

Responses to Public Comments on the Understanding Children's Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) New Information Collection (ICR Reference #202108-0970-009)

From Alan Guttman

Consider adding the following respondents to the list of those individuals to be surveyed as transition of children with disabilities (or suspected disabilities) from Head Start to kindergarten includes specific communication and coordination requirements for Head Start and receiving schools:

> LEA

special education coordinators/managers/specialists

special education specialists

> Private School

special education coordinators/managers/specialists

> LEA

Child Find staff

HS2K Response: Our current respondent structure allows this type of inclusion of staff focused specifically on students with disabilities from both Head Start and LEAs. For example, in Appendix F of our OMB package, we note there are multiple administrators per site on both the Head Start and LEA sides. Special education coordinators and specialists would be considered one of the Head Start and district administrator staff who could participate in our study.

From NHSA

In order to maximize the success of this study, we have several recommendations we would like to share with the research team to inform this and future stages of the HS2K study.

Defining Transitions: *We recommend a broad definition of transitions, looking further than just the time between the end of Head Start and beginning of kindergarten. Critical components of a successful transition begin long before and continue long after this hand-off. They include activities such as coordinated enrollment between early learning programs, shared data, appropriate assessment tools, and strong parent and family engagement efforts by both schools. Ensuring your definition of transitions include these elements will lead to a more complete picture of successful strategies.*

HS2K Response: We appreciate this broad definition of transitions and have carefully considered the most appropriate definition for this specific project. Because the project is specifically focusing on the transition to kindergarten and we believe that a focused definition will help us learn more about transition supports (not only from teachers but also at the program and systems levels), we have

defined the time period of kindergarten transitions to include the full year of Head Start prior to transitioning into kindergarten and the full year of kindergarten. As noted in our Topic Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews, our protocols include topics noted by NHSA, such as:

- Strategies for engaging family around the kindergarten transition
- Perceptions of family participation in kindergarten transition practices
- Alignment and continuity of practices between Head Start and kindergarten
- Information/data collection and sharing between Head Start and kindergarten
- Family relationship with center/school staff
- Partnerships with community organizations to support kindergarten transitions

Addressing Families: *We encourage the research team to assess the contributions of and impacts on families during the Head Start to kindergarten hand-off. Parents are a child's first and most important teacher and they are integral to facilitating a smooth transition to kindergarten and supporting a child long after. Thus, any study on transitions should understand the impact of Head Start's parent and family engagement activities on children's transitions, and the effect of the transitions themselves on families.*

HS2K Response: While the current study is not designed to measure impact, it does have an intentional focus on understanding families' experiences and contributions throughout their child/children's transition from Head Start to kindergarten. We propose holding focus groups with Head Start parents and following up with a subset of them once their child has started kindergarten. Discussion topics for the Head Start Family Focus Group (OMB Instrument 3g) include information and engagement with Head Start staff around how to prepare for the transition and activities families could be doing at home with their child. Once children have transitioned into kindergarten, our Kindergarten Family Interview protocol (OMB Instrument 3f) includes discussion of ongoing engagement and collaboration with their child's kindergarten teacher/school after the transition, how relationships with their child's kindergarten teacher/school have supported the transition process, and what has been most helpful—not only for their child but for them (as a parent/guardian).

Focusing on Equity: *Given Head Start's focus on serving the most vulnerable families in their communities, we recommend the study include analysis on families with additional needs. Head Start programs provide support around homelessness, mental health, substance use disorder, foster care, and more. We would be interested in learning what transitions looks like and what transition strategies are most successful for those families who need more than pre-K in isolation or fragmented services.*

HS2K Response: We appreciate this comment and agree on the focus on equity. Our protocols with staff have specific probes that ask about sub-populations of children and families and our questions seek to understand whether transition supports are universally available or if more targeted approaches are undertaken. In addition, we plan to intentionally seek out families who have special needs for inclusion in our Head Start family focus groups. Our recruitment materials (OMB Appendix C4a) include language that seeks to understand whether potential families have additional needs and/or faced particular challenges that could require additional supports during the transition. Then, at the beginning of our focus groups, we ask questions on a short survey that allow us to understand whether families who are in that focus group have particular situations that may require special attention during the transition



(e.g., child with disabilities, family or child speaks a language other than English, child or family have experienced trauma, child is in foster care, family has a history of housing instability or food insecurity).