programs and organizations.
- Continuous improvement: ask families and providers for feedback on their experiences with transitions.
- Professional development: alignment between schools and other programs on the importance of a systemic approach to transition.
- Economies of scale: Utilization of resources that already exist that are low- or no-cost (e.g., blending and braiding of programs, including Head Start, state funded pre-kindergarten, Title I funded prekindergarten, IDEA Part C/619 programs, child care subsidy, and local public and private funding sources).
- Data: Utilize existing data to support transition efforts

Establishing a timeline

To be successful in creating and implementing effective transition policies, school and district leaders may want to keep the school calendar in mind and create a timeline of activities that integrates these principles and components.

The sample timeline below contains steps that can be taken throughout the year to ensure that you are constantly working to implement an effective transition plan. Please note that this timeline is simply a sampling of ideas and is not meant to be time bound but ongoing.

ASAP	January	Spring	Summer	Fall
• Conduct self-assessment to identify existing transition practices and supports • Identify local providers	• Develop a Transition Team • Identify gaps and needed resources	• Reach out to community partners • Identify summer learning/transition opportunities and partners	• Hold a Kindergarten Summit • Provide professional learning opportunities to maximize transition	• Give preschool experience survey and analyze results to prepare for next cycle

Section 3: How Can District and School Leaders Implement Successful Transitions?

In this section, you will find the components of a successful transition plan:

- Professional development opportunities
- Family partnerships
- Leveraging existing resources
- Communication

Professional development opportunities

As the district identifies professional learning needs and creates an intentional plan for teachers and school leaders working with children from pre-kindergarten through third grade, every opportunity should be considered to include early childhood staff, community providers, and school readiness councils or other local early childhood councils. This will help to create shared expectations, foster improved alignment between and across settings, and help identify strengths and needs within the community. To develop these plans, districts can convene a working group that includes community providers. The group can identify, maximize, and promote existing early learning professional learning opportunities through a common calendar, develop a plan for transition activities between and across settings if not currently available, and develop an ongoing process to align professional learning opportunities throughout the year.

The plan should also be coordinated with the district Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) and should incorporate the elements of a high-quality professional learning system identified by the Connecticut Department of Education. All stakeholders, including superintendents and central office administrators, should be included whenever possible in early learning professional development opportunities (e.g., Guidance for a Professional Learning System.) Efforts should be coordinated with community agencies such as Head Start. (For information about the professional development at the community level, see Resources for Early Learning Professional Development, an overview of the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning resources for Head Start teaching staff). A checklist and flowchart like the ones below (based on information in Planning for Professional Development in Child Care) may be a helpful resource.

Questions for Developing Effective Professional Development for Early Learning

- What existing professional development does the district provide for early childhood teachers?
- What are the top two or three instructional goals for the year, both at the school or district level?
- Does currently available professional development programming in the district or community align with research about teacher learning?
- How do instructional goals translate into learning outcomes for all staff, specific teams, and individual staff members?
- Is professional development producing an impact on student learning?
- How much exactly is the district spending on professional development?
- What current in-house staff or community partners can be used to provide coaching and professional learning communities?
- What external resources can be used to staff coaching and professional learning communities?
- Is an in-house or consulting model of staffing more cost efficient and effective for the goals of the professional development, or is it better to have a combination of the two?

Based on the Center for Public Education's Teaching the Teachers: Effective professional development and NWEA's Seven Questions to Ask When Building a Teacher Professional Development Plan.

Flow Chart for Developing a Professional Development Plan
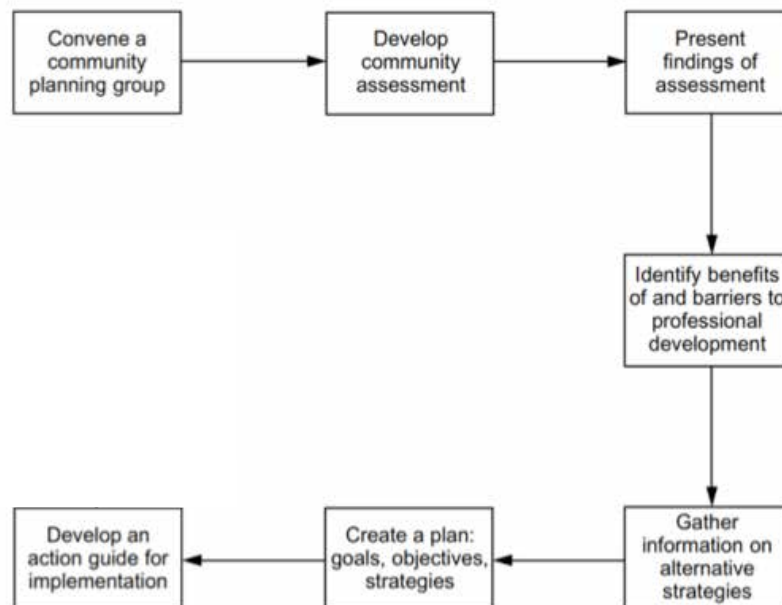
Source: *Planning for Professional Development in Child Care*

Family partnership activities

It is imperative that schools and districts engage in an ongoing culturally and linguistically appropriate communication with families, rather than completing discrete engagement activities or sending resources home with children. Communication should be authentic and reciprocal. Families should be given a menu of options, and schools must be as flexible to meet families' unique needs. Activities might include home visits; multiple language forms/surveys/inventories at the start of the year, phone conversations with families who cannot be at the school in person to begin to get to know them and their goals for their children; tours and parent-teacher meetings before the start of school; and orientation with parents of pre-K students who can answer questions of others based on their experiences. Staff should all be trained to welcome new children and families, help them navigate the transition process, and foster and maintain positive relationships.

The following table includes examples of family partnership activities and resources that your school or district can use and adapt as you implement your transition plan. Please keep in mind that some of these activities can be done with families of 3-year-olds as well — there is no need to wait until children are of pre-K age to begin communicating with them. The earlier the better!

Family Partnership Activities	
Communities support family interests and goals	Staff and families collaborate with community, health, mental health, social service, and school partners to build peer networks, link families and children to needed services, and support successful transitions for children and families. Families should have opportunities to work with staff to identify goals for their children
Preschool experience survey (see appendix 2)	CSDE collects school-level data on pre-K experiences.
Host a kindergarten summit	Transition and Alignment Summit Guide, Summit Planning Resources, Effective Transitions to Enhance School readiness PowerPoint
Form partnerships with community organizations	Form partnerships with parent-to-parent organizations or other K-12 family engagement groups to facilitate connections for families. Support family experiences with community resources that promote children's learning and development, such as libraries and museums. School and district leaders can work with community organizations to convene events during the summer to welcome and orient families and children as they move into the school community.

Family and community partnership example	Windham, Connecticut, Public Schools has a Family & Community Partnerships Department, which includes a district quality advisor for before and after school programs, family outreach worker/homeless family support, and a family-school liaison at each school.
School-Family-Community Partnerships	From Connecticut's website: "School-Family-Community Partnerships (SFCP) help educators, families, and community members develop partnerships by providing training, workshops, newsletters, books, videos and other resources. The project is designed to promote policies and programs at the local level and to increase public awareness of the positive impact of partnerships on student learning. Led by the State Department of Education, SERC and CREC, this project has been working to increase family and community involvement since 1995."

The website linked to the left includes the SFCP position statement and guidance, which is a useful introduction. |
Building Family Partnerships	This website includes many resources that schools can use to develop their own school-parent compacts. There are 10 video workshops, each describing a step in the process. There is also a sample compact available for download, and resources provided for each step are described in the videos.
Role of parent/teacher organizations	Members of the school governance councils and other relevant internal or external parent organizations, e.g., People Empowering People (PEP), Parents as Teachers (PAT), CT Parent Power, PTO, Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), can work with the school to create events for new families, serve as welcome volunteers, create orientation materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for all families, and answer questions for new families.
colspan	*Note:* **Be prepared to have some families show up on the first day of school without having attended any engagement events. School leaders should have transition plans for these families as well.**

Leveraging existing resources

Using the self-assessment and pre-transition activities, districts may identify resources already in place that can support each component of the successful transition process. Whether these include existing professional development opportunities, transportation and other family supports, data on the needs and strengths in the community, transference of available data from public and community preschools to kindergarten teachers, or other resources, working with partners will ensure that districts and their partners are maximizing existing resources. Districts have a wealth of information at their disposal about their currently enrolled students, and may be able to access additional information through community partners such as Head Start, the Office of Early Learning, enrollment information gathered in the transition process, and new guidance around an early childhood landscape analysis developed by the State Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood.

Existing Resources	
Connecticut School Readiness Program	Programs receiving School Readiness funding are required to have a plan of transition for children moving from a School Readiness program to kindergarten and transfer records from the School Readiness program to kindergarten under Section 10-16a(a)(8).
Head Start	Head Start programs are required to transition children into elementary school programs. They are required to create a memorandum of agreement with the local district but also have best practices to follow. (See this example about Head Start in Las Cruces, New Mexico)
Preschool-Kindergarten Transition Summary Sheet (see appendix 3)	This tool is completed by the child's preschool teacher as a summary of the skills a child has demonstrated. The skills presented are based upon the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS). This is not an assessment tool, rather a format for sharing information to support a child's transition to kindergarten.

Communication

To facilitate successful transitions, district and school leaders need to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with Head Start staff and community-based early childhood providers. They should also create mechanisms for ongoing two-way communication and information sharing with families and providers through a regular convening of active families in the community, leading community agencies working with families, libraries, health centers, and others who regularly meet with families.

Communication	
Example	**Description**
CCSSO MOA (see appendix 4)	This resource includes self-assessments for transitions at the district level and other examples of effective MOU/MOA.
Fostering a Love of Learning and Engaging Families Before Entering School	To reach children not in formal child care settings before entering kindergarten, school and district leaders may want to partner with libraries, museums, and other community resources to engage family, friend, and neighbor caregivers in activities and provide them with information about the transition to school.
Transition survival kit/welcome packet: The examples to the right include different welcome packets to model your district/ school's packet after. It may be best to use different portions of several of these examples to ensure that your welcome packet/survival kit includes what is most useful for the families in your district or school.	Examples: • Welcome packet from a teacher • The World of Kindergarten Family Welcome Packet • Schoolwide Welcome Packet • School Welcome Packet and Parent Handbook

Now Get Started!

Here are some immediate and best next steps to get started on this work in your district:

1. Gather your team and act!
2. Establish a timeline for improving or expanding your transition activities.
3. Identify needed resources, complete a self-assessment of the district, and engage community partners.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Other useful resources and research

Resource	Description
Connecting The Steps: State Strategies to Ease the Transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten	State examples of great transition practices.
Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten	Ideas for transition activities
Family Engagement in Transitions	Head Start family engagement resource
Supporting Transitions: Resources for Building Collaboration	Head Start resource
Ready Freddy Pathways to Kindergarten	Pieces of a quality transition
National Education Association: A Parent's Guide to a Successful Kindergarten Transition	Parent/family resource
Building Positive Family-School Partnerships	Website with information about family-school partnerships
Graduates of early childhood program show greater educational gains as adults	National Institute of Health study about staff qualifications.
Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary	Resource for developing consistent terminology and definitions
Transition Practices from Preschool to Kindergarten	Research brief co-authored by Robert Pianta
Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities Competencies for Effective Principal Practice	National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) guide to support the role of principals
Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches	Framework for use by schools, school districts, early learning programs, and other community partners

Appendix 2: Preschool Experience Survey

Child's Name:		Parent/Guardian Name:	
Address:		Kindergarten School: Town:	

Preschool is an early childhood program for children ages 3 to 5 years old. Preschool combines learning with play and have staff who have been trained in the growth and development of young children.

1. Was information about preschool options easy to find **and understand?**	☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Did your child attend preschool at some point between the ages of 3 and 5? If you answered no, skip down to Section 5.	☐ Yes ☐ No

3. IF YOUR CHILD ATTENDED PRESCHOOL BETWEEN THE AGES OF 3 AND 5 YEARS OLD:

How many years **did they attend?**	☐ Less than a year ☐ 1 year ☐ 2 years ☐ Other
How many hours per day did your child attend preschool over the last year?	☐ Half Day (3 hrs.) ☐ School Day (6 hrs.) ☐ Full day (10 hrs.)
How many days per week did your child attend preschool over the last year?	☐ 1 day ☐ 2 days ☐ 3 days ☐ 4 days ☐ 5 days

4. When choosing a preschool, what helped you make your decision? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Preschool was free

☐ Reasonably priced/not too expensive

☐ Close to where I live

☐ Close to where I work

☐ Preschool provided transportation for my child

☐ I felt the preschool was high-quality

☐ Accommodated my child's special need(s)

☐ Application process was easy

☐ Space not available for my first choice

☐ Meals were included

☐ Staff spoke my child's home language

☐ Year-round program

☐ Other: _____

5. IF YOUR CHILD DID NOT ATTEND PRESCHOOL BETWEEN THE AGES OF 3 AND 5 YEARS OLD, WHY DID YOUR CHILD NOT ATTEND? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Too expensive

☐ No preschool was nearby my home

☐ No preschool was nearby my workplace

☐ No transportation

☐ Did not believe the preschools with available space were good enough

☐ Did not accommodate my child's special need(s)

☐ Application process was too hard or confusing

☐ Missed deadline for applying for preschool

☐ Could not find space mid-year

☐ Could not find a preschool that had staff that spoke my child's language

☐ Wanted to keep my child home with me/family

☐ Other: _____

Appendix 3: Preschool-Kindergarten Transition Summary Sheet

Preschool Program: _____

Child's Last Name, First Name: _____

Date of Birth _____

Preschool Teacher completing summary: _____

This summary should be completed by the child's preschool teacher as a summary of the child's demonstrated skills in the preschool classroom. The skills in this summary are based upon the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS). This is not an assessment tool, but rather a format for sharing information to support the child's transition to kindergarten.

Directions: Rate each student in your class on each of the domains below, considering the indicators mentioned. When rating a child's performance level on each domain, please use all available information and pertinent observations that you have gathered over time.

Performance Level 1: Child at this level demonstrates *emerging skills* in the specified domain and requires *a large degree of instructional support*.

Performance Level 2: Child at this level *inconsistently demonstrates the skills* in the specified domain and *requires some instructional support*.

Performance Level 3: Child at this level *consistently demonstrates the skills* in the specified domain and requires *minimal instructional support.*

Domain	Performance Level Check 1, 2, or 3 below for each domain		
	1	**2**	**3**
Social Emotional Learning			
Expresses emotions Follows classroom rules and routines Seeks help from adults Tolerates small amounts of frustration Cooperates with peers through taking turns			
Cognition			
Engages in high interest activities for 15 minutes Experiments with cause and effect Tries multiple ways to solve a problem Persists at tasks Represents ideas in construction, art, and dramatic play			

Language			
Participates in conversations with adults and peers about common experiences			
Understands complex sentences that include multiple concepts			
Uses vocabulary learned from new experiences and books			
Answers who, what, where, why questions			
Literacy			
Understands that print conveys meaning and how it is read			
Explores books independently			
Recognizes come printed letters, especially those in his/her name			
Uses drawing/writing to convey meaning			
Retells familiar stories			
Numeracy			
Counts 10 objects			
Compare groups of objects up to 10 as more, less, the same			
Identifies and describe some 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional shapes			
Sorts and group objects by one attribute			
Compares objects lengths or weight			
Gross Motor			
Runs, jumps, throws balls, kicks balls, climbs			
Walks up and down stairs with alternating feet			
Fine Motor			
Uses various drawing, painting, and writing materials to make simple forms, shapes, and some letters			
Uses a 3 finger pencil grasp			

Is this child learning another language, in addition to English? _____ yes _____ no
Does this child receive special education services? _____ yes _____ no
Is this child receiving interventions as part of an SRBI process? _____ yes _____ no

Please share any comments that you feel might be helpful in supporting this child as he/she transitions to kindergarten:

Appendix 4: CCSSO MOA

The Council of Chief State School Officers and
The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices

Common Core Standards
Memorandum of Agreement

Purpose. This document commits states to a state-led process that will draw on evidence and lead to development and adoption of a common core of state standards (common core) in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. These standards will be aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and be internationally benchmarked. The intent is that these standards will be aligned to state assessment and classroom practice. The second phase of this initiative will be the development of common assessments aligned to the core standards developed through this process.

Background. Our state education leaders are committed to ensuring all students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global economy and society. State standards provide a key foundation to drive this reform. Today, however, state standards differ significantly in terms of the incremental content and skills expected of students.

Over the last several years, many individual states have made great strides in developing high-quality standards and assessments. These efforts provide a strong foundation for further action. For example, a majority of states (35) have joined the American Diploma Project (ADP) and have worked individually to align their state standards with college and work expectations. Of the 15 states that have completed this work, studies show significant similarities in core standards across the states. States also have made progress through initiatives to upgrade standards and assessments, for example, the New England Common Assessment Program.

Benefits to States. The time is right for a state-led, nation-wide effort to establish a common core of standards that raises the bar for all students. This initiative presents a significant opportunity to accelerate and drive education reform toward the goal of ensuring that all children graduate from high school ready for college, work, and competing in the global economy and society. With the adoption of this common core, participating states will be able to:

- Articulate to families, teachers, and the general public expectations for students;
- Align textbooks, digital media, and curricula to the internationally benchmarked standards;
- Ensure professional development to educators is based on identified need and best practices;
- Develop and implement an assessment system to measure student performance against the common core; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the common core standards and "end-of-high-school" expectations.

An important tenet of this work will be to increase the rigor and relevance of state standards across all participating states; therefore, no state will see a decrease in the level of student expectations that exist in their current state standards.

Process and Structure

- **Common Core State-Based Leadership.** The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) shall assume responsibility for coordinating the process that will lead to state adoption of a common core set of standards. These organizations represent governors and state commissioners of education who are charged with defining K-12 expectations at the state level. As such, these organizations will facilitate a state-led process to develop a set of common core standards in English language arts and math that are:

  - Fewer, clearer, and higher, to best drive effective policy and practice;
  - Aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school;
  - Inclusive of rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills, so that all students are prepared for the 21st century;
  - Internationally benchmarked, so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society; and
  - Research and evidence-based.

- **National Validation Committee.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will create an expert validation group that will serve a several purposes, including validating end-of-course expectations, providing leadership for the development of K-12 standards, and certifying state adoption of the common core. The group will be comprised of national and international experts on standards. Participating states will have the opportunity to nominate individuals to the group. The national validation committee shall provide an independent review of the common core. The national validation committee will review the common core as it is developed and offer comments, suggestions, and validation of the process and products developed by the standards development group. The group will use evidence as the driving factor in validating the common core.

- **Develop End-of-High-School Expectations.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene Achieve, ACT and the College Board in an open, inclusive, and efficient process to develop a set of end-of–high-school expectations in English language arts and mathematics based on evidence. We will ask all participating states to review and provide input on these expectations. This work will be completed by July 2009.

- **Develop K-12 Standards in English Language Arts and Math.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene Achieve, ACT, and the College Board in an open, inclusive, and efficient process to develop K-12 standards that are grounded in empirical research and draw on best practices in standards development. We will ask participating states to provide input into the drafting of the common core and work as partners in the common core standards development process. This work will be completed by December 2009.

- **Adoption.** The goal of this effort is to develop a true common core of state standards that are internationally benchmarked. Each state adopting the common core either directly or by fully aligning its state standards may do so in accordance with current state timelines for standards adoption not to exceed three (3) years.

  This effort is voluntary for states, and it is fully intended that states adopting the common core may choose to include additional state standards beyond the common core. States that choose to align their standards to the common core standards agree to ensure that the common core represents at least 85 percent of the state's standards in English language arts and mathematics.

  Further, the goal is to establish an ongoing development process that can support continuous improvement of this first version of the common core based on research and evidence-based learning and can support the development of assessments that are aligned to the common core across the states, for accountability and other appropriate purposes.

- **National Policy Forum.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene a National Policy Forum (Forum) comprised of signatory national organizations (e.g., the Alliance for Excellent Education, Business Roundtable, National School Boards Association, Council of Great City Schools, Hunt Institute, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, and others) to share ideas, gather input, and inform the common core initiative. The forum is intended as a place for refining our shared understanding of the scope and elements of a common core; sharing and coordinating the various forms of implementation of a common core; providing a means to develop common messaging between and among participating organizations; and building public will and support.

- **Federal Role.** The parties support a state-led effort and not a federal effort to develop a common core of state standards; there is, however, an appropriate federal role in supporting this state-led effort. In particular, the federal government can provide key financial support for this effort in developing a common core of state standards and in moving toward common assessments, such as through the Race to the Top Fund authorized in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Further, the federal government can incentivize this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to effectively implement the standards. Additionally, the federal government can provide additional long-term financial support for the development of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, other related common core standards supports, and a research agenda that can help continually improve the common core over time. Finally, the federal government can revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from states' international benchmarking efforts and from federal research.

Agreement. The undersigned state leaders agree to the process and structure as described above and attest accordingly by our signature(s) below.

Signatures
Governor:
Chief State School Officer: