

Technical Report

Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Child & Family Transitions into Preschool in NYC 2023



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Abstract

This technical report summarizes the data collection and analysis process for a research study focusing on children’s transitions into preschool programs in New York City. Educators’ perceptions and experiences of successful transitions for children and families can provide valuable contributions to research, practice, professional development, and policy recommendations around improving the transition into preschool. Thus, the purpose of this study is to better understand teacher’s use of transition-related practices to support the varying needs of young children and their families as they enter preschool programs in New York City.

The study used a mixed-methods case study design (Yin, 2014). Early childhood educators were recruited to participate in a survey (N = 327) and qualitative interview (N = 20). Descriptive statistics and correlations among transition practices, teacher demographics, and classroom characteristics are presented to describe the features associated with successful child and family transitions into preschool. The presentation of key themes and patterns derived from the interview data are presented to dig deeper into these associations. Finally, we share recommendations for future research and practice.



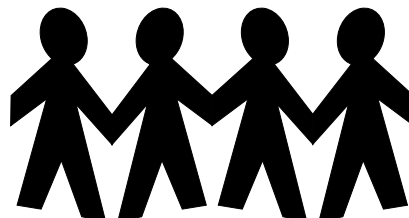
Introduction

A child's transition into formal education marks an important milestone and stage for a child's development. Beginning formal education also means adjusting to life outside of the home, new-found independence, and adjusting to a new caregiver in the form of a teacher. A child's transition into formal education also marks an important milestone and developmental stage in a parent's life. For some families, this may be the first time parents begin to regularly leave their child in the care of another adult outside of the family. Additionally, this milestone requires families to navigate various educational philosophies, special services criteria, professional disciplines and service delivery for a multitude of different academic programs (Kagan & Tarrant, 2010, Fowler & McCollum, 2000).



Successful adjustment to the formal-schooling environment can lay the foundation for a child's future school experiences. Successful transitions can have a positive impact on children's academic abilities and social competencies (Hubbell et al., 1987; Fabian and Dunlop, 2007). Despite some struggles, children can learn from transitions and build resilience and coping skills from the experience (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; O'Farrelly & Hennessy 2014). Conversely, the developmental trajectory of children who are challenged with this adjustment during school transition is discouraging, resulting in academic difficulties and antisocial behavior, which may further increase their likelihood of disliking school and eventually dropping out of school (Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003).

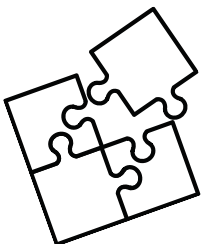
Early Childhood transitions in research tends to focus on investigating the transition into Kindergarten (e.g. Welchons and McIntyre, 2015; Stoner et al., 2007). However, the availability of public and low-cost preschool programs has increased precipitously across the United States over the past decade (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). NYC’s historic Pre-K for All (UPK) program, which launched in 2014, is a prime example of a free, full-day preschool initiative that is redefining the start to “formal” schooling. The program was further extended in 2017 with 3-K for All, which, together with the UPK program, offers every child in NYC a free high-quality education beginning at age three and four. On a national level, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education put out a joint policy statement emphasizing the importance of inclusion and high quality early childhood education programs, especially for children with disabilities (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Specifically, the policy statement identifies research indicating that access to early childhood education and inclusion is essential given that the beginning years of all children’s lives are critical for building the early foundations of learning and wellness needed for success in school and later in life. The statement also outlines the 40 States and the District of Columbia (in 2015) offering some form of State-funded public prekindergarten programs and indicates that a growing number of States are increasing access to infant-toddler early childhood programs as well. Through the emergence of more affordable or accessible preschool options, now more than ever before, children younger than five-years-old are beginning the milestone transition into formal education through preschool education. As a result, there is a great need to build on the initial transition literature for children entering preschool programs (e.g., Douglas et al., 2021). Particularly, only limited research investigates the holistic family preschool transition experience (Douglas et al., 2021; George-Puskar, 2018).



When exploring transition processes, it is important to note that children transitioning into preschool programs come from a variety of different early care and education experiences. Children may be entering preschool classrooms from group daycare settings, home-based care settings, Early Head Start programs, Early Intervention programs, being home with parents or family or a combination of environments. Thus, while programs like 3-K and UPK aim to support the needs of all children, it is important to take an ecological approach to understanding a child's transition into preschool classrooms. Educators and administrators need to consider a child's prior experiences and family characteristics when evaluating how to guide a student's transition. This will allow teachers to differentiate their support practices and engage families from the beginning of the preschool experience. It ensures that families have a positive transition experience that builds engagement in their child's education.

Supporting Children with Developmental Delays and Disabilities

Federal programs, policies, and research have demonstrated an investment in young children with disabilities and their families through multiple funding streams for various services and programs, such as preschool programs, early intervention services, referral and screening, child care, maternal and child health services, and service care coordination (Rous & Smith, 2011). For example, Head Start was developed as a preventative preschool program for children living in poverty as an environmental risk (Office of Head Start, 2017). IDEA Part C targets children who have an established risk or disability that has resulted in a developmental delay, as does IDEA Part B 619 for preschoolers (IDEA, 20. U.S.C. §1400, 2004). The Health Resources and Service Administration's Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program aims to improve maternal and child health, prevent child abuse and neglect, encourage positive parenting, and promote child development and school readiness by providing evidence-based home visiting services for parents of infants from professionals such as nurses, social workers, early childhood educators (HRSA, 2017).



Supporting Children with Developmental Delays and Disabilities

Transition under Part C is defined the same as under Part B of IDEA as “a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed with an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from [one educational setting to the next]” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C., 1400, 2004). Transition services under Part C assist the toddler with a disability and their family to experience a smooth transition to the child’s next program, regardless of whether or not they qualify for special education services (34 C.F.R. § 303.209). Despite the importance of transition, data has shown that providers of early intervention consider a successful transition into preschool as children receiving special education services (George-Puskar, 2018). At 3-years-old children exit from early intervention programming and may continue to receive preschool services under Part B of IDEA if they continue to demonstrate a delay in one or more areas of development. If they no longer qualify for services under IDEA, they may move into a community-based preschool or other setting. While a successful transition could include receiving services in a preschool setting, that is far from the only criteria. In fact, in the most recent Report to Congress, only 38.8% of children leaving early intervention qualify for special education services in preschool (US DOE, 2021). Thus, a child’s transition should be based on their individual needs and requirements, rather than on their ability or accessibility to receive services.



Transition Practices

The ultimate goal of transition planning is children’s success in their next environment (Rous et al., 2007). The practices associated with a successful transition are defined as “key elements of transition planning that are broad and global in nature, can be implemented in ways that reflect a shared understanding of the intent of the practice, and are regularly and consistently implemented across staff within programs across a community” (Rous & Hallam, 2019). These practices involve the implementation of strategies that aim to support children and their families as they enter a new school setting or environment. Preschool in particular, there is a need for coordination and collaboration between sending and receiving programs, program practices involving the preparation of classrooms and programs to welcome children and families, and family specific practices to communicate and engage effectively with families and caregivers (Bruder, 2010; George-Puskar, 2018; Rous & Hallam, 2019).

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC), under the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), has a current set of recommended practices defines transition as “the events, activities, and processes associated with key changes between environments or programs during the early childhood years” (DEC, 2014, p. 15).

The two current recommended transition practices are stated as:

TR1. Practitioners in sending and receiving programs exchange information before, during, and after transition about practices most likely to support the child’s successful adjustment and positive outcomes.

**TR2. Practitioners use a variety of planned and timely strategies with the child and family before, during, and after the transition to support successful adjustment and positive outcomes for both the child and family.
(DEC, 2014, p.15).**

It is essential to acknowledge the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children and families. It remains unclear how the pandemic influenced children’s journey into the school system when entering preschool. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to examine the transition-related practices and strategies that teachers and administrators continued to implement, even in a virtual environment. By exploring the differences in transition practices from in-person (pre-COVID) to virtual (during-COVID), we can gain a better understanding of the most effective practices and gain insight into how to best support children and families as they begin their transition to preschool.

Summary

In summary, successful adjustment to school is key for future academic success and life outcomes (Ahotola et al 2011; Fabian and Dunlop, 2007; Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003). Prior research has largely focused on the transition to kindergarten (e.g. Welchons and McIntyre, 2015; Stoner et al., 2007), however, now with the availability of public and low-cost preschool programs increasing precipitously across the United States (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021), there is a great need to build on the initial transition literature for children entering preschool programs (e.g., Douglas et al., 2021, Hanson et al., 2000; Podvey & Hinojosa, 2009; Goodrich et al., 2015; Urbina-Garcia, 2019; Xie & Li, 2018). Although this initial preschool literature describes a variety of factors at play during the transition, the specific impact of the transition into the preschool classroom and culture is not thoroughly explored. This gap in the literature is concerning, given that parental involvement is associated with positive child outcomes, such as academic achievement and social-emotional development (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; El Nokali et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2011). The interview and survey-based data reported here attempts to bridge this gap through an investigation of preschool teachers' reports on their practices, perceptions, and experiences surrounding effective and ineffective preschool student and family transitions.



Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand teachers' practices, perceptions, and experiences surrounding effective and ineffective preschool student and family transitions.

The research questions that guided the data collection and analysis of data for this study include:

- 1. What transition practices are being implemented by preschool teachers to support the transition of children and families entering preschool programs in New York City?*
 - 2. Is there a difference in the reported use of transition practices based on teacher demographic or educational backgrounds or classroom structure?*
 - 3. What are the perceived experiences of the children and families during the transition into preschool classrooms, as reported by teachers?*
 - 4. How are the perceived experiences, based on teacher reports, of children with an already Identified Individualized Education Plan (IEP) different from their typically developing peers during the transition into preschool classrooms?*
 - 5. What challenges (or perceived barriers) do staff, students and families face during their transition into preschool classrooms?*
-

Study Design

A mixed-methods case study research design, informed by Yin (2014), was used to examine the transition practices implemented by early childhood teachers for children and families entering preschool classrooms in NYC. Case studies like these can allow researchers to better understand a multi-faceted and contextually-specific process through the use of multiple methodologies (Hays, 2004; Yin & Davis, 2007). A quantitative survey was completed by 347 NYC preschool teachers and a subsample of 20 of these teachers completed a qualitative semi-structured interview. The surveys collected responses from educators across all five boroughs of NYC on their use of transition practices, perceived experiences of child and family barriers during transition, and experiences with virtual transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interviews were used as a follow-up to the survey to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experiences of teachers. Teacher participants in the interviews were asked to describe successful transitions, unsuccessful transition experiences, and indicate practices and barriers from their perspective.

Participants and Recruitment

Eligible participants for the interviews were required to be fluent in English, work within one of the five boroughs of NYC, and hold a role as a lead teacher for a preschool (ages 3-5) classroom since at least December 2019 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic). The minimum length of teaching ensured that teachers had the experience of supporting transitions into their classrooms using in-person instruction prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as teaching in the fall of 2020 when transitions were more likely to be remote. Participants were recruited using the ASPIRE Registry, an “online system that supports early childhood professionals” (New York Works for Children, 2021) in which early childhood teachers can register to keep a record of their certification status, employment, and professional development. ASPIRE Registry personnel facilitated participant recruitment and circulation of the survey link to early childhood educators registered within the ASPIRE system. Recruitment of interview participants were supported by an invitation at the end of the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. Interview participants were offered a \$25.00 Amazon electronic gift card as part of the recruitment information.

Data collection yielded a final survey sample of 327 early childhood teachers working in NYC. Of this larger sample, 57 teachers volunteered to further participate in follow up in semi-structured interviews. Due to limitations of funding and anticipation of saturation of data, 20 preschool teachers were recruited from the initial survey to participate in the follow-up interviews. In order to maintain confidentiality, interview responses were not linked to the original survey data. Survey data was collected for eight weeks in fall 2021 and the interviews were conducted for 8 weeks in the fall and winter of 2021.

Data Collection

Survey

The survey was developed by the lead authors of this report and the questions were finalized based on consultation and feedback from field experts and practitioners. Survey questions were derived from an extensive literature review of empirical transition research in early childhood education, including adapted questionnaires on family engagement and experiences (e.g. Kim et al., 2015; Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality Scale). Surveys began with screening questions regarding the inclusion criteria for participation. The final survey was piloted with 10 teachers to ensure question clarity (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Surveys were programmed in Qualtrics and responses were collected using online links derived from the platform. Survey data was collected for eight weeks in fall 2021.

Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview is designed to collect subjective responses from participants regarding a particular topic, situation, or phenomenon that is familiar to their experience. While it employs a relatively detailed interview guide, participants are free to respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and the researcher may probe these responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The current semi-structured interview was developed by the Principal Investigator along with expertise from a quantitative research scientist. In addition, expertise from teachers, administrators, and providers in the early childhood education system in NYC provided input and support in the development of the measures for the study. The interview questions were based on the guidance of literature and follow up from the survey areas of focus for the study.

The overarching goal of the semi-structured interview questions was to gain an in-depth understanding of the transition practices and the perceived child and family experiences during the transition into preschool. The interview questions were based on the guidance of literature and follow up from the survey areas of focus for the study. The overarching goal of the semi-structured interview questions was to gain an in-depth understanding of the transition practices and the perceived child and family experiences during the transition into preschool.

First, some demographic and background information regarding the participants current position, educational background, and years of experience were collected. Following this, questions regarding the teachers' perception of the transition into preschool with children and families were discussed. There were no limits on respondent answers. The semi-structured interview consisted of about 16 different prompts. The prompts were designed to give direction to the interview, while remaining interpretable and exploratory. For example, one of the primary prompts included "how do you know a transition is successful for a child and family?". The doctoral research assistant would pose primary overarching questions and actively listen to responses, allowing for possible follow up questions for further explanation, clarifications, and descriptions from the teacher participants. Interviews were conducted for 8 weeks in fall and winter of 2021.

Zoom Video Communications

Interviews were conducted by a doctoral-level research apprentice via Zoom. Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features including online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Permission to record the audio (not video) of Zoom interview sessions was verbally acquired at the beginning of each interview.

NVivo

Interview audio files were first transcribed and then coded using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. NVivo software is a program created by QSR International. The program allows researchers to manage and analyze interviews and other kinds of primary documents and data in multiple formats. NVivo is a tool for transcribing, sorting, organizing, and analyzing qualitative data (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020).

Data Analysis

Survey Data Analysis

A total of 604 individuals began the Qualtrics survey by the close of the survey in November 2021. First, 80 observations (13%) were dropped due to non-completion of critical survey modules. Another 197 cases (33% of original responses) did not meet one or more of the survey screening criteria (e.g., not the lead teacher, not English-proficient, not employed in NYC). The removal of these 277 cases (46% of the initial submissions) resulted in a final dataset of $N = 327$.

Survey data were cleaned using Stata 17.0 (StataCorp, 2021) and SPSS 28.0 (IBM Corp, 2021). Data cleaning procedures included combining multiple-choice categories with low response rates to maintain sufficient cell sizes. Teacher income was top-coded to protect the anonymity of the few respondents who reported annual incomes in excess of \$80,000. In order to capture the diversity of the educator workforce, the survey permitted short-answer responses for individuals who did not feel represented by the question categories. For example, for the survey question “which best characterizes the type of preschool program you work in?” 15% of respondents selected “other” and provided written details about their specific preschool program. Short answer responses like these were discussed among the research team and either re-coded into existing categories, or, new categories were created if a sufficient number of responses merited it. Additionally, some questions allowed participants to enter in a number (e.g., number of students in their classroom, number of students with IEPs) and responses included numbers written as words, ranges of numbers, and some illogical numbers. Recoding for these cases included translating words to numbers, selecting the median number of a given range, and dropping illogical numbers.

The survey data was analyzed in Stata and SPSS. Primary methods of analysis included calculating descriptive statistics of educator and classroom demographics, and measuring associations between demographics and transition-related practices using correlation tests and ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, where appropriate. In particular, we examined how teachers’ years of experience, exposure to professional development (PD) covering the transition to preschool, the preschool program type, and the student-teacher ratio were each related to teachers’ use of transition practices.

Interview Data Analysis

The survey data was analyzed in Stata and SPSS. Primary methods of analysis included calculating descriptive statistics of educator and classroom demographics, and measuring associations between demographics and transition-related practices using correlation tests and ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, where appropriate. In particular, we examined how teachers' years of experience, exposure to professional development (PD) covering the transition to preschool, the preschool program type, and the student-teacher ratio were each related to teachers' use of transition practices.

Once all interviews were complete, the recordings were transcribed via NVivo. Interview data was subject to three-pass-per-recording tests to ensure accuracy of data collection. All 20 transcript files were audited for accuracy by two doctoral research assistants. Mistakes made by the automated transcription were edited in the final transcript file. The transcripts were then analyzed within the NVivo software. Based on Guest et al. (2020) research on qualitative interview saturation, the collected interviews reach saturation based on the base size, run length, and new information threshold present in the data set.

Analyses followed conventional content analysis, as the aim of the study was to describe a phenomenon, the preschool transition process. More specifically, an inductive-emergent coding approach, based on the Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilized to assess the data. This approach was selected to allow for identification of common themes while preserving valuable individual contextual information from the teacher's semi-structured interviews. After the initial immersive data analysis, the captured codes were refined and collapsed into categories. The researcher reviewed the categories and outcome statements with an expert in early childhood transitions to ensure consensus of wording, category themes, and statements (Tesch, 2013).

Results and Key Findings

Survey Results

Educator Demographics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics for the educators in our sample. Some questions allowed participants to select more than one option, and in these cases the percentages may not total to 100% across all categories. As expected, the vast majority (97%) of teachers were female. Our sample includes a fairly even distribution of ages, with the majority (29%) between 31 and 40 years old. The majority of our respondents identified as white (47%), 34% identified as Black, 12% Asian, 3% Native American, and 9% as a race not listed here. Additionally, 22% were of Hispanic or Latinx ethnicity. While these racial and ethnic proportions are not representative of the early childhood workforce in NYC, it does reflect the overall trend of a majority white educator workforce, followed by Black and then Hispanic or Latinx. Our sample actually underrepresents the percentage of white early childhood educators in NYC and over-represents educators of color (Amin, 2019; NYSED, 2019).

The educators in this sample were highly educated, with 70% holding a Master's degree or higher, and the vast majority holding one or more teaching certifications (92%). Importantly, just under half of the sample (45%) reported receiving professional development on supporting children's transitions to school.

Table 1 - Educator Demographic

Table 1. Educator Descriptive Statistics		
	Percent	SD
Female	97%	(0.16)
<i>Age</i>		
21-30	11%	(0.32)
31-40	29%	(0.45)
41-50	25%	(0.43)
51-60	22%	(0.41)
61 or older	13%	(0.34)
<i>Race (select all that apply)</i>		
Asian	12%	(0.32)
Black	34%	(0.47)
Native American	3%	(0.16)
White	47%	(0.50)
Other	9%	(0.28)
Hispanic or Latino/a	22%	(0.42)
<i>Years of Experience</i>		
2-5	19%	(0.39)
6-10	30%	(0.46)
11-15	23%	(0.42)
16-20	12%	(0.32)
21 or more	16%	(0.37)
<i>Highest Degree</i>		
No college degree	6%	(0.25)
Bachelor's degree	24%	(0.43)
Master's degree or higher	70%	(0.46)
Received PD on transitions	45%	(0.50)
<i>Number of Certifications</i>		
0	8%	(0.27)
1	68%	(0.47)
2 or more	24%	(0.43)
<i>Certification(s) Held (select all that apply)</i>		
Assistant	3%	(0.16)
Childhood Ed	19%	(0.39)
Dual Childhood Ed/Special Ed	6%	(0.24)
Early Childhood	64%	(0.48)
Dual Early Child/Special Ed	30%	(0.46)
Specific subject	6%	(0.23)
In progress	2%	(0.13)
None	2%	(0.14)
<i>Salary Range</i>		
Less than \$40000 a year	17%	(0.38)
\$40001-50000	22%	(0.41)
\$50001-60000	19%	(0.40)
\$60001-70000	31%	(0.46)
Over \$70000 a year	11%	(0.31)
Observations	327	

Results and Key Findings

Program/Classroom Demographics

Table 2 presents teachers' reports of their preschool classroom and program demographics. The majority (43%) of teachers in this sample taught in NYC's Universal Pre-K programs, the free public preschool available for 3- and 4-year old children. The remainder taught in private schools (28%), 18% in Head Start programs, and 3% in special education programs. The majority of teachers' classrooms are in Brooklyn (35%) or Queens (23%), and the fewest teach in Staten Island (6%). Corresponding with the large number of teachers in public and Head Start preschools, the majority of the sample teach full-day (91%), full-week (5 days; 97%) classrooms.

In terms of student characteristics, an overlapping proportion of teachers reported having classrooms of 3- and 4-year-olds, suggesting that many were teaching in blended-age classrooms. Classrooms had an average of 13.1 students and an average of 2.4 adults. We used the reported number of students with IEPs to calculate the proportion of students with IEPs in each classroom. Teachers reported an average of 17% of children with IEPs, and at the extremes, 10% of teachers reported that all of their students had IEPs while 48% of teachers reported no students with IEPs.

Table 2 - Program/Classroom Demographics

Table 2. Classroom Descriptive Statistics			
	Percent	Mean	SD
<i>Program Type</i>			
NYC DOE UPK/3K	43%		(0.50)
Head Start	18%		(0.39)
Parochial/Religious	5%		(0.22)
Private	28%		(0.45)
Special Education	3%		(0.17)
Other	3%		(0.17)
<i>Age(s) in Classroom (select all that apply)</i>			
Under 3	16%		(0.37)
3	58%		(0.49)
4	62%		(0.4)
5	21%		(0.40)
Over 5	3%		(0.16)
Number of adults in classroom		2.37	(0.58)
Number of students in classroom		13.10	(3.61)
Percent of students with IEPs in classroom [^]		0.17	(0.30)
All students in class have IEPs	10%		(0.30)
No students in class have an IEP	48%		(0.50)
Number of languages spoken in classroom		1.96	(1.14)
<i>Number of Class Days per Week</i>			
1-3	2%		(0.12)
4	2%		(0.13)
5	97%		(0.18)
<i>Length of the School Day</i>			
Full day	91%		(0.28)
Half day	7%		(0.25)
Both	2%		(0.14)
<i>Borough</i>			
Manhattan	18%		(0.38)
Bronx	17%		(0.38)
Staten Island	6%		(0.25)
Queens	23%		(0.42)
Brooklyn	35%		(0.48)
Observations		327	
<i>Note.</i> [^] Percent of IEPs in the classroom was calculated using the reported number of children in the classroom and number of students with IEPs.			

Transition Practices

Teachers were originally asked to report their use of nine common transition practices (as determined through literature review), and the distribution of their responses can be seen in Figure 1. To simplify our analyses, we dichotomized each of these responses so that 1 indicates use of the practice and 0 indicates that the teacher does not use that practice. These were then summed ($\alpha = 0.68$) among teachers who responded to at least 70% of the transition practices questions to create a transition practice score on a scale of 0 (did not use any transition practices) to 9 (did all nine transition practices). Teachers in the sample used $M = 5.95$ ($SD = 2.00$) practices on average. Figure 2 presents the distribution of teachers' transition practice sum scores in the survey sample.

Figure 1: Transition Practices Used by NYC Preschool Teachers in Fall of 2021

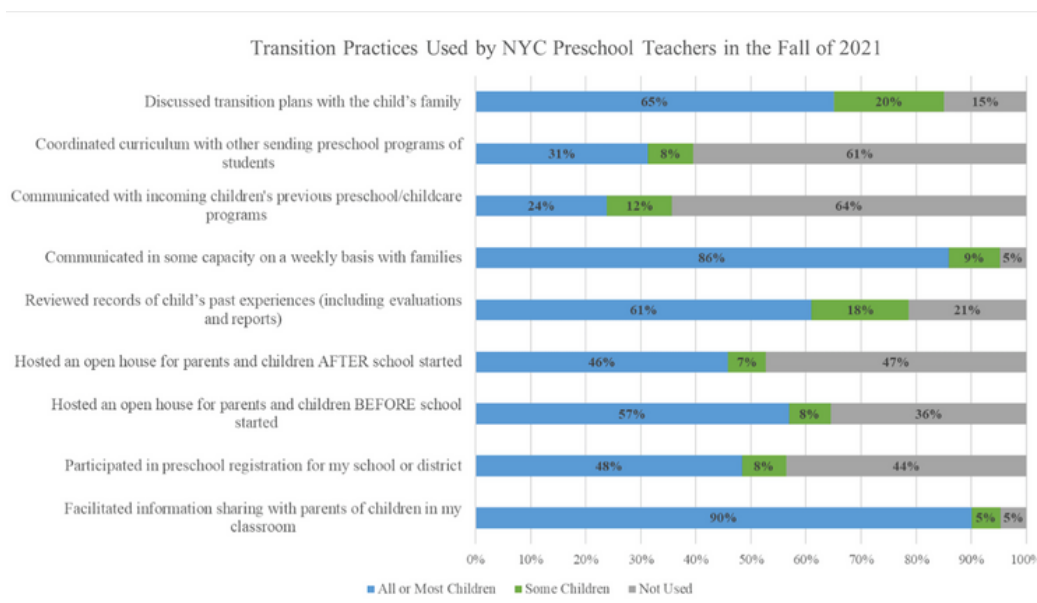
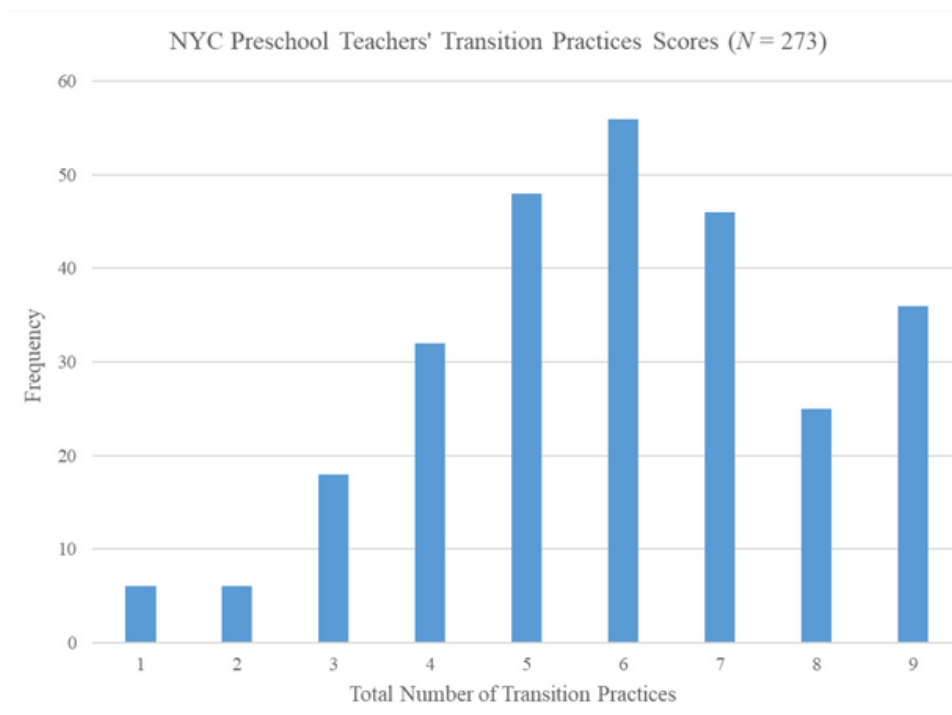


Figure 2 - NYC Preschool Teacher's Transition Practice Scores



Transition Practices

Teachers were originally asked to report their use of nine common transition practices (as determined through literature review), and the distribution of their responses can be seen in Figure 1. To simplify our analyses, we dichotomized each of these responses so that 1 indicates use of the practice and 0 indicates that the teacher does not use that practice. These were then summed ($\alpha = 0.68$) among teachers who responded to at least 70% of the transition practices questions to create a transition practice score on a scale of 0 (did not use any transition practices) to 9 (did all nine transition practices). Teachers in the sample used $M = 5.95$ ($SD = 2.00$) practices on average. Figure 2 presents the distribution of teachers' transition practice sum scores in the survey sample.

As a first step, we descriptively examined the average number of transition practices teachers used based on:

- Years of experience: 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21 or more.
- PD on transitions: Received PD and did not receive PD/unsure if they did.
- Program type: NYC UPK/3K, Head Start, Private/Religious, and Special Education/Other. Note that the second two categories are different from those reported in Table 2. This regrouping was necessary to achieve adequate sample size for significance testing.
- Student-teacher ratio: Two to 4 students per teacher, more than 4 to 6 students per teacher, more than 6 to 8 students per teacher, and more than 8 to 10 students per teacher.

In Figures 3-6, we describe the average number of transition practices teachers from each one of these categories (separately) used in the fall of 2021.

Figure 3 - Transition Practices and Adults Number

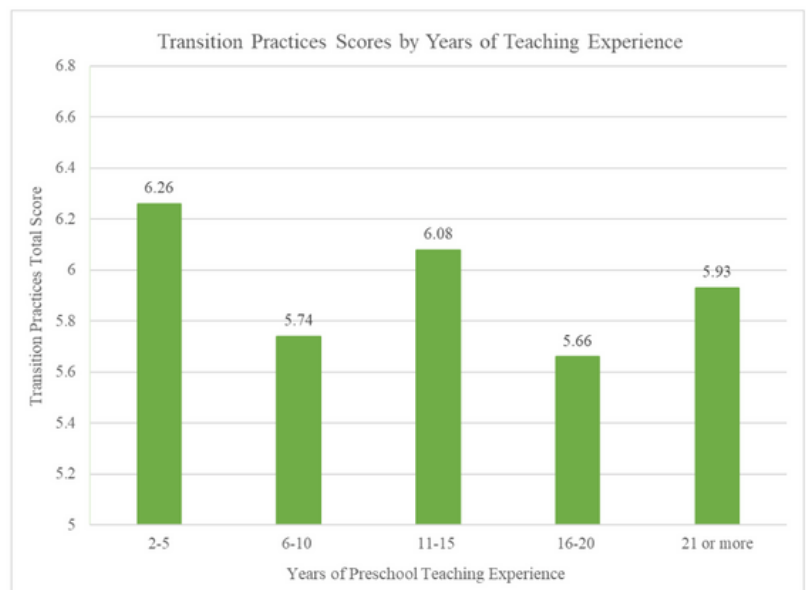


Figure 4 - Transition Practices Scores by Professional Development Experience

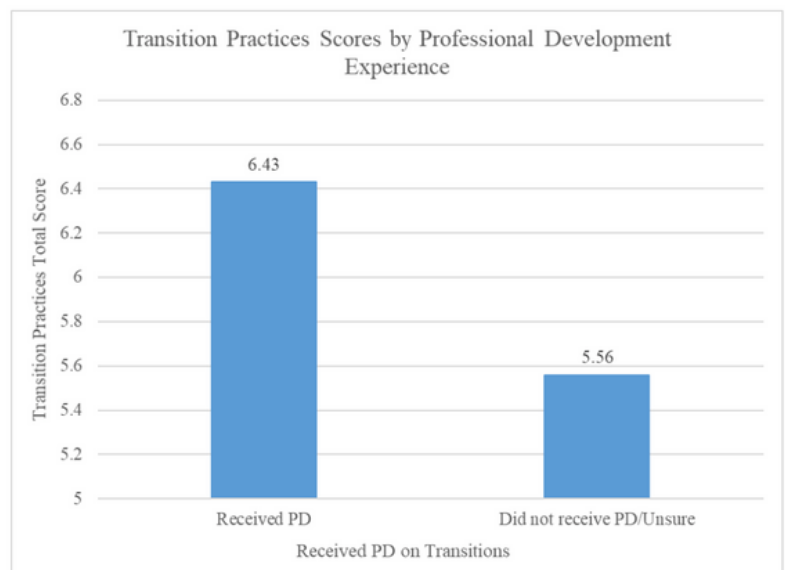


Table 3: OLS Regression Models Predicting Transitions Practice Scores from Teacher and Class Characteristics

To examine if any average differences in the use of transition practices were significant for any particular group, we conducted OLS regressions with and without demographic controls. For the models with controls, we included teacher age, race, ethnicity, borough, and the percentage of students with IEPs in the class. The results from these regression models are presented in Table 3.

	Years of Experience		PD on Transitions		Program Type		Student-Teacher Ratio	
	No Controls	Controlled	No Controls	Controlled	No Controls	Controlled	No Controls	Controlled
<i>Years of Experience</i>								
2-5	Ref.	Ref.						
6-10	-0.52 (0.35)	-0.33 (0.42)						
11-15	-0.18 (0.37)	0.04 (0.46)						
16-20	-0.60 (0.45)	-0.47 (0.54)						
21 or more	-0.33 (0.41)	0.03 (0.53)						
<i>PD on Transitions</i>								
Received PD			0.88** (0.23)	0.70** (0.25)				
Did not receive/Unsure			Ref.	Ref.				
<i>Program Type</i>								
NYC UPK/3K					Ref.	Ref.		
Head Start					0.36 (0.33)	0.14 (0.35)		
Private/Religious					-0.71* (0.27)	-0.61+ (0.33)		
Special Education/Other					0.36 (0.49)	0.53 (0.57)		
<i>Student-Teacher Ratio</i>								
2-4 students per teacher							Ref.	Ref.
4-6 students per teacher							0.47 (0.32)	0.83* (0.34)
6-8 students per teacher							0.20 (0.34)	0.34 (0.38)
8-10 students per teacher							0.22 (0.40)	0.72+ (0.43)
<i>Demographic Controls</i>								
		Included		Included		Included		Included
N	272	235	273	236	271	234	251	231

Note. Ref. = Reference group, or the group that all the other estimates in the model are calculated as a comparison to. Standard errors in parentheses below the estimates. Estimates were produced from eight separate OLS regression models. Demographic controls include teacher age, race, ethnicity, program borough, and the percentage of students with IEPs in the class.
+ p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

Years of Experience

Figure 3 - Transition Practices and Adults Number



From the averages in Figure 3, it appears that teachers with 2-5 years of preschool classroom teaching experience used the most transition practices in 2021, on average, with 6.26 transition practices. As the years of experience increase in the sample, it appears that teachers use relatively fewer practices, although this association is not linear. This could be explained by the higher likelihood of teachers with less experience having recently completed their teaching education, so certain techniques may be more fresh for these educators. This trend could also mean that teachers with more years of experience have found certain practices to be more effective for their classroom than others, so they selectively incorporate a few practices, rather than trying multiple.

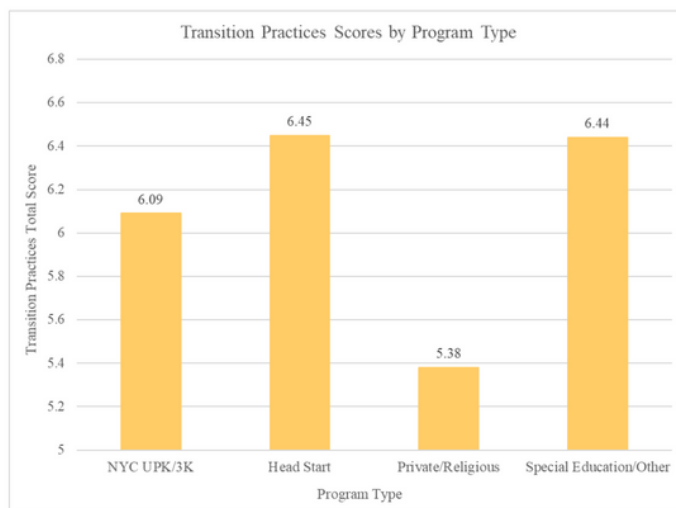
However, once we examined these associations in regressions with and without controls we found that these differences were not statistically significant. It's possible that our sample size was too limited to detect any differences, or that the years of experience categories we selected were not meaningful enough to describe differences in practices.

Professional Development on Transitions

Program Type

Figure 5 presents a dramatic difference in the average number of transition practices used by teachers in private and religiously-affiliated preschool programs (5.38) versus the three other program types (6.09 - 6.45). Indeed, in the regression models, when teachers in private preschool programs are compared against teachers in NYC UPK/3K programs (the reference group in the models), teachers in private programs use significantly fewer transition practices (no controls: $[b = -0.71; p = 0.01]$; marginally significant in models with controls: $[b = -0.61; p = 0.07]$). These effects are replicated with stronger magnitudes when the reference group is rotated. There are many potential explanations for these associations; it could be the case that teachers in private or religious programs are already familiar with the students and families entering their programs because they are embedded in their communities.

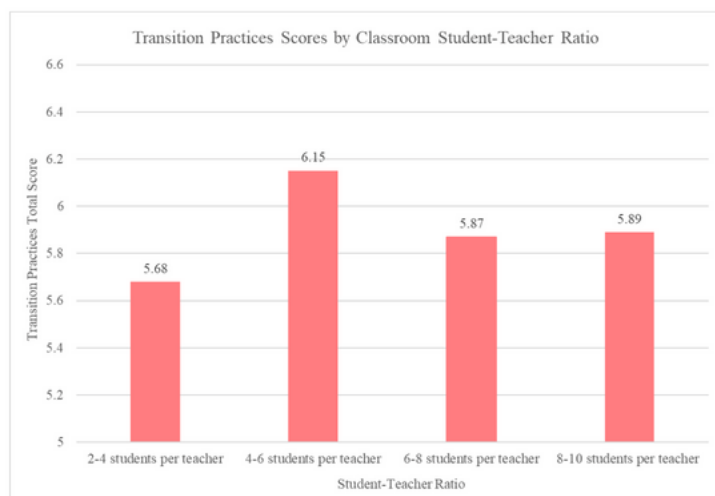
Figure 5 - Transition Practices Scores by Program Type



Student-Teacher Ratio

The average number of transition practices used by teachers in classrooms with different student-teacher ratios displays an interesting trend (Figure 6). Teachers in classrooms with more than 4 and up to 6 students for every teacher appeared to use the most transition practices in 2021 on average (6.15). Upon running the regression models (Table 3), teachers in classrooms with 4-6 students per teacher used significantly more transition practices than those in classrooms with 2-4 students per teacher ($b = 0.83, p = 0.02$). This association was marginally significant for classrooms with 8-10 students per teacher ($b = 0.72, p = 0.09$). It's possible that this association is related to program type, in which private programs tend to have smaller student-teacher ratios. Moreover, smaller classrooms or classrooms with more adult support may require fewer transition practices – a question worth pursuing in future research.

Figure 6 - Transition Practice Scores by Classroom Student Teacher Ratio



Interview Results

Of this survey sample, 20 educators participated in the qualitative semi-structured interviews. Full demographic data of the interview participants was not collected in an effort to reduce linkage to the original survey data and maintain anonymity. However, information related to professional experience was collected from the interview participants to provide context for their interview responses. Demographic information was not used as a way in which to screen participants or strategically identify participants for completion of the interview.

Demographic Information

On average, interviewed participants had about 16 years of experience in early education. Additionally, most of the participants interviewed held a master's degree (55%) while others held a professional degree (35%) and some were still in process of completing their degrees through teacher education programs (10%). Most of the teachers interviewed were general education classroom teachers (85%) while some taught in special education classrooms (15%). Additionally, the majority of the participants identified as female (55%) while the remainder identified as male (45%). On average, interviews were conducted in about 37 minutes. However, the shortest interview lasted 13 minutes while the longest interview lasted approximately 70 minutes.

Baseline Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%	-	-
<i>Total Participants:</i>	20	100	-	-
<i>Sex, Gender:</i>				
<i>Female, Women</i>	19	95	-	-
<i>Male, Man</i>	1	5	-	-
<i>Qualifications:</i>				
<i>Masters in Education</i>	11	55	-	-
<i>Professional Certificate</i>	7	35	-	-
<i>Teacher Ed. Program</i>	2	10	-	-
<i>Classroom Type:</i>				
<i>General Ed.</i>	17	85	-	-
<i>Special Ed.</i>	3	15	-	-
Baseline Characteristic	<i>M</i>	<i>Ran</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<i>Interview Length</i>	36.7	57	13	70
<i>Experience in Years</i>	16.3	37	3	40



Data Analysis

An inductive-emergent coding process based on Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilized for this project rather than an a priori coding process. This allowed for the identification of all key elements present in the raw data and prevented the loss of essential nuances that may have been otherwise ignored through an a priori process. In other words, the data alone guided the key themes, rather than the researcher's initial impressions and beliefs. A total of 172 codes were developed through the initial inductive-emergent coding on the Nvivo software. While the interviews were semi-structured and covered a variety of topics and follow up, overall, 8 principal questions were asked to all interview participants.

These 8 principal questions were as follows:

1. Thinking about the transition into your classroom, how do you know a transition is successful for a child and family?
2. For children who are coming into your classroom that already have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), what do you do as a teacher to prepare for them entering into your classroom?
3. We have talked about both successful transitions and less-successful transitions. When you compare those experiences, what is different about those transitions that are less-successful?
4. What are the biggest challenges to successful transitions into your classroom/program? Describe what would be needed to ensure all transitions for all children and families are smooth.
5. Thinking about the experience from last year to what you did this year around the transition, what is the biggest difference in your experience?
6. What do you think was similar about the experiences between the two academic years?
7. What cultural considerations do you include when planning for the transition into your classroom?
8. What would be helpful for you to know more about to ensure transitions for children and families are successful in your classroom?

As a result, initial codes were reviewed and organized by each principal question. Next, the codes associated with each principal question were categorized and sorted. This process allowed all information provided by the interview participants to be summarized accurately and integrated holistically. The codes and categorizations for each principal question is discussed in detail below.

Question 1 Summarized

"Thinking about the transition into your classroom, how do you know a transition is successful for a child and family?"

All interview participants were first asked "Thinking about the transition into your classroom, how do you know a transition is successful for a child and family?". After coding this question for all 20 interview participants, a total of 17 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into four major categories of responses. Overall, teachers reported that a transition into preschool is successful when (1) "routine is established," when there is (2) "family-teacher alignment," when there is (3) "limited child-parent separation anxiety," and when (4) "positive student dispositions and interactions" are observed.

"80% of the teachers interviewed specifically discussed the role of routine in a successful transition"

Notably, 80% of the teachers interviewed specifically discussed the role of routine in a successful transition. Routines are typically interpreted as student practiced responses to the teacher's directions and scheduled cues that add structure to the day. According to teachers interviewed, once classroom routines are strongly established and the child is able to build independence in following those classroom routines, then this is a cue that transition was successful for the child. The importance of consistent attendance in the classroom was also discussed as an aspect of establishing routine in order to foster a positive transition. Additionally, establishing and child adjustment to classroom routine should be completed within a reasonable time frame as reported by one teacher. This "reasonable" time frame was defined as a few weeks to several months depending on the teacher response.. Finally, when curating and promoting the routine, teachers discussed the importance of utilizing child-centered practices in order to adjust transition plans to accommodate specific child attributes and characteristics.

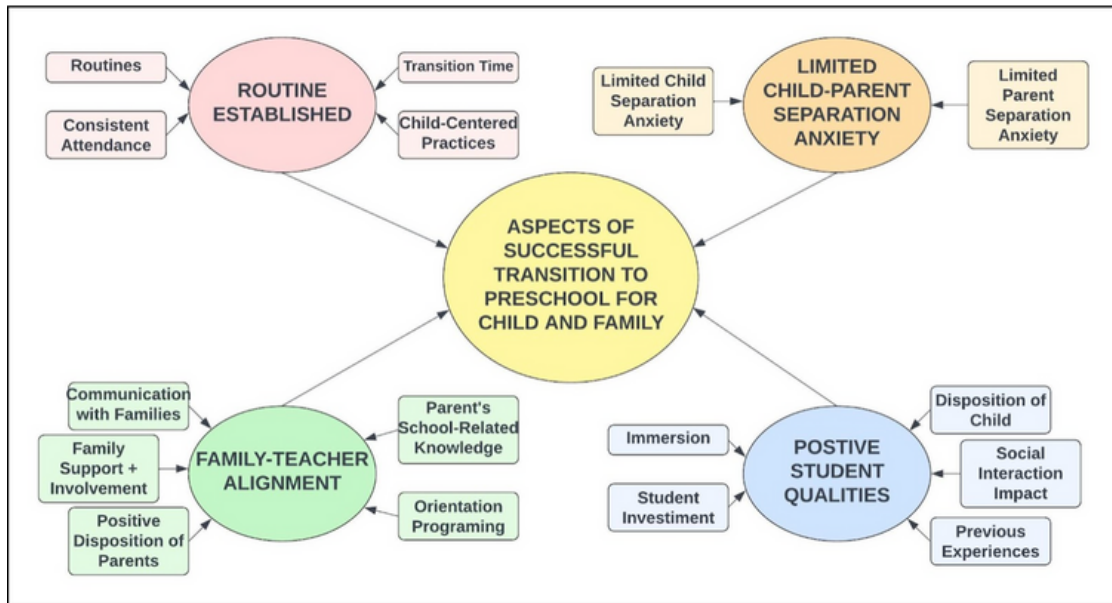
A general theme of “family-teacher alignment” was established as a primary response provided when teachers were asked, “how do you know a transition is successful for a child and family?” Namely, teachers often discussed the importance of communications with families as well as the importance of family involvement and support. This included families reading weekly updates/newsletters, responding to emails, staying abreast of classroom activities/events, picking up the phone when called, sending children to school with appropriate materials, and volunteering for some school-related activities. Additionally, teachers discussed some general parent characteristics that allow for positive family-teacher alignment. These characteristics included a positive attitude and disposition towards schooling as well as some base school-related knowledge, such as school clerical responsibilities, attendance at orientation programming, as well as reinforcement of classroom curriculum and behavioral expectations.

The effectiveness of “limited child-parent separation anxiety” was notably discussed by about 50% of the teachers interviewed when discussing the characteristics of a successful transition into preschool. Separation anxiety is when a parent or child becomes excessively anxious when separated from one another. Many children experience mild non-clinical separation anxiety symptoms (Stone et al., 2019). It is important to note that every human, even adults, has some degree of anxiety. It is the degree of pervasiveness and severity that define whether a child’s anxiety meets clinical criteria. (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) However, sometimes behaviors are non-age-appropriate and excessive in nature for preschoolers. For instance, a fear of being away from caregivers may be age-appropriate for a small child, but this can become problematic when the child refuses to go to preschool (Cronk et al., 2004). To note, the current qualitative research is based on teacher reports, as a result, it is impossible to know if the parents and children being discussed anecdotally have clinical or non-clinical levels of anxiety. Overall, teachers reported that parents and children who experience little to no separation anxiety signals a successful preschool transition.

“I know the transition was successful for everyone when the child successfully says goodbye and so does the family. The family confidently says goodbye without sending a text message 10 minutes later.”

(Participant # 01-007 KS)

Figure 7 - Aspects of Successful Transition to Preschool for Children and Families



Finally, teachers also discussed student specific characteristics that indicate a successful transition into preschool. For example, 80% of the teachers interviewed indicated that they observe the disposition of the child in order to assess the success of the transition. Most teachers indicated that a transition is successful when a child generally has a positive presence in the classroom. Specifically when the child is smiling, happy, explorative, and playful in the classroom environment, as well as when the child interacts socially with peers, immerses themselves in play, and appears invested in the classroom experience. Additionally, teachers indicated that a positive transition into preschool was often promoted by students with prior separation experiences. Overall, teachers indicated that a successful transition has occurred when positive student dispositions and interactions are observed.

Question 2 Summarized

"For children who are coming into your classroom that already have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), what do you do as a teacher to prepare for them entering into your classroom?"

Eighteen of the 20 teachers interviewed responded to this question, as two teachers interviewed indicated that they never had a student with an IEP in their classroom. After coding this question for 18 interview participants, a total of 15 different themes were identified.

These themes were coded and then sorted into four major categories of responses to this principal question related to prep for students with IEPs. Overall, teachers reported that in order to prepare for students with IEP to enter into their classrooms, these teachers (1) “review relevant documents,” (2) “collaborate with special education teams, (3) “attempt family collaboration,” and (4) “prepare for child-specific needs.”

Notably, over 50% of the teachers interviewed explained that they review relevant documents related to the child, such as IEPs and doctors notes. However, three of the teachers interviewed expressed that IEPs are often reviewed late or not at all received by administrators prior to a child starting in their classroom. Teachers also detailed the importance of learning students’ pre and post natal history prior to beginning preschool, specifically if there were any traumatic birth factors that may impact the child’s learning or behavior. Overall, teachers expressed the importance of reviewing relevant documents in order to prepare for students with IEPs transitioning into the preschool classroom.

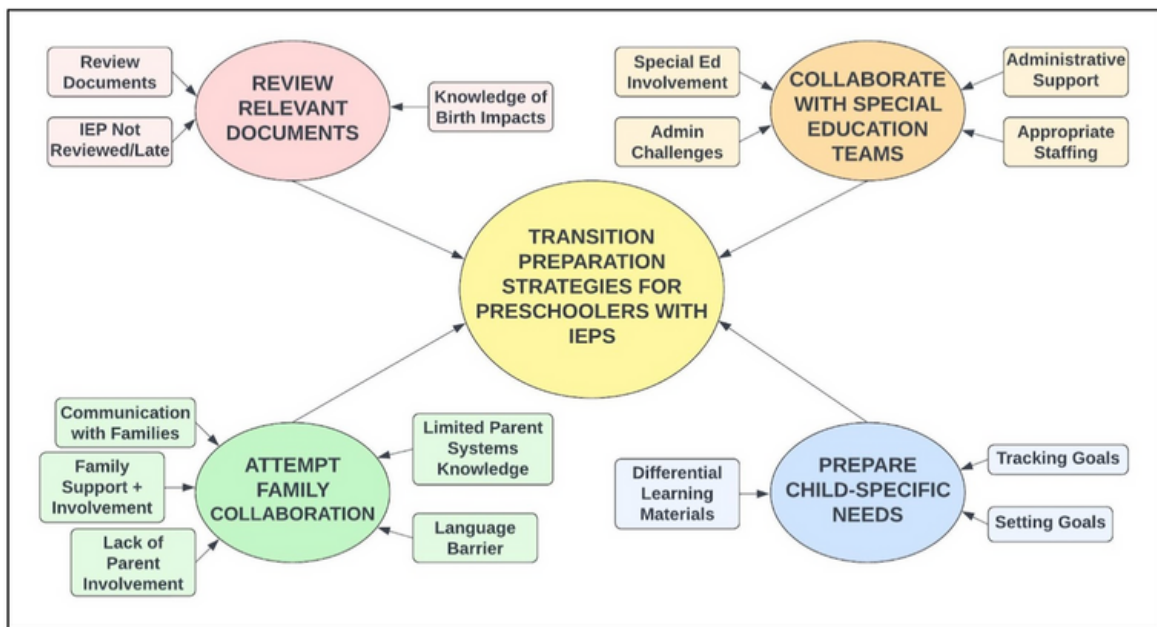
"50% of the teachers interviewed explained that they review relevant documents related to the child, such as IEPs and doctors notes"

“So an intake is done by the family coordinator or the family worker and the student into the classroom. The child document is also given to the teacher, and these materials are kept in a closet, and the teacher reads the Page Six to make sure that the IEP goals educationally are being met.” (Participant # 01-003 GC)

Collaboration with special education professionals within the school was also discussed frequently by the teachers interviewed. Specifically, teachers note that collaborating with the special education team on pull out instruction time as well as behavioral goals is an essential step in preparing for the student’s transition into preschool. Additionally, teacher’s also mentioned some challenges with these collaborations, specifically related to staffing shortages and administration support styles. Overall, teachers expressed that collaborating with the special education team is essential to preparing for students with IEPs to transition successfully into the preschool classroom.

In addition to collaborating with the special education team, teachers also expressed the importance of collaborating with the family in order to prepare for children with IEPs to enter into their classrooms. Teachers specifically detailed how they communicate with families and promote family involvement and support during the transition period. Some teachers also discussed barriers in this process, such as language barriers, lack of parent systems knowledge, and lack of parent involvement overall. Ultimately, teachers expressed that collaboration with the family is an essential part of preparation for students with IEP to enter the classroom.

Figure 8 - Transition Preparation Strategies for Preschoolers with IEPs



Finally, teachers discussed methods in which they prepare for a child’s specific needs. In other words, these teachers explained that they need to create unique and specific tools, environments, and curriculums for their students with IEPs. Interestingly, only seven of the 18 teachers interviewed noted this as part of their response. Some teachers described creating “differential learning materials,” such as developmentally appropriate worksheets or informative signs around the classroom. Additionally, setting and tracking specific goals for students with IEPs was also discussed. Overall, some teachers indicated that unique and diverse classroom curation is necessary for assisting children with IEPs during the preschool transition.

“I will modify and individualize as much as I can. At first to transition in. Observation-seeing how the child does when they first come in and kind of let them get a feel of the classroom. And once I see what they are drawn to, I'll build from there. I'll expand from there so that the child can get comfortable and kind of explore more areas. If they were just keen to be in the library, I would show them books in other areas so they would explore more. Building off of what they feel comfortable with.”

(Participant #01-008 MP)

“We have talked about both successful transitions and less-successful transitions. When you compare those experiences, what is different about those transitions that are less-successful?”

After coding this question for all 20 interview participants, a total of 15 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into four major categories of responses to this principal question. Overall, teachers reported that there are differences in (1) “teacher practices,” (2) “parental involvement” and (3) “individual child characteristics” when comparing successful and less-successful preschool transitions.

Overall, about 35 percent of the teachers discussed personal teacher practices that are key for ensuring a positive transition for students and their families. According to six of the teachers interviewed, successful transitions have strong routines established efficiently. Other teachers discussed logistical aspects of teacher practices, such as creating a pleasant classroom appearance and creating child-centered activities and curriculums.

"90% of teachers expressed that differences in parental involvement has an effect on successful versus less successful transitions."

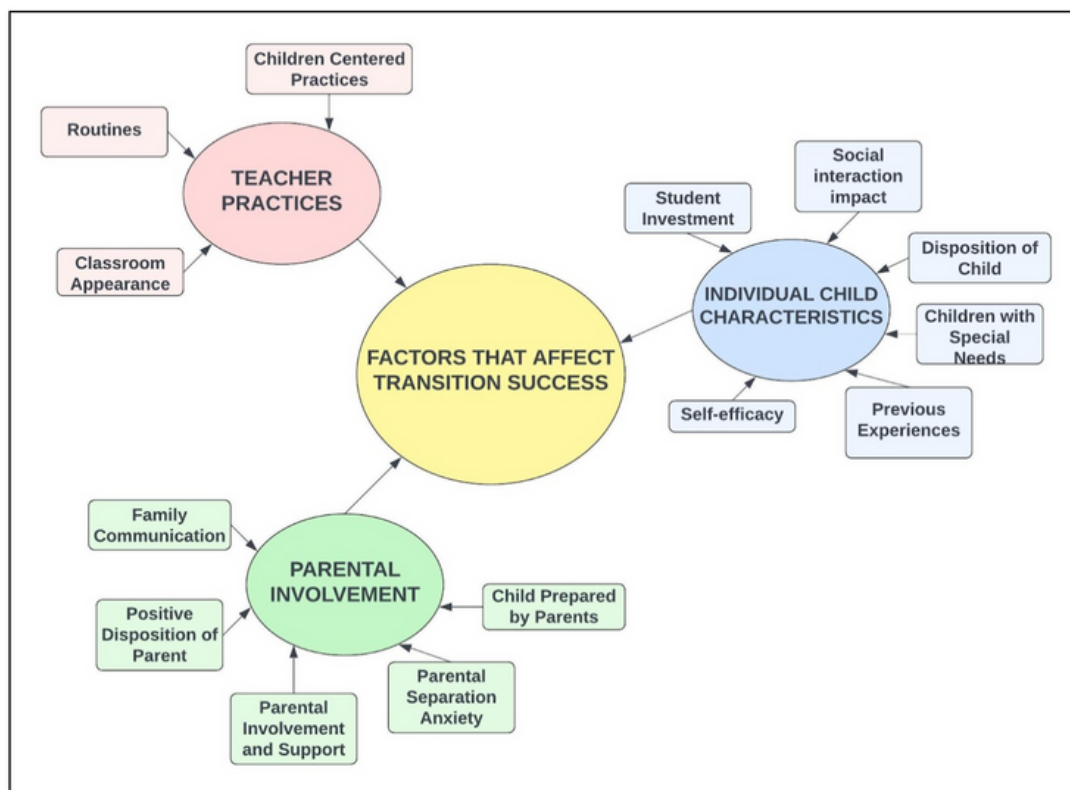
“But at home they don't necessarily have routine- especially in this area. Well, the community that we serve, which is low income. Most of the parents, either they don't work or they're from the shelter or in foster care. So there's no stability really, where when they come in, then there's such high expectation: “OK, when we come in, this is what we do first. After that, we do X. This is the next step. This is the next step.” And sometimes they don't know how to cope with that high expectation routine.” (Participant #01-008 MP)

Most of the teachers interviewed (90%) expressed that differences in parental involvement has an effect on successful versus less successful transitions. Specifically, teachers reported that parental involvement and support is beneficial to the child and family's success during the preschool transition. Furthermore, teachers discussed parents who participate in streamlined and regular communication with the teacher typically correlate with a successful transition. Additionally, parents who take an active role in preparing their child for the preschool transition are more likely to support a successful transition. This includes participating in orientation programming, educating their child about the first day of school, and practicing shorter separations in alternative settings (such as a short play group or story time). Finally, teachers shared that parents who have little to no separation anxiety during drop off typically help foster a more positive transition experience for their children.

"Eighty-five percent of the teachers interviewed discussed specific child characteristics that affect successful versus less successful transitions."

Eighty-five percent of the teachers interviewed discussed specific child characteristics that affect successful versus less successful transitions. Just shy of half of the teachers interviewed (45%) discussed a child's general disposition as a factor that affects successful versus less successful transitions. Specifically, teachers detailed that some children are more easy going, content and flexible than others. Typically, children with these personality characteristics are more likely to transition successfully. Additionally, teachers mentioned that the transition for children with special needs can be more challenging than a typically developing child. Children's experiences also play a role in the transition. Children who have previous experiences separating, children who have experiences socializing with other children and adults, and children who have self efficacy typically fare better during the preschool transition, according to the teachers interviewed.

Figure 9 - Factors that Affect Transition Success



Question 4 Summarized

“What are the biggest challenges to successful transitions into your classroom/program?”

After coding this question for all 20 interview participants, a total of 17 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into three major categories of responses to this principal question. Overall, teachers reported that there are (1) “parent related barriers,” (2) “school related barriers” and (3) “individual child related barriers” to a successful preschool transition.

All 20 of the teachers interviewed discussed parent related barriers. Specifically, limited parental involvement and communication was most addressed by the teachers. A parent's lack of knowledge about school related information as well as a parent promoting inconsistent attendance also adds to barriers to successful transition experiences. Additionally, some teachers reported that the parent’s lack of knowledge about the preschool experience led to a child’s lack of preparation for the transition by the parents.

“Yeah, I think it would be on parent involvement because I think in the past couple years I could see the children that were more successful- not even just in transitions, but successful in terms of meeting goals and identifying letters, numbers, things like that. The children that are more successful typically have parents that are more engaged, parents that attend meetings, parents that respond to emails, parents that initiate contact to ask questions. Versus children that are less successful. These are the parents that don't respond to emails. Don't really prioritize communication with the teacher. Don't complete homework.” (Participant #01-002 EL)

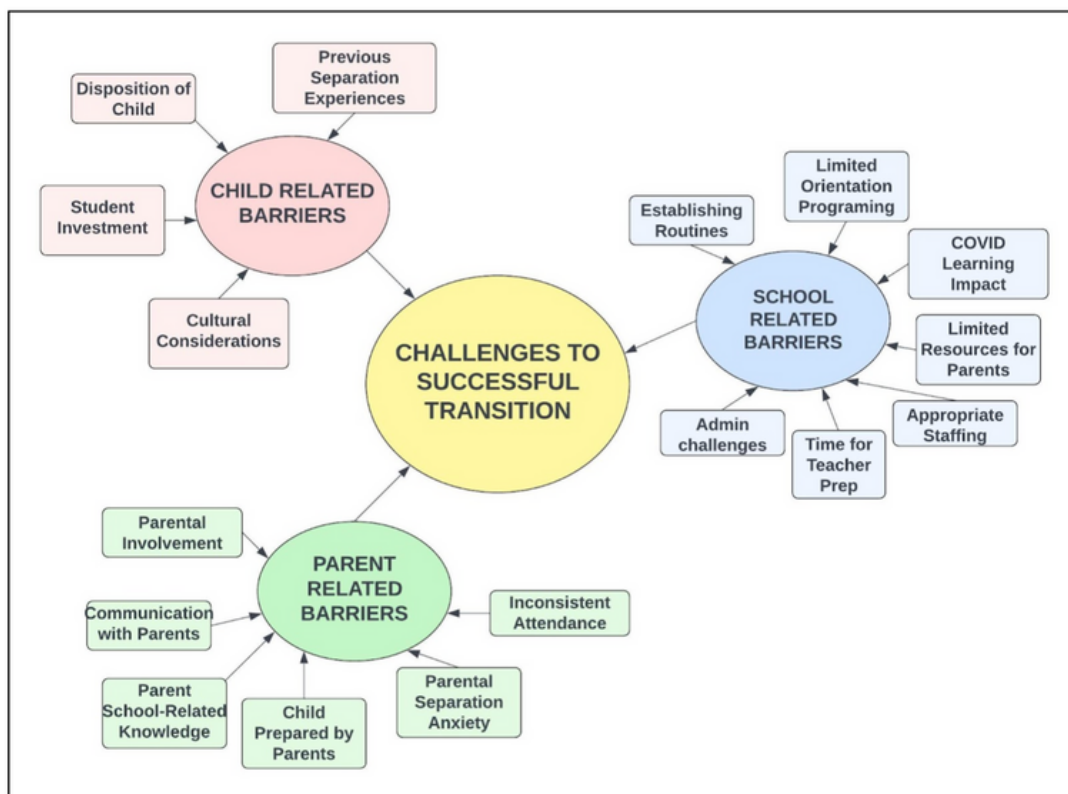
The majority of the teachers interviewed (90%) reported school related barriers for successful transition experiences. As has been discussed previously, many teachers reiterated the importance of establishing routines. When routines cannot be established (such as having inconsistency in attendance), this presents a major barrier to a successful transition. Teachers also discussed limited orientation programming and limited resources for families as a barrier. Orientation programming and parent resources provided by school districts often promotes collaborative education for children and also provides opportunities for comradery among parents, according to many teachers interviewed. Additionally school policy and staffing issues, specifically around COVID-19 policies and administrative challenges, was mentioned by several interviewed teachers as a barrier to success. Finally, one teacher mentioned that limited teacher preparatory time prevents her from creating the best transition related materials and content, therefore, this limited time is also a major barrier to promoting successful transitions.

"Forty percent of the teachers interviewed discussed individual child related barriers"

Finally, some teachers (40%) discussed individual child related barriers. These barriers included some child characteristics, such as the disposition of the child and the child's personal investment in school. Other barriers were related to the child's prior experiences, specifically related to previous separation experiences. Additionally, one teacher mentioned that cultural considerations can be a barrier when schools are unable to accommodate or have limited experiences accommodating certain cultural needs.

“Also, I feel like it's emotional regulation, because a lot of kids again, the parents are the ones mostly doing everything for them. When it's time for them to clean up after themselves or go wash your hands and work teaching them how to wash their hands. That frustration of being told what to do or directing them to do something, they don't know how to self-regulate and it kind of creates the crying or the tantrums or whatever the problem behavior that's happening.” (Participant #01-008 MP)

Figure 10- Challenges to Successful Transition



Question 5 Summarized

“Thinking about the experience from last year to what you did this year around the transition, what is the biggest difference in your experience?”

Fifteen of the 20 teachers interviewed responded to this question directly and clearly. After coding this question for all 15 interview participants, a total of nine different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into three major categories of responses to this principal question. Overall, teachers reported that there are (1) “differences within schools” (2) “differences in the student population” and (3) “differences in parent behaviors” when comparing the transition experience from last year to the current year (2021-2022).

Notably, 73% of the teachers who responded discussed changing COVID requirements as a major difference that impacted learning in the schools over the two years discussed. These changing COVID requirements include mask mandates, visiting parent policies in the building/classrooms, classroom sanitation protocols, and social distancing procedures. Additionally, related to the impact of COVID-19, teachers additionally discussed smaller class sizes and more slowly developed routines as major differences between the 2020 and 2021 school years. Finally, an increase in orientation programming was discussed as COVID restrictions began to be loosened in the 2021-2022 school year.

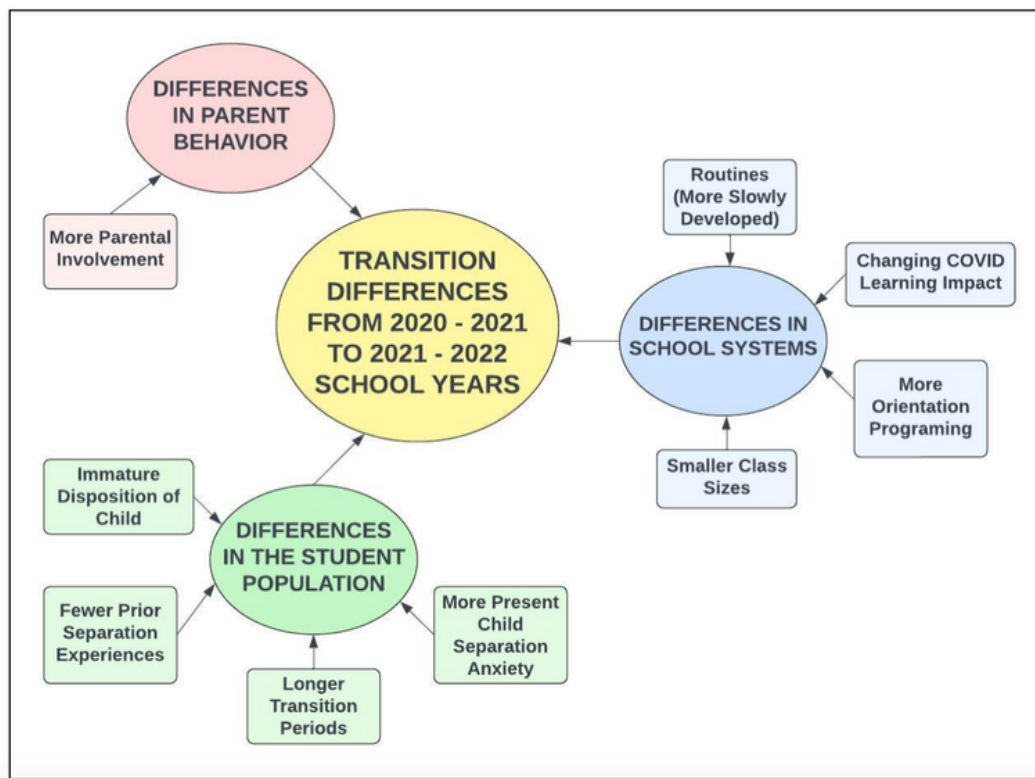
73% of the teachers who responded discussed changing COVID requirements as a major difference that impacted learning in the schools over the two years discussed

“This year, the safety and well-being of everyone is the biggest concern. You know, children are having difficulties with wearing the masks, staff not being able to be nurtured as much as they like. You know, a lot of hugs make them feel better. Now it's six feet social distance, although only three feet is mandated. But COVID has been so overwhelming to so many, that taking those extra COVID precautions is a necessity. So, I mean, I don't think the school or the classroom function as it did pre COVID.” (Participant #01-003 GC)

"Sixty percent of the teachers discussed differences within the student population"

Sixty percent of the teachers discussed differences within the student population. Five teachers discussed that toddlers who began school in 2021 were noticeably more immature than past student cohorts (based on anecdotal observation). Three teachers also discussed how the experience of COVID-19 may have led to children having less opportunities to separate from their parents so in turn more separation anxiety was discussed by three teachers. Finally, one teacher reported a longer transition period with the 2021 cohort than with past cohorts. Overall, it appears that teachers reported a variety of differences largely due directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 11 - Transition Differences from 2020 - 2021 to 2021 - 2022 School Years



Question 6 Summarized

“What do you think was similar about the experiences between the two academic years?”

Sixteen of the 20 teachers interviewed responded to this question. After coding this question for all 16 interview participants, a total of 14 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into three major categories of responses to this principal question. Overall, teachers reported that there were similarities in terms of (1) “classroom management” (2) “child qualities” and (3) “family considerations” when comparing the transition experience from last year to the current year (2021-2022).

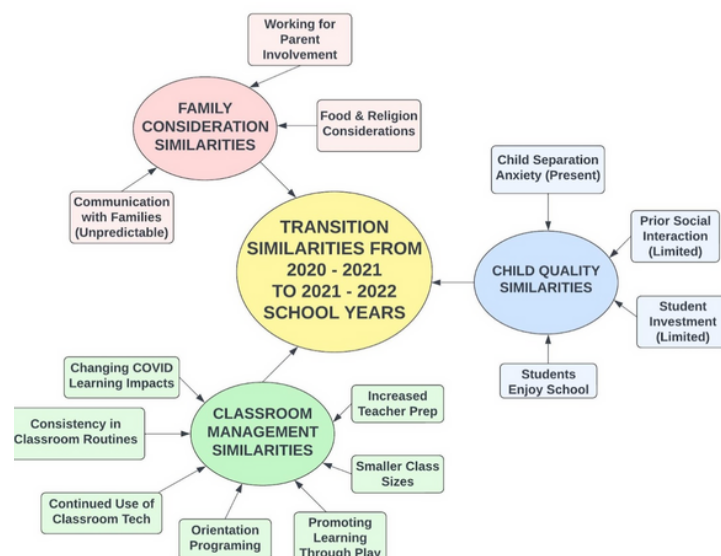
In terms of classroom management, several teachers reported continued use of classroom technology. This technology was introduced during the prior year’s uncertain pandemic and remote work. Several teachers cited the same orientation programming and the same classroom routines. The smaller class sizes that existed the year prior persisted for one teacher in particular. Finally, teachers discussed that the amount of prep required to teach students is still extensive, and promoting learning through play is still the goal of the school year for these teachers.

A variety of child qualities were reported to be consistent throughout the two year period. Specifically, teachers reported that many of the students continue to lack prior social interactions before beginning preschool. Additionally, one teacher cited the persistence of separation anxiety in their students from the 2021 to 2022 school year. Finally, a teacher reported limited student investment in school, while another teacher reported students enjoying school both in the 2021 to 2022 school year.

“Children that have not been exposed to a preschool setting or having the experience of separating from familiar loved ones make it difficult for them to come to school- successfully transition into school successfully.” (Participant #01-003 GC)

Teachers discussed similarities between the 2021 and 2022 academic years in terms of factors related to the families. Specifically, about five teachers reported that communication between the families were similar for 2021 and 2022. In other words, parents were neither more nor less responsive to teacher outreach between the two school years. One teacher reported a continuation of cultural considerations in the classroom between the 2021 and 2022 school year, specifically related to family’s food, religion, and language preferences and practices. Finally, three teachers discussed the continual need to work at promoting parental involvement in their child’s preschool education throughout both the 2021 and 2022 school year.

Figure 12 - Transition Similarities from 2020 - 2021 to 2021 - 2022 School Years



Question 7 Summarized

“What cultural considerations do you include when planning for the transition into your classroom?”

Seventeen of the 20 teachers interviewed responded to this question . After coding this question for all 17 interview participants, a total of 16 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into three major categories of responses to this principal question. It’s important to note that five of the 17 classroom teachers specifically noted that limited cultural factors are taken into consideration during the transition practice. However, overall teachers reported cultural considerations in terms of (1) “classroom and curriculum adjustments” (2) “family cultural information gathering and involvement” and (3) “language and communication support.”

Overall, seventy-six percent of teachers reported adjusting their classroom practices to better reflect the individual cultures specifically represented in their classrooms. Six teachers discussed decorating their classroom according to present nationalities, such as hanging the flags of the countries represented in the room, as well as having culturally diverse learning tools, such as multicultural crayons. Preparing special events and cultural activities also appears to be a common way teachers take culture into consideration when teaching, however, this does not necessarily occur during the initial transition period. One teacher discussed that they try to adjust their actual teaching curriculum to reflect the cultures represented in the classroom. One other teacher discussed making a concerted effort to create opportunities for social interactions between diverse students by inviting children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to play with one another in different games or activities, such as blocks.

A majority (70%) of the teachers discussed the importance of gathering cultural information about their families or involving these families in the classroom activities. Specifically, teachers discussed gathering details about each family’s background, including relevant dietary practices, religious obligations, as well as even toileting routines. Additionally, teachers expressed involvement with families in classroom learning and celebrations through providing materials to celebrate certain holidays with students.

"Seventy-six percent of teachers reported adjusting their classroom practices to better reflect the individual cultures specifically represented in their classrooms"

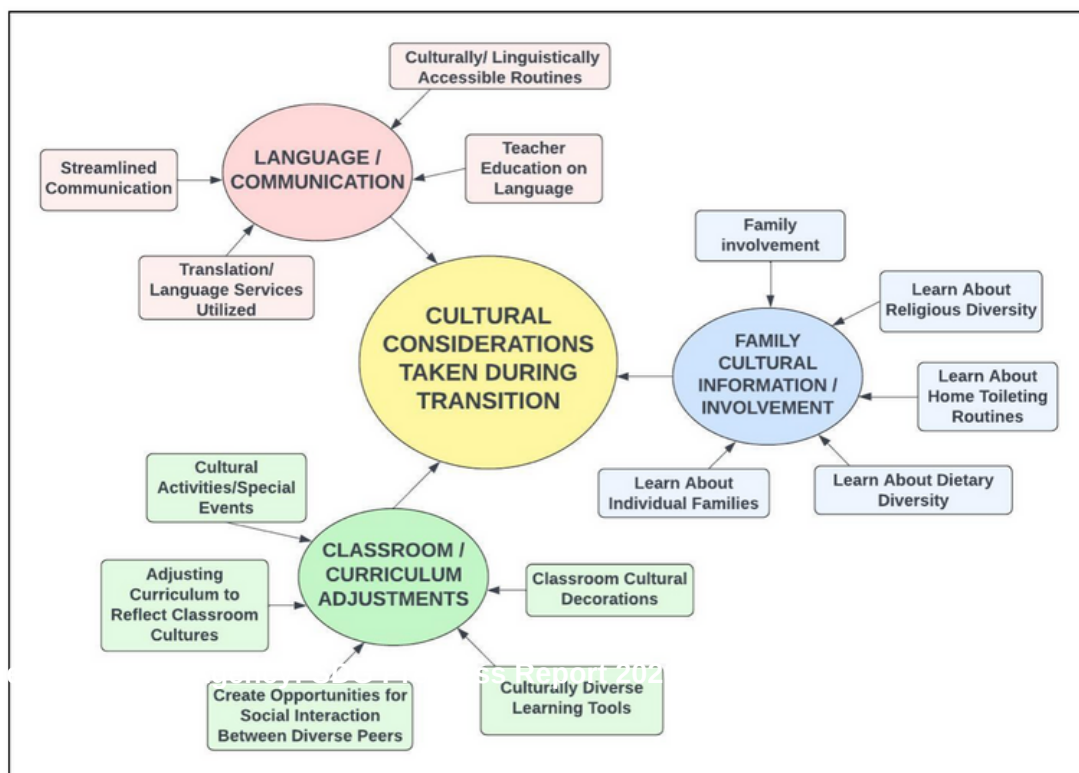
"70% of the teachers discussed the importance of gathering cultural information about their families or involving these families in the classroom activities."

"Cultural considerations in terms of language and communication support was reported by 94% of the teachers respondents"

Finally, language and communication with families seemed to be the main focus expressed by the teachers interviewed. Cultural considerations in terms of language and communication support was reported by 94% of the teachers respondents. Specifically, the utilization of translations and language services in school was discussed by ten of the teachers interviewed. Additionally, teachers mentioned the importance of frequency and streamlined communication with parents with different English language abilities, as well as personal education on the teacher's part on the family languages present in the classroom. Finally, as routine is a major focus for many teachers, a handful of teachers mentioned the importance of making classroom routines culturally and linguistically accessible to their students.

"I would definitely say to have more opportunities to translate documents and to have conversations in the family's home languages. So as I said, many of the families do not speak English or have trouble with reading and speaking English. So having more resources available about classroom life for families in their home language would definitely help." (Participant #01-013 LG)

Figure 13 - Cultural Considerations During Transition



Question 8 Summarized

“What would be helpful for you to know more about to ensure transitions for children and families are successful in your classroom?”

Nineteen of the 20 teachers interviewed responded to this question. After coding this question for the 19 interview participants, a total of 17 different themes were identified. These themes were coded and then sorted into three major categories of responses to this principal question. Overall teachers reported a desire to have access to information regarding (1) “current background of families” (2) “available parent tools” and (3) “teacher transition and curriculum tools.”

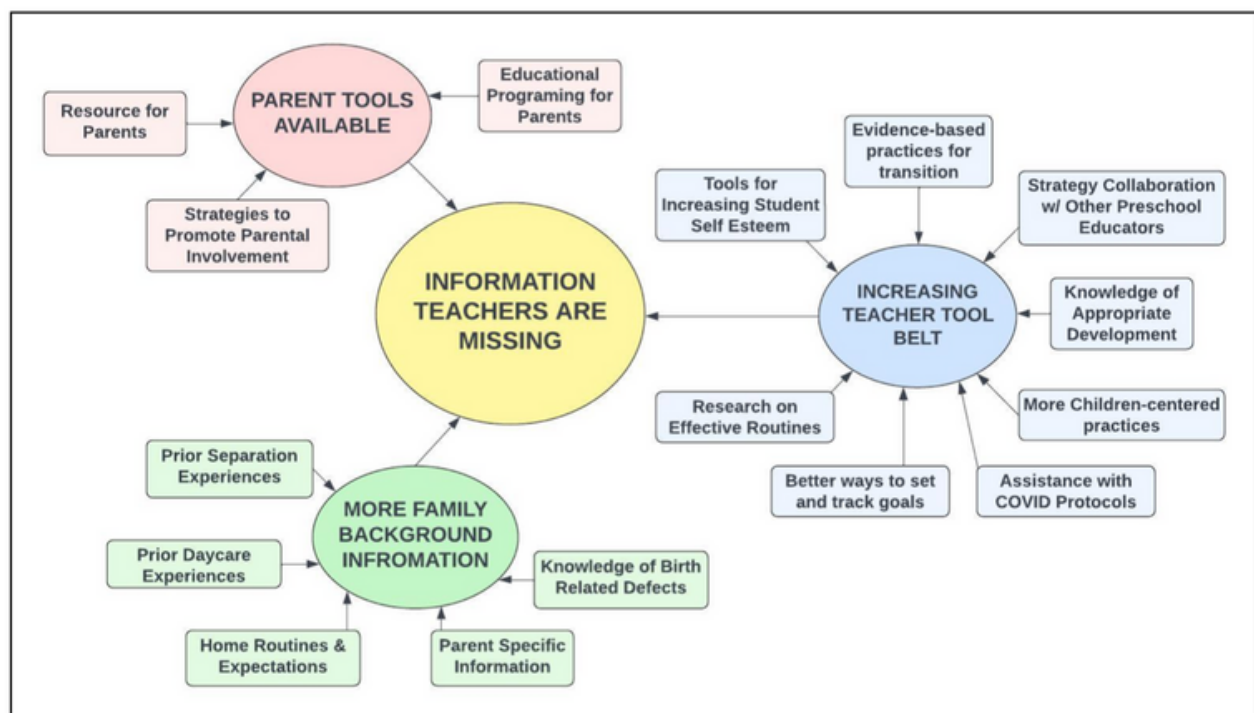
"57% of teachers expressed wanting to know more about the background of the families represented in their classroom in order to ensure transitions for children and families are successful"

Over half of the teachers interviewed (57%) expressed wanting to know more about the background of the families represented in their classroom in order to ensure transitions for children and families are successful. Specifically, teachers want to know more information about their student’s prior separation experiences and daycare experiences, if any. Additionally, information about the family’s home routines and expectations as well as cultural considerations in the home were discussed as important pieces of information to acquire prior to the first day of school. One teacher discussed the importance of learning students’ pre and post natal history prior to beginning preschool, specifically if there were any traumatic birth factors that may impact the child’s learning or behavior. Specific information about the parents, such as their marital status and living situation, was mentioned as important family background to collect in order to ensure transitions for children and families are successful.

There was a portion of the teachers interviewed (36%) who discussed the need for more parent tools to be made available by school districts. In Particular, six teachers discussed educational programming for parents as a key parent tool that needs to be made more available in school districts. Additionally, one teacher also mentioned wanting to learn more strategies to help promote parental involvement in the child’s education.

Teachers also appear to have a vested interest in furthering their own education and increasing their “teacher tool belt.” Of the teachers interviewed, 52% discussed this topic. Particularly teachers want information on more evidence-based practices for successful preschool transition. Additionally, a need for a forum to collaborate with and learn from other preschool teachers was expressed. Teachers also want to gain information about child-centered practices in the classroom, strategies to increase student self esteem, effective classroom routines, and information on appropriate child development pace. As was discussed regularly throughout the interviews, one teacher also described the importance of learning more COVID-19 related resources and protocols. Finally, teachers described wanting better methods for setting and tracking individual goals for their preschoolers as well.

Figure 12 - Information Teachers are Missing



Conclusion

As more parents of young children begin to participate in preschool programs, and public and low-cost preschool programs are now widely available in the United States (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021), there has become a greater need for research regarding the transition into preschool. From this research, educators, parents and other service providers can create better informed strategies, policies and procedures for facilitating successful transitions into preschool.

Overall, the findings from the current study indicate that teachers emphasize the role of the parent as a necessary component of a successful transition. This aligns with prior research indicating that parental involvement is associated with positive child outcomes, such as academic achievement, social-emotional development, enhanced school adjustment, and greater school engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; El Nokali, et al., 2010; Lau, et al., 2011). These findings also break down the aspects of parental involvement and suggest which aspects are the most essential according to educators. Therefore, this research has many implications for future directions in terms of educator practice and policy surrounding promotion of parental involvement.

Theoretically speaking, this research has many implications for future transition research in the education and psychological fields. While prior research on the preschool transition has a strong emphasis on individual child-preschool-readiness (Goodrich et al., 2015; Hanson et al., 2000), the current research study indicates that there is a greater need for looking at the preschool transition across the system of education, rather than specific experiences. Particularly, there is a need for greater focus on parent readiness as well as strategies to support the families as a unit during the preschool transition, rather than focusing solely on the child's individual readiness. In addition, the conditions of the preschool programs – the student-teacher ratios, the type of program, and the professional development opportunities – may play a meaningful role in teachers' use of transition practices. This suggests that, beyond the individual roles of the teacher, parent, and student, the conditions of the preschool program can facilitate optimal (or suboptimal) transition environments.



Future Directions for Research, Practice, & Policy

This study has important implications for how the field of early childhood education considers the transition into preschool in NYC. First, teachers overwhelmingly described their need for a better understanding of how to work with parents and caregivers to support the transition into preschool. Teachers expressed their confidence in being able to establish classroom routines and identify ways in which children were developmentally progressing (or struggling), however there was an expressed concern that parents/caregivers may not be ready to send their child to preschool. Future research should focus on how teachers can evaluate parent readiness to preschool transitions, and be able to use data to inform adult-to-adult practices. There needs to be a particular emphasis on establishing relationships, communication and collaboration across teachers, parents/caregivers, and other providers. In particular, the cultural considerations need to be highlighted so that teachers are implementing culturally responsive practices.

Teachers who reported having had professional development (45%) in the transition were significantly more likely to report higher use of transition practices in the classroom. Although the current study has a limited understanding about the professional development experiences (i.e. dosage or content focus), it's clear that teachers who merely report exposure to transition-related PD more readily use transition practices. There needs to be more research on the professional development experiences and opportunities provided to teachers that focus on the transition into preschool. In turn, it would be beneficial to consider the pre-service curriculum in early childhood education and how teachers are initially being taught to support the transition into preschool as part of their training programs. As we saw in the survey results, teachers with the least amount of experience tended to use more transition practices (although not statistically significant), suggesting a willingness to experiment with these techniques.



Additional considerations for preschool transitions should be explored in future data collection and research. For example, teachers reported the barrier of consistency in child attendance, which in turn impacted their ability to establish routines within the classroom setting. Identifying the barriers to consistent child attendance in school is an area of research that should be investigated as part of the transition into preschool research.

Research in early childhood settings is often looking at the transition from preschool into kindergarten (Welchons and McIntyre, 2015; Stoner et al., 2007). The researchers and authors of this report believe that there needs to be a stronger connection in the research to support preschool as a transitional year. Teachers are responsible for supporting the transition into the classroom and also implementing practices to support a child leaving the classroom as they move to kindergarten. The preschool year (particularly for a 4-year-old program) needs to be examined with a lens of transition experiences in an overlapping way, rather than these two completely separate experiences of transitioning into and out of preschool. There is no prescribed timeline for the transition into preschool, however, it would be beneficial for teachers to have tools to assess milestones across the transitional period so they can adjust their practices for both children and parents/caregivers. Further research is needed to develop and explore assessment measures for transitioning and build on the work to support young children and their families during their time in preschool programs.

Finally, the needs of children with already identified Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), it needs to be interwoven throughout the work in early childhood transitions. While the unique needs of a child with a disability or developmental delay adds a level of complexity in the transition experiences, teachers need to be equipped with the differential practices necessary to support the transition for all young children and their families. Opportunities for collaboration between early intervention (birth-3) providers and preschool teachers should be systemic and considerations for systems-level changes should be explored. More than anything, the purpose of early childhood preschool programs is to ensure children are safe and developing through high quality learning experiences in the classroom setting, and these positive experiences translate to life in the home and community. The more the field of early childhood can collaborate across agencies, providers, educators, parents/caregivers, and community partners the more sustainable our system of education can become to support the varying needs of young children as they learn and grow.



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