

S Y M P O S I U M S U M M A R Y

TERRIFIC TRANSITIONS:

Child Care to Kindergarten

April 22, 2006

Launching a Child Care – Public School Dialogue
About School Readiness in Fairfax County



This second annual symposium was made possible
by a grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation.

Launching a Child Care – Public School Dialogue About School Readiness in Fairfax County

The *Terrific Transitions* symposium brought together two communities integral to the early education of young children in Fairfax County – child care and preschool professionals and Fairfax County Public school educators and administrators – to share best practices regarding young children’s smooth transition to kindergarten. Held at Northern Virginia Community College, the April 22, 2006 program was sponsored by Fairfax Futures through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation. Speakers included noted early childhood expert, Dr. Robert Pianta, and Verdia Haywood, Deputy Fairfax County Executive.

Research confirms that young children’s successful transition to kindergarten is enhanced by the relationships and communication between those who work with, care for and educate young children. The *Terrific Transitions* school readiness symposium provided an excellent opportunity for participants to meet with colleagues and other educators throughout the county who work with young children in a child care, preschool or kindergarten classroom setting.

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS

Keynote Presentation: Dr. Robert Pianta

Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Linking Families, Children and School

Robert Pianta, PhD, Novartis US Foundation Professor in the Curry School of Education and Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, encouraged kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals to reach out to children and their parents before the start of kindergarten. He emphasized the importance of building relationships with parents that encourage them to become active partners with teachers in nurturing their children’s love of learning and interest in school.

Pianta shared research showing that teachers often wait until after school has started before reaching out to engage parents and noted that initial meetings almost always takes place at school. He encouraged the community to think creatively about other opportunities for kindergarten teachers and incoming parents to meet and share information that could support the school readiness of young children.



MORNING PANEL PRESENTATION:

Exploring Successful Transition Strategies

Moderator:

Ann Monday

Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services
Fairfax County Public Schools

Panelists:

Theresa West, Principal, Glen Forest Elementary School

Zelnita McIntosh, Kindergarten Teacher, Hollin Meadows Elementary School

Carol Bellamy, Education Coordinator, Greater Mount Vernon Head Start

Judy Falkenrath, Executive Director, ACCA Child Development Center

Bernice Mayfield, Family Child Care Provider

Panelists identified effective strategies to support smooth transitions:

- Work with parents as partners in children's growth and development.
- Implement curriculum that helps children develop the social, emotional, and intellectual skills needed to become successful learners.
- Know the community in which the children live.
- Recruit staff and volunteers knowledgeable about the community's diverse cultures and languages to help all children have a successful transition to kindergarten.
- Spend time in kindergarten classrooms, meet teachers and learn about kindergarten registration requirements.
- Ensure that families' and children's initial contact with school and kindergarten is a positive experience.
- Invite first and second-graders to come back to preschool or child care to talk about what it is like to be in kindergarten.
- Provide opportunities for incoming kindergarten parents to connect with other parents of young children.

Breaking Down Barriers and Building Bridges

Following lunch, symposium attendees participated in breakout sessions focused on key barriers to children's successful transition and potential solutions. The barriers discussed were:

- A. No Consistent Means of Sharing Information
- B. Lack of Coordination on Transition Plans
- C. Challenges Posed by Cultural and Language Differences

A. NO CONSISTENT MEANS OF SHARING INFORMATION

Early childhood educators may be unaware that they can participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings with teachers and parents of special needs children, with parents' consent.

Possible solutions:

- a. Develop a good rapport/relationship with children's parents.
- b. When preparing for a child's Individualized Education Plan, Fairfax County Public Schools might request permission from families to invite child care providers to participate.
- c. Let parents know early on about the many services Child Find provides to support young children.
- d. Encourage Child Find to visit the child care program.
- e. Request parent permission for a Child Find representative to observe the child in a child care or preschool setting.
- f. Assess children in their natural environments.

It is difficult to arrange cross-program visits to learn about kindergarten expectations and early childhood education programs; challenges include lack of space in which to hold meetings, transportation constraints and timing issues.

Possible solutions:

- a. Think of transition as a process that occurs over time, rather than as something which occurs as a result of one or two meetings.
- b. Encourage elementary school representatives to visit area child care centers and preschools to talk about kindergarten.
- c. Consider giving kindergarten teachers additional days off from class to allow them to visit early childhood education programs.
- d. Schedule neighborhood panel presentations that also include opportunities for audience members to ask questions.

Confidentiality issues related to sharing information about children and their families.

Possible solutions *(posted following the discussion):*

- a. Ask parents to sign permission form allowing early childhood education program to share helpful information about the child and family with Fairfax County Public Schools.
- b. Provide opportunities for kindergarten teacher to observe children in child care or preschool.
- c. Encourage kindergarten teacher to meet with child and family in their homes prior to child entering kindergarten.

B. LACK OF COORDINATION ON TRANSITION PLANS

Early childhood education programs and professionals may be unaware of kindergarten and elementary school expectations of entering children and their families.

Possible solutions *(posted following the discussion):*

- a. Provide opportunities for face-to-face dialogue as well as ongoing sharing of best practices between early childhood education programs and public school teachers and administrators in each neighborhood.
- b. Use personal as well as written communication between family child care providers, child care centers, preschools and school teachers and administrators to ensure open channels of dialogue and communication.

Parents may not have the information they need to best support their children's transition to kindergarten.

Possible solutions:

- a. Get information to parents earlier, including through child care and preschool programs.
- b. Encourage parents to visit their neighborhood schools well before their children reach school age.
- c. Schools might consider reaching out to families in non-school settings to let the community know what the school offers, introduce them to the school website and invite them to visit school classrooms.
- d. Encourage family child care providers, center directors and preschool teachers to hold a "Get Ready for Kindergarten" program that might include a kindergarten teacher or principal from a neighboring school.
- e. Provide opportunities during the summer for kindergarten teachers to visit with parents of incoming kindergarten students, either in their homes or at neighborhood libraries or community centers.
- f. Invite parents of first and second graders to speak with parents whose children are getting ready to transition to kindergarten.

C. Challenges Posed by Cultural and Language Differences

Families' diverse cultures and languages may make it difficult to become engaged in the school community.

Possible solutions:

- a. Child care providers can help parents become more familiar with what to expect in preparing their children for transition to kindergarten.
- b. School leadership can reach out to make connections with community/ religious leaders to support families' successful entry into the school system.
- c. Create a list of staff and volunteers at each neighborhood school who speak different languages; distribute the list through the early childhood education community, faith-based community and other organizations.
- d. Use a variety of communication tools, including visuals, phone contacts, and the assistance of informal liaisons who speak the parents' native language to identify potential barriers.

Kindergarten orientation and the ongoing transition to kindergarten is not always a meaningful experience for every family.

Possible solutions:

- a. Provide kindergarten orientation by different language groups, with additional personnel available to help with interpretation, using inclusive approaches.
- b. Talk with parents about their expectations of school and their children's education.
- c. Encourage school staff to recognize and respect the school community's cultural diversity.
- d. Provide opportunities for families to improve their English language skills.
- e. Encourage families to share their experiences through activities such as "family photo" projects.

For additional resources and information, please contact:

Fairfax County Office for Children
12011 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, Virginia 22035
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare

Fairfax County Public Schools
Office of Early Childhood
Lacey Instructional Center
3705 Crest Drive
Annandale, VA 22003
<http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OECFS/>

*Fairfax Futures is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that our county's youngest children are well prepared to succeed in school and in life. In collaboration with partners across the county, we invest in early childhood education and school readiness by bringing attention and financial resources to sustain our region's future. For more information about Fairfax Futures or to learn more about membership in the **School Readiness Network**, visit www.fairfaxfutures.org*

Created by Freddie Mac in 1991, the Freddie Mac Foundation is dedicated to opening the doors to hope and opportunity for children and their families. As one of the largest corporate funders in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, Freddie Mac and the Freddie Mac Foundation have invested nearly \$250 million in organizations serving the community. www.FreddieMacFoundation.org



Fairfax Futures: Investing in School Readiness

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