
**Kindergarten Transition Practices:
Changing “The Way We Do Things Here” in Discovery Communities**

Prepared by

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The analyses and conclusions in this report solely reflect the perspective of the Evaluation Team.

"I believe that the people who sit around our table truly believe in what we are doing. We have built relationships and structure. When I hear that kindergarten teachers are calling preschool teachers to talk about a child-- there is respect between providers and teachers that is so evident. The sharing, the sense of partnership. I believe this will live in the schools and community--some in the schools and some in the early care realm because they have all seen the value."

Discovery Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

The Discovery Initiative is guided by the belief that ensuring that the best practices in education and child development are embedded in communities requires input and support from all stakeholders in the community. In the Discovery Initiative, more than 50 Connecticut communities have been provided technical assistance and funding to establish collaborative structures for community-wide assessment, planning, and local decision-making about early childhood issues.¹

One of the Discovery Initiative's four objectives is to "build strong connections between early care and elementary education." For many Discovery communities, work toward achievement of this objective involves working with their school systems to implement policies and practices that will foster seamless transitions between home and school and between education settings. One of the challenges the Discovery communities have faced in this area as well as others is gaining commitments from agencies and institutions to make and sustain changes in their policies and practices that go beyond small-scale, volunteer-driven, or one-time efforts.

This paper examines the experiences of communities in the Discovery Initiative in changing "the way we do things here" with respect to the transition for children into the formal school system. A previously prepared paper by the evaluation team explored the early experiences of the first two cohorts of communities participating in the Discovery Initiative's technical assistance workshop series or institute.² This paper, *The Kindergarten Transition Institute Model for Providing Capacity-Building Technical Assistance in the Discovery Initiative, 2006-2007*, noted that [w]hile the transition teams intended to replicate, expand, or add new transition activities, they had concerns about the availability of resources and institutional support." In this paper "the way we do things here" refers to the broad, systemic, and continuous implementation of effective

¹ For more information on the Discovery Initiative, see the "About Discovery" page on the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/about.html>

² The paper is available on the Discovery website at http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps_resource_1156.pdf

practices believed to ensure smooth transition into kindergarten and the ability to maintain and evolve the practices over time.³

WHAT WERE THE GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS STUDY?

This work was guided by the following research questions:

- In what ways have kindergarten transition practices and policies become “the way we do things here” in Discovery communities?
- What in the process of developing and promoting kindergarten transition practices and policies is associated with becoming “the way we do things here”?
- What community capacities, infrastructure, or leadership are associated with these changes in kindergarten transition practices and policies?
- What challenges or barriers to kindergarten transition practices and policies becoming the norm in the community were encountered, and how were they addressed?

WHAT SOURCES OF INFORMATION WERE USED?

This paper draws on three sources of information⁴ gathered by the Discovery evaluation team in 2010, as well as on notes and observations collected throughout the evaluation of the Initiative, particularly in an earlier focused study of the Kindergarten Transition Institute model of technical assistance.⁵

The evaluation developed a survey questionnaire that was sent to all Discovery community coordinators in June 2010. The purpose of this survey was to gather basic information from all of the communities about kindergarten transition activities, the organizations and groups that were involved in this work, factors that contributed to the success of the community’s work on kindergarten transition, and results observed to date. A total of 30 communities (out of the 54 contacted) completed a survey.

In June and July 2010, six communities participated in an intensive site study on kindergarten transition. These six communities were nominated by Memorial Fund staff, the community liaisons, and the director of the Connecticut Center for School Change as communities that appeared to have implemented kindergarten transition policies and practices in a sustained and community-wide way.

³ In sociological parlance, this process and the resulting sustained changes are called “institutionalization” in that specific ways of operating become the norm for an institution such as schools or early care and learning systems.

⁴ A detailed summary of each of the data collection efforts and questions used for each are provided in Appendix A of this paper.

⁵ See footnote 2 above.

The communities included the four communities that are partners in the Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, and Shelton), Norwalk, and Vernon. Within each community, the individuals involved in planning, implementing, and overseeing kindergarten transition work were asked to come together for a group interview. The interview focused on the development and evolution of the work and on their assessment of the factors that contributed to the success of their work.

Preliminary findings from the survey and intensive study provided the backdrop for a community workshop session at the Fall 2010 Discovery Stone Soup Conference, at which five of the six intensive site study communities participated in the presentation.⁶ The workshop provided a forum for communities in the audience to share their experiences in transforming kindergarten transition activities into “standard operating procedure.” Observations and comments made at the workshop provided another source of information for this paper.

WHAT KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION ACTIVITIES TOOK PLACE IN THE DISCOVERY COMMUNITIES?

The Discovery communities that were surveyed and those that participated in the intensive study were engaged in an array of kindergarten transition activities.⁷ These activities fall into four general types:

Bringing Together Early Education Providers & Kindergarten Teachers

As one respondent to the community survey reported, “One of the major findings we had was...the lack of knowledge that both sides – pre-K and K teachers – had about what each other did, and what experiences children had in both settings.” More than three-quarters of the Discovery communities responding to the survey (77% or 23 out of 30 communities) implemented activities intended to build relationships and communication channels between the early education providers and kindergarten teachers.

These activities included:

- Sharing observation and assessment information about individual children between early education providers and kindergarten teachers (reported by 57%)
- Arranging for early education providers and kindergarten teachers to exchange classroom visits to learn more about each other’s teaching methods and curricula (reported by 53%)

⁶ Norwalk did not participate in the Stone Soup session, due to recent changes in staff responsible for managing the kindergarten transition work there.

⁷ Among the 30 communities responding to the survey in June 2010, all but 3 reported conducting one or more kindergarten transition activities.

- Holding joint professional development for both early education providers and teachers in the early elementary grades (reported by 47%)

Preparing Children and Families for Kindergarten

Eighty percent of the communities responding to the survey reported that they were engaged in activities related to preparing children and families for kindergarten, including:

- Setting up kindergarten orientation sessions for the families of entering kindergarten students to learn about kindergarten expectations, the kindergarten experience, and the school system (reported by 70%)
- Providing kindergarten preparation and transition activities for all children, regardless of whether they had attended preschool (reported by 63%)
- Arranging for entering students to visit kindergarten classrooms (reported by 63%)
- Providing kindergarten preparation and transition activities for children who had not attended preschool (reported by 47%)
- Communicating regularly with families of entering kindergarteners between registration and the first day of school (reported by 23%).

In Norwalk, the Norwalk Children’s Foundation, the Norwalk Community College and the Norwalk Public Schools have created a program that reaches beyond children already taking part in preschool programs by creating a summer kindergarten prep program. Brighter Futures is a six-week program in which teachers use a literacy-based curriculum to work with students and create portfolios for each student. The program targets children who have had little or no preschool experience, do not speak English at home, or are at risk of not succeeding in kindergarten. Teachers in the program are able to identify areas in need of improvement, which gives kindergarten teachers an opportunity to address these areas earlier.

Changing Specific Practices

Seventy percent of the communities responding to the survey reported that they were engaged in activities related to changing kindergarten transition practices, including:

- Making kindergarten registration procedures simpler, more convenient, and/or more uniform across community schools (reported by 63%)
- Working to make sure early education and elementary curricula, child assessment methods, and teaching approaches are in line with each other (reported by 43%)

One Discovery community described its activities in this area on the survey:

We reach out to families in the lower socio-economic areas of town at kindergarten registration time by using ‘mobile registration.’

We rent an RV that travels to five different schools over five days where parents can go in and register. Not only are parents registering there, but they receive information packets containing literature and brochures about resources in town and on preparing kids for kindergarten.

Another community described its effort to hold “articulation meetings between public school pre-K and kindergarten teachers with early care teachers” as “a great success.”

Building Community Support

Of the 30 communities responding to the survey, half (50%) reported undertaking efforts to build community support. Nearly all of these communities (47%) reported “distributing information about kindergarten registration, curriculum, learning experiences via the local cable television channel, local newspaper, community meetings, flyers or materials in local businesses like grocery stores, laundromats, doctor’s offices, etc.” Fewer (17%) reported “working with local organizations to provide incentives for families to register their child for kindergarten or to participate in kindergarten orientation activities.”

Having a broad-based group involved in kindergarten transition planning was another way that some communities built community support, as one community responding to the survey described:

“The stakeholders involved as part of our transition team included a kindergarten parent, a grandparent, a social worker from one of the receiving elementary schools, a teacher for the other receiving elementary school, and representatives from several preschools as well as our recreation center teacher, School Readiness head teacher, parent representatives from community home daycares, the Family Resource Center, a grandparent connected to a community civic group, and a town pre-K teacher. They were able to communicate the importance of the program and the transition work to many others in the community. This helped our district have an unprecedented amount of parent and community involvement in our kindergarten classrooms.”

The work of the intensive study communities spanned all of these areas, with each community focused on particular aspects. Profiles of each of the intensive study communities, summarizing their kindergarten transition activities, can be found in Appendix B.

HOW DO WE DEFINE “THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE?”

As described above, the Discovery communities are engaged in an array of kindergarten transition activities, all designed to help build a seamless connection

between the early learning environment and kindergarten for children and their families. A great deal of work typically goes into developing and trying out new kindergarten transition procedures and policies. The question then becomes *how to keep effective practices going, expand them, and sustain them over time*, until they become simply *the way we do things in our community*. As noted earlier, “the way we do things here” refers to the broad, systemic, and continuous implementation of effective practices believed to ensure smooth transition into kindergarten and the ability to maintain and evolve the practices over time.

In order to support communities interested in changing kindergarten policies and practices, the Memorial Fund has offered technical assistance in various formats throughout the Discovery Initiative. The Discovery Initiative initially began offering support on kindergarten transition to participating communities with a peer sharing opportunity in May 2003 at which a number of communities reported on local transition activities and practices. This was followed in 2004 with two linked workshops in 2004 on “Effective Kindergarten Transition” offered by the Connecticut Center for School Change. Both sessions used Robert Pianta’s work on kindergarten transition as a resource, the first focusing on effective practices and the second on policy changes.

In 2006, Discovery communities were introduced to another form of technical assistance on this topic – the Kindergarten Transition Institute. The Institute differed from other workshops and training sessions in several key ways:

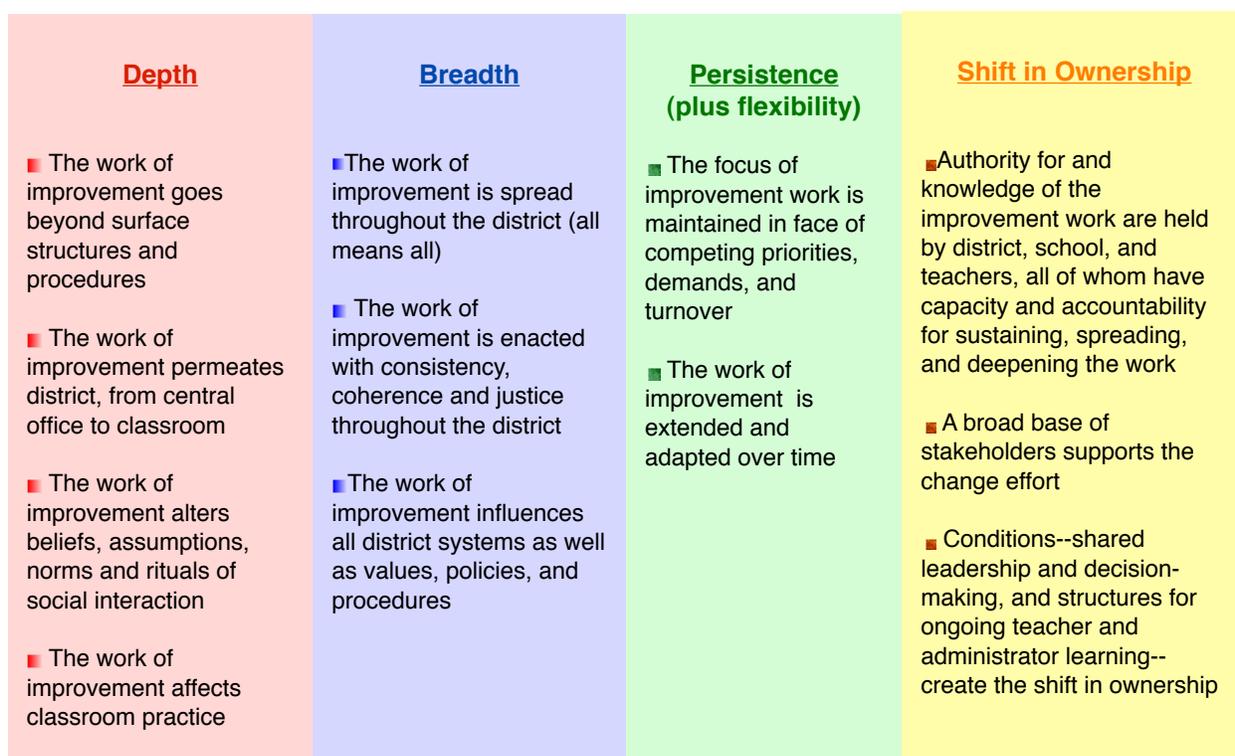
- Communities had to apply to participate and propose a team of people who would attend.
- Applying communities had to have identified kindergarten transition as one of the objectives of their Discovery collaborative action plans.
- The Institute was held over several sessions with the expectation that the community teams would carry out a plan of action between sessions.

The Institute used a curriculum and materials developed and used previously in other communities – the “Terrific Transitions” project developed by the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, first published in 1997 and last revised in 2005. The focus of “Terrific Transitions” is to assist community transition teams organize, plan for, and implement a successful plan that maximizes the continuity of experience for children and families between early childhood education settings, including home, and their first formal “school” setting, that is kindergarten.

Between 2006 and 2009, a total of 27 communities participated in the Kindergarten Transition Institute. Of the six intensive site visit communities participating in the research for this paper, four – Derby, Seymour, Shelton, and Vernon – had been Institute participants, while Ansonia and Norwalk had not.

Principles Characterizing “The Way We Do Things Here”

The Connecticut Center for School Change (the Center), whose staff developed and facilitated the Kindergarten Transition Institute, offers one way of characterizing change that has become “the way we do things here.” The Center applies the principles of depth, breadth, persistence, and shift in ownership in thinking about sustaining changes in school policies and procedures. “Depth” refers to work that permeates all levels of the organization or areas of the community. “Breadth” refers to work that is consistently implemented community-wide. “Persistence” refers to sustaining, extending and adapting the work over time, even when other competing demands surface. “Shift in ownership” refers to the commitment of stakeholders to sustaining and deepening the work through shared resources and decision-making. These principles are explained in more detail in the diagram below, with reference specifically to school reform practices.



Prepared by the Connecticut Center for School Change⁸

⁸ Sources used by the Connecticut Center for School Change in developing this framework include:

- “Sustaining Leadership,” Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, *Phi Delta Kappan* 84(9), May 2003
- *The Challenge of Change*, ed. Michael Fullan, 2009, Corwin Press (in particular, “Sustaining Leadership in Complex Times,” Michael Fullan & Lyn Sharratt)
- “Leading Change Handbook,” Wallace Foundation
- “Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change,” Cynthia E. Coburn, *Educational Researcher*, Vol.32, No. 6, pp. 3-12

Evidence that kindergarten transition practices and policies have become “the way we do things here” in Discovery communities

Using the four principles described above and information from the kindergarten transition communities, it appears that specific kindergarten transition practices and policies have become the norm to some extent in a number of communities, as described below.

- **Depth of the Work**

Among the 30 Discovery communities responding to the survey, all but 3 were currently carrying out one or more kindergarten transition activities. In 20 of the 27 communities involved in kindergarten transition, those activities spanned three or all four types of practice described above: working with early education and elementary teachers, working with children and families, changing specific practices, and involving the community.

As reported on the survey, many of the communities were seeing the effects of their work on learning environments, both in school and at home. Most (80%) of the communities reported that their work on kindergarten transition had increased the knowledge of parents about how to prepare their children for kindergarten and the awareness of early care and education providers about what children are expected to know and be able to do when entering kindergarten. Many communities also reported that kindergarten teachers were more aware of what children learn in their community's early education settings (70%) and are better informed about each individual child's development (57%).

- **Breadth of the Work**

Almost three-quarters (74%) of the communities implementing one or more kindergarten transition activity reported on the survey that these activities were being carried out with all or almost all of the schools, early childhood education providers, families, or children in the community.

- **Persistence of the Work**

Communities responding to the survey were asked to indicate whether each activity implemented since 2004 was being implemented now, and if there were plans to implement it in the future. Of the 27 communities implementing any transition activity at the time of the survey, about half (13 or 48%) had been carrying out four or more specific activities for some period since 2004. Eight communities out of the 27 (about 30%) intended to continue carrying on those activities in the future.

- **Shift in Ownership of the Work:**

Many of the kindergarten transition activities pursued in the Discovery communities require changes in school district practices or policies; therefore, the commitment of the school system to the work is critical. Among the communities responding to the survey, a large majority (between 80% and 90%) reported that the participation of school staff – principals, teachers, and central office staff – has contributed to the success of their work. In fact, 87% of the communities reported that school or central administration staff have been assigned by the district to work on kindergarten transition activities and projects.

WHAT WERE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES IN THE PROCESS OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES AND POLICIES BECOMING “THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE?”

The community groups interviewed in the six intensive study communities were asked to reflect on their experiences and to identify what is was about the process of planning and developing their specific kindergarten transition practices and policies that contributed to them becoming embedded in the normal operations of the schools, early care providers, and other agencies. These reflections also surfaced challenges to this process, some of which were successfully met and others that remained of concern.

Kindergarten transition practices and policies are tied to broader district goals

“It is important to demonstrate value of the work to the schools - let them know how your work can help them. Focus on research that links what you are doing to the preparation gap.”

Discovery Community
Collaborative Member

Intensive study communities noted the importance of linking kindergarten transition practices and policies to broader district goals. Where improving the transition to kindergarten is tied to goals such as school readiness or reducing the achievement gap and there is a clear understanding of how kindergarten transition policies and practices support these goals, they are more likely to be sustained. As one community survey respondent noted, “The school system has seen the value of reaching out to incoming students long before they enter school – this has been a great place to collaborate and create bridges of success for working in partnership.”

Sharing information on the impact of transition strategies helps to emphasize the connection between the kindergarten transition policies and practices and the district goals. Being able to demonstrate results can protect programs from cuts and elimination when school budgets are tight or in the face of staff or leadership changes. However, it can be difficult to tie student results directly to specific activities. One intensive study community found that, in spite of continuing efforts and investment, data from kindergarten assessments did not demonstrate that students participating in transition activities were better prepared for entry into kindergarten.

The “right mix” of people is involved in planning and developing kindergarten transition

All of the intensive study communities emphasized the importance of involving a diverse group of people on the kindergarten transition team. As noted earlier, having a large and diverse group of stakeholders involved in planning for kindergarten transition was one way to gain broad community interest and support.

Having many stakeholders with different experiences and perspectives is also valuable in developing transition approaches that are feasible as well as building support for their implementation. As pointed out in one community survey response, “Our team consists of representatives from each of our elementary schools- principals, reading consultants, the children’s librarian, parents, preschool providers, kindergarten teachers, and the director of curriculum for the district. Having such a diverse team helped conquer some of the ‘what ifs’.”

Attention is paid to addressing “turf” issues and gaining and sustaining the support of key leadership for kindergarten transition

Making changes in processes and procedures is challenging, even when the changes seem fairly easy to implement and in the best interests of children and families. The intensive study communities encountered a range of issues; from principals seeing kindergarten transition as a “turf” issue and not understanding the necessity of a coordinated district-wide strategy, to engaging busy providers who may not feel connected to or respected by the schools, to PTAs who are unwilling to work across schools, to boards of education that do not see a role for themselves in setting kindergarten transition policies.

Though each of these challenges is very different, the intensive study communities emphasize the importance of early buy-in and inclusive planning efforts. Getting to this phase requires relationship building-- with principals, the superintendent, and key central administration staff. Intensive communities suggest “selling” successful transition as a way to accomplish these individuals’ mission and goals.

The communities where transition activities were most strongly supported by the community and the school district were characterized by two important factors: the existence of a “champion” for the work and strategies to proactively and systematically orient new stakeholders, leaders, and decision-makers to the work.

Having a champion “on the inside” within the school system and with “influence to keep the issue on the table” was considered crucial. Such a champion is

“Having a champion in the district with the influence to bring the right people to the table is key. As a principal she was able to engage other principals - you need, passion, energy and influence.”

Discovery Community
Coordinator

particularly effective if he or she not only brings personal passion to the table, but is in a position to influence key decision-makers.

As is often the case, several of the intensive study communities had experienced turnover in superintendents as they were developing and beginning to implement their kindergarten transition activities. These communities pointed to the value of reaching out to the new leadership to position their work as an asset on which the new superintendent can build. For example, in Ansonia, the kindergarten transition work has survived turnover in the superintendent, assistant superintendent, several principals and assistant principals. As members of this community's kindergarten transition team pointed out, "Getting them up to speed with what we are doing is important. It is not hard to get them on the bandwagon, but it requires almost an orientation process."

The kindergarten transition strategies are tied to the work of other groups or communities

The more connected the kindergarten transition work is to other groups within the community and to similar work in other communities, the more likely it is to be sustained, both because adopting successful strategies can be efficient and because it gives greater legitimacy and credibility to the work. For example, having an organized group of early care and education providers in the community was cited as a factor in the success of kindergarten transition work in 87% of the surveyed communities.

A particularly powerful example of the value of linking efforts across communities is provided by the four intensive study communities engaged in a regional effort focused on kindergarten transition. The Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Valley Task Force) is a partnership that includes Ansonia, Shelton, Derby, and Seymour. The goal of the Task Force is to increase the school readiness skills of young children in the Lower Naugatuck Valley through promoting the importance of early learning. Though initially funded through both Discovery grants and a regional grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the Valley Task Force has also received matching funds from the four municipalities, the four Boards of Education, TEAM, the Valley United Way, and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

These communities have shared ideas and resources and implemented programs and services jointly,⁹ while carrying out their own individual local activities. This partnership was able to conduct many more activities than any of these communities would be able to accomplish on their own, while the shared financial commitment from all four districts demonstrated an understanding of and commitment to improving transition practices. Each partner also brought back ideas and strategies that they had seen work in partner communities to their own community.

The intensive site communities also stressed the importance of "getting the message out consistently in community," and pursuing relationships with partners that can reach

⁹ As described in the profile of the Valley Early Childhood Task Force in Appendix B.

out into the community and create greater visibility for the transition work. This kind of broad-based support can sometimes be a key asset when competing district priorities threaten to eliminate or reduce existing activities. Community partnerships can provide funds or in-kind support for activities and partners may be effective advocates for the continuation of the activities.

The activities, strategies, and planning efforts have dedicated staff support

Both the intensive study communities and communities responding to the survey identified the importance of resources committed to the work, in particular a staff person responsible for keeping the work on track and supporting the day-to-day functions. One community responding to the survey commented, “While committees and task forces are great for pulling together ideas, identifying data needs, and developing plans, ultimately there needs to be an individual who has broad responsibility for issues related to transition.” Beyond managing the implementation of current transition activities, staff support is needed to shepherd the development and approval of formal school policies that incorporate these practices into ongoing operations.

Related to the importance of having someone who takes responsibility for keeping the work going is the challenge of sustaining that support, particularly when the individual involved has not had this responsibility formally assigned to him or her. As one community pointed out, “Having a coordinator who could take on those tasks related to transition that no one else had responsibility for was very helpful. One of the outstanding issues regarding transition is that there is a need for someone to be accountable. We are now formalizing a transition plan and the sections about who has responsibility for oversight are blank.”

In several of the intensive study communities, kindergarten transition had become part of the job description for an administrative position within the school system. In these communities there was greater confidence that the work would continue. On the other hand, in several communities, the sustainability of the work was dependent on the commitment of an individual who took on kindergarten transition out of personal interest rather than job responsibilities, making the work more vulnerable if that person were to be reassigned or leave.

Support for community collaboration and technical assistance laid a solid foundation for kindergarten transition work

The Discovery Initiative’s support for collaboration, parent engagement, and a focus on community change all helped build the capacity for communities to engage successfully in kindergarten transition work. As one community noted on the survey, “[Discovery] has helped to create a table where all voices are heard and parents can have the ability to help create change that is long lasting.” Another pointed out, “Discovery allowed us to bring home providers, center-based providers, and school personnel together to discuss easing the transition.” Overall, 21 (70%) of the 27 responding communities currently implementing kindergarten transition activities agreed that their Discovery collaborative

group was helpful in “serving as a place to focus our community’s work on early childhood and early education issues.”

Having one of the Discovery objectives focused on strengthening the connections between early childhood and elementary school was also a factor in communities’ ability to sustain attention to kindergarten transition, cited by 20 of the surveyed communities. As one survey respondent pointed out, “Discovery reinforced the importance of the transition to kindergarten work begun by our School Readiness initiative by providing information and resources to expand our efforts.” In addition, funds provided by the Memorial Fund to the Discovery communities were often the seed money for transition activities, as one community described, “Discovery provided the resources to better connect with families of entering children through offering workshops on helping their children at home.”

The Discovery Initiative also provided communities with technical assistance, including a series of workshops organized as an institute on kindergarten transition. Communities that participated in the Institute valued its role getting their work off to a good start. One survey respondent noted that “participating in the Kindergarten Transition Institute through Discovery was very helpful to our community. It provided a vehicle to bring all stakeholders together for the sole purpose of working collaboratively to assist students and their parents to transition to the kindergarten classroom. The transition team examined the move into kindergarten from a wide variety of pre-kindergarten experiences, or lack thereof, and the transition from kindergarten into first grade. It allowed each of the stakeholders to express views and assist in improving the experience for students and their families.”

The surveyed communities also cited other ways in which the Discovery Initiative provided inspiration and information for kindergarten transition work, including examples and resources available on the Discovery website (14 of the 30 responding communities), information and ideas shared by the community liaison (11 of the communities), and sessions on kindergarten transition presented at the annual Stone Soup conference (9 of the communities).

SUMMARY

At the Fall 2010 Stone Soup session, “Kindergarten Transition Practices: Pathways to Changing ‘The Way Business Is Done’,” participants were asked to summarize the ideas, information, or lessons they were taking away from the session. Their thoughts provide a useful summary of some of the key points garnered in this study:

- Gather and share information
- Focus on developing relationships
- Build support from the ground-up as well as from top-down
- Communicate the value of successful transition experiences

- Develop a plan and work it through
- Find a “home” for kindergarten transition responsibilities

When these factors come together in a community, effective kindergarten transition practices and policies are more likely to be developed, to be implemented, to be sustained, and to become “the way we do things here.”

APPENDIX A

Kindergarten Transition Community Learning Session: Summary of Process and Products

Community Survey on Kindergarten Transition Activities

Intensive Study Community Interview Protocol

Stone Soup Session Agenda

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION COMMUNITY LEARNING SESSION

Summary of Process and Products

Goals:

- Identify factors that increase the likelihood that practices and policies to promote successful transition to kindergarten will become embedded within the normal operations of community institutions, such as schools
- Hold a community learning session to share observations and encourage peer-to-peer exchange of strategies and results

Data Collection Methods:

- **Community Survey:**

In June 2010 all Discovery community coordinators were contacted about their community's participation in an on-line survey about kindergarten transition planning and practices. The coordinators were asked to identify the individual or group within their community who would be best able to respond and to forward the on-line link to them.

The survey included questions about past, current, and planned kindergarten transition activities, the breadth of these activities within the community, the organizations and groups in the community involved in the kindergarten transition planning and activities, factors that contributed to the success of the community's work on kindergarten transition, sources of information and resources, and results observed to date from the community's kindergarten transition work. A copy of the survey questions is attached.

A total of 30 communities (out of the 54 contacted) completed a survey.

- **Intensive Data Collection in Selected Communities:**

Simultaneously with the development and implementation of the survey, nominations were sought for 4 to 6 communities that had made progress on implementing kindergarten transition activities and had been able to sustain these activities over time. The community liaisons were asked for their recommendations, as was the CT Center for School Change.

The nominated communities that agreed to be part of the intensive study included the four communities that are partners in the Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, and Shelton), Norwalk, and Vernon. Preliminary conversations via telephone and e-mail were conducted to gather information about each community's work prior to the site visit.

Each community coordinator was asked to find a time when as many members of the community's kindergarten transition "team" would be available for a group interview. One or both of the Discovery Initiative evaluators conducted the on-site interviews, which generally lasted about two hours. In the case of the four Valley communities, a group interview with the Early Childhood Task Force was held prior to separate group interviews in each community. Some follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone with individuals who were not available for the group interview. The questions guiding the group interviews are attached.

Upon completion of the group interview, each community was provided a \$500 honorarium from the Memorial Fund. (The Valley Task Force received a separate honorarium of \$500 from the evaluation.) A two-page color brochure was prepared by the evaluation for each of the participating communities, summarizing its kindergarten transition activities and highlighting key successes. These brochures were reviewed by the communities before being finalized as pdf files for their own use.

Community Learning Session at Stone Soup:

- **Agenda Development:**

Plans for this work originally called for a community convening in the fall of 2010 to share observations and provide a forum for community sharing. The opportunity arose to submit a proposal to the Stone Soup planning committee for a workshop session to accomplish these same goals.

Original agenda for the community convening fit well into the Stone Soup format and the proposal to hold a workshop there was accepted. Once acceptance for a Stone Soup session was obtained, the evaluators contacted each of the 6 intensive study communities to request their participation. All except Norwalk agreed; the person who had staffed the kindergarten transition work in Norwalk had recently retired and the new person in that position did not feel familiar enough with Norwalk's work to participate.

The agenda for the workshop, entitled "Kindergarten Transition Practices: Pathways to Changing The Way Business is Done," was developed in consultation with Andrew Lachman of the CT Center for School Change and with the participating communities.

- Introduction to the topic: "ensuring the broad, systemic, and continuous implementation of effective kindergarten transition practices"
- Setting the Stage:
 - Overview of kindergarten transition practices among the Discovery communities (from the survey)
 - Initial observations from the early Kindergarten Transition Institute cohorts: Having practices widely adopted and sustained beyond a "pilot phase" was challenging.
 - The focus for the workshop: Making effective practices stick to that they become they "way we do business here" and not be dependent on particular relationships, individual interests, discretionary resources, volunteers, etc.
- Community Comments and Observations on:
 - What have been the most successful ways for getting deep and ongoing buy-in and support for kindergarten transition practices?
 - How have challenges to broadly implementing and sustaining kindergarten transition practices been met?

Two to three of the participating intensive study communities commented on each question, followed by questions and comments from the audience and from Andrew Lachman.

- Wrap-up and Feedback from Audience
 - What are you taking away from this?

Preparations:

Telephone conference calls were held with the 5 communities that were going to participate in the Stone Soup workshop to review and fine-tune the agenda. In particular, given the limited time for the workshop and its topic (broadening and sustaining practices, rather than on the practices themselves), time was spent on the calls honing in on the lessons that each community could highlight with regard to the two questions on the agenda (see above). This proved to be a very productive discussion and was largely successful in keeping the focus on the workshop topic during the session.

Results:

Workshop participants were asked to complete an anonymous evaluation form at the end of the session. This form included a question about what information or ideas participants were “taking home” from the session. The fourteen responses included the following:

- Recognition that the participant’s community’s experience was in line with those of other communities (“shared challenges,” “that our Discovery work is at least operating at the same pace or even moving faster than other communities”)
- Possibilities for potential partners in kindergarten transition work (“the importance of PTAs in kindergarten transition”)
- Importance of communication and relationship-building (“the importance of sharing program pieces throughout the system,” “get buy-in from the community,” “keep trying to build relationships”)
- Evidence of the success of particular practices (“it’s possible to get family child care providers and public school teachers together,” “bring kindergarten teachers together with pre-school and home care education providers”)
- Value of taking time to reflect (“to remember what we have accomplished, how at how we can improve on it, and how we need to grow”)
- Strategies to sustain practices (“all the pieces to kindergarten transition need a home and could be included in a job description or committee role”)
- Ways to build support and develop practices (“a ground-up approach,” “some very valuable ideas on incorporating a transition plan”)

Materials and Products:

Participants at the Stone Soup workshop were provided copies of the following materials:

- The two-page brochures developed for each of the six intensive study communities
- A one-page description of the work of the Valley Early Childhood Task Force
- Selected results from the community kindergarten transition survey (current practices, types of school district involvement, factors making work on kindergarten transition successful, results from the work)
- A policy brief prepared by the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, “More than Maintenance: Sustaining Improvement Efforts Over the Long Run,” by Craig Jerald, September 2005

- A one-page handout describing four “principles of sustainability applied to improvement in education,” prepared by the CT Center for School Change

COMMUNITY SURVEY ON KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

1. Below are some possible kindergarten transition activities. In the first column, please check any activities that have taken place in your community since 2004; in the second column please check any activities that are currently underway; in the third column please check any activities that are being planned. Please check all that apply, regardless of whether or not they were planned, supported, or implemented by the Discovery collaborative group.

Since 2004 *Now* *Planned*

- | <i>Since 2004</i> | <i>Now</i> | <i>Planned</i> | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Arranging for early education providers and kindergarten teachers to exchange classroom visits to learn more about each other's teaching methods and curricula |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Holding joint professional development for both early education providers and teachers in the early elementary grades |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Working to make sure early education and elementary curricula, child assessment methods, and teaching approaches are in line with each other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Providing kindergarten preparation and transition programs for children who had <u>not</u> attended preschool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Providing kindergarten preparation and transition activities for <u>all</u> children, regardless of whether they had attended preschool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Making kindergarten registration procedures simpler, more convenient, and/or more uniform across community schools |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sharing observation and assessment information about individual children between early education providers and kindergarten teachers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Setting up orientation sessions for the families of entering kindergarten students to learn about kindergarten expectations, the kindergarten experience, and the school system |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Arranging for entering students to visit kindergarten classrooms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Distributing information about kindergarten registration, curriculum, learning experiences via the local cable tv channel, local newspaper, community meetings, flyers or materials in local businesses like grocery stores, Laundromats, doctor's offices, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Working with local organizations to provide incentives for families to register their child for kindergarten or to participate in kindergarten orientation activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Communicating regularly with families of entering kindergarteners between registration and the first day of school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other kindergarten transition activities in our community – please describe: |

If there are no kindergarten transition activities currently underway or planned in your community, please stop here and return this survey to: Sam Stephens, 1622 Riverside Drive, Trenton, NJ 08618 sstephens@capd.org.

Thank you.

2. Please check any of the following descriptions that apply to work on kindergarten transition in your community. Please check all that apply to your community.

- Our Discovery collaborative group has a committee or workgroup working on kindergarten transition.
- A committee or workgroup in our community that is not part of the Discovery collaborative is working on kindergarten transition.
- School district staff are active members of the kindergarten transition committee or workgroup.
- Parents serve on the kindergarten transition committee or workgroup.
- Work on kindergarten transition was started by the Discovery collaborative group.
- Work on kindergarten transition was started by our school district.
- Work on kindergarten transition was started by our School Readiness Council.
- School or central administration staff are assigned by the district to work on kindergarten transition activities and projects.
- Other ways in which work on kindergarten transition in our community was started or is organized:

3. Please describe how broadly the kindergarten transition activities are being planned or carried out now. Please check the one that best describes the situation in your community now.

- Kindergarten transition activities are being **planned or carried out as a pilot** for some of the schools, early childhood education providers, families, or children, **before expanding** to the entire community.
- Kindergarten transition activities are being **planned or carried out for some** of the schools, early childhood education providers, families, or children, **with no specific plans to expand** to the entire community.
- Kindergarten transition activities are being **planned or carried out for all or almost all** of the schools, early childhood education providers, families, or children in our community.
- Other ways of describing the reach of current kindergarten transition activities in our community:

4. Please check any of the following that have helped make work on kindergarten transition successful. Please check all that apply to your community.

- Having a superintendent who is willing to make changes in district policies and practices
- Having school staff in central administration available to help plan and organize
- Having principals and/or teachers willing to participate in planning and/or carrying out transition activities
- Having other community leaders interested in kindergarten transition issues
- Having an organized group of early care and education providers interested in kindergarten transition
- Having parents express interest or concern about kindergarten transition issues
- Having a history of collaboration between the school system and our community
- Having funds available or resources allocated to support kindergarten transition activities
- Other things about our community that have helped make work on kindergarten transition a success:

5. Please check any of the following that were helpful to work on kindergarten transition in your community. Please check all that apply to your community.

- Our Discovery collaborative group as a place to focus our community's work on early childhood and early education issues
 - Having kindergarten transition as one of our community's Discovery objectives
 - Our community's participation in the Kindergarten Transition Institute
 - Sessions on kindergarten transition presented at Stone Soup
 - Examples and resources available on the Discovery website or the weekly Digest
 - Information and ideas shared by our community liaison
 - Information available from the CT Department of Education
 - Information and materials available from state or national professional organizations
 - Information and materials available from universities or research organizations
 - Other information sources or activities that have been helpful to work on kindergarten transition in our community:
-

6. Please check any of the following results that have been seen from work on kindergarten transition in your community. Please check all that have resulted from work in your community.

- Entering kindergarten students are better prepared to be successful in school
- Parents of entering kindergarten students know more about what kindergarten will be like and how to prepare their children for kindergarten
- More kindergarten students are registered in the spring before their kindergarten year
- Kindergarten teachers are more aware of what children have learned and experienced in our community's early education settings
- Early care and education providers and programs in the community are more aware of what children are expected to know and be able to do when entering kindergarten
- Parents of entering kindergarten students are more involved in school activities and in supporting their children's learning at home
- Kindergarten teachers are better informed about each individual child's development in preparing for the students in their classrooms
- Community residents are more aware of the value of early education and the importance of children being prepared for kindergarten
- Our school district has allocated more resources and/or staff time to early childhood education issues, including those related to linking early education experiences and elementary schools
- Other results from work on kindergarten transition in our community:

7. Please describe the kinds of information that have been gathered in your community about the results checked above. Please include the name of any instrument or tool that is being used (for example, ECERS or DECA).

8. Please describe the most important way in which participating in the Discovery Initiative has contributed to the work on kindergarten transition in your community:

9. Please provide any additional information about work on kindergarten transition in your community:

10. Please suggest any information, training, or technical assistance you feel would be helpful to work on kindergarten transition in your community:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

Please return to:
Sam Stephens, CAPD
1622 Riverside Drive
Trenton, NJ 08618
sstephens@capd.org

INTENSIVE STUDY COMMUNITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Can you tell us a little about the kindergarten transition work here? What kinds of programs and activities have you implemented?
 - How widespread are these activities?
- Do you think that the kindergarten transition work has “taken hold” in your community? How do you know?
 - What results/outcomes are you hoping for/expecting? What have you seen so far?
- What has helped you to move the Kindergarten Transition work forward and be successful?
- How has being part of the Discovery Initiative helped in your community’s Kindergarten Transition work?
- What challenges have you faced in achieving the goals set out in your kindergarten transition plan?
- What can you tell us about how the school system is involved in this work? Has the relationship evolved over time or was there already a history of working together?
- What are the future plans for the kindergarten transition work? What challenges, if any, do you see to continuing or expanding this work moving forward?

AGENDA
STONE SOUP SESSION
OCTOBER 24, 2010

Kindergarten Transition Practices: Pathways to Changing “The Way Business Is Done”

- Introductions
- Setting the Stage: What Does It Mean to “Change the Way Business Is Done”?
- What have been the most successful ways for getting deep and ongoing buy-in and support for kindergarten transition practices?
- How have challenges to broadly implementing and sustaining kindergarten transition practices been met?
- Wrap-up and Feedback: What are you taking away from this session?

APPENDIX B

**DESCRIPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION WORK
IN THE INTENSIVE STUDY COMMUNITIES:**

**Ansonia ~ Derby ~ Norwalk ~ Seymour ~ Shelton ~ Vernon
The Valley Early Childhood Task Force**

Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Ansonia, Connecticut

“In 2003, we took kindergarten transition as the big project, our baby. Prior to that, nobody had any information prior to school, nobody knew where to go. We looked at a kindergarten transition timetable and started to work on registration and orientation. We have lots of activities that happen now.” Diana Brancato, Ansonia School Readiness Coordinator

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

ANSONIA POPULATION IN 2000

18,554

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

2

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE

10%

% OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE

62%

% OF K-12 STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

48%

The first day of Kindergarten is a big deal in Ansonia.

Preparing students and families for that first day begins well before the students take their seats in their new classroom, though.

For some families, it starts when they see a banner or a billboard as they drive by or visit an area business. For others, it is a fun family outing to the Family Resource Fair at Prendergast School where school secretaries, principals, and board of education employees register kids for kindergarten. Nurses talk about immunizations. Kindergarten teachers, the school Psychologist, and the school Social Worker are on hand to talk about what to expect and show parents the work that kids do in school.

Children at the fair get books, bags full of toys and games, and a book with photographs of the school staff. Parents get a handbook and fun ideas to help them prepare their child for kindergarten. They also have a chance to meet and talk with teachers, the principal and other staff.

Families and students are invited back to the school again in June for kindergarten orientation. Students visit a Kindergarten classroom while their parents meet with teachers and administrators.

Finally, an Open House the Saturday before school starts eases those first day jitters and helps everyone to feel ready and excited for the first day.

Everyone working together

Beyond providing activities, events and resources for families, Ansonia's kindergarten transition plan also builds in opportunities for collaboration among School Readiness staff, community preschool teachers and directors, and kindergarten teachers and school principals.

Preschool providers help kindergarten teachers to learn about and develop strategies for incoming students and have regular opportunities for input to the kindergarten transition plan and activities. Preschool and kindergarten teachers participate in joint professional development opportunities and in the Family Resource Fair and other readiness activities.

Preschool teachers are also invited to visit kindergarten classrooms and keep abreast of changes in classrooms or teachers.

What has worked

The number of children registered before school begins has quadrupled, from 40 or 50 registered by mid summer to almost 200 (about 80% of total enrollment) for the 2011 school year, according to Ansonia School Readiness Coordinator Diana Brancato. Parents now call in advance to find out when the Family Resource Fair will be held, so they can plan to attend and have the information they need to register their child. Additionally, having individual screening information on each child ensures placement in the appropriate classroom and adequate planning to meet the needs of the incoming students.

Brancato also points to increased parent engagement and awareness as a benefit of the kindergarten transition activities in Ansonia. "Parents want more information and want to make sure that their child is ready for school. Parents want to know what they can do to help."

For more information on the Ansonia Kindergarten Transition process and strategies, contact Karen Hicks at ansoniadiscovery@yahoo.com or visit the [Ansonia](http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/) page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

'COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN'

The Ansonia annual timetable carves out year-round activities for School Readiness staff and preschool teachers, community preschool staff, and public school staff. The following are just a few items from this timetable. The complete list is available on the Ansonia page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

FALL

✓ School Readiness staff, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers discuss children's portfolios and the Preschool Information Form and prepare for incoming students.

✓ Preschool staff welcome kindergarten students to school.

✓ Parents of preschool children who will be eligible for Kindergarten the following year receive transition information.

✓ Professional development is offered for preschool and school staff.

WINTER

✓ Preschool teachers visit kindergarten classrooms.

✓ Parents receive registration and nutrition information.

✓ The Family Resource Fair is held and children receive the "Going to Kindergarten" book.

SPRING

✓ Preschool teachers provide schools with information about each child.

✓ Kindergarten orientation is hosted at each school.

✓ School Readiness staff, preschool staff, and public schools staff attend a meeting to discuss transition policies.

SUMMER

✓ A Kindergarten Academic Inventory is scheduled for each registered child.

✓ A welcome event for students and families is held at the schools.

The Valley Early Childhood Task Force

Ansonia is part of The Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Valley Task Force), a partnership that includes Ansonia, Shelton, Derby, and Seymour. The goal of the Task Force is to increase the school readiness skills of young children in the Lower Naugatuck Valley through promoting the importance of early learning. The four municipalities and Boards of Education have contributed to this effort with financial and in-kind resources.



The Task Force carries out the following activities:

- Distribution of baby books and developmental resources to families when their child is born
- Hospital baby fair with educational information and giveaways
- People Empowering People (PEP) leadership development program
- Valley Kindergarten Kick Off kindergarten registration activities
- Legislative breakfasts for legislators, superintendents, and elected officials in winter and fall
- Play and Learn fair in April with hands-on activities for children and their parents
- Professional development day for area early childhood providers and teachers
- Elementary principals roundtable
- Parent workshops with the Valley Family Resource Center
- Resources for parents and providers at area libraries
- Monthly home care provider meetings for sharing and training
- Monthly Preschooltools newsletter for parents and providers
- Valley Director's Network of early childhood professionals
- Development of regional website <http://www.preschooltools.org/>

For more information on The Valley Early Childhood Task Force, contact Pam Lorenzo at plorenzo@vnascc.org

This work was initially funded through the individual community Discovery grants, then in 2006, through a regional grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. The Valley Task Force has also received matching funds from the four municipalities, Boards of Education, TEAM, the Valley United Way and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

Discovery initiative Evaluation by CAPD

The [Center for Assessment and Policy Development \(CAPD\)](#) has been funded by the Memorial Fund to evaluate the Discovery initiative. CAPD is working with [On Point Consulting](#) on this project, which began in 2004. The evaluation team has selected kindergarten transition as a focus policy area to examine school engagement in change to support young children's early success in school. Ansonia was one of 6 intensive study communities interviewed as part of this study, the purpose of which was to identify factors that increase the likelihood that practices and policies to promote successful transition to kindergarten will become institutionalized. For more information on the Discovery evaluation, visit the [Discovery website](#) at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/> or contact Sam Stephens at sstephens@capd.org

Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Derby, Connecticut

"I believe that the people who sit around our table truly believe in what we are doing. We have built relationships and structure. This work will live on in our community because everyone sees its value." Connie Condon, Derby Discovery Coordinator

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

DERBY POPULATION IN 2000
12,391

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
2

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE
17%

% KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE
69%

% STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS
41%

Derby, the smallest city in Connecticut, still struggles with some "big city" problems, including the fact that too many of its public school students are not meeting Connecticut Mastery Test proficiency goals.

The Derby School Readiness Council and Discovery collaborative are working to change that by focusing on Derby's youngest residents and strengthening the connections between families and the public schools--before the children even start school.

A whole host of year-round activities are designed to increase the number of families who register their children for kindergarten early and help families feel comfortable with their new school. In addition to the many kindergarten registration and orientation activities and readiness tools for families, the

Derby School Readiness Council also reaches out to its 12 home care and center based early education providers.

The providers are invited to a roundtable discussion to meet with other providers and teachers in the area, receive training, and share questions and concerns with their peers. They receive training in an area they have indicated an interest in, such as tax advice about their business, nutrition, emergency preparedness, teaching literacy, and local programs that can support their families. They also receive information about school readiness and strategies for working with the children in their care.

It is the back and forth sharing among peers that has brought more providers to the table every year, though.

Building a network

When asked to describe the benefit of participation in the early childhood provider roundtables, Connie Condon, Derby Discovery Coordinator responds, “Home care providers are in their homes on their own with small children for 10-12 hours a day. They are isolated and don't get much ‘me’ time. They relish the time they sit and talk and network. Part of it is just being truly connected with somebody else who understands what their day was like.”

Condon says that every year, the trust and respect between folks around the table grows, and with it the working relationship and communication about the needs of Derby’s young children and their families. “We are all there to make sure that everything happens in the best interest of the kids,” Condon says. Relationships and communication are everything.”

What has worked

The number of children registered before school begins in Derby has increased and Condon hears a “buzz” in Derby and the surrounding communities during the kindergarten registration season.

In Derby, the percentage of students with a preschool experience before entering kindergarten has risen from 47% percent to 69%. School readiness advocates in Derby believe that there is still more work to be done, but see that a lot of progress has been made.

Derby is entering into a community-wide comprehensive planning process for young children and will be looking closely at the needs of young children in the community and what can be done to help them come to school ready to learn.

For more information on the Derby Kindergarten Transition process and strategies, contact Connie Condon at conniecondonct@gmail.com at or visit the [Derby](http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/) page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

To learn more about the kindergarten transition activities and strategies in Derby, visit the Derby page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

FALL

- ✓Preschool programs receive a calendar of kindergarten transition events and readiness checklist.
- ✓Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers meet to discuss challenges and opportunities.
- ✓Parents of preschool children who will be eligible for Kindergarten the following year receive transition information.
- ✓Workshops for families, preschool providers, administrators and teachers.
- ✓Preschool children come to elementary schools to meet staff and participate in activities.
- ✓Children watch a video and receive a book with pictures of school staff and a count down to school calendar.

WINTER

- ✓Registration packet is developed.
- ✓Kindergarten registration is marketed in the community through the media, posters, flyers, banners, and press releases.

SPRING

- ✓Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers visit each other's classrooms.
- ✓Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers meet to discuss challenges and opportunities.
- ✓Kindergarten orientation is hosted at each school.

SUMMER

- ✓Preschool teachers provide an assessment checklist to kindergarten teachers for each incoming child.

The Valley Early Childhood Task Force

Derby is part of The Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Valley Task Force), a partnership that includes Ansonia, Shelton, Derby, and Seymour. The goal of the Task Force is to increase the school readiness skills of young children in the Lower Naugatuck Valley through promoting the importance of early learning. The four municipalities and Boards of Education have contributed to this effort with financial and in-kind resources.



The Task Force carries out the following activities:

- Distribution of baby books and developmental resources to families when their child is born
- Hospital baby fair with educational information and giveaways
- People Empowering People (PEP) leadership development program
- Valley Kindergarten Kick Off kindergarten registration activities
- Legislative breakfasts for legislators, superintendents, and elected officials in winter and fall
- Play and Learn fair in April with hands-on activities for children and their parents
- Professional development day for area early childhood providers and teachers
- Elementary principals roundtable
- Parent workshops with the Valley Family Resource Center
- Resources for parents and providers at area libraries
- Monthly home care provider meetings for sharing and training
- Monthly Preschooltools newsletter for parents and providers
- Valley Director's Network of early childhood professionals
- Development of regional website <http://www.preschooltools.org/>

For more information on The Valley Early Childhood Task Force, contact Pam Lorenzo at plorenzo@vnascc.org

This work was initially funded through the individual community Discovery grants, then in 2006, through a regional grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. The Valley Task Force has also received matching funds from the four municipalities, Boards of Education, TEAM, the Valley United Way and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

Discovery initiative Evaluation by CAPD

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Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Seymour, Connecticut

“We want children to be comfortable in the schools and parents to know what to expect to come in on the first day with a sense of familiarity and have a positive experience. We believe that a positive initial experience will lead to positive student outcomes.”

Mary Sue Feige, Principal of Bungay Elementary School

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

SEYmour POPULATION IN 2000

15,454

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

3

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE

7%

% OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE

86%

% OF K-12 STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

14%

Starting “big kid” school is exciting and scary for both kids and parents.

Educators know that parent involvement makes a big difference in their child’s success in school. Still, building relationships with parents can be hard work.

Seymour is a small community in the Lower Naugatuck Valley that takes parent engagement very seriously. It starts with kindergarten registration, which is held on three evenings at the library as well as during the day. School secretaries, teachers and principals attend the evening sessions where they meet parents, answer questions and hand out the Countdown to School calendar.

Parents are involved on the kindergarten transition team that plans the activities. They can speak to the

concerns and challenges parents face and suggest solutions.

After registration, the PTA follows up with every family- inviting them to events, sharing their experience and answering questions. This “Welcome Wagon” started at one school and has spread to all of the schools and provides ongoing contact for parents, and parent mentors. The schools also offer parenting and literacy workshops and opportunities to meet school teachers and principals prior to the start of school.

The school district provides release time for kindergarten teachers to participate in School Readiness Council Roundtables. Teachers, providers, and district staff come together during the roundtables to share ideas and develop strategies for working together.

Communities helping each other

Seymour is not a Discovery community grantee and does not have excess resources to implement programs and host events-- but it does have administrators, principals, teachers, and parents that are committed to making parents and students feel at home in the schools.

Seymour has drawn upon the experiences of its surrounding communities, Derby, Ansonia, and Shelton. Together, these communities received a Discovery Regional Grant to develop a regional approach to their kindergarten transition work. Seymour was able to participate in the Discovery Kindergarten Transition Institute, which helped the communities to develop a regional perspective and concentrate the regional effort around standardizing kindergarten registration both within each community and across the communities. Now residents see billboards, flyers, and notices in all of the communities about kindergarten registration which is held on the same day in all four of the communities.

What has worked

Seymour has a champion who is passionate about making the first experience families have with the Seymour schools a positive experience. Mary Sue Feige, formerly the Director of Instruction for the District, is now the Principal of Bungay Elementary School. With the support of the Superintendent, she has spearheaded the regional and local efforts to standardize kindergarten transition practices.

Seymour has also been able to accomplish quite a lot despite having limited funds for the work. By focusing on low cost projects and working in collaboration with the library, Seymour has been able to obtain small grants to support their kindergarten transition activities and make a lot of progress in a relatively short period of time.

For more information on the Seymour Kindergarten Transition process and strategies, contact Mary Sue Feige at msuefeige@seymourschools.org

WELCOMING FAMILIES TO SCHOOL

The Seymour School Readiness Council offers a variety of activities and services to families and the community, some of which are listed below. To learn more about the work in Seymour, contact Mary Sue Feige at msuefeige@seymourschools.org

- ✓ Fall parent survey
- ✓ Summer Bus Information meeting where kids can ride the bus with their teacher
- ✓ Summer contact from the Welcome Wagon committee
- ✓ Summer Story Hour where incoming students meet spend time with teachers. Parents learn about the Family Resource Center and other services and meet with the principal, school counselor, PTA President and others.
- ✓ Spring Information Session
- ✓ Parenting workshops
- ✓ Round Table discussions for early education providers and kindergarten teachers

The Valley Early Childhood Task Force

Seymour is part of The Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Valley Task Force), a partnership that includes Ansonia, Shelton, Derby, and Seymour. The goal of the Task Force is to increase the school readiness skills of young children in the Lower Naugatuck Valley through promoting the importance of early learning. The four municipalities and Boards of Education have contributed to this effort with financial and in-kind resources.



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- Play and Learn fair in April with hands-on activities for children and their parents
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- Parent workshops with the Valley Family Resource Center
- Resources for parents and providers at area libraries
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- Monthly Preschooltools newsletter for parents and providers
- Valley Director's Network of early childhood professionals
- Development of regional website <http://www.preschooltools.org/>

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Discovery initiative Evaluation by CAPD

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Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Shelton, Connecticut

“To us, the relationship between the library and the Shelton School Readiness Council is a very natural one and we enjoy each others company very much.” Elspeth Lydon, Director of the Shelton Library System and Chair of the Shelton School Readiness Council.

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

SHELTON POPULATION IN 2000

38,101

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

5

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE

10%

% OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE

89%

% OF K-12 STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

11%

In 2003, Elspeth Lydon, Director of the Shelton Library System was invited by then Superintendent Leon Sylvester to attend a meeting of the Shelton School Readiness Council. Little did she know that in just a few years, she would be the group's Chair.

“The first thing I did was research school readiness to see why a public library director would be involved in a school committee,” remembers Lydon. “Finding that the local public librarian was seen as a key player in the council's work, I attended the first meeting and saw what direction the readiness council was taking. With a BS in Child Development, it was natural that I stuck with the Council...”

During that time, the Plumb Memorial Library has become a hub of activity for school readiness events. In addition

to story times for preschoolers, the library also offers a special program series for school support, including Mother Goose Math, Math +Books=Fun, Book Buddies, book discussions, Family Bingo, craft programs, and seasonal events.

In the winter, families participate in the Passport to Family Fun event. In the summer, children preparing to enter kindergarten can sign up for Kindergarten Boot Camp, where educators do fun activities with the children and provide pointers to parents on various subjects.

In addition to these special events, there are School Readiness desk sites at the main library and the branch library where readiness information is distributed.

Reaching families

The Plumb Memorial Library is located in the downtown area of Shelton and is used by many lower income families, an important target group for the School Readiness Council. The programs described above, as well as classes for parents, such as English as a second language classes, are offered in an accessible, comfortable environment. For some parents, schools are not comfortable places, perhaps because they feel intimidated or because memories of their own educational experience are not positive. The Library is a non-threatening learning environment, where all in the community feel welcome.

What has worked

The Plumb Memorial Library markets the work of the School Readiness Council and lets people know how the School Readiness Council can be a support to families. Through the library, school readiness activities reach children who are not enrolled in preschool and provide an opportunity for them to be exposed to learning experiences.

Through the partnership with the library, the School Readiness Council has been able to expand its reach and do more than it otherwise would. The library provides staff and supplies, as well as a free location for Council meetings and activities.

The Library also promotes the Council's activities, both directly through its newsletter, events listed in the weekly paper, and flyers. It also promotes the work in a less direct way. Council meetings are held monthly at the library and community members sometimes drop in and become engaged in the work. "Over the past 6 months more than 6 new people have 'wandered' in to the meetings to offer support," says Elspeth Lydon.

For more information on the Shelton Kindergarten Transition process and strategies, contact Pat Banfe at william.banfe@snet.net or visit the [Shelton](http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/) page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

'FIRST YEARS LAST FOREVER'

The Shelton School Readiness Council offers a variety of activities and services to families and the community, some of which are listed below. To learn more about the work in Shelton, visit the [Shelton page](http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/) of the Discovery websites at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

- ✓ Early Childhood Fair at the Plumb Memorial Library in April
- ✓ "A Day in Kindergarten" video
- ✓ Community/Partner Breakfast
- ✓ Monthly newspaper columns about parenting
- ✓ Monthly newsletter in English and Spanish
- ✓ Parenting workshops
- ✓ Round Table discussions for parents
- ✓ Round Table discussions for early education providers
- ✓ School Readiness Desks with information at the Shelton Community Center, the local library, Shelton City Hall, and the Boys and Girls Club
- ✓ Rotating School Readiness Desk at Back-to-School Nights, fairs, festivals, business, library, and provider locations
- ✓ School Readiness Kits
- ✓ Welcome to Kindergarten booklet for students with pictures of teachers and school staff

The Valley Early Childhood Task Force

Shelton is part of The Valley Early Childhood Task Force (Valley Task Force), a partnership that includes Ansonia, Shelton, Derby, and Seymour. The goal of the Task Force is to increase the school readiness skills of young children in the Lower Naugatuck Valley through promoting the importance of early learning. The four municipalities and Boards of Education have contributed to this effort with financial and in-kind resources.



The Task Force carries out the following activities:

- Distribution of baby books and developmental resources to families when their child is born
- Hospital baby fair with educational information and giveaways
- People Empowering People (PEP) leadership development program
- Valley Kindergarten Kick Off kindergarten registration activities
- Legislative breakfasts for legislators, superintendents, and elected officials in winter and fall
- Play and Learn fair in April with hands-on activities for children and their parents
- Professional development day for area early childhood providers and teachers
- Elementary principals roundtable
- Parent workshops with the Valley Family Resource Center
- Resources for parents and providers at area libraries
- Monthly home care provider meetings for sharing and training
- Monthly Preschooltools newsletter for parents and providers
- Valley Director's Network of early childhood professionals
- Development of regional website <http://www.preschooltools.org/>

For more information on The Valley Early Childhood Task Force, contact Pam Lorenzo at plorenzo@vnascc.org

This work was initially funded through the individual community Discovery grants, then in 2006, through a regional grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. The Valley Task Force has also received matching funds from the four municipalities, Boards of Education, TEAM, the Valley United Way and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

Discovery initiative Evaluation by CAPD

The [Center for Assessment and Policy Development \(CAPD\)](#) has been funded by the Memorial Fund to evaluate the Discovery initiative. CAPD is working with [On Point Consulting](#) on this project, which began in 2004. The evaluation team has selected kindergarten transition as a focus policy area to examine school engagement in change to support young children's early success in school. Shelton was one of 6 intensive study communities interviewed as part of this study, the purpose of which was to identify factors that increase the likelihood that practices and policies to promote successful transition to kindergarten will become institutionalized. For more information on the Discovery evaluation, visit the [Discovery website](#) at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/> or contact Sam Stephens at sstephens@capd.org

Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Norwalk, Connecticut

“We know that kindergarten transition is multi-layered and the children in our program have had little or no preschool experience and sometimes English is not their primary language. Our program prepares the kids for what school looks like and creates individual portfolios for each child that teachers can use to understand where they are at.”

Anthony Allison, Program Director at Norwalk Children's Foundation

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

NORWALK POPULATION IN 2000

82,951

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

12

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE

33%

% OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE

82%

% OF K-12 STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

30%

How to reach young children who have had little or no preschool experience and help them be better prepared for kindergarten? This is a question that many communities wrestle with.

The Norwalk Children's Foundation and Norwalk Community College have teamed up with the Norwalk Public Schools to address this challenge by creating a summer kindergarten prep program.

Brighter Futures, which grew out of a pilot project in 2005, is a six-week program where teachers use a literacy-based curriculum to work with students and the Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework to create portfolios for each student. The program targets children who have

had little or no preschool experience, do not speak English at home, or are at risk of not succeeding in kindergarten. While six weeks is a very short period of time to impact a child's development, teachers are able to identify areas in need of improvement, which gives kindergarten teachers an opportunity to address these areas earlier. Further, relationships are built between school staff and the children in the program, and with their families.

Children, parents, and teachers alike experience something special through their participation in Brighter Futures. One parent commented, "...This program has been a blessing to my daughter who had no preschool experience. She loves school and on weekends I have to explain why there is not school."

What has worked

In 2009, more than half of the students in the Brighter Futures program showed progress in their language skills and 88% showed improvement in writing. Almost all of the students showed progress in their social and literacy skills.

Further, teachers note that children who participate in Brighter Futures transition easily into kindergarten. The portfolios created for each child in the program are also very helpful for the teachers in understanding each child's strengths and areas that need attention.

Lessons learned

The team has learned a few things along the way about how to deliver the highest quality program in a relatively brief period of time. Not unexpectedly, high quality teachers who see this as more than a "summer job" are key. Similarly, keeping the class size small to give teachers time to work with students is critical.

Communication, not only between staff members, but also with parents to build relationships and work together is another important element of this kind of program.

Finally, the team in charge of planning this program emphasize that, despite being only a six week program, the planning is year-round.

Brighter Futures is just one aspect of the Norwalk Early Childhood Council's plan for young children. For more information, contact Karen Helyer at helyerk@norwalkps.org or visit the [Norwalk page](#) of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

What do Kindergarten teachers say about Brighter Futures?

"I can specifically say that the Brighter Futures program is one of the most exciting early childhood benefits in Norwalk. It is amazing how many times the children make reference to their teachers from the summer and the big books that they made connections to as we read them in kindergarten, too."

Lisa Malizia, Kindergarten Teacher

What do students say about Brighter Futures?

"I love this school. I don't want to leave."

Arianna

What do parents say about Brighter Futures?

"The teachers were amazing with the children. They did an amazing job getting kids interested in the books they were doing each week."

The Blair Family

Discovery initiative Evaluation by CAPD

The [Center for Assessment and Policy Development \(CAPD\)](#) has been funded by the Memorial Fund to evaluate the Discovery initiative. CAPD is working with [On Point Consulting](#) on this project, which began in 2004. The evaluation team has selected kindergarten transition as a focus policy area to examine school engagement in change to support young children's early success in school. Norwalk was one of 6 intensive study communities interviewed as part of this study, the purpose of which was to identify factors that increase the likelihood that practices and policies to promote successful transition to kindergarten will become institutionalized. For more information on the Discovery evaluation, visit the [Discovery website](#) at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/> or contact Sam Stephens at sstephens@capd.org

Kindergarten Transition



in the Discovery Initiative

A Discovery Evaluation Project, Fall 2010

Vernon, Connecticut

“People in the trenches often feel left out of planning and advocacy. This gives them the opportunity to be involved in meaningful work.” Bruce Blair, Co-chair of the Vernon School Readiness Council Professional Development Committee

FAST FACTS

*From 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

VERNON POPULATION IN 2000
28,063

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
5

% OF STUDENTS FROM A HOME WHERE ENGLISH IS NOT THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE
6%

% OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS WITH PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE
74%

% OF K-12 STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEALS
28%

Bringing early care and education program providers and teachers together and getting them on the same page is an important aspect of the kindergarten transition process. The Vernon School Readiness Council has developed an inclusive approach to developing partnerships and aligning practices.

The Vernon Early Childhood Community of Practice is a group of public school and community program early childhood professionals. The group works to improve communication across all Vernon early childhood programs, share information and best practices, and align classroom and administrative practices around National Association for the Education of Young Children standards and the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework.

The purpose of this work is to ensure that young children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

The work of the group to date has been focused primarily on kindergarten transition activities and policies, planning a conference for preschool and kindergarten professionals, and producing a universal assessment “report card” based on the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework.

This work arose from the recognition that teachers and providers were not connected to each other or the School Readiness Council. It started with the sharing of curriculum and teaching practices and has grown into a focus on sharing of standard child assessment information to create a seamless transition to kindergarten.

Building Partnerships and Aligning Practices: A Conference for Preschool and Kindergarten Professionals

In 2008, the Vernon School Readiness Council used Discovery funds to offer a conference for early childhood providers called, “Building Partnerships and Aligning Practices: A Conference for Preschool and Kindergarten Professionals. The conference offered sessions on using child-specific assessment data, balancing data collection with teaching time, using teaching and assessment tools, and sharing promising practices in kindergarten transition.

Out of this conference came monthly meetings to work on curriculum alignment. The Community of Practice group has drafted and piloted a preschool child assessment report based on the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework.

What has worked

There is a sense among participants that the Community of Practice work has given them a feeling of acknowledgement and respect. “Now we have a tool for knowing and sharing children’s readiness and we can better prepare children for school. We have a way to establish relationships and jointly problem solve when sending on a child with developmental gaps.” Bruce Blair, Co-chair of the Vernon School Readiness Council Professional Development Committee.

The Community of Practice has helped to establish basic concepts and common language that each program can use. The process has brought together early childhood practitioners from a variety of settings.

For more information on the Vernon Kindergarten Transition process and strategies, contact Sally Sherman at ssherman@vernon-ct.gov or visit the [Vernon](http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/) page of the Discovery website at <http://www.discovery.wcgmf.org/>

WHAT ARE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE?

“Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

Webpage of cognitive anthropologist Etienne Wenger
<http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>