Understanding Children's Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten

OMB Information Collection Request
New Collection

Supporting Statement
Part B

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Part B

B1. Objectives

Study Objectives

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposes to conduct a comparative multi-case study of promising approaches to supporting the transition from Head Start to kindergarten. The primary objectives are to understand (1) the multi-layered perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices around kindergarten transitions within Head Start, within elementary schools, and across systems including the organizational contexts that influence transitions; and (2) the direct experiences of families and their children. OPRE aims to better understand these two objectives through a case study of six purposively selected cases, by studying (1) the organizational strategies and approaches that support effective transition practices at scale—including understanding relationships within and among organizations and systems—and (2) families' individual experiences. To that end, OPRE and its' contractors (henceforth referred to as the research team) will collect information through semi-structured, informational interviews. In addition, within each site, the research team will recruit individual Head Start families to participate in a focus group in order to learn how families experience the kindergarten transition and how different strategies may differentially influence children and families with different needs. OPRE will also examine the social and organizational networks, connections, and associations among the various respondents involved in the transition process through a social network instrument and analysis approach. Findings will inform future ACF data collections and testable hypotheses related to kindergarten transitions.

Generalizability of Results

This study is intended to present an internally valid description of the population of staff and families in selected sites. The case study approach precludes generalization to other sites or service populations. Based on our recruitment and sampling plan, this study will focus on sites that already have existing relationships and/or partnerships across Head Start programs and LEAs that focus on supporting kindergarten transitions. Therefore, findings would highlight the experiences, strategies, strengths, and challenges for programs and schools already engaged in collaborative work. The goal, then, is to provide some guidance that may be useful for other sites as they begin efforts to collaborate across the two systems. Within our sample, we will be exploring how different characteristics of these programs and LEAs may be related to their experiences, such as configuration (see "Appendix C—Case Study Site Examples by Organizational Structure and Configuration" and description under B.2).

Appropriateness of Study Design and Methods for Planned Uses

A comparative multi-case study design is the most appropriate design to answer our research questions (*see Supporting Statement A, part 2*) because it involves an examination of bounded systems, that is, individual *cases*. Each case in this study is the inter-organizational system that exists between Head Start and elementary school sites. The case study approach allows for comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices of interest within individual contexts. The holistic and rich descriptions possible with this design can inform future, testable hypotheses. No causal links between approaches and outcomes can or will be measured. The key limitations of the study design listed here will be included in all written products associated with this study. As noted in Supporting Statement A, this information is not intended to be used as the principal basis for public policy decisions and is not expected to meet the threshold of influential or highly influential scientific information.

B2. Methods and Design

Target Population

For each of the six cases, the research team will collect information from a similar set of respondents from Head Start centers, elementary schools, Head Start grantee/delegate agencies, and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to foster comparability across the Head Start and K-12 "sides" of the kindergarten transition process. Respondents will include agency administrators, program/school leaders (i.e., Head Start center directors and elementary school principals), teachers, staff, and community service partners. We will also collect information from Head Start families and conduct a follow-up interview with a subset of these families after their child transitions into kindergarten. See "Appendix C—Case Study Site Examples by Organizational Structure and Configuration," and "Instrument 3—Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups" for more detail.

In order to identify who will be recruited for the study, we will ask each site for rosters. From each Head Start program, we will request a roster of Head Start teachers of 4-year-old children who plan to transition into kindergarten. From each partner elementary school, we will ask for a roster of kindergarten teachers who receive children from partner Head Start programs. From each Head Start Grantee, Head Start program, LEA, and elementary school, we will ask for a roster of administrative and support staff that support children and families throughout the transition, in addition to a list of community providers that work with children and families throughout the kindergarten transition. The research team will use non-probability, purposive sampling to identify potential respondents who can provide information on the study's key constructs. Because participants and case study sites will be purposively selected, they will not be representative of the population of Head Start agencies, Head Start programs, LEAs, elementary schools, or community service partner staff. Participating families will not be representative of the population that the programs or schools serve. Instead, we aim to obtain variation in families' experiences to understand engagement with the range of transition activities and supports within a given site.

Site Selection

Identification of prominent Head Start-LEA configurations. We hypothesize that perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices will differ depending on inter-organizational systems. Examples of these configurations include:

- One-to-One: A Head Start grantee provides direct services at one or more Head Start centers; parents and children enroll in kindergarten within one LEA.

- One-to-Many: Head Start grantee provides direct services at one or more Head Start centers or delegates its services to an LEA; parents and children enroll in kindergarten in multiple schools and/or LEAs (which can be inclusive of the school(s) where Head Start classroom(s) are co-located).
- Many-to-Many: Head Start grantees provide direct services or delegates services to multiple centers and/or elementary schools; parents and children enroll in kindergarten in multiple schools and/or LEAs (which can be inclusive of the school(s) where Head Start classroom(s) are co-located). In addition, LEAs receive kindergarten students from multiple Head Start programs.

In order to compare what strategies, practices, experiences, relationships, and outcomes look like across different types of configurations, the research team will recruit cases from across various Head Start-LEA configurations.

Within each of the six cases, data collection will occur at center-based and school settings to capture the systems and processes most proximal to the experiences of children and families as well as at community organizations that partner with the Head Start center and/or school. "Appendix C—Case Study Site Examples by Organizational Structure and Configuration" is illustrative of a scenario where the research team samples two cases from each configuration.

Identification of potential cases that reflect Head Start-LEA configurations. In order to identify potential cases for our study, the research team will seek nominations of known Head Start-LEA partnerships that depict innovative and/or promising transition practices. As we gather names of potential cases, we will compile a list to review as a research team that will include features of the cases and sites.

Collection of preliminary data from potential cases for selection. To best address the research questions, the six cases will be selected across a variety of selection criteria (see "Appendix A—HS2K Characteristics of Potential Sites for the Comparative Multi-Case Study" and Section B2. Methods and Design below for more detail). While some of these characteristics can be identified through pre-existing datasets (see Supporting Statement A, part 4), several require initial conversations with administrators at potential case study sites. For example, the research team will conduct conversations with potential sites regarding pre-existing relationships between Head Start agencies/delegates and Local Education Agencies (LEAs), as well as innovative practices and promising approaches to the kindergarten transition. A brief conversation––conducted virtually via videoconference or telephone––with administrators at potential sites is the most appropriate method to gather this qualitative information. See attached "Instrument 4—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Programs and Schools" for more detail.

Criteria for selecting cases. We will select cases using intensity sampling.[1] The primary selection criterion is the existence of promising transition practices and approaches, including those practices that demonstrate coordination, alignment, and collaboration within and across the Head Start and LEA

[1] Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. Qualitative Social Work, 1, 261-283.

systems. Furthermore, cases will be selected for variation across predetermined selection criteria. See "Appendix A—HS2K Characteristics of Potential Sites for the Comparative Multi-Case Study" and "Appendix D—Urbanicity Categories" for more detail.

Respondent Recruitment

See Appendix E for all recruitment materials.
Head Start grantee/agency and LEA. The research team will hold initial 45-minute conversations with Head Start grantee/delegate agency and LEA administrators for recruitment using an outreach script (see "Instrument 4—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Programs and Schools Head Start Families" and "Instrument 5—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Head Start Families"). Once a Head Start grantee/agency or LEA agrees to participate in the study, the research team will provide written documentation that outlines the agreement and expectations of both the research team and the agency/LEA.

Practitioners. As the research team reaches out to Head Start grantees and LEAs to gauge the feasibility of participation in the study, they will request an organization chart and staff roster to identify potential respondents and seek Head Start and LEA's guidance on the most appropriate staff to interview within each respondent category. See "Appendix F—Type of Respondents, by Organization, and Data Collection Protocol" for the number of respondents per site. Once selected, the research team will seek guidance from Head Start center and elementary school leaders on the best way to recruit staff (e.g., through the leaders or by directly reaching out to staff to invite them to participate in the study).

Head Start families. The research team will recruit a group of Head Start families for participation in focus groups. Participants will be selected through a four-step process after Head Start programs agree to participate in this study.

1. The research team will generate an initial slate of potential respondents by randomly selecting from de-identified rosters—provided by Head Start programs—of children transitioning to kindergarten.
2. Center Directors will conduct an initial outreach to families to gauge interest in study participation and obtain approval to share families' contact information with the research team.
3. The research team will contact and gather preliminary information from interested parents. (See details under *B4: Collection of Data*).
4. The research team will use this preliminary information to intentionally select families for recruitment, narrowing down the list of families to a final focus group of 8-10 primary caregivers per Head Start site (not to exceed a total of 48 families across the six Head Start sites). Families will be contacted and invited to participate in a focus group.

Recently-transitioned Head Start Families. The research team will select a smaller respondent group from the Head Start families participating in the focus groups for a follow-up interview after their child transitions to kindergarten. During the Head Start focus group, the research team will ask families if they would be interested in participating in an individual interview once their child is in kindergarten. To ensure a respondent group of families of diverse circumstances and backgrounds, the research team will use the information gleaned from the background questionnaire to recruit two participants per each of the six Head Start sites. The research team will then reach out to families the following school year (once their child has transitioned into kindergarten) to invite them to participate in an interview. See "Instrument 1—Head Start Family Background Questionnaire" for more details.

B3. Design of Data Collection Instruments

Development of Data Collection Instruments

As discussed in Supporting Statement A, Exhibit A2.1: Data Collection Activities, the study instruments include a recruitment script for programs and schools; a recruitment script for Head Start families; discussion guides meant to address study constructs through interviews with practitioners and primary caregivers; a family background questionnaire for collecting demographics, information on exposure to transition activities, and special family circumstances; and a practitioner survey meant to capture the professional social networks within cases.

The research team created a matrix of draft constructs and protocol items, mapping each protocol item onto the study research questions. This format ensured that each construct was represented in the appropriate respondent protocols. See "Instrument 3—Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups" for more details.

All constructs and related protocol items are project-generated and uniquely tailored to the respondent type; however, the research team kept note of which items were informed by existing projects and studies that completed similar qualitative work regarding kindergarten transitions. The research team derived protocol items from the following works:

- Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (2003). *Successful kindergarten Transitions: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools.* Brookes Publishing.
- Arneson, R. (2016). Preschool to school: Transition through the eyes of teachers (Dissertation).
- Miller, K. (2015). The transition to kindergarten: How families from lower-income background experienced the first year. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *43*(3), 213-221.
- National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). *Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies Program: Data collection instruments.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/instruments2011.asp.
- National Education Association and National Parent Teachers Association (n.d.). *A successful kindergarten transition.* Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/successful-kindergarten-transition-nea
- Tempe PRE preschool expansion project (ongoing research project led by NORC at the University of Chicago)

To minimize qualitative measurement error from the interviews and focus groups, the research team developed role-specific protocols for interviewers so that each respondent type is asked the same questions and follow-up probes across case study sites. Additionally, the research team will oversee the training of interviewers to ensure standardized interviewing practice (see "Site Visit" section below for more details).

B4. Collection of Data and Quality Control

Data Collection Quality and Consistency. Preliminary recruitment conversations with LEA and Head Start Grantee/Delegate Agency administrators will be held by one senior and one mid-/junior-level researcher from OPRE contractor NORC at the University of Chicago. The same script will be used to verify and collect information, ensuring consistency in the information collected across potential future case study sites.

The site visits will be conducted by a two-person team, comprised of one senior/mid-level and one junior staff, drawing upon staff across the contractors comprising the research team. Planning for the winter/spring 2022 visit will occur during pre-site visit calls with the Head Start grantees and LEAs.

The research team will conduct a half-day training for all data collection staff to address general and site-specific concerns to ensure consistent, efficient, and culturally responsive data collection. Topics will include:

- Study purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework
- Primary data collection measures and instruments (i.e., social network survey, interview protocols, focus group background questionnaire and protocol)
- Document review (see "Appendix G—Document Review Abstraction Template")
- Respondent privacy and informed consent procedures
- Team roles and responsibilities
- Etiquette
- Planning, logistics, scheduling, and post-data-collection activities
- Documentation and data handling/security
- Note cleaning and coding and analysis procedures

Initial Recruitment Conversations with Practitioners. The research team will hold 45-60 minute conversations with Head Start grantee/delegate agency and LEA administrators. They will not be obligated to participate. Conversations will be held virtually and recorded, with respondent permission. If permission is not granted, the junior member of staff will take notes. Using an outreach script (see "Instrument 4—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Programs and Schools"), we will verify the information aggregated from PIR and CCD (see Supporting Statement A, part 4), probe for the interpersonal and institutional relationships that support the transition to kindergarten, inquire about transition approaches and practices, review the proposed study's purpose and goals, and gauge feasibility for potential study participation. The research team will use the information from these initial recruitment calls to inform the selection of the final six cases, and formally invite those cases to participate in the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Practitioners. The research team will conduct semi-structured interviews with key staff at Head Start grantee/delegate agencies, LEAs, Head Start centers, elementary schools, and community service providers. After recruiting case study sites at the agency level, we will invite respondents to participate in an interview. They will not be obligated to participate, and they will receive a token of appreciation for their participation. Interviews will be conducted on-site and recorded, with respondent permission. If permission is not granted, the interviewer will take notes. If COVID-19 restrictions and/or guidelines prevent on-site data collection, interviews will occur virtually (e.g., Zoom or similar service). This data collection will also include a short questionnaire (see "Instrument 2—Social Network Instrument") asking about the respondent's professional social network, which will be administered via Qualtrics on a tablet or through a web link if interviews are conducted remotely. Interview transcripts will be coded and subjected to inter-coder reliability checks. See section "Data Collection Quality and Consistency" for more detail.

Initial Recruitment Conversations with Head Start Families. To ensure a respondent group of families of diverse circumstances and backgrounds, we will hold a 15 minute initial discussion with potential family members for recruitment to the focus groups. The research team will inquire as to whether families have experienced circumstances requiring special supports, as well as whether parents have participated in leadership activities. We will provide a list of family characteristics we hope to represent —exposure to trauma, special education needs, culture and linguistic variations, exposure to child welfare systems, and housing instability and homelessness––but will not prompt families to specify. (See "Instrument 5—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Head Start Families" for specific language we will ask families.) We will also ask whether family members participate in any leadership activities, such as serving on the policy council. This information will help the research team decide who to formally invite to participate in focus groups.

Focus Group with Head Start Families. The research team will conduct focus groups with Head Start families. Family focus groups will be conducted in-person after case study sites have committed to participating in the study or virtually if either (a) the Head Start program does not allow for in-person data collection due to COVID-19 or (b) the recruitment of families is not complete by the time in-person site-visits occur with case study practitioners. If COVID-19 restrictions and/or guidelines prevent on-site data collection and the focus group will occur virtually, families will have the option to call into the focus group, although we will encourage video participation to mimic the interactive nature of focus groups. In-person and/or virtual focus groups will be recorded, with permission of participants. If permission is not granted, the research team will take notes. A background questionnaire (see "Instrument 1—Head Start Family Background Questionnaire") will be administered at the start of the focus group. If done virtually, the research team will forward a Qualtrics link prior to the start of the focus group. Transcripts will be coded and subjected to inter-coder reliability checks. See section "Data Collection Quality and Consistency" for more detail.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Recently Transitioned Head Start Families. The research team will conduct follow-up semi-structured interviews with two primary caregivers from each of the focus groups. Families will be recruited from the Head Start family focus group participants. Interviews will be conducted remotely via Zoom or similar platform, with both video and call-in options. Transcripts will be coded and subjected to inter-coder reliability checks. See section "Data Collection Quality and Consistency" for more detail.

B5. Response Rates and Potential Nonresponse Bias

Response Rates

The interviews, focus groups, and case studies are not designed to produce statistically generalizable findings and participation is wholly at the respondent's discretion. Response rates will not be calculated or reported. Respondent demographics will be documented and reported in written materials associated with the data collection.

Non-Response

As participants will not be randomly sampled and findings are not intended to be representative, non-response bias will not be calculated; however, the research team will record refusal rates and refusal demographics where applicable.

B6. Production of Estimates and Projections

The data will not be used to generate population estimates, either for internal use or dissemination.

B7. Data Handling and Analysis

Data Analysis

The data confirmed and obtained through initial recruitment will help populate a matrix that documents selection criteria for the future case study in "Appendix A—HS2K Characteristics of Potential Sites for the Comparative Multi-Case Study."

The research teams' analyses will focus on examining whether coordination between the systems leads to successful transitions for teachers, families, and children. Through case-level analysis, the research team will describe coordination strategies and practices, relationships to support transitions, and the intended outcomes for each Head Start and elementary school site, as noted in the research questions (*see Supporting Statement A*, *section 2*). We will learn about the length and depth of relationships across systems, how staff collaborate with one another to support transitions, and the specific shared practices and supports that are enabled through the coordination efforts. Through a deeper and comparative analysis across the six cases, we will then examine whether we see similarities and differences in the perceived outcomes of transition efforts across cases. We will do this by comparing how families, teachers, and staff perceived the successes and challenges of the transition strategies and coordination efforts. Building on our understanding of the level and degree of coordination within each case, we will then compare the perspectives, professional supports, practices, and policies as well as perceived outcomes across cases to see if there are similarities and differences. For example, do similarities and difference exist by type of configuration (1-1, 1-to-many, many-to-many), structural characteristics, programmatic and implementation factors, or by role and relationship? In “Appendix H—Constructs and Analytic Questions,” we present examples of analytic questions we would explore, building on the research questions and constructs (as presented in “Instrument 3—Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups”). We anticipate that this systematic and comparative inquiry will generate emergent themes and more nuanced understandings about the structural or process features that support the transition to kindergarten and alignment across child-serving systems

Developing the coding scheme. As a precursor to the analysis, the research team will develop a codebook based on the research questions, conceptual framework, the research team’s theory of change, and constructs. The initial codebook will contain a priori codes drawn from the protocols and organized by the research questions and related constructs (see “Instrument 3—Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups”): Strategies and practices across Head Start and elementary schools (RQ 1, RQ2); relationships to support transitions (RQ3); and outcomes (RQ4). Additional inductive codes may be added during the analysis process as we compare and contrast information across sites and discuss understandings of the data.

Qualitative data cleaning and coding procedures. Two senior researchers from the research team will oversee all data collection and analysis procedures, with input and support from The broader team of senior project staff. These two senior researchers leading this task will be responsible for training all staff involved in data collection as well as training for qualitative coding and analysis procedures using Dedoose software.[2] Following each site visit or virtual data collection effort, site visit teams will clean and prepare the interview and focus group transcripts for coding. All transcripts will be scrubbed of personally identifiable information before uploading to Dedoose. Every researcher involved in a site visit, will meet together and hold targeted, consensus-building discussions, to answer specific questions and discuss convergent or conflicting coding and themes. The site-visit team will also review and potentially add inductive codes that have emerged. The senior researchers overseeing data analysis will conduct a random spot-check of coded transcripts to check agreement with coding decisions and gauge inter-rater reliability.

Conducting within-site and cross-site analyses on key constructs. Using the query tools in Dedoose, the research team will retrieve coded data relevant to the research questions and conduct a tiered analysis to identify key themes within and across sites. Integrated analyses will focus on transition approaches, strategies, and relationships; how these may differ across sites; and how families are experiencing those practices and supports. Cross-site analyses will compare similarities and differences in strategies and practices in Head Start and elementary schools, relationships to support transitions, and perspectives on outcomes across the three types of configurations (i.e., one-to-one; one-to-many, many-to-many), given their potential differences in structure (agency type, enrollment size), policy context, practice,

[2] Dedoose (version 8.0) is a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2019).

relationships, and contextual factors. The research team will conduct analyses by respondent type on similar constructs to obtain a well-rounded understanding about multiple aspects of the transition experience from the perspective of administrators, managers, staff, providers, and families.

Conducting thematic analyses of family experience. The research team will conduct analyses using the focus group and interview data on families' experience with the transition process to understand how variations in policies, professional supports, and practices relate to kindergarten transitions may inform their experience. Additionally, further analyses will examine if there are similarities or differences based on family characteristics (e.g., exposure to trauma, special education needs, culture and linguistic variations, exposure to child welfare systems, and housing instability and homelessness).

Understanding coordination and collaboration through social network analysis. The social network analysis will shed light on the relational nature of coordination and collaborations across Head Start and LEA staff in support of the transition process (i.e., administrators, staff, teachers, a community provider). From each set of respondents we will learn: 1) with whom individuals work—both within their organization and outside of their organization—to coordinate or carry out transition activities or supports between Head Start and kindergarten; 2) the frequency of their interactions; and 3) the degree to which respondents perceive the individuals they work with to be instrumental in ensuring successful transitions. The analysis will address the composition and structure of networks and calculate typical measures of network structure and cohesion: number of people named; number of people named with different roles (domains); density of contacts; and inter domain connections (the connections of different types of people within and across organizations and systems). During analysis, the research team will triangulate the social network data with descriptions gleaned from the interviews with Head Start and LEA staff about policy implementation, information sharing, and coordinated activities and practice within organizations and across systems. We note that a lack of direct correspondence by role within cases or conflicting perceptions (e.g., if a Head Start teacher names a kindergarten teacher that is part of the case study site, but the kindergarten teacher does not list that same Head Start teacher when filling out the social network survey) might be attributed to sampling and data collection constraints or differing perceptions across respondents about the nature or strength of a relationship.

Data Use

The research team will publish findings from this data collection in at least one practitioner- or policymaker-friendly brief that will be publicly available and actively disseminated to various stakeholders in the kindergarten transition landscape. Study design limitations will be clearly noted in all publicly available materials. This includes the fact that these results are not intended to be representative of or generalizable to any given subpopulation, but rather to provide descriptive information about what approaches are being implemented in various locales and what their key challenges are.

Data will be made available through data archiving. The research team will properly archive information and data collected and thoroughly document all materials archived so that a wide variety of researchers and stakeholders are able to access, use, and duplicate any analyses conducted by the project. As it is commonly done in qualitative studies, the research team expects to be able to archive interview guides (list of questions posed to study participants); codebooks (list of codes with definitions); documentation of study approval by an oversight board such as the IRB; transformed data such as raw data tagged with codes, key quotes illustrating themes, and a description of the methods used to collect and analyze data.

B8. Contact Person(s)

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*Can answer questions about the statistical/methodological aspects of the design and analyses.

Attachments

Appendix A—HS2K Characteristics of Potential Sites for the Comparative Multi-Case Study

Appendix B—Consent Language for Data Collection

Appendix C—Case Study Site Examples by Organizational Structure and Configuration

Appendix D—Urbanicity Categories

Appendix E—Recruitment Materials

Appendix F—Type of Respondents, by Organization, and Data Collection Protocol

Appendix G—Document Review Abstraction Template

Appendix H—Constructs and Analytic Questions

Instrument 1—Head Start Family Background Questionnaire

Instrument 2—Social Network Instrument

Instrument 3—Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups

Instrument 3a—Administrator Interview Protocol

Instrument 3b—Site Leadership Interview Protocol

Instrument 3c—Teacher & Staff Interview Protocol

Instrument 3d—Head Start Manager Interview Protocol

Instrument 3e—Community Partner Interview Protocol

Instrument 3f—Kindergarten Family Interview Protocol

Instrument 3g—Head Start Family Focus Group Protocol

Instrument 4—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Programs and Schools

Instrument 5—Initial Outreach and Recruitment Scripts for Head Start Families