

Kishwaukee College Early Childhood Center

Transitions Plan

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Overview

The quality standards set forth in ExceleRate Illinois call for high-quality early care and learning programs to have and implement written **transition plans** which identify activities and strategies that “facilitate the transition of children and families into and out of classrooms, early learning environments, community services, and school setting including transition to kindergarten” (ExceleRate Gold Circle of Quality, Standard 2B).

The Kishwaukee College Early Childhood Center has long implemented a variety of strategies to successfully ease the many transitions that children and families experience and this document serves as a summary of these activities and strategies. To share this policy with our stakeholders, this document will be added to the Early Childhood Center’s Professional Staff Handbook and the Center’s Family Handbook and will also be shared with ECC staff during regular team meetings.

In its training, *Introduction to Transitions*, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), defines a transition as “A passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.” It is our Center’s goal to help children and families move through these life-passages successfully and confidently.

Furthermore, this training identifies five types of transition experiences that this transition plan focuses on. The five key transitions are:

1. Transitions into a program;
2. Transitions while enrolled;
3. Transitions within the program day;
4. Family transitions outside a program; and
5. Transitions when leaving a program.

This document will now summarize activities that our Early Childhood Center does to help children and families navigate necessary transitions.

Our Transitions Plan

1. Transitions **INTO** our Center.
 - a. **Prospective family visits**—families considering enrolling their children are invited to visit the Center for a tour. During this tour, families learn of our approach to teaching and learning (philosophy), see our learning environments, meet our teaching staff, and have opportunities to have their questions answered. The goal of this visit is to make sure that our Center is a “good fit” to prospective families.
 - b. **Family Information sheet**—when a family chooses to enroll, we provide the parents with several forms to complete. One form is a “Family Information Sheet.” This three-page document provides parents the opportunity to tell us all about their child and their family. From this sheet we learn about child interests, typical guidance approaches,

family dynamics, health history, why the family is enrolling in the ECC, and much more. After this form is returned our entire lead staff (director and lead teachers from each of our center's two classrooms), read the form as a means of getting to know the child and family better. Each reader initials the form before it is returned to our director for filing.

- c. **Family Handbook**—upon enrollment parents are provided with a comprehensive Family Handbook. This handbook clearly explains the Center's purposes, policies, and procedures. The purpose of the handbook is to help the parent transition into the culture of the Center with a clear understanding of how the Center operates. Choosing a child care center is an important task and we use our Handbook as one way of telling families all about who we are and what we do.
 - d. **New family orientation**—prior to the start of each semester, we host a mandatory orientation for new families. We use an orientation checklist to make sure the enhanced orientation is complete. The orientation includes: a tour of the building, showing children where their cubby is, meeting teaching staff, playing in their classroom with peers and teachers, conversations between parents and teachers and between children and teachers, learning more about the ECC's policies and practices, learning drop-off and pick-up procedures, and much more. Teachers also speak with parents about a child's first day and talk about how we will help the parent and child with common separation issues. The goal of orientation is to help children and families feel comfortable and part of the ECC family and ease the child into their first day of attendance.
 - e. **New family welcome**—teachers warmly welcome new (and continuing) children into the classroom with a well prepared learning environment and warm interactions. Teachers help children who may be having a difficult time separating by speaking calmly to them, helping them get involved in activity, singing to them, listening to them, giving them a "lovey" from home, waving to parents from our "waving window," etc.
 - f. **New family info sharing**—teachers encourage parents to call later in the day to see how their child is doing. Teachers also try to send a quick e-mail during rest time so parents can know how their child's first days are going.
 - g. **Observation booth**—our Center features an observation booth with a one-way window where parents can observe unobtrusively. As parents leave they are invited to step into the observation booth if they wish to see how their child is transitioning to the Center.
2. Transitions **WHILE** enrolled:
- a. **One Center, two classrooms**—our Center includes a Younger Classroom (twos and threes) and an Older Classroom (threes, fours, and fives). The classrooms are contained in one very large room with 4' dividers separating our classrooms. This building design, and our smallness, helps all of our children get to know all of our teachers and vice versa. Children typically remain in a classroom for at least one academic year. When it is time for them to move to the other classroom, this transition tends to be very easy because the child already knows the teachers, the teachers know the child, the routine is the same, and peers move with the child.
 - b. **Blended classroom**—each summer our two classrooms combine into one mixed-age classroom due to lower enrollments. This mixed-age classroom helps our Younger Children develop relationships with their older peers thereby making moving from our Younger to Older Classroom easier at the start of the fall semester.
 - c. **Teacher looping**—Each of our classrooms are staffed by two Lead Teachers and several student workers and student teachers. Each year one of a classroom's two lead teachers switch classrooms. The result of this is that when a child moves from our

Younger Classroom to our Older Classroom, a teacher who already knows them well moves with them. Children remaining in the Younger Classroom or Older Classroom maintain one of the teachers who know them well. We have used this looping practice for many years and find it gives children continuity of care and provides teachers with variety in their work as they work with all ages of children in our Center.

- d. **Primary caregivers**—each of our classroom Lead Teachers are assigned half of the classroom’s children as their “primaries.” The Lead Teacher is then responsible for completing observations, developmental screening, and parent-teacher conferences for her primaries. This arrangement helps the each Lead Teacher to develop closer relationships with children and parents.
 - e. **Staff turnover**—fortunately our Center has very low turnover among Lead Teachers and administration. Our Lead Teachers have served an average of 9 years and our director is in his 24th year. Strong longevity means that our classrooms are able to remain consistent and we are able to provide consistent, quality care for young children. We do experience turnover with our student worker staff because we are housed in a ‘two-year’ college, however this turnover doesn’t impact children significantly because it is countered by the longevity and continuity of our Lead Staff.
 - f. **Community Services and Specialists**—when children enrolled in our Center have special learning needs necessitating the use of specialists (ex., speech or physical therapists), the specialists spend time at the Center either working with children directly in the classroom or in our multipurpose room. Prior to beginning to work with children at the Center, parents are asked to have the specialist work at home with the children to gain familiarity. In addition, we receive monthly visits from our R & R Social Worker and Nurse. These professionals spend time in our classroom observing and interacting with children. Because they get to know the children and the children become familiar with them, the children are comfortable with their visits.
3. Transitions **WITHIN** the program day.
- a. **Written daily routine**—each of our classrooms follow the same daily routine. This routine includes: child choice time, snack times, lunch time, bathroom breaks, group time, and outdoor play time. While exact timing of transitions from one activity to the next may vary slightly from day to day, each day includes the same sequence of activities. This allows children to easily transition from one activity to the next because they know the schedule and can predict what is coming next.
 - b. **Plentiful time for play**—since children learn primarily through their play activities in a well-designed learning environment, the biggest part of our day is dedicated to child-choice time in our classroom interest centers. We minimize the number of transitions we have by providing generous amounts of playtime.
 - c. **Notice of change of activity**—prior to switching activities (ex. from child-choice play time to group time), teachers walk around the room and give children time reminders such as “in ten minutes, we will be cleaning up for group time.” Teachers also involve children in announcing upcoming transitions by asking children to walk around and share that the transition is approaching with their peers.
 - d. **Songs, finger plays, and movement activities during “waiting” times**—on occasion where children are waiting for an activity to begin (such as the start of lunch), our teachers engage in singing songs, doing finger plays, participating in movement activities, etc. so children are not required to sit idly but rather can have fun and learn while waiting.

- e. **Sending and receiving teachers**—our teachers work together during transitions. For example, at the conclusion of group time, the teacher facilitating group time sends children in small groups to the bathroom for hand washing, where the receiving teacher is waiting. This process minimizes waiting time.
4. Family transitions **OUTSIDE** a program.
- a. **Offer understanding and support**—because families can experience a variety of “passages” in their life such as divorce, separation, illness, job loss, moving, financial challenges, etc., our staff strives to provide children with an “island of calm” in the midst of their sometimes challenging life. By providing children with a consistent environment that they can depend on, we believe we are providing a place where children can relax and receive the love and support they need from our staff.
 - b. **Connect parents to helpful services**—our Center works closely with our Resource and Referral agency’s social worker and nurse. When a family is experiencing challenging times, we work to connect the parent with these important resources so they can receive the support and assistance they need. Furthermore, when a Kishwaukee College student may need additional support, we are able to refer them to a variety of college professionals including counsellors, tutors, career advisors, financial aid specialists, etc. When a self-pay family experiences a financially challenging life change, we refer them to our R & R for information about the Child Care Financial Assistance Program.
5. Transitions **WHEN LEAVING** our program.
- a. **Various reasons for leaving:** as a community college program, children leave our center for a wide variety of reasons including: parents graduating from the college, parents choosing not to continue college, parents transferring to another college, and children moving onto kindergarten. Due to the nature of college students, we often do not know in advance that a child is leaving the Center. We often don’t learn until the end of a semester that a child will not be returning, so it is difficult to help them transition to their next care environment. Parents sometimes learn between semesters that they did not do well enough academically to continue so children we expected to return are not able to do so.
 - b. **Kindergarten transitions:** With regards to children leaving for kindergarten, we have a challenging time connecting children with “receiving schools” because of the vast variety of school districts that we serve. As a community college, parents who bring their children to our Center come to Kishwaukee College from many surrounding communities. In the college’s district, we have eight high-school districts that feed students to Kishwaukee College. Each of these high school districts have multiple grade schools within their district. In addition, we have several “out of district” students who come to our college from Chicago and suburbs. Rather than having one or two elementary schools where child care graduates will transition to as a typical community center may have, we likely have upwards of 50 different grade schools where our graduates may attend. It is impossible for our small staff to connect with such a large number of “receiving” kindergartens. Rather than trying to connect with one or two schools, and missing many others, we do not initiate relationships with schools so each family is treated equitably.
 - c. **Equipping children to be learners who can succeed in school.** Because of the challenges identified above, we help children to transition to next care environments and kindergartens in a few strategic ways. First we work to help children to be successful life-long learners by building in them the dispositions needed such as curiosity, cooperativeness, friendliness with peers, respect for teachers and

administrators, ability to follow routines, ability to speak and listen, ability to follow directions, etc. Second, we also develop academic skills and knowledge so children will know what they need to know when entering kindergarten. Third, we frequently provide a workshop for parents entitled “Kindergarten Readiness” where our social worker helps parents understand what they need to know to help their child be ready for formal school. Fourth, we help parents learn how to partner with their children’s teachers and center administrator. By encouraging parents to attend parent-teacher conferences at our Center and get involved at our child care center, we are working to help them develop the understanding of how important their involvement is in their child’s continuing education.

- d. **Practical helps**—when a child exits the Center and moves to a new Center, we help the parent with this transition by providing a copy of the child’s physical so they can take it with them to the next care setting.

Summary

The above mentioned practices are consistently employed to help children and families to best handle the various transitions that they face as they enter our center, while enrolled in our center, and as they exit our center. Since one of our goals is to develop lifelong learners, we believe that helping children and families learn to successfully navigate transitions while they are with us will help them learn the skills needed to handle transitions in their future.