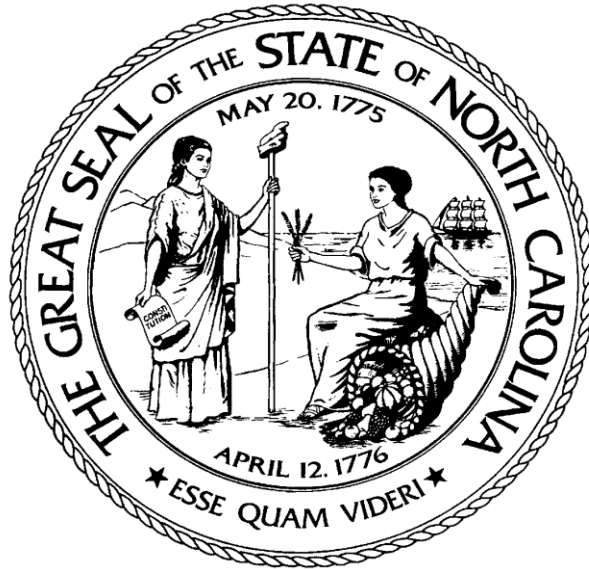


**State Agency Collaboration on Early Childhood
Education/Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten**

Session Law 2016-94, Section 12B.5.(d)



Report to the

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human
Services**

and

Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

By

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

December 15, 2016

Background

SECTION 12B.5.(c) The Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, shall promote the successful transition of children who receive assistance from NC Pre-K program and the Child Care Subsidy Assistance program for four- and five-star rated facility classrooms to kindergarten. In its promotion of a successful transition from preschool to kindergarten, the Department of Health and Human Services shall recommend that both NC Pre-K teachers and preschool teachers prepare a preschool to kindergarten transition plan for each child transitioning to kindergarten that documents the child's strengths and needs based on the five Goals and Developmental Indicator domains for children's developmental and learning progress that are based on the NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development. The preparation of the transition plan shall only apply to children who receive assistance through the NC Pre-K program or the Child Care Subsidy Assistance program. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Departments utilize this transition plan until such time as the standardized program to transition children from preschool to kindergarten, required pursuant to subsection (e) of this section, is developed and implemented.

SECTION 12B.5.(d) The Department of Health and Human Services shall report on the implementation of the transition plan required pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, including any findings and recommendations and any legislative proposals, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on or before December 15, 2016.

SECTION 12B.5.(e) The Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, shall develop and implement a standardized program to transition children from preschool to kindergarten. In developing this standardized transition program, the Department of Health and Human Services shall identify, at a minimum:

- (1) Methods to standardize student transition information such that it is quantifiable.
- (2) Recommendations for sharing data contained in a student's transition plan between preschool teachers and either kindergarten teachers or the schools that receive the incoming kindergarten students.
- (3) Recommendations for sharing data contained in a student's transition plan between preschool teachers and the parents or guardians of the child who is transitioning to kindergarten.
- (4) Recommendations for preschool teacher training and continuing education to support their role in completing transition plans for preschool children.
- (5) Recommendations for baseline information that should be compiled in transition plans for students transitioning to kindergarten.
- (6) Procedures for the management of transition plan documents, including recommendations for the length of records retention, provisions for confidentiality, and proper disposal.
- (7) Any other components the Department deems appropriate in the provision of information between preschools, students' families, and kindergartens.

SECTION 12B.5.(f) The Department of Health and Human Services shall report on the development of the standardized transition program required pursuant to subsection (e) of this section, including any findings and recommendations and any legislative proposals, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on or before January 1, 2018.

Recommendation to address state agency collaboration on early childhood education/transition from preschool to kindergarten

The Department of Health and Human Services and The Department of Public Instruction acknowledge the importance of ensuring that children have smooth transitions between Pre-K and kindergarten programs. The agencies also recognize the necessity of promoting and supporting collaboration between state and local agencies that serve young children to prioritize and improve birth-through-third-grade alignment and future and ongoing success.

The following are recommendations to meet the requirements of the law as described in SECTION 12B.5.(d) and SECTION 12B.5.(e) of the 2016 Appropriations Act. The term Pre-K, when mentioned, refers to all applicable 4 year old programs that fall under the requirements of this law.

(1) Methods to standardize student transition information such that it is quantifiable.

A standardized method for documenting transition information will be developed that incorporates a subset of the developmental indicators from the NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development that align with the constructs measured by North Carolina's Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) program. Pre-K teachers in applicable 4 year-old programs will document transition information for each child by marking and dating the developmental indicators in each of the 5 domains of learning and development that indicate that child's learning status at the end of the Pre-K year. The transition documentation will also include a way to indicate if a particular set of developmental indicators was "not observed" in the event that a child enters a program late in the year and the Pre-K teacher does not have the opportunity to observe the child exhibiting skills represented in the selected developmental indicators. Also, there will be a way for Pre-K teachers to indicate that a child is "emerging" if they are demonstrating skills that are precursors to those that appear on any given set of developmental indicators or "beyond" if a child is demonstrating skills that are beyond those represented in the selected developmental indicators.

In addition to indicating learning statuses at the end of the Pre-K year, Pre-K teachers will select evidences of learning and development that they have already collected to include as transition information for each child. These evidences will provide families and kindergarten teachers with examples of each child's progress and a general picture of each child's growth and development. Examples of evidence might include existing Pre-K assessment information and/or summary reports, information gathered from a teacher's formative assessment process, student work samples, and/or anecdotal notes.

The format of the transition information will allow it to be easily transferable. However, if a child's transition information is not shared directly by the Pre-K teacher and/or family with the kindergarten teacher, it should be transferred in a way that maintains the security of the information.

(2) Recommendations for sharing data contained in a student's transition plan between preschool teachers and either kindergarten teachers or the schools that receive the incoming kindergarten students.

This plan for transitioning children from Pre-K to kindergarten will leverage the current requirement that local NC Pre-K committees develop a written plan to transition children into Pre-K and from Pre-K to kindergarten. Local NC Pre-K committees consist of stakeholders representing key organizations

that serve young children in the community, providing an opportunity for local cross-agency collaboration. These are co-chaired by the Local Education Agency (LEA) school superintendent or designee and the board chair of the local Smart Start Partnership and include representation from licensed child care centers (4- or 5-star license), Head Start programs, families, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, local departments of social services or other child care subsidy local purchasing agencies, and public school exceptional children's preschool programs. It is acknowledged that the NC Pre-K Program Requirements do not directly and completely govern non-NC Pre-K funded programs such as some 4 and 5 star-rated private childcare and Head Start programs; however, the agencies and organizations who are responsible for administering these programs have representation on the NC Pre-K committee and can therefore inform and support students' transition planning.

In addition to the policy requiring local NC Pre-K programs' written plan for transitions, this Departmental plan will leverage the transition planning opportunities provided by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA provides opportunities to build and strengthen birth-through-third-grade alignment through provisions that encourage LEAs to develop transition plans in collaboration with the early childhood community with a purpose of creating a shared understanding between early childhood programs, schools, administrators, and families of what children should experience between early childhood programs and schools.

It is this committee's recommendation that the responsibility for implementing the Pre-K to kindergarten transition plan in each local area will be shared by the local NC Pre-K committee and LEA, with involvement from any programs who may be receiving child care subsidy for 4 year olds not enrolled in an NC Pre-K classroom. Local transition activities will include all key components, be evaluated for effectiveness, revised, and reported to DHHS and DPI annually. DHHS NC Pre-K staff and DPI staff will work collaboratively with their respective organizations to provide technical assistance to NC Pre-K contracting agencies and LEAs in understanding the new requirements related to the development of transition plans and DCDEE staff will do the same for private child care providers receiving subsidy funds for 4 year olds not in the NC Pre-K program.

The NC Pre-K program requirement related to transition planning will be revised to include the key components of a transition plan that will be identified by DHHS in consultation with DPI. These key components will provide guidance for transition planning and consistency in transition plans statewide while allowing for some flexibility for differences in local context and the leveraging of transition best practices that may already be occurring. A planning template which includes the key components will be developed by DHHS and DPI and be provided to local NC Pre-K contracting agencies, public schools and child care providers.

Note: For children with Individual Education Plans in place, procedural safeguards related to transition planning must be followed according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations.

Long-range collaborative transition planning should also incorporate best practices for facilitating smooth transitions into kindergarten for children such as: joint professional development for Pre-K and kindergarten teachers; discussions between Pre-K and kindergarten teachers about individual child transition information prior to and after the school year begins; discussions about Pre-K developmental indicators and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment construct progressions between Pre-K and kindergarten teachers; relationship-building opportunities between Pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers and administrators; conversations between Pre-K and kindergarten teachers about Pre-K and kindergarten standards, curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices; and communicating public school transition activities and expectations to families.

(3) Recommendations for sharing data contained in a student's transition plan between preschool teachers and the parents or guardians of the child who is transitioning to kindergarten.

A key component of the local plan for transitioning children from Pre-K into kindergarten will be to provide opportunities for families to contribute to, receive, and discuss transition information with their child's Pre-K teacher and to share and discuss transition information with their child's kindergarten teacher. The transition planning template will provide guidance for best practices related to this key component.

Long-range collaborative transition planning should also incorporate best practices for family engagement that facilitate smooth transitions into kindergarten such as: invitations to kindergarten teachers to participate in end-of-year Pre-K family meetings; invitations for Pre-K teachers to participate in LEA kindergarten transition activities and events; opportunities for families and children to visit kindergarten classrooms during the spring prior to kindergarten entry; opportunities for kindergarten teachers to do home visits for the purpose of meeting children and families to ease transition; and other opportunities for LEAs to engage with families prior to the start of school.

(4) Recommendations for preschool teacher training and continuing education to support their role in completing transition plans for preschool children.

The State's plan for transitioning children from Pre-K to kindergarten will include statewide communication that leverages existing networks used by NC's early care and education system and Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This communication will include messaging to build awareness of the law (transition requirement) and the policies developed to address its requirements, available professional development opportunities, and other pertinent information related to implementation. Local NC Pre-K contracting agencies and LEAs will communicate necessary and timely information related to the state and local transition plan to local child serving agencies, NC Pre-K programs, applicable childcare providers, applicable elementary school staff, and families.

Professional development resources will be created by DHHS and DPI to support Pre-K teachers, directors, kindergarten teachers, and school administrators to successfully implement the transition plan. The committee recommends that online professional development modules be created and provided as one resource for professional development.

Local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs will work collaboratively to develop and implement a professional development plan to ensure that all applicable stakeholders receive adequate training and ongoing support. Training and continuing education and support for Pre-K teachers will be supported and/or provided through existing structures such as Child Resource & Referral agencies, NC's Early Learning Network, local Smart Start Partnerships, and the Head Start program. DPI's Office of Early Learning will support LEAs to incorporate professional development into local KEA professional development plans as part of the statewide system of support for KEA implementation. These agencies and organizations will identify staff who will be responsible for providing professional development and technical assistance at the state level and in counties, and DHHS and DPI will work collaboratively to prepare those staff to provide local training and support.

(5) Procedures for the management of transition plan documents, including recommendations for the length of records retention, provisions for confidentiality, and proper disposal.

The management of transition plan documents will fall under the laws governing records retention for public schools. This includes the retention of all documents, both physical and digital and their disposal. Per those laws and requirements, all transition information must be adequately secured when being transferred between programs and persons, regardless of the method of transference.

(6) Recommendations for baseline information that should be compiled in transition plans for students transitioning to kindergarten.

Please see item 1 for a detailed description of the information to be compiled for each child as part of their transition plan.

In summary the following would be included:

- the status of each child on the identified subset of developmental indicators at the end of the Pre-K year that also includes a way to indicate “not observed”, “emerging”, and “beyond” whenever necessary;
- a number of evidences of learning and development selected by the Pre-K teacher for each child, which might include existing Pre-K assessment information and/or summary reports, information gathered from a teacher’s formative assessment process, student work samples, and anecdotal notes.

(7) Any other components the Department deems appropriate in the provision of information between preschools, students' families, and kindergartens.

Proposed Implementation Plan

SECTION 12B.5.(d) of the 2016 Appropriations Act requires this report on the implementation of the transition plan on or before December 15, 2016. In early childhood education, a general requirement is approximately 3 to 5 years to fully implement a new program to ensure the intended outcomes. Given the scope of this program and the requirements and opportunities presented for collaboration across multiple child-serving agencies, a phased approach to scaling-up and implementation is proposed to be used.

During the initial stages of exploration and installation, program policies and guidance and program materials will be developed. Plans for providing professional development ongoing support, the development of training materials, and the preparation of training and technical assistance staff will also occur during this time. Once this preparation has been completed, usability testing will be used to determine the fit and feasibility of the initial plan and training materials and processes. The usability testing will occur with three to four partnering counties. Within each partner county, a subset of at least ten percent, or three Pre-K programs and elementary schools (whichever is greater), will be sought to participate. With input from stakeholders participating in usability testing, revisions will be made to the State’s proposed plan, and recommendations for actual implementation will be made to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on or before January 1, 2018.

The following lists outline the proposed activities and deliverables for each year of scale up and implementation:

- **2017 – Program Development and Usability Testing (3-4 counties)**
 - Establish a state level implementation planning team co-led by DHHS and DPI including all applicable agencies and stakeholders involved with the transition process
 - Convene a stakeholder input process to better understand what transition practices are already occurring in counties
 - Develop a statewide plan for communication
 - Develop policies and guidance related to local NC Pre-K/child care and LEA collaborative transition planning
 - Develop a standardized method and related materials for documenting transition information
 - Develop training and information materials for teachers, administrators, and families
 - Select 3-4 counties to participate in usability testing
 - Provide training for teachers, administrators, and families participating in usability testing
 - Provide technical assistance for transition plan development and activities to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs participating in usability testing
 - Collect evaluative feedback from usability testing participants
 - Revise policies, guidance, transition documentation materials, and training materials based on data collected from usability participants
 - Revision and finalization of State transition plan requirements based on data collected
 - Develop a plan for monitoring transition activities
 - Identify first cohort of counties that are most ready for scaling-up
 - Develop plan for training local professional development providers in Cohort 1 counties
 - Develop online professional development resources
 - Finalize and deliver recommendations to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee
- **2018 – 1st Cohort (10 counties)**
 - Train local professional development providers in Cohort 1 counties
 - Provide technical assistance to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs to develop collaborative transition plans
 - Provide technical assistance to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs in Cohort 1 to develop collaborative plans for training and ongoing support
 - Local professional development providers train Pre-K and K teachers, administrators and families in 1st cohort counties
 - Provide ongoing technical assistance to all implementing counties as they are operating and implementing transition plan activities
 - Identify second cohort of counties
 - Train local professional development providers in Cohort 2 counties

- **2019 – 2nd Cohort (20 counties)**
 - Provide technical assistance to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs in Cohorts 1 and 2 to develop collaborative transition plans
 - Provide technical assistance to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs in Cohorts 1 and 2 to develop collaborative plans for training and ongoing support
 - Local professional development providers train Pre-K and K teachers, administrators and families in Cohort 2 counties and new staff in Cohort 1 counties
 - Provide ongoing technical assistance to all implementing counties as they are operating and implementing transition plan activities
 - Identify third cohort of counties
 - Train local professional development providers in Cohort 3 counties
- **2020 – 3rd Cohort (30 counties)**
 - Provide technical assistance to local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs in Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 to develop collaborative plans for training and ongoing support as they are operating and implementing transition plan activities
 - Local professional development providers train Pre-K and K teachers, administrators and families in Cohort 3 counties and any new staff in Cohort 1 and 2 counties
- **2021 – 4th Cohort (40 counties)**
 - Train local professional development providers in Cohort 3 counties
 - Provide technical assistance to all local NC Pre-K committees and LEAs to develop collaborative plans for training and ongoing support as they are operating and implementing transition plan activities
 - Local professional development providers train Pre-K and K teachers, administrators and families in Cohort 3 counties and new staff in Cohort 1, 2, and 3 counties
 - Provide ongoing technical assistance to all implementing counties

DHHS and DPI will work to explore the feasibility of pursuing additional funding to support the implementation of this program. Many potential issues related to the portability and security of child information as well as the possibilities for local and state data collection and analysis could be solved through the use of existing digital tools, systems and portals, although those would have to be modified to add additional users and activities. Also, additional allocated human resources with responsibility to provide support and technical assistance could help ensure that timelines and requirements for implementation are met and the program is implemented as intended.