

GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TRANSITION

CHILDCARE SERVICES

SCHOOL





The content of this publication is the result of a joint initiative of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Québec.

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Title of original document: Guide pour soutenir une première transition scolaire de qualité

English version: Direction de la production en langue anglaise (DPLA)
Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone et des affaires autochtones (SSCAAA)

Association Québécoise des Centres de la Petite-Enfance (AQCPE)
Commission scolaire de la Seigneurie des Mille-Îles (CSSMI)
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Direction générale des services sociaux (DGSS)

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Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

ISBN : 978-2-550-60545-4

ISBN : 978-2-550-60546-1 (PDF)

Dépôt légal – Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2010

Dépôt légal – Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2010

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

How can educational childcare services and schools take concrete action to make sure they implement every means possible to support a successful school transition? What can we learn from studies on successful transition activities? This guide aims to provide childcare services and the education community with information on what constitutes a successful transition in order to help them analyze, improve and implement transition practices between the different environments that care for and provide services to children.

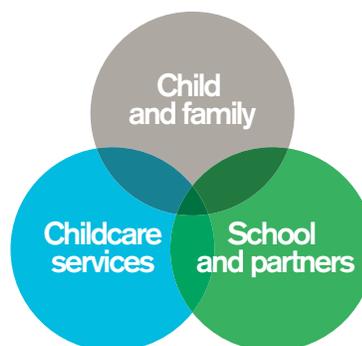
WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is intended for the staff and management of childcare services, school boards, schools, the health and social services network (CSSSs) and youth centres, as well as various community partners.

WHAT IS A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION?

Transition is defined as the “time period during which the child gradually adjusts to his or her new physical, social and human environment” Legendre, 2005, p. 1404 (translation).

A successful transition means a harmonious transition for the child, the child’s family and the adults in the child’s life. This period requires mutual adjustment by the surrounding environments involved in order to promote a successful start at school.



WHAT DOES A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION ACCOMPLISH?

A successful transition enables the child to do the following:

- › Have a sense of well-being and security in the new school environment
- › Develop positive attitudes and emotions towards school and learning
- › Develop a sense of confidence in his or her ability to do well in school

A successful transition also provides the child with the following:

- › Continuity in his or her educational experience, thus fostering the child’s optimum development
- › Recognition of his or her abilities
- › Development of positive social contacts with the staff and with the other children

Various studies (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003) show that positive experiences on the part of the child and the child’s family contribute significantly to a successful start at school. The manner in which adults support, or fail to support, children during this transition period can give rise to experiences that are either happy or difficult—even disturbing (Rosenkoetter, Hains and Fowler, 1994). In certain contexts, the transition may be a sensitive period for student development and learning, and therefore requires increased attention (Côté, Goupil, Doré and Poulin, 2008). Finally, a successful transition helps to reassure parents regarding this important step in their child’s life.

WHAT MAKES THE FIRST SCHOOL TRANSITION SO UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT?

The transition from childcare to preschool is the first in a long series of transitions for both the child and the family. Studies show that if this first transition occurs harmoniously, it will lay the foundation for future transitions. It will have a real impact on the child's motivation and commitment to school. By extension, it will also have consequences for his or her retention and success in school. The child and the family will feel more capable of making successful transitions elsewhere once they have already made a successful transition here. The start of the child's schooling also represents an excellent opportunity for developing harmonious school-family-community relationships.

WHO BENEFITS FROM SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS?

All children benefit from the positive effects of a successful transition when starting school. Most of them have the ability to adapt, which enables them to make these transitions harmoniously. These children are said to have personal **protection factors** (e.g. positive peer relationships) which, when combined with positive protection factors in their family (e.g. parental support and encouragement) and social environment (e.g. participation in supervised activities in the community), go a long way to promote adaptation.

For a number of children, however, transitions are more difficult, due to an accumulation of **risk factors** that require the provision of increased transition practices adapted to their particular needs and attributes (e.g. difficulty in establishing close relationships, certain motor or other impairments, limited access to supervised recreation services in their community and difficult socioeconomic conditions). It is important to note that all these factors relating to success and perseverance in school interact with one another and have a combined effect. In fact, studies have shown that negative risk factors have a multiplying effect:

Combined number of risk factors	Negative impacts
One risk factor	The probability of negative impacts is the same as for children who are not exposed to any risk factors
Two or three risk factors	The probability of negative impacts is four times greater.
Four risk factors	The probability of negative impacts is multiplied by ten.

Source : Rutter, Giller and Hagell, 1998

Admittedly, childcare services and schools have less control over some of these risk factors. However, knowing the child and analyzing his or her individual needs and situation make it possible to adapt and modulate actions accordingly. Childcare services and schools have the tools to jointly support the child by introducing protection factors that are equal or superior to the risks incurred, by focusing on the following aspects:

- › The quality of the adult-child relationship
- › The support offered throughout the child's development
- › Cooperating with the family
- › Introducing interactions between childcare services and the school
- › Developing a coherent approach to school transition
- › Eliminating administrative obstacles
- › Etc.

WHEN SHOULD ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION BE INTRODUCED?

An effective transition is planned and carried out over a period of at least 12 months, at the following five times:

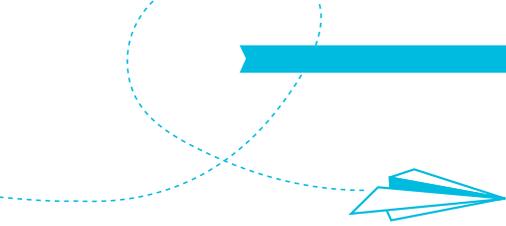
- › prior to admission to school (August to December)
- › during admission to school (January-February)
- › after admission to school, but before the beginning of the school year (March to June)
- › around the beginning of the school year (June to September)
- › after the beginning of the school year (October-November)

“Numerous and frequent transition activities guarantee a successful transition for each child.”
(Ruel, Moreau, Bourdeau and Lehoux, 2008)

WHAT PRINCIPLES FORM THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PRACTICES?

Current findings identify certain principles that promote a successful school transition. Six of these principles were selected as the foundation for six analysis grids on the transition practices established in your environment, which are presented below, along with various suggested activities. These suggestions are not meant to be carried out in full, but rather to serve as examples to stimulate further reflection by childcare services and schools. The activities may be implemented continuously throughout the school year or at repeated sessions. Childcare services and schools are encouraged to develop their own innovative practices to meet the specific needs of the children.





FIRST PRINCIPLE

Recognizing that it is the parent who is primarily responsible for the child's education.

Main protection factors to be put in place

Adopting a positive attitude toward parents at all times.

Factor
in place

Factor to be
developed

Developing and maintaining a collaborative relationship with parents.

Including parents in the organization of some transition activities.

Informing parents of the services available at the school.

What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Frequently invite parents to participate in various transition activities.

Support parents and their child in preparing a portfolio of the child's transition from childcare to school (strengths—prior learning—preferences—working approach) and provide them with a model portfolio to serve as a guide.

Invite parents to come play with their child in the school yard in the summer.

Send a letter to welcome and inform parents and have the word "welcome" and a summary of the information translated into their mother tongue.

At the time of admission, provide parents with documents that will help them prepare their child for this transition.

Plan an admission schedule that takes the parents' availability into account.

Offer parents support on how to follow procedures for admission to preschool education.

Plan the first meeting with parents of preschool students to take place on a pedagogical day at the beginning of the school year (helps to reassure parents).

Organize a school open house during which students at the school act as tour guides for visiting parents and their children.

Establish a clear communication protocol with parents (use of agenda, returning calls, etc.).

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Sharing responsibility for a successful transition among stakeholders through collaborative practices.

Main protection factors to be put in place

Developing a spirit of collaboration among the stakeholders involved in the life of the child (family, childcare service, school, community partners, CSSS, etc.)

Factor in place	Factor to be developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sharing of responsibilities among stakeholders.

Recognizing each person's contribution and expertise in a spirit of complementarity and not competition.

Diversifying and facilitating communication among stakeholders, both internal and external.

What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Hold various joint activities with childcare services and the CSSS in the neighbourhood school.

Jointly organize and plan activities for future students at the school's childcare services facilities.

Invite preschool teachers to come visit the childcare facilities, and vice versa.

Invite future students attending childcare to come see a year-end show put on by the students at the school or by students at the childcare services.

Use many different strategies to maintain links connecting childcare services, the school, community services and families (e.g. open houses, home visits, letters to children and to parents).

Announce the dates and times for admission to neighbourhood schools at the childcare facilities.

Establish and respect guidelines for presenting portfolios made by the children and their parents, in collaboration with childcare services.

Identify ways of connecting with parents who may be weak readers or have little schooling (e.g. use different-coloured sheets of paper for different types of information; use large print, simple vocabulary and short sentences).

THIRD PRINCIPLE

Continuously planning, organizing and assessing transition activities

Main protection factors to be put in place

Establishing a transition process planned jointly by the school board and the different childcare services in its territory.

Factor
in place

Factor to be
developed

Ensuring that the transition practices are part of a planned, vibrant and structured procedure that involves all stakeholders.

Ensuring there is someone clearly designated to promote and monitor transitions in each of the environments concerned.

Fostering commitment and shared responsibility, while respecting the role of each participant.

Quickly developing, where applicable, an individualized intersectorial service plan (IISP).

Jointly, and on a regular basis, assessing the transition practices used in the child's environment.

What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Provide an efficient, recognized space for working together between the networks and the partners in order to establish planning guidelines.

Raise awareness and mobilize childcare and school administrators regarding the importance of successful transitions and of analyzing the practices that are already in place in their environment.

Organize annual meetings for school administrators and the staff concerned to meet with childcare workers in order to plan the transition process for the children in their territory, including the Passe-Partout services.

Regularly discuss educational practices and identify strategies to support successful transitions between childcare services and the school.

Plan and carry out activities to raise awareness among target groups with the support of community organizations and health and social services (CSSSs).

Inform parents regularly of the transition activities their child will take part in throughout the school year.

Invite children to participate in organized classroom activities. The school administrators meet with the parents to discuss the school's expectations and the complementary educational services offered by the school, and to answer various questions.

Be sure to quickly mobilize, where appropriate, all stakeholders in developing an individualized intersectorial service plan (IISP) for a child.

Jointly assess the transition activities that have been carried out and make any necessary adjustments.

FOURTH PRINCIPLE

Recognizing the time required and providing the necessary resources

Main protection factors to be put in place

Recognizing the time required for various staff members to plan, organize, implement and assess transition activities.

Factor in place	Factor to be developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tailoring the duration and intensity of the transition activities to the individual needs and attributes of the child, the child's family and the environments.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Setting up a plan for the continuous professional development for each staff category.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Making sure to allow for the necessary budgets.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Plan discussions between childcare services, the Passe-Partout program and preschool staff on their respective programs, and coordinate their continuity.

Set up a flexible work structure and the conditions to facilitate it, in keeping with the implementation of transition activities (e.g. allow for release time, use pedagogical days, recognize the time needed, assign supplementary staff).

Integrate into the planning of childcare activities occasions for talking about the school (e.g. put together a photo album of the school, explore it with the children, tell stories about the school).

Offer the staff training adapted to the characteristics of the children in their care.

Offer information events for parents (e.g. mini-conferences).

FIFTH PRINCIPLE

Involving everyone who knows the child and tailoring transition practices to the child

Main protection factors to be put in place

Ensuring the sharing of relevant information (e.g. summaries, reports) in keeping with the rules governing confidentiality.

Factor in place	Factor to be developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remaining focused on the needs of the child and the child's family throughout the transition.

Focusing on the quality of the relationship with the child and the child's family.

Making sure to take into account each child's individual situation.

Emphasizing the strengths of each child.

What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Encourage practitioners in the community and the CSSS to support families in preparing for their child's admission to school.

Agree on means (forms, portfolios or other) of providing relevant information that emphasize the child's particular needs during admission.

Invite the different staff members who work with the child and the child's parents to talk about the child in order to determine the child's needs (intersectorial meeting).

Invite, as needed, partners from cultural community groups and associations to these meetings.

Make sure the child's portfolio and the childcare services and CSSS reports are available to the child's school and are presented before the school year begins.

Involve the CSSS staff in supporting the students that are known to them as they begin school (e.g. school visit; strategy sharing).

SIXTH PRINCIPLE

Recognizing that starting school is a determining factor in the child's development

Main protection factors to be put in place

Talking about the child and the child's family in positive terms.

Factor in place	Factor to be developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Frequently saying positive things about the school.

Raising staff awareness about the importance of a successful transition.

What needs to be developed?

Examples of effective practices

Get the children actively involved in the suggested transition activities.

Arrange special activities, projects, formal and informal talks on the topic of starting school.

Organize activities to help the children and parents feel comfortable about school.

Set up, in each respective environment, transition activities to be carried out over time, in connection with the other five principles.

WHO DOES WHAT, WHEN AND HOW?

Prior to admission to school

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

During admission to school



**After admission to school,
but before the beginning of the school year**

After the beginning of the school year

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

Around the beginning of the school year

USEFUL LINKS TO PRACTICAL, CONCRETE TOOLS

CENTRE D'AIDE ET DE SOUTIEN AUX INTERVENANTS ET ORGANISMES EN PETITE ENFANCE. *Passage à l'école* (<http://www.casiope.org>).

CENTRE D'EXCELLENCE POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DES JEUNES ENFANTS. *Transition vers l'école* (<http://www.enfant-encyclopedie.com/fr-ca/transition-ecole/est-ce-important.html>).

MINISTÈRE DE LA FAMILLE ET DES AINÉS. *La passerelle* (http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/SG_frequentation_scolaire_passerelle.pdf) (French only).

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"TABLE DE CONCERTATION POUR LES ENFANTS AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS," IN MAURICIE—CENTRE-DU-QUÉBEC *De la petite enfance vers le préscolaire – Une transition* (<http://www.rcpe04-17.com>) (French only).



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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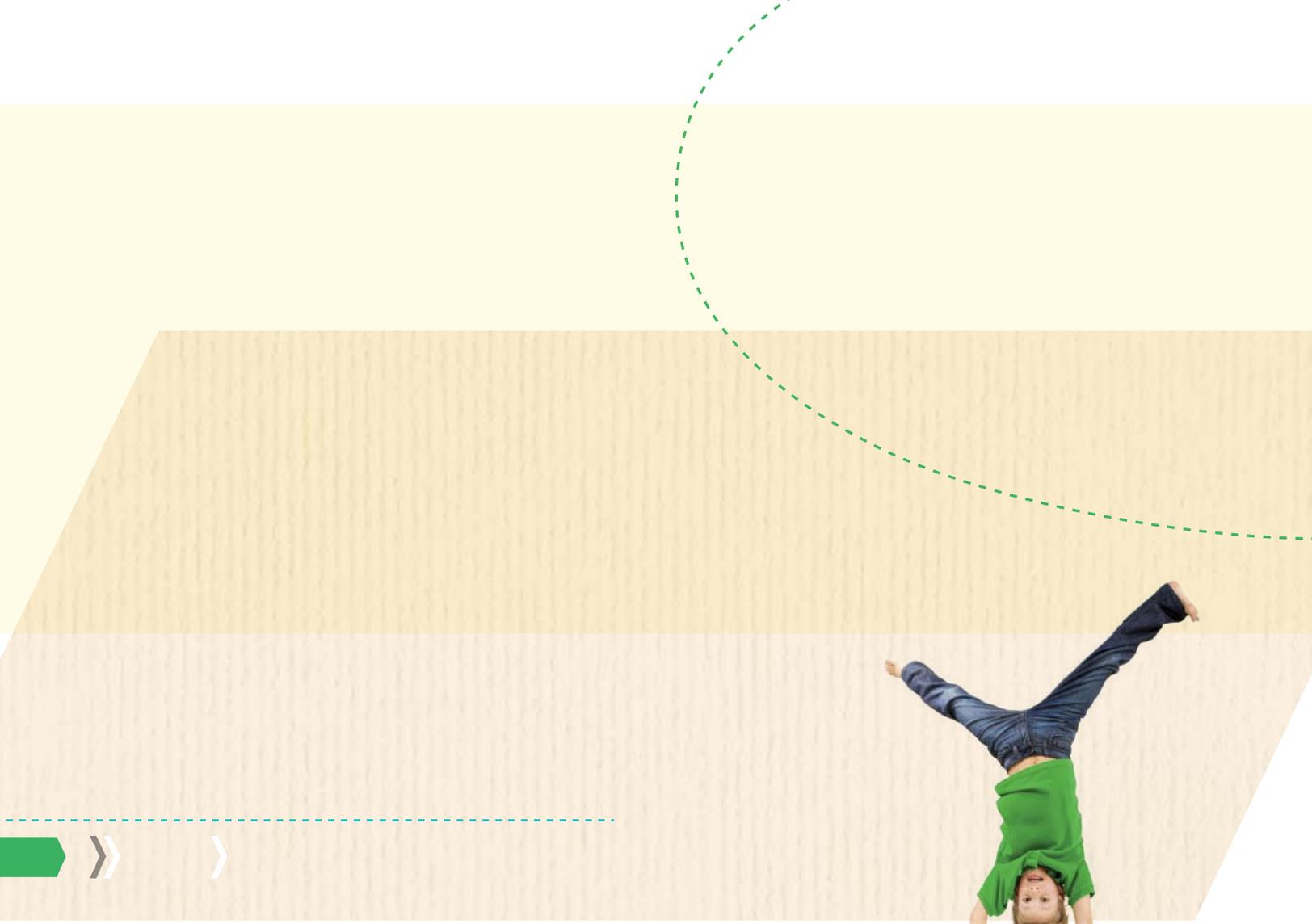
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With the participation of:
• Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
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