

Discussion paper

Measuring effective transitions to school

Continuity of learning and development

Published June 2022



The Australian Education Research Organisation is Australia's national education evidence body, working towards excellent and equitable outcomes for all children and young people.

Acknowledgements

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and Elders past and present.

AERO acknowledges that this publication was made possible by the joint funding it receives from Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Authors

Amie Fabry, Jen Jackson, Katy Thomas, Emily Greaves and Katey De Gioia.

Other contributors

AERO appreciates the valuable input from the Transitions Project Advisory Group (PAG) members and expert advisors, Emeritus Professors Sue Dockett and Bob Perry. Views represented in this paper are attributable to AERO, and do not represent an endorsed view from PAG members or others consulted in its development.

Contents

What are effective transitions? 4

Measuring effective transitions 4

Whose views matter on transitions? 6

Options for measurement 6

01 Children's capabilities 7

02 Teacher and educator practices 11

03 The context in which transitions occur 12

About the project 15

References 16

What are effective transitions?

An effective transition to school occurs when children and families feel a sense of belonging in their new school community, and when this is also recognised by teachers and educators (Dockett and Perry 2014). While various definitions of effective transitions to school exist (Fane et al. 2016), this definition provides an especially useful starting point for improving practice.

An effective transition to school has occurred when a child feels a sense of belonging in their new school community.

For a child, this sense of belonging at school may include a feeling that:

- their teacher and peers like, value and accept them
- the curriculum is interesting and relevant
- they are capable of succeeding at school
- their cultural identity is welcome and valued
- they can 'be themselves', within appropriate boundaries.

This definition of an effective transition is based on the Australian Education Research Organisation's (AERO) initial scoping of the literature that exists around transitions to school. Relevant insights include:

- transition is a social process, unique to each child and their family, involving many stakeholders and extending over time. Developing a sense of belonging at school depends on the experiences and actions of the child; their family; and the support that they receive from their teachers and educators in early childhood education and care (ECEC); teachers at school; their peers; and the wider community (Joerdens 2014; CESE 2021a; Krakouer et al. 2017)
- a sense of belonging can support learning, wellbeing and engagement over a child's entire time at school (Gregory et al. 2021; Nergaard 2020). Students who feel engaged in school achieve better outcomes and stay at school for longer. Those who are disengaged at the beginning of their schooling risk falling into cycles of low achievement and further disengagement (Martins et al. 2022)
- a marker of effective transitions lies in the child's sense of belonging, not only the behaviours they might display (Dockett and Perry 2022). While behaviour can be one indicator of whether children feel they belong, children who demonstrate required behaviours at school may still be concealing fear and discomfort

This definition of an effective transition provides a valuable starting point for conversations about how we know whether children and their families feel a sense of belonging in their school community. It also provides opportunities to consider how we might use measures to better understand children's and families' sense of belonging and how we can better support them to achieve this.

Measuring effective transitions

Various definitions of effective transitions to school have made it difficult to measure whether transitions are effective (CESE 2021). By focusing on a child's sense of belonging, it becomes possible to organise a range of measures relevant to transitions around a central idea and apply and interpret them more easily.

Measurement of effective transitions can serve a range of purposes.

- **Recognising and celebrating existing practices that support transitions** across ECEC and schools, to build on and sustain current successes. Recognising the contributions of both ECEC and schools to the transition process, and how each can foster a child's sense of belonging, is a strong basis for partnerships that can take transitions practice to the next level.
- **Monitoring and evaluating efforts to improve transitions**, including in policy and practice. Substantial efforts have already been made across Australia to support better transitions to school, so a shared framework for describing effective transitions can help identify what is working.
- **Catalysing and concentrating conversations about transitions**, which bring stakeholders together to interpret data and evidence. These discussions can help to clarify roles and responsibilities in the transition process, and how stakeholders can work together to shift outcomes.

Each of these purposes requires a broad view of transitions that takes multiple indicators of effectiveness into account. Focusing on any single measure of transitions risks excluding important perspectives or narrowing the focus of practice to what is measurable, rather than what matters. The best methods are those that include multiple perspectives (Dockett and Perry 2022; Hugo et al. 2018); and prompt critical reflection for teachers and educators (Semann et al. 2015).

Research highlight: Child and family voices

Incorporating children's voices into any evaluative measure may have particular benefits and is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989) and the OECD's position that 'the view of the child is crucial to the realisation of a child and family centred ECEC system' (OECD 2015). Privileging children's voices when evaluating transition practices can bridge tensions and divisions between professionals in ECEC and schools, allowing for reflective processes to centre on the child; and for transitions programs to be relevant and meaningful (Büker and Höke 2019).

Examples of the power of children's voices to inform transitions include:

- in Germany, a joint project between one primary school and two kindergartens involved cross-institutional and multi-professional learning activities several times a year. Children's thoughts were regularly discussed in joint reflection and planning meetings. The ensuing discussions prompted critical reflection, new solutions and strategies, and improved learning experiences for the children (Büker and Höke 2019)
- in Iceland, children's voices were captured to inform transition practices, revealing their preoccupation with the differences in structure, routines, behavioural and academic expectations between ECEC and school (Einarsdottir 2013)
- in Denmark, interviews conducted with preschool children and their ECEC teachers revealed the children's needs and expectations about what they would do and learn at school (Broström 2019). This rich information about their desires for friendships, a friendly atmosphere, kind teachers, challenging play-oriented lessons and outdoor activities provided a wealth of opportunities to create transition practices that met their needs.

Parents' voices are also valuable for evaluating transitions and exploring how to foster families' sense of belonging in the school community. An example of this is The Tassie Kids project, which explored how parents experienced their children's transition, their own role in preparing their children for school, and the role of ECEC services through the concept of readiness (Jose et al. 2020). Findings from this study highlighted the transition that parents experienced from ECEC parent to school parent. It also revealed that some parents feel a sense of anxiety about separation or carried negative associations from their own experiences of school.



Whose views matter on transitions?

As there are multiple stakeholders involved in transitions, the 'success' of transition to school may vary depending on whose perspective is being considered (Hugo et al. 2018). As children experience the transition to becoming school students, families become the family of a school child and teachers and educators in both ECEC and schools experience the transition as they either become or relinquish their role as the child's educator (Dockett and Perry 2022).

Different perspectives on the transition experience may arise from the below.

- **Children**, whose perspectives on their transition to school are shaped by a range of factors, including their level of family support, siblings' prior experiences, making friends, familiarity with their teacher, rules and expectations, and knowledge of the school environment and routines (Hugo et al. 2018; Semann et al. 2015).
- **Diverse professionals**. The success of a transition may look different to ECEC and school professionals, depending on their expectations and experiences. In addition, many children and families have professional supports (e.g. welfare, medical or allied health professionals), who each bring their own perspectives.
- **Families**, who may hold different views to teachers and educators, including the criteria about what constitutes an effective transition to school. Parents may also experience different levels of confidence in assisting their child to transition to school and navigate challenges (Giallo et al. 2008).

Research has also explored the distinctive transition experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Bell-Booth et al. 2014; Taylor 2011), those with a disability or developmental delay (Zaidman-Zait et al. 2019; Hughes et al. 2018), or from a language background other than English (De Gioia 2017). While not every child in these cohorts will experience a more challenging transition to school, issues of equity and diversity for individuals and communities are important considerations in understanding transition experiences.

These diverse perspectives warrant situational rather than blanket approaches to transition (Broström 2019). This requires sophisticated methods of measurement that can capture diverse views. A range of evaluative methods are currently used:

- in policy, transitions evaluation methods include case studies, reflective questions, decision-making and assessment tools, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, pilot studies and action research projects
- in research, transitions evaluation methods include collaborative, reflective Participatory Action Research (McLeod and Anderson 2020); situated learning models (Fleet et al. 2018); self-evaluation instruments used by ECEC and schools to plan collaboratively (Büker et al. 2022) and reflection rubrics (Dockett and Perry 2022)
- in practice, teachers and educators often use informal strategies to elicit diverse views and evaluate their practice, such as discussions with children and families and feedback from colleagues, even if they are unaware of formal measurement options (Semann et al. 2015).

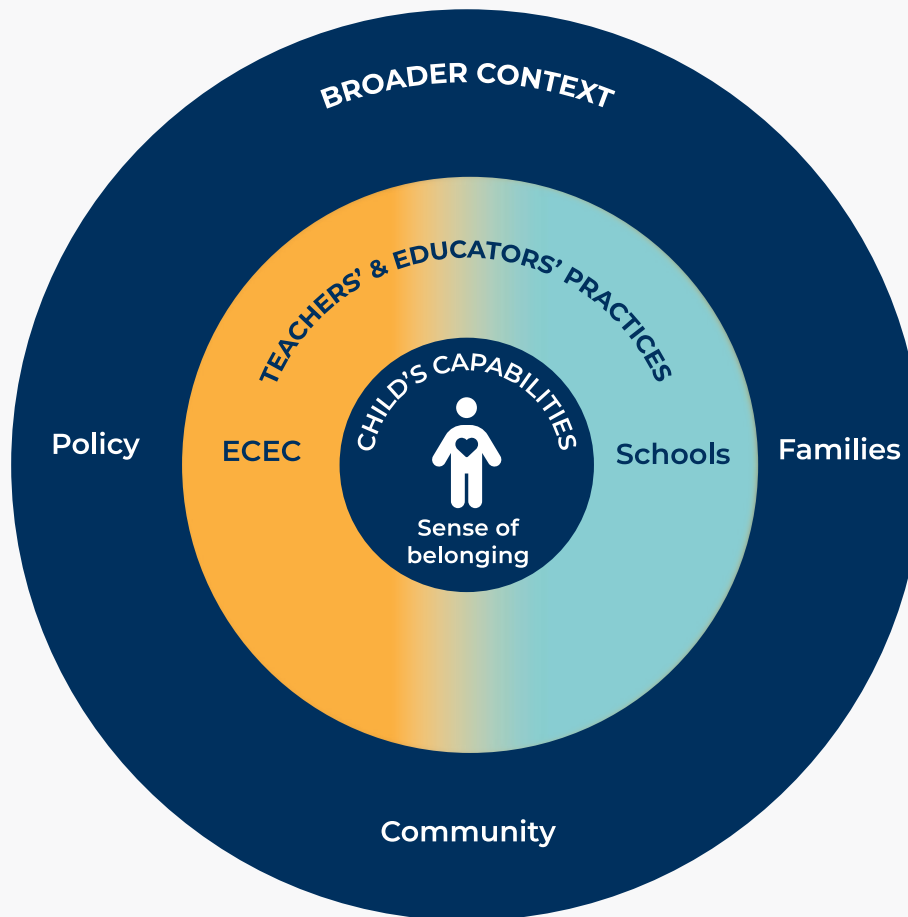
This paper aims to help policymakers, schools and ECEC services better connect and interpret existing evidence on transitions from various sources, to improve measurement without adding to administrative burden. It may also help identify new opportunities for measurement, where capacity exists to explore them.

Options for measurement

This section outlines the constructs that can be measured in determining whether transitions to school are effective. The constructs are illustrated in a framework below, which draws on the ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993). The framework has 3 key components:

- at the centre of the measurement framework are the experiences of the child and their family. This is the true measure of an effective transition; their sense of belonging at school
- the capabilities of the child help to shape their experience of transition. This approach moves beyond a normative view of the child as 'school ready' or not, to reframe the transition process as an interaction between what the child knows and can do, and the support that they receive
- the next layer addresses the practices of teachers and educators in both ECEC and school settings, which also help shape the child's experience. Practices in each setting are not viewed in isolation but can complement and reinforce each other when professionals work collaboratively
- the outer layer concerns the context around the child and the ECEC and school setting. This

Figure 1: Measurement framework for effective transitions



includes the family and school community as well as the broader policy context.

- Bronfenbrenner acknowledged that these layers influence one another and also change over time.

Figure 1 illustrates how these factors contribute to the development of a sense of belonging at school. The remainder of this paper details these factors, including their importance for transitions, options for measuring and evaluating them, and examples of how they are measured internationally and in current Australian policy and practice.

Each section ends with reflective questions for policymakers, leaders, teachers and educators in ECEC and schools to drive discussion about the effectiveness of transitions in their context. Reflecting on each individual factor and the interactions between each factor can improve understanding of transitions as a whole.

Children's sense of belonging is closely related to their sense of identity and feelings of competence (Margetts 2013). Children's capabilities assist them to navigate the changes associated with transition as they become familiar with the new environment. The capabilities that children need in the transition process align well with the capabilities that schools and ECEC services aim to foster.

In ECEC services, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), *Belonging, Being and Becoming* (DESE 2019) positions a sense of belonging as central to a child's ability to grow, learn and thrive. This is supported by the 5 outcomes of the EYLF:

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

01 Children's capabilities

Research highlight: Context matters

Christensen et al. (2020:14) state, 'we need to be cautious in interpreting child-only measures of school readiness.' The research found that children exposed to parenting risk, which is not measured by AEDC indicators, were more likely to also experience lower academic outcomes and experience emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Through collecting data on children's physical health, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development at the age 4 to 5 years and comparing this information to data collected at age 8 to 9, they found that child indicators such as social-emotional skills as well as parenting and community risk factors and interactions with teachers were all predictors of child outcomes in third grade.

The researchers argue that improvement to existing policy and practice should consider context in addition to child development, stating, 'school readiness is not just a question of whether the child is ready for school, but also whether the child's family, school and community are ready to support the child in going to school' (Christensen et al. 2020:2).

In schools, the Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2011) sets out 7 general capabilities that all children and young people will be supported to develop at school:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology (ICT) capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding.

Children's progress in each of these outcomes and capabilities shapes their experience of the transition process. Schools and ECEC services can enhance children's experience of transition by fostering this broad base of capabilities, not just literacy and numeracy alone. Understanding children's progress is therefore an important part of understanding how each child can best be supported, and the many types of strengths that each child may bring to the transition.

Information about children's capabilities is captured in a range of ways:

- **at national level**, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), an internationally validated measure of learning and development across 5 domains for all Australian children, is undertaken every 3 years. AEDC data is collected in the first year of school, so it is a valuable measure of children's capabilities at a critical time in the transition phase (Clanchy et al. 2021; Semann et al. 2015). Other relevant national work includes

measures of preschool 'value add' through the Preschool Outcomes Measure Expert Advisory Group (DESE 20 October 2021), and Schools Policy Group (SPG) has examined measures of readiness for school, which may inform the next National Measurement Framework for Schooling

- **at state and territory level**, additional measures of child capabilities exist in preschool or the first year of school. These address progress in literacy and numeracy, wellbeing and health related factors, or gaps in learning and developmental concerns to access early intervention (CESE 2021a)
- **at ECEC service and school level**, teachers and educators collect a range of information about children's capabilities before and after their transition to school. This may include observations of children's progress against the EYLF outcomes, assessments of learning against the capabilities in the Australian Curriculum, or other child-level measures such as student engagement surveys. When this information is interpreted through the lens of transitions to school and shared between ECEC and schools it can be valuable for identifying what kinds of support a child might need, or which strengths can be celebrated and leveraged to help them through the transition process.

Best practice in measuring capabilities

- **Measure capabilities for formative, not summative purposes**

Measures of children’s capabilities are most valuable when they are used formatively, to inform transitions practice or policy. This frames measurement as a diagnostic process to help schools to be ready for children. Summative uses of such measures can result in over-emphasis on children’s ‘readiness’ for school, placing pressure on ECEC services and families to have children ‘ready’, such as learning letter recognition and being able to sit cross-legged (Jose et al. 2020; McDowell Clark 2017). Summative measurement also poses a risk in labelling children as ‘not ready’ for school while they are still in a critical period of learning and development (Boyle et al. 2018; McDowell Clark 2017).

- **Measure a range of capabilities that matter for effective transitions**

The transition to school is an ideal time to focus on children’s general capabilities, reinforcing the holistic learning and development in the outcomes of the EYLF. This may involve adopting new ways of observing and measuring children’s progress, as many capabilities that matter to transitions (such as problem-solving and executive function) are not generally measured in schools (Education Council 2019; ACARA 2011). It may also involve strengthening information-sharing between schools and ECEC services.

The use of holistic measures also prevents the risk of ‘schoolification’ of ECEC, where a focus on academic achievement creates pressure to adopt formal approaches to teaching and learning in the early years (Bradbury, 2019); as well as creating anxiety for many families (Mergler and Walker 2017).

- **Measure capabilities in diverse contexts, to capture ‘hidden strengths’**

Children may demonstrate different capabilities in different contexts, depending on where they feel most comfortable, or have the most opportunities. These differences are especially important in transitions to school, as children’s capabilities may be hidden when they move from ECEC or home into school. Schools can work with ECEC services to understand how they can provide an environment in which each child can be at their best. Families may also have valuable insights into children’s strengths in the context of the home that are not picked up through formal measures (Boyle et al. 2018).

Understanding capabilities across contexts can also illuminate contextual factors that affect children’s progress. Measuring capabilities alone fails to capture the cultural, contextual and regional backgrounds that shape children’s capacity (Boyle et al. 2018; Dockett and Perry 2022; McDowell Clark 2017), and level of support they need to transition (Joerdens 2014).



Policy highlights: Recognising the importance of partnerships

Evaluating transition practices

The Queensland Department of Education's Supporting successful transitions: school decision-making tool is designed to provide schools with a framework for reflection and evaluation of their transition practices to support improvements in their approaches.

Four principles underpin the guide: knowing children and families, showing leadership, trusting partnerships and from evidence to action.

A matrix describes school-centred, consultative, or collaborative actions schools can take noting that while actions in each of these categories are valuable, the intention is to move towards collaborative practices.

Examples of collaborative practices include shared professional development for teachers and educators, viewing learning as an individualised continuum, incorporating family perspectives into transition strategies, and responsive timetabling that adjusts according to children's learning preferences over time (Queensland Department of Education 2020).

Positive partnerships between ECEC and schools

The Linking Schools and Early Years project (Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne n.d) in Victoria from 2006-2012 used a place-based community-led

approach to develop and strengthen relationships between ECEC and schools to facilitate better outcomes for children.

The importance of building professional networks was further highlighted with an action research project across 15 sites in Victoria each examining one of 3 promising practices: buddy programs, reciprocal visits for teachers and educators, and family involvement (Smith et al. 2010). Data collected through observations, focus groups and individual interviews demonstrated that transition practices do not sit in isolation and that building relationships is integral.

The importance of reciprocal visits was also emphasized through further work in Victoria that evaluated focus group data, evaluation protocols and professional learning videos from two sites in 2015 (Scull and Garvis 2015).

Responding to communities

The NSW Department of Education (2022) recently launched the South West Sydney Revitalisation Package, a COVID-response targeting communities of known disadvantage through a range of initiatives designed to support the unique learning and wellbeing needs of students across their entire learning journey. Supporting transition to school partnerships is one of the initiatives in this package.



Reflective questions

What measures of children's capabilities are currently employed, and how are those currently used in planning ways to support children's transitions?

What additional information might need to be collected to gain a holistic view of child capability? How might this information be gathered?

What evidence is available about how children's capabilities vary across contexts, including in schools, ECEC services and at home? How can this information be connected, so that children's 'hidden' capabilities are visible and valued?

02 Teacher and educator practices

Practices that support effective transitions include collaboration, communication and a shared responsibility between ECEC, schools, families and communities to assist children through the transition process. The importance of cooperation and collaborative practices in transitions are recognised on a global (OECD 2020) and local (Dockett and Perry 2021a; Nolan et al. 2021) level. Relationships between professionals, the child, and their family are therefore crucial to the success of transitions (Boyle et al. 2018; Dockett and Perry 2014; Margetts and Kienig 2013) and assist children to be 'ready' for school, while also assisting schools to become 'ready' to accept all children regardless of their developmental progress (OECD 2017).

Collaborative practices that support effective transitions to school include those that prioritise ongoing communication; value personal relationships; commit to individualised support and respect for diverse children and their families; have high expectations of all children; focus on continuity of learning between settings; and are well organised, flexible and responsive to individual children, families and communities (Ahtola et al. 2016; NSW Department of Education 2020; Semann et al. 2015).

Families play a key role in assisting teachers and educators in both ECEC and schools to better understand how effective partnerships can be established and maintained. Research suggests that families value personal meetings with teachers, transition statements and ongoing communication with teachers and educators in which the specific circumstances of their family can be shared (Ahtola et al. 2016; Hugo et al. 2018; Semann et al. 2015).

The National Quality Standard (NQS) Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA n.d.) Element 6.2.1 requires that, 'continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing information and clarifying responsibilities.' Data from the NQS assessment and rating process measures whether ECEC services are meeting this element, although does not identify the specific practices that teachers and educators are implementing in order to do so.

At a school level, the national Family School Partnerships Framework (DESE 2020) emphasises collaborative partnerships with families and communities. At the teacher level, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers also expect teachers to engage in partnerships with other professionals in the community to support children's learning (see Standard 7: Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/ carers and the community) (AITSL 2017). While the Framework and Standards are tools for guidance rather than accountability, they highlight the importance of partnerships in all Australian teachers' practice.

Best practice in measuring the quality of practice

- **Focus on collaboration as a purposeful, visible practice**

Evidence on effective collaborative practice is limited (Boyle et al. 2018), despite its importance to transitions. This makes it difficult to evaluate whether existing practices reflect the best evidence-based strategies.

Schools and ECEC services can build their understanding of effective collaboration by being critical in their reflections on practice. This includes identifying when collaboration has worked well, and where there are areas for improvement. This can help the work of collaboration remain visible and valued, both as a practice for individual teachers and educators, and as a shared practice that schools, ECEC services and others create together. A number of initiatives currently support this reflective process (see below).

- **Highlight everyday successes, as well as visible gaps**

Measuring the quality of practice includes highlighting and consolidating what is working well, as well as identifying opportunities for improvement. Schools and ECEC services already implement

Research highlight: Professional networks

Researchers have found that networks involving teachers and educators from ECEC and schools have led to enhanced transition to school processes, drawing on perspectives of both sites in conjunction with children and families.

An evaluation conducted by Dockett and Perry (2021b) identified the benefits of networks to include opportunities for developing shared understandings, sharing practice, and contributing to the development of educator professional identity.

Challenges to networks were identified to include a lack of leadership and organisation, content and purpose. In some contexts, limited funding and support also inhibited the network. The evaluation identified the strengths of the networks as well as areas where greater support was needed to enable them to operate more effectively.

many practices that contribute to effective transitions, including those aimed at meeting the standards and professional expectations outlined above. Improving transitions does not need to involve additional tasks but can involve recognising what everyday practice is already contributing to the process and doing what matters more often.

- **Recognise the need for responsive practice**

Different practices benefit diverse socio-demographic groups, and specific practices may be required for children with disabilities and developmental delay, children experiencing disadvantage, children from language backgrounds other than English, or for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals. Measuring the effectiveness of practice to support these groups may involve consultation with communities, and with other professionals involved in supporting the child and their family.

Reflective questions

What practices are currently in place that assist positive partnerships being established between families, schools and ECEC; and, how do we know they are effective?

How might partnerships between ECEC, schools and families be collaboratively evaluated to determine the strengths and areas for improvement?

How might practices differ for diverse children, families and communities, and how can their voices inform responsive transition practice?

03 The context in which transitions occur

To fully understand how children develop a sense of belonging at school, it is important to look beyond the child and their teachers and educators and explore factors that may support or inhibit effective transitions in their context.

Families and communities

The transition process is unique to each child and family and is supported by the structures that surround the child, including not only their teachers and educators, but also peers, family and the wider community (CESE 2021a; Krakouer et al. 2017). Transition programs and the schedule of activities and practices they involve can therefore be evaluated by both school and ECEC at the local level to determine whether they meet the needs of the children, families and local community.

Families are critically important to transitions and the strength of connection between schools, ECEC services and families is one of the decisive factors in a child's sense of belonging (Dockett and Perry 2021a; Joerdens 2014). Understanding effective transitions involves understanding whether families are well-supported to develop their own sense of belonging in the school community, as partners in their child's learning. Evaluations can involve ongoing opportunities to connect with families considering the diversity of family contexts. This could include an awareness of cultural expectations of the families' role in schools; family member disengagement; or poor previous experiences of school, which may impact a family's involvement. This information can help to identify

opportunities to strengthen or improve relationships and transitions, and leverage community support.

System structures and policy

Beyond the immediate school and ECEC service community, the governance and policy context for schools and ECEC services can make a significant difference to the effectiveness of transitions. This influence may occur through many factors, such as:

- **requirements for documenting children’s learning and development**, so that records of children’s progress can be readily shared between ECEC, families and schools
- **time, space and resources to enable professionals to collaborate**, which respect the different working arrangements and practices in ECEC services and schools
- **collaboration at system level**, with policymakers and sector leaders in ECEC and schools working together to break down silos and share responsibility

- **curriculum or pedagogical guidelines** that emphasise the importance of building children’s sense of belonging.

Evaluating these structural elements, and how they impact on specific school and ECEC communities, is important to understand the context for transitions.

Process over time

Transitions are a long-term, multi-faceted process rather than a one-off event (Joerdens 2014; Lincoln et al. 2016). The transition process begins well before the point of entry to school and continues until the point at which children and families feel a sense of belonging in their new school community, and when this is also recognised by teachers and educators (Dockett and Perry 2014). It may take many months, even years for some children and families to reach this point. Measures of effective transitions should therefore look beyond a single point in time and treat transition as a dynamic, long-term process of both change and continuity (Dockett and Perry 2022; Boyle et al. 2018).

Evaluation of transition statements in New South Wales schools

In New South Wales, transition statements have been formally adopted as a key transition strategy since 2014. The efficacy of these was evaluated in 2015 by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), which included the perspectives of parents, ECEC directors, school principals and kindergarten teachers in their study. The findings identified both obstacles and benefits. For example, the process was found to be too time consuming and professional development was required, however most participants indicated that the transition statements were valuable and relevant to support children’s learning.

CESE’s evaluation resulted in a series of recommendations for improvements in the content and format of the statement, as well suggested strategies to increase uptake by teachers and educators. In 2020, a digital version of the transition statement was piloted by the NSW Department of Education, accompanied by target professional learning. Feedback from the pilot is currently being incorporated into an updated digital transition statement that will be made available more broadly in NSW (CESE 2021a, 2021b).



Evaluating a Victorian state-wide initiative

The *Transitions: A positive start to school* initiative in Victoria was evaluated in 2015. The evaluation included commissioning researchers to review the use of transition statements and the ways transition programs were being evaluated locally.

The evaluation involved gathering the perspectives of ECEC, school and outside school hours care teachers and educators, as well as families and children. The data was then used to assist the Department to understand how transition statements and other existing resources were being used, which of those were effective and where improvements could be made (Semann et al 2015).

Best practice in monitoring the context for transitions

- **Determine the purpose of monitoring and evaluation**

Collecting and analysing data can be overwhelming if the purpose for monitoring and evaluation is not clear. Knowing the aims of the transition program or initiative will help guide the evaluation process. Children's sense of belonging can be used to generate shared understandings between multiple stakeholders about what constitutes an effective transition. Children's sense of belonging at school is influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including the relationships established with their teachers and peers, access to relevant and meaningful curriculum, and their sense of having their individual and cultural identity welcome and valued.

A focus on a child's sense of belonging can guide monitoring and evaluation activities at many levels. At the local level, this may involve monitoring whether individuals, families, and community members feel welcome and valued when they come into the school. At the policy level, it may guide evaluation of the effectiveness of tools and resources that to help teachers and educators to implement effective transitions, or to determine how successfully transition programs are implemented across multiple contexts.

- **Collect information from a range of sources across the community**

To understand the contextual factors that can contribute to improving transitions to school, it is necessary to collect information from outside the immediate school and ECEC service context. Reflection on contextual factors from policy, school and service governance can also help situate transitions in the 'bigger picture'.

At the local level perspectives sought from a range of stakeholders, including those from diverse backgrounds, will provide the most accurate information about transition experiences. Engaging multiple stakeholders could include offering flexible options for data collection and catering to individual preferences such as completing a survey, participating in a focus group or individual interview (Dockett and Perry 2022). Capturing diverse perspectives may also require overcoming cultural or linguistic barriers to enable families or community members to engage in the evaluation. This could include using interpreters for those who do not speak English or translating a survey into multiple languages (Dockett and Perry 2005).

Consulting with stakeholders when planning a monitoring or evaluation process can help to ensure that data is gathered and interpreted appropriately and can then be used effectively to inform further developments or improvements (Dockett and Perry 2022).

- **Collect information over time**

Collecting information throughout the transition process can provide a richer picture of what shapes children's and families own experiences, and where transitions practices can be strengthened.

A broader view of transitions might also include analysing data over time, such as through longitudinal measures of children's and families' experiences from birth to school. These can provide insights into what affects school readiness for different cohorts; such as lower rates of participation in ECEC services for children who are vulnerable or from disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD 2020). Measurement strategies based on children's experiences over time could also include consideration of elements of ECEC quality, patterns of participation, and learning approaches (DESE 21 October 2021). While large-scale longitudinal studies are costly, simply examining trends in data over time can help create a picture of the changes in contexts, and what might



Reflective questions

Who determines what an effective transition looks like? How could a focus on a child's sense of belonging help to create shared understandings of effective transitions between schools, ECEC, families and communities?

How are the perspectives of multiple stakeholders gathered in planning how to monitor and evaluate transitions; collecting and interpreting data; and determining next steps for improving transition programs and practices?

What factors outside the immediate school or ECEC service context contribute to a child's sense of belonging, and how can you leverage these contributions? How might these factors differ for different children and families in your community

About the project

AERO's 'transitions project' considers how to enhance the effectiveness of children's transitions across the different contexts in which children learn and develop. It is part of the Continuity of Learning and Development priority on AERO's Research Agenda.

The project responds to the enduring policy interest in transitions to school, as well as broadening thinking to other transitions between ECEC services and schools that impact on learning. This project has broader

strategic value in addressing the intersection between schools and ECEC and will generate future possibilities to create a shared language about continuity of learning and development at the policy and practice levels.

This project will fill priority gaps in the transitions landscape, initially focusing on:

- measurement of effective transitions to school
- enhancing transitions to school for children with disability and developmental delay
- supporting continuity of learning and development between school and outside school hours care (OSHC).

This discussion paper addressed the first priority and was informed by consultation with the Project Advisory Group (PAG) and expert advisors. AERO appreciates the valuable input from PAG members and expert advisors. Views represented in this paper are attributable to AERO, and do not represent an endorsed view from PAG members or others consulted in its development.

The next steps in the project will involve the development of practical resources for teachers and educators in schools and ECEC services to address the other identified priority areas, and support more effective transitions for all children.

References

- ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (2011) [General capabilities \(Version 8.4\)](#), ACARA website, accessed 31 March 2022.
- ACECQA (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority) (n.d.) [Quality area 6 – collaborative partnerships with families and communities](#), ACECQA website, accessed 14 February 2022.
- Ahtola A, Björn PM, Turunen T, Poikonen P-L, Kontoniemi M, Lerkkanen M-K and Nurmi J-E (2016) 'The concordance between teachers' and parents' perceptions of school transition practices: a solid base for the future', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(2):168–181, doi:10.1080/0313831.2014.996598.
- AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) (2017) [Australian professional standards for teachers](#), AITSL website, accessed 10 March 2022.
- Bell-Booth R, Staton S, and Thorpe K (2014) 'Getting there, being there, staying and belonging: a case study of two Indigenous Australian children's transition to school', *Children & Society*, 28(1):15–29, doi: [10.1111/j.1099-0860.2012.00441.x](#).
- Boyle T, Petriwskyj A and Grieshaber S (2018) 'Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices: the role of practice architectures', *Australian Educational Researcher*, 45(4):419–434, doi:10.1007/s13384-018-0272-0.
- Bradbury A (2019) 'Datified at four: the role of data in the 'schoolification' of early childhood education in England', *Learning, Media and Technology* 44(1):7-21, doi: 10.1080/17439884.2018.1511577
- Bronfenbrenner U (1979) *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bronfenbrenner U (1993). 'Ecological models of human development', in Gauvain M and Cole M (eds) *Readings on the development of children*, 2nd edn, Freeman, New York.
- Broström S (2019) 'Children's views on their learning in preschool and school: reflections and influence on practice', in Dockett S, Einarsdottir J and Perry B (eds) *Listening to children's advice about starting school and school age care*, Routledge, London.
- Büker P and Höke J (2019) 'Children's voices as a bridge between educators in kindergarten and teacher in primary school: potential of children's perspectives to support professional development', in Dockett S, Einarsdottir J and Perry B (eds) *Listening to children's advice about starting school and school age care*, Routledge, London.
- Büker P, Höke J and Ogradowski J (2022) 'Paderborner Qualitätsstern (PQ3) self-evaluation of transition to school programs for educators and teachers', in Dockett S and Perry B (eds) *Evaluating transition to school programs: learning from research*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- CESE (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation) (2021a) [Transition to school: literature review](#), NSW Department of Education website, accessed 1 March 2022.
- CESE (2021b) [Evaluation of transition to school statement](#), NSW Department of Education website, accessed 22 March 2022.
- Christensen D, Taylor C, Hancock K and Zubrick S (2020) 'School readiness is more than the child: a latent class analysis of child, family, school and community aspects of school readiness', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 57(1):1-19, doi:10.1002/ajs4.138.
- Clanchy KM, Sulek R, Baque E, Caine AM, Cardell E, Chambers L, Clark M, Dare L, Irvine-Brown L, Irwin C, Headrick J, Mahler N, Vincze L, Weir KA and Trembath D (2021) 'Supporting a healthy start to school: a case study of the Griffith University-Nerang Alliance initiative', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 49:285-306, doi: [10.1007/s13384-021-00429-9](#).
- De Gioia K (2017) 'Giving voice to families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds during transition to school', in Dockett S, Griebel W, and Perry B (eds) *Families and transition to school*, *International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development* 21, Springer, Cham, doi:[10.1007/978-3-319-58329-7_3](#).
- DESE (Department of Education, Skills and Employment) (2019) *Belonging, being & becoming – the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, DESE, accessed 15 February 2022.
- DESE (2020) [Family-school partnerships](#), DESE, Australian Government, accessed 14 February 2022.
- DESE (20 October 2021) [Preschool outcomes measure expert advisory group terms of reference](#), DESE, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2022.
- DESE (21 October 2021) [Preschool Reform Funding Agreement](#), DESE, Australian Government, accessed 9 February 2022.
- Dockett S and Perry B (2005) 'Starting school in Australia is 'a bit safer, a lot easier and more relaxing': issues for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds', *Early Years*, 25(3): 271-281, doi:10.1080/09575140500251889

- Dockett S and Perry B (2014) [Continuity of learning: a resource to support effective transition to school and school age care](#), Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2022.
- Dockett S and Perry B (2021a) 'Invisible transitions: transitions to school following different paths', *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 46(3):224-235, doi:[10.1177/18369391211009698](#).
- Dockett S and Perry B (2021b) 'Professional linkages at the transition to school: boundaries and linked ecologies', *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(4):459-477, doi:[10.1177/1478210320973116](#).
- Dockett S and Perry B (2022) *Evaluating transition to school programs: learning from research and practice*, Routledge, New York.
- Education Council (2019) ['Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration'](#), Education Services Australia, Council of Australian Governments Education Council, accessed 30 March 2022.
- Einarsdottir J (2013) 'Transition from preschool to primary in Iceland from the perspectives of children', in Margetts K and Kienig A (eds) *International perspectives on transition to school: reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice*, Routledge, London.
- Fane J, MacDougall C, Redmond G, Jovanovic J, and Ward P (2016) 'Young children's health and wellbeing across the transition to school: a critical interpretive synthesis', *Children Australia*, 41(2):126-140, doi:[10.1017/cha.2016.4](#).
- Fleet A, De Gioia K, Madden L and Semann A (2018) 'Evaluating innovation and navigating unseen boundaries: systems, processes and people', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(1):66-79, doi:[10.1080/1350293X.2018.1414012](#).
- Giallo R, Kienhuis M, Treyvaud K, and Matthews J (2008) 'A psychometric evaluation of the parent self-efficacy in managing the transition to school scale', *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 8:36-48.
- Gregory T, Dal Grande E, Brushe M, Engelhardt D, Luddy A, Guhn M, Gadermann A, Schonert-Reichl KA, and Brinkman S (2021) 'Associations between school readiness and student wellbeing: a six-year follow up study', *Child Indicators Research*, 14:369-390, doi: [10.1007/s12187-020-09760-6](#)
- Hughes C, Foley S, White N, and Devine RT (2018) 'School readiness in children with special educational needs and disabilities: psychometric findings from a new screening tool, the Brief Early Skills, and Support Index', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(4):606-627, doi:[10.1111/bjep.12206](#).
- Hugo K, McNamara K, Sheldon K, Moulton F, Lawrence K, Forbes C, Martin N and Miller MG (2018) 'Developing a blueprint for action on the transition to school: implementation of an action research project within a preschool community', *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 50(2):241-257, doi:[10.1007/s13158-018-0220-1](#).
- Joerdens S (2014) 'Belonging means you can go in: children's perspectives and experiences of membership of kindergarten', *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39(1):12-21, doi:[10.1177/183693911403900103](#)
- Jose K, Banks S, Hansen E, Jones R, Zubrick S, Stafford J and Taylor C (2020) 'Parental perspectives on children's school readiness: an ethnographic study', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50:21-31, doi:[10.1007/s10643-020-01130-9](#).
- Krakouer J, Mitchell P, Trevitt J and Kochanoff A (2017) [Transition to school: supporting children and families at risk of experiencing vulnerability fact sheet](#), Victorian Department of Education and Training website, accessed 30 March 2022.
- Lincoln M, Hagon M and Paxton C (2016) 'Transition partnerships: embracing opportunities for innovation', *Australian Educational Leader*, 38(4):38-42.
- Margetts K (2013) 'Transition and adjustment to school', in Perry et al (eds) *Transitions to school – international research, policy and practice*, Springer, Netherlands.
- Margetts K and Kienig A (2013) *International perspectives on transition to school: reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice*, Routledge, London.
- Martins J, Cunha J, Lopes S, Moreira T and Rosário P (2022) School engagement in elementary school: a systematic review of 35 years of research, *Educational Psychology Review*, 34:793-849, doi:[10.1007/s10648-021-09642-5](#).
- McDowell Clark R (2017) *Exploring the contexts for early learning*, Routledge. London, doi:[10.4324/9781315676036](#).
- McLeod N and Anderson B (2020) 'Towards an understanding of 'school' readiness: collective interpretations and priorities', *Educational Action Research*, 28(5):723-741.
- Mergler A and Walker S (2017) 'This is possibly the hardest decision a parent has to make'. Deciding when your child is ready to start Prep', *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(2): 97-104, doi:[10.23965/AJEC.42.2.12](#)
- Nergaard K (2020) 'The heartbreak of social rejection: young children's expressions about how they experience rejection from peers in ECEC', *Child Care in Practice*, 26(3): 226-242, doi:[10.1080/13575279.2018.1543650](#)

Nolan A, Kilderry A and Chu C (2021) 'Cross-sectoral professional relationships and transition to school: an Australian study', *Early Years*, 41(5):476-490, doi:10.1080/09575146.2019.1617250.

NSW Department of Education (2020) [Strong and successful start to school: transition guidelines](#), NSW Department of Education website, accessed 2 March 2022.

NSW Department of Education (2022) [South West Sydney Revitalisation Package](#), NSW Department of Education website, accessed 30 March 2022.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2015) [Early Childhood Education and Care - Network](#), OECD website, accessed 9 March 2022.

OECD (2017) [Starting strong V: transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education](#), OECD website, accessed 9 March 2022.

OECD (2020) [Early childhood education: equity, quality and transitions](#), Report for the G20 Education Working Group, OECD website, accessed 1 March 2022.

Queensland Department of Education (2020) [Supporting successful transitions: school decision making tool](#) [PDF 1.26MB], Queensland Department of Education, accessed 5 May 2022.

Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne (n.d.) [Linking Schools and Early Years Project \(LSEY\)](#), Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne website, accessed 21 March 2022.

Scull J and Garvis S (2015) [Transition: a positive start to school](#), Victorian Department of Education and Training, Monash University website, accessed 9 March 2022.

Semann A, Madden L, Sukkar H, Walker C, Michelmore S, Fleet A (2015) [Transition: a positive start to school initiative. Consultation 2015](#) [PDF 14.39MB], Victorian Department of Education and Training website, accessed 9 March 2022.

Smith K, Kotsanas C, Farrelly A and Alexander K (2010) [Research into practices to support a positive start to school](#) [PDF 1.26MB], Report prepared for the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, accessed 9 March 2022.

Taylor A (2011) 'Coming, ready or not: Aboriginal children's transition to school in urban Australia and the policy push', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 19(2):145-161, doi:10.1080/09669760.2011.602593.

United Nations General Assembly (1989) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), United Nations website, accessed 9 March 2022.

Zaidman-Zait A, Poon BT, Curle D, Jamieson JR and Norman N (2019) 'The transition to school among deaf/hard-of-hearing children: teacher and parent perspectives', *Journal of Deaf Studies & Deaf Education*, 24(4):396-407, doi:10.1093/deafed/enz027.

All material presented in this publication is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence, except for:

- the organisation's logo, any branding or trademarks
- content or material provided by third parties
- where otherwise indicated.

You may copy, communicate and adapt the publication, as long as you attribute the Australian Education Research Organisation Limited ACN 644 853 369 ABN 83 644 853 369 (AERO), and abide by the other licence terms.

How to cite

When referencing this publication, please attribute it as:

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Ltd. (2022), Measuring effective transitions to school, edresearch.edu.au

Further information

AERO produces resources to support the use of high-quality research. Explore these at: edresearch.edu.au/browse