



RESEARCH BRIEF

Improving the Transition to Kindergarten Through Information Sharing



October 2020

About the Madison Education Partnership

The Madison Education Partnership (MEP) is a research-practice partnership between the University of Wisconsin (UW) – Madison, School of Education’s Wisconsin Center for Education Research and the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). MEP provides a context for collaborative problem identification, jointly designed empirical research to address problems of practice, development of educational interventions, and the creation of mutually beneficial lasting relationships across the UW and MMSD. The partnership serves as a conduit to establish new research within the district, enhances research use for the district, and creates mechanisms for the dissemination of new knowledge in Madison and beyond.

Project Team

Lauren Lauter, Moonjoo Woo, Eric Grodsky and Beth Graue
Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Beth Vaade, Culleen Witthuhn, Caroline Racine-Giles, and Nicole Schaefer
Madison Metropolitan School District

Acknowledgments

This project was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation to the Madison Education Partnership (201900002). This report also benefitted substantially from the insights and guidance that Caroline Racine-Gilles, Nicole Schaefer and Culleen Witthuhn shared with us. We are grateful to Heather Albrecht, Lorri Fish, Leah Nelson, Christina Opheim, and Heidi Schultz for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this report and to the many teachers who took time out to talk with us about the transition from 4K to 5K.

Findings in this report need not reflect the views of the Spencer Foundation or the Madison Metropolitan School District. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

Keywords

Kindergarten transition, transition practice, information sharing, qualitative research

Suggested citation

Lauter, L., Woo, M., Grodsky, E. & Graue, M.E. (2020). *Improving the Transition to Kindergarten Through Information Sharing: Project Report*. Madison Education Partnership. pp. 1-35.

© 2020 by Lauren Lauter, Moonjoo Woo, Eric Grodsky & M Elizabeth Graue. All rights reserved. Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies, WCER, or cooperating institutions. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for noncommercial purposes by any means, provided that the above copyright notice appears on all copies.

Executive Summary

Why did we take on this project?

The Madison Education Partnership (MEP) brought together Madison Metropolitan School District educators and researchers from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research to learn about current information-sharing practices and information gaps in the transition from four-year-old kindergarten (4K) to five-year-old kindergarten (5K).

What did we do?

In January and February of 2020, we talked with twenty 5K teachers and thirteen 4K teachers from across the District about their transition and information-sharing practices. We recruited 5K teachers from six elementary schools with varying numbers of 4K feeder sites and conducted focus groups with each 5K team. We also conducted a mix of focus groups and individual interviews with the 4K teachers working at the feeder sites for two of the six elementary schools, including 4K sites in public schools, Head Start programs, and early care and education centers (ECEs). We asked teachers about transition practices they used, what information sharing looks like between 4K and 5K and what barriers they see to giving or receiving that kind of information. Once we had the data, we coded it to elicit broader themes.

What did we learn?

- **Current information-sharing practices are limited,**
 - 4K and 5K teachers, especially those not working in the same school, communicate little about their students.
 - 5K teachers were generally unaware of data 4K teachers compiled about their students, including Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD) and Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS).
- **4K and 5K teachers generally agree about what 5K teachers should know about their students,**
 - They want to know developmental and dispositional information about students, as well as circumstantial, often personal, information about children's and families' circumstances.
 - Teachers report institutional and interpersonal barriers inhibit the sharing of information. These include trust, physical separation, and concerns about the ethical and legal deterrents to sharing information.

Recommendations

1. Develop an easily accessible, brief report for sharing information from 4K teachers with 5K teachers
2. Build relational trust between 4K and 5K teachers to facilitate the flow of information
3. Inform principals about the information available to them to help them optimize 5K rosters

Background

Teachers, administrators, and researchers agree that sharing information about children's strengths and challenges is key to supporting children as they make the transition from four-year-old kindergarten (4K) to five-year-old kindergarten (5K) (Pianta et al, 2001; Alatalo et al., 2017). Sharing information helps to strengthen relationships between early childhood learning professionals in various sites (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) and is associated with student's positive social behaviors and increased academic skills (Ahtola et al. 2011; Cook, Dearing, & Zachrisson, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Information sharing as a transition practice can also increase curricular and pedagogical alignment between 4K and 5K and provide 5K teachers with data to help them make proactive decisions about their practices before the start of the school year.

This research aims to identify information sharing strategies teachers currently use as well as institutional barriers that inhibit communication between 4K and 5K teachers in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). We asked 4K and 5K teachers what information they feel 5K teachers need to successfully support students and families through the kindergarten transition, and how the teachers convey or acquire that information. We hope to use this report as a foundation on which to design a prototype for information sharing between 4K and 5K teachers. This research builds on what we have learned from the last 18 months of studying 4K–5K transition practices in MMSD.

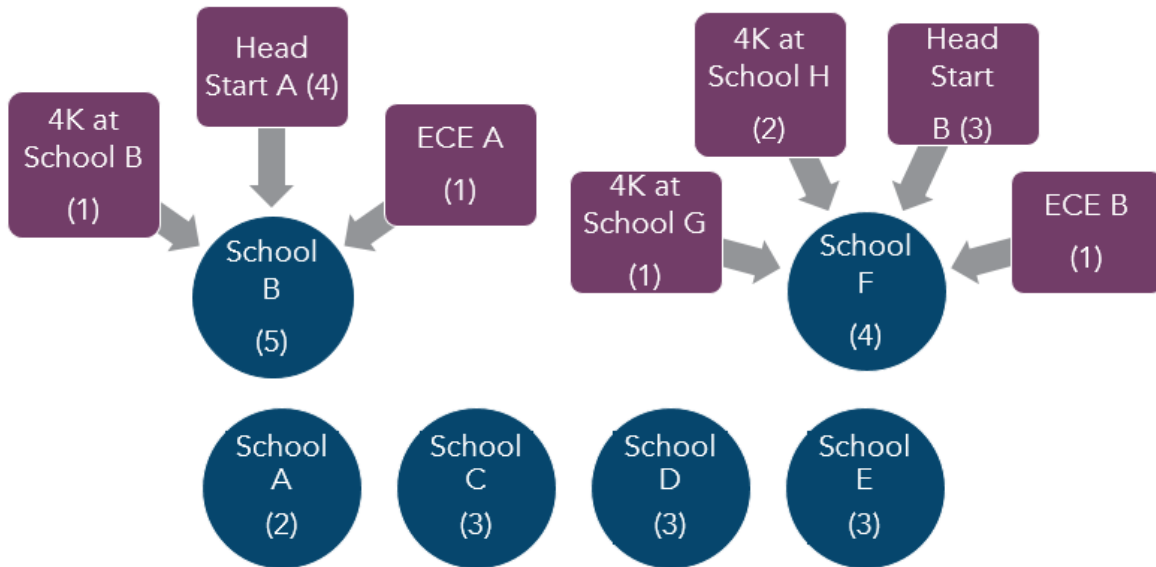
Procedure and Participants

In consultation with MMSD, we recruited teachers from both 4K and 5K sites to give us a broad overview of the transition practices they employ. First, we purposively selected six schools with varying numbers of 4K feeder sites, under the assumption that the challenges in sharing information would be greater for 5K schools and teachers with more 4K feeders. We stratified schools based on the number of 4K sites from which they drew at least 5% of their kindergartners; Schools B and E drew students from three or fewer 4K feeder sites, Schools A and C drew students from four to five feeder sites, and Schools D and F drew from more than five feeder sites¹. In total, we spoke with twenty 5K teachers working at six elementary schools. After selecting the elementary schools, we recruited 4K teachers working at the feeder sites for Schools B and F. We intentionally chose 4K sites across three different types of programs—public schools, Head Start programs, and early care and education centers (ECEs). Thirteen 4K teachers participated in the study. Of the thirteen teachers, four worked at school sites, seven at Head Start programs and the last two at ECEs. We hoped that this diversity would provide richer information about the practices and challenges teachers face. The recruitment did not

¹ We use letters rather than school names to protect the confidentiality of study participants.

proceed without difficulties. Teachers at two ECEs and one school site to whom we reached out refused to participate in the study. In addition, we were only able to recruit one of two teachers at Schools B and G, so we conducted one-on-one interviews instead of focus groups at these two sites. We also completed one-on-one interviews at ECEs because only one 4K teacher worked at each site. Figure 1 illustrates the connections between the 4K and 5K sites in our study.

Figure 1: Participating 4K and 5K sites



Note. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of teachers who participated

Instrument

We base this report on interviews conducted in January and February of 2020. The two lead authors conducted focus groups with six kindergarten teams and a mix of focus groups and individual interviews with 4K teachers. In consultation with MMSD and researchers in the Madison Education Partnership, we developed the interview protocols to understand:

- the types of transition practices in which schools and teachers engaged to help students transition to kindergarten,
- how teachers think we could improve transition practices in the school and district,
- how teachers shared and/or provided information, and
- what information teachers believed would be useful to share and/or receive to facilitate a better transition for students and families.

We include the interview protocols in Appendix 1.

Findings

How Do Teachers Support the 4K to 5K Transition?

4K and 5K teachers used several strategies to help children and families move smoothly into kindergarten. Below we describe the practices teachers implemented and outline how information that was relevant to the kindergarten transition flowed between home and school or across schools.

4K Teachers' Transition Practices

4K teachers viewed their classroom instruction as a central element of their work supporting students' transitions to 5K. They suggested that teaching social-emotional and/or academic skills that help children function successfully in kindergarten fit under the umbrella of transition practices. As shown in the first two transition practices in Table 1, four teachers suggested that teaching social-emotional and/or academic skills that help children function successfully in kindergarten fit under the umbrella of transition practices. The Head Start teachers mentioned that teaching both skills is an important component of their practices. One 4K teacher noted, *"Throughout the school year, we're working on preparing them for kindergarten with school readiness goals, with social skills, academic readiness, just kind of the whole experience of being with peers and teachers."* Many 4K teachers shared this perspective and said that they also focused on self-care and coping skills for children's needs, emotions, and problems. Some teachers told us that they shortened nap time from two hours to none by the end of August because the kindergarten schedule did not include nap time. 4K teachers defined their transition practices differently from those of 5K teachers, particularly 5K teachers who described school-wide activities such as orientation, open house, and parent-teacher conferences as their core practices.

Outside their instructional work, 4K teachers support transition efforts by informing parents about kindergarten expectations and their children's school readiness. As indicated in the last row of Table 1, all the teachers at six out of the seven sites said that they talked about 5K with parents. One teacher at an ECE site used the spring parent-teacher conference to discuss their children's academic skills and identify areas to improve prior to kindergarten entry. She noted,

In the spring, we'll focus more on talking about the academics and if they are behind on something. ...When I have a conference in October, I'm not going to say 'your child's behind in reading.' ... We'll talk more in-depth on...what we really need to work on. This is what he or she is still struggling on, and what that transition to kindergarten will look like.

For children who could benefit from continued learning opportunities during summer, teachers at all four ECEs and a public school said that they make summer school referrals. Another teacher at a Head Start program said that providing a brief blueprint of kindergarten was an

important part of her job. She informed parents about “*what to expect when they're going to kindergarten. It's all day. You know, they're riding the bus, you know? Could be for this long and everything like that. So it just really shows them what experience they're about to go on.*” Some teachers indicated that such information was especially useful for families who were new to the district, those who were non-native English speakers, and first-time kindergarten parents.

Although many of the transition practices we learned about appeared to be similar across different types of 4K programs, we did find a few important differences. As shown in Table 1, Head Start programs reported engaging in more family support services related to school transition than did ECEs or school sites. These services included helping families coordinate kindergarten registration and find social work and translation services to assist with the transition as well as their overall needs. The Head Start programs were able to provide this type of comprehensive support because they had family outreach workers who are designated staff to address families’ basic needs for food, clothing, and housing. 4Ks in Schools B and H, on the other hand, were able to take advantage of their location by having their students visit 5K classes. This helped school-based 4K teachers talk with children about different behavioral expectations in kindergarten (i.e., less playtime, self-care skills for using the bathroom, clothing, eating lunch at school cafeteria).

Table 1. 4K teachers’ transition practices

Transition Practice	School 4K			Non-school 4K			
	School B	School G	School H	Head Start a	Head Start b	ECE a	ECE b
Teach socio-emotional skills	x			x	x	x	
Teach academic skills		X	x	x	x		x
Create student portfolio						x	x
Make summer school referral		X		x	x	x	x
Provide family support				x	x		
Visit 5K classroom	x		x				
Talk about 5K with children	x		x				
Talk about 5K with parents	x	X	x	x	x	x	

5K Teachers' Transition Practices

5K teachers reported using three common school-wide transition practices: kindergarten orientation, open house, and the Ready, Set, Go conference. We discussed the details of these practices (i.e., planning, execution, benefits, and challenges) in our previous Madison Education Partnership [report](#). Here we focus more on the exchange of information between teachers and families through these practices.

Both spring orientation and summer open house events provide parents with an overview of kindergarten and logistics and introduce children and families to the school setting. Because open houses are large gatherings, 5K teachers said they gained little information about individual students and their families at these events. 5K teachers voiced concerns about the low turnout for spring orientation, noting that around 5–15 out of 60 families showed up. Teachers from three schools, denoted as “L” for low attendance in Table 2, spoke about the difficulty of attracting more families. One suggested that online registration might have contributed to the low attendance by removing the need to register at the school building. Another teacher noted that even though parents attended open houses, not all came with their children, which left no opportunity for teachers to connect with them. The teachers at Schools B and E did not talk about orientation events; this was denoted in Table 2 as “NM” for not mentioned. While the turnout for open house immediately before school started was usually better than the turnout for orientation in spring, they characterized the open house as more of a social gathering. Thus, exchanging valuable information regarding the transition to kindergarten was difficult. Teachers perceived the open house and orientation practices as formal, obligatory annual events instead of valuable opportunities to connect with the children and parents.

In contrast, teachers reported that the individual Ready, Set, Go conference (RSG), which is the first parent-teacher meeting, was a strong channel for sharing information. All schools implement the RSG, a district-mandated transition practice, as shown in the last row of Table 2. One teacher asked her families to fill out a form that included basic logistics such as school transportation, allergies, and best contact information. Another teacher also shared her experience of finding out a student's health condition during RSG. She said,

I have met with someone for the initial RSG and it's before school has started but I haven't received that information from the nurse's office yet. And I've had parents be a little alarmed. 'Oh, you don't know yet about my child's health?' And I'm like, 'Oh well, the nurses are going to touch base with us before school begins but please share with me right now.' And so, I think too, just having that would be helpful right from the get-go.

Although school has basic information about students and families, some teachers prefer to gather the information themselves during RSG, to establish deeper personal connections. Also, because the information comes directly from parents, the teachers can be sure the information is accurate.

Some teachers discussed the limitations of sharing information during RSG. For example, if parents were new to kindergarten or had many questions, teachers ended up spending considerable time answering questions. In this case, the teachers gave more information than they received from the parents. One teacher noted,

I feel like parents are very worried about logistical things. How is my kid going to get to their room? How is my kid going to eat lunch? So, like, they want to know what's happening and where their kid's going to be when. And then if we had more time it would be great to (ask) how were they in 4k and yeah, we ask that question. But, really, like the logistical things take up the whole time because they want to know 'how is my kid going to be safe?' is their biggest concern.

Many teachers echoed this concern about a shortage of time, indicating that 30 minutes for each family was inadequate to discuss details about the students and their families. Another possible limitation was the varied timing of the RSG. Table 2 shows that one school completed the RSGs in the summer before school started (denoted as "Su" for summer), two schools completed the RSGs in fall after school started (denoted as "Fa" for fall), and the remaining three schools completed the RSGs before and after school started, with a longer window period (denoted as 'Su/Fa'). Teachers at Schools D and E delayed having RSGs until the class lists were firmly fixed; therefore, they began the school year with much less information. However, in School A, teachers completed all RSGs in summer; thus, teachers could meet every family before the first day of school.

Table 2. 5K teachers' use of transition practices

Transition Practice	School A	B	C	D	E	F
Spring orientation	Yes (L)	NM	Yes (L)	Yes (L)	NM	No
Summer open house	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (L)	Yes	Yes
Ready, Set, Go conference	Yes (Su)	Yes (Su/Fa)	Yes (Su/Fa)	Yes (Fa)	Yes (Fa)	Yes (Su/Fa)

Note. L = low attendance (5–15 families), NM = not mentioned, Su = summer, Fa = fall

Overall, 4K and 5K teachers reported using different strategies to support the transition to kindergarten. While 5K teachers reported annual school-wide transition practices, 4K teachers considered any instruction that would contribute to children’s school readiness as such a practice. More importantly, none of the practices listed by teachers involved information sharing between 4K and 5K teachers. The information almost always flowed from 4K teachers to parents, parents to 5K teachers, and vice versa.

Our interviews with 4K and 5K teachers indicated that current transition practices may not effectively provide 5K teachers with the type of information that they need. Teachers may feel unsupported without a strategic approach, as reflected in one 5K teacher’s comment,

It’s like we’re investigators. We’re just always, like, trying to figure out why this problem is happening and then we have to dig, and dig, and dig, and dig, until we can find an answer. And there’s not a lot of things that are given to us because we don’t have a lot of information about what or who they were in school before.

In the next section, we discuss what information 4K teachers hoped to share with 5K teachers and what 5K teachers wanted to know in advance.

Information That Helps Teachers Better Support the Transition to Kindergarten

4K and 5K teachers reported different types of information about students and their families that would be useful to support the transition to kindergarten. We distinguish between two domains of information. The child domain includes information such as children’s previous school experiences, Individualized Education Program (IEP), strengths, and coping strategies for behavioral/emotional challenges. It also includes information about behavioral self-regulation skills, social-emotional, and academic skills (literacy and mathematics). The family domain includes any information about children’s home lives. Appendix Table 1 shows exemplars of each type of information and Appendix Table 2 shows whether the information was identified by teachers as important for supporting kindergarten transition. In the following sections, we discuss the similarities and differences between 4K and 5K teachers’ perspectives on the information needs of 5K teachers.

Areas of Agreement Across 4K and 5K Teachers

Information About Coping Strategies. Teachers most frequently identified the importance of 5K teachers knowing the coping strategies that worked when a child was emotionally or physically overwhelmed. All 5K teams raised this issue, showing that 5K teachers hoped to proactively address the needs of students who might have trouble adjusting to long hours in kindergarten. 4K teachers discussed specific practices such as using problem-solving cards, designating a quiet place, and having calm-down tools in their classroom. However, most 4K teachers said

that they had few opportunities to share this information with 5K teachers unless problems occurred in kindergarten and the 5K teacher contacted the former 4K teacher. 4K teachers at school sites talked about instances when 5K teachers dropped by to ask about specific strategies. This only happened if the child who was experiencing a tough transition had attended 4K at the same school. 4K teachers at ECEs and Head Start programs reported that they only occasionally received calls from 5K teachers.

Teachers can expend considerable time discovering children's coping strategies—time during which children can experience considerable distress. One 5K teacher at School B shared her experience with a shy student. She said,

(I had) a child that was really super shy at the beginning of the year. I wasn't sure about the shyness ... If I had heard from the 4K teacher 'oh, she's shy at the beginning but she'll really warm up quickly,' or, 'boy oh, boy, we really had to try X, Y, and Z to encourage her and have her feel comfortable' (that would have helped).

Another teacher at School A also wondered about,

What strategies worked to keep them like safe, or what strategies helped them keep their body in control? You know what worked to help them make choices, like did they have a chart? Cause we're starting blank over here with, you know, I mean I'm sure that these behaviors existed before they came here but, we don't know.

Many 5K teachers echoed this difficulty and said that they could have saved time understanding children's emotions and behaviors if they had been informed about individual coping mechanisms in advance.

Information About Family Context.

4K and 5K teachers agreed that information about the children's home lives helped their understanding of the children's learning and behaviors in the classroom. This information broadly includes family dynamics, language, parental employment, and incidents of trauma. One 5K teacher at School F said this type of family information was valuable because "*if you understand where the student is coming from, the way that you address behavioral issues or academic issues would be different.*"

Two 4K teachers at one Head Start program told us that the information about the parents' work schedules and incidents of trauma helped them understand parents better, especially those with low school involvement. One teacher told us that she understood "*how hard they (parents) work, and like, how they're not sometimes showing up to those open houses or those family nights because they're at work supporting their families. It's not that they don't care*

about what their children are learning." Another teacher added, *"A lot of our families that we're working with come with trauma experience. They're just trying to make it day by day. And they may miss a parent-teacher conference but it's not because they don't care. It's because they're just trying to survive that day based on what they're going through."* To better support these parents who had limited opportunities for communication, the Head Start teachers said they had been conducting regular home visits to stay in touch.

Some 4K teachers said that they would like to share some of this information with 5K teachers, especially if students had experienced traumatic life events, or changes in caregivers or living situations. However, because this kind of information is highly confidential and sensitive, 4K teachers did not know how to share such information appropriately with 5K teachers. One Head Start teacher said,

I know it's hard to share because a lot of families, they open up, and then they don't want other, you know, like, they don't want that information shared. But, you know, I think for a good handful of families, if the teachers knew the home situation and what was going on, they can be like, Ah, that makes sense why this child is doing this or that.

Some 4K teachers mentioned that parents felt comfortable sharing sensitive situations with them due to the trusted parent-teacher relationships that they had built. Because of 4K teachers' concerns about confidentiality, we noticed that the 4K teachers at ECEs and Head Start programs would rather let 5K teachers discover the home situations themselves. Interestingly, none of the 4K teachers at school sites mentioned trauma incidents and family needs as necessary information for 5K teachers.

Many 5K teachers said that they begin the school year with generic contact information for their families. Some teachers said that they could guess the children's race/ethnicity/language from their names and guess parents were divorced or separated if two different home addresses were listed. Without details, however, many teachers said that they felt like they were starting with almost no information. One 5K teacher at School D talked about a child who lived in two homes with parents sharing joint custody, a situation the teacher discovered only later.

I have a student who spends part of the week with his dad, part of the week with his mom. But I didn't know that to begin with, and you can definitely tell a difference in his behaviors on the days he's with mom versus the days he's with dad. And, you know, it was like I had to do a lot of asking of questions. Like, oh, I'm noticing, I'm noticing. And, of course, I don't have the relationship with the mom, and there's animosity between mom and dad. So they're not talking to

each other nicely. But, you know, it took a good couple of months to get all that information.

One 5K teacher thought it was understandable and said, "*I mean some families at RSG just tell you everything you need, and others you are still piecing things together, like even at this point in the school year, (they) just don't want to share. Reluctant to share understandably. It's like, this is personal.*" As one 4K teacher noted, close parent-teacher relationships are built first and then they can ask deeper questions about the child's home situation. However, some 5K teachers reported that building a trusting relationship can be hard if children take a school bus, because there is minimal interaction with the parents.

Differences Between 4K and 5K Teachers' Perceptions of What 5K Teachers Need to Know Information About Child Development.

4K and 5K teachers had different views on some information, especially regarding behavioral, socioemotional, and academic skills. 5K teachers talked about the need for that information more than 4K teachers. One 5K teacher at School A noted,

We'd want to know like what do you know academically, can you count to 100, what letters do you know, what letter sounds do you know? What did you score on PALS? We want to know if you have severe behaviors, are you running out of the room, are you throwing things, are you hitting people, are you not being safe? I mean like those. We would love to know if that stuff's going on before they enter so that we're kind of like active about it instead of just, yeah. I mean we would love information.

5K teachers at all except one school suggested that comprehensive information about children helps teachers provide developmentally appropriate practices. 4K and 5K teachers agree that it is important for 5K teachers to know the academic skills their 4K students possess at 5K entry. The most frequently reported academic skill was literacy: children's ability to recognize letters and associate sounds with the letters. In addition, half of the 5K teachers with whom we spoke mentioned that basic math skills such as counting would be good to know. Because teachers do not start assessments until October, these baseline skills inform teachers where and how to start the curriculum. One teacher at School B suggested another way to use knowledge about children's academic skills. She said that she would form small groups consisting of students who "*had experience with this type of thing that they might be able to help another friend.*" Her colleague commented that this method, balancing out groups depending on students' skills, is applicable when making class lists so that one classroom does not accidentally have too many students with academic hardships.

However, 4K teachers working at five out of the seven sites were more interested in conveying information about children's interests, strengths, and approaches to learning. One 4K teacher at a school site indicated that the goal of sharing such information should be to provide a "synopsis" of each child. She believed that 5K teachers could benefit from knowing "*what their [children's] strengths are, and how hard they've worked to get those strengths.*" Another teacher at a different school was concerned about a student who she thought was a slow but steady learner. She said,

It would be helpful for [5K teachers] to know that the pace at which these children are learning will greatly impact the outcomes you're going to see from them. So if you're pushing them too hard, too fast, to get to some point, they might bristle against that.

Similarly, one Head Start teacher underscored having an asset-based approach to children's abilities, noting that "*[children] may have behavior issues in the classroom but they're capable.*"

Lastly, 5K teachers said that important information included whether children had attended 4K or other child care centers before entering kindergarten. The teachers noticed that children who had spent time in structured, center-based programs were more adaptable to full-day kindergarten. In contrast, children without any experience in educational settings needed more guidance on how to behave independently in school as they interacted with peers. One teacher said,

We do have one student who came in who hadn't gone to school prior to (kindergarten), didn't go to any 4K or an formal schooling, I would have been curious to know what were you guys doing every day, like what was your day-to-day like because he kind of came in really low and just completely no concept of what was going on, like to sit on the rug. And then, so, when everyone would turn their body, he just wouldn't, you know. So, it's just kind of like the group mentality he just didn't have, which is, you know, if you're not, if you're just with your mom or dad all day, so I would be curious as to see what, what were they doing all day, and that's something we never found out.

5K teachers said they directly asked parents about their children's previous experiences for two reasons. First, the teachers did not know how to access information in the Infinite Campus database, even though they assumed that the district stored information about children and their families there. It was not a part of their protocol or training to independently attain that information online. Second, the district did not have information about 4K experiences of the children from other districts or who had attended non-4K child care centers. Interestingly, only one 4K teacher at a community site said 5K teachers needed to know such information. The

rest of the 4K teachers may have assumed that 5K teachers would see this information because it was listed in the children's report cards. Our interviews with 5K teachers, however, indicated that they rarely looked up the report cards.

Information About Family Communication. Notably, 5K teachers were more likely than 4K teachers to say that they needed information about parents' communication preferences. This is probably because, as discussed above, 4K teachers tended to have more face-to-face interactions with parents during drop-off and pick-up times. Only having family contact information may not be adequate for 5K teachers. They desired more specific information. One 5K teacher said she directly asked parents, "*What's the best way you'd like to be communicated with? Do you prefer phone calls, notes, you know, email, that sort of thing? ... When they're available to meet and talk on the phone.*" One 4K teacher said, "*Honestly if teachers feel supported in how to communicate with their incoming families, that's a huge, huge step ahead to start your year,*" implying that this type of information increases their comfort level in reaching out to families.

One 5K teacher commented that the extent of communication parents preferred was more important than the timing and method. She told us that

[parents] don't want to know everything or they don't want to have us call them during the day while they're at work, which is fine, like, totally understandable. I think their preference on what would happen if their student had a behavior (issue) would be nice to know because you don't want to overwhelm them.

This comment emerged when teachers talked about their uncertainty of whether they should reach out to parents regarding any behavior issues. However, 4K teachers learned parents' preferences from experience. For example, one 4K teacher at a school site said she would like to tell 5K teachers

not to take things personally because hey, this parent, like, gets really frustrated and takes it out on you but then you know, retract. You know, we have had situations this year with families that were like hey just be prepared or like hey this family really needs you to do this or like hey this family never answers their phone but they'll text you back.

Considering that one 5K teacher has fifteen to twenty families to communicate with, more detailed information about family preferences would save considerable time for the teachers.

Institutional Barriers to Sharing Information

We found various institutional barriers that made it harder for 4K and 5K teachers to engage in practices that might help students and families transition to kindergarten. Below, we lay out

some of the challenges teachers faced around facilitating transition practices in their schools and collaborating with each other.

Logistical Barriers

It mattered whether communication happened across schools or within schools and if 4K shared the school with a kindergarten or was a stand-alone Head Start program or ECE. To develop responsive practices that meet the needs of specific teacher, student, and family populations, we feel that it is important to note these idiosyncrasies.

4K Onsite in Public Schools. 4K teachers working at school sites reported taking advantage of both formal and informal opportunities to share information with 5K teacher in their schools. These conversations were meant to assist the 5K teacher in receiving new students and help them tailor their instruction and expectations to those students' strengths and needs. One 4K teacher at a school site spoke about how the principal set aside formal meeting times close to the end of the year for that conversation, after registration had occurred.

So we can connect with them specifically about those kiddos and tell them, you know, and kind of give them the rundown, the brief, like letter ID, like, how are they with counting, how are they with friendships? How are they with social and emotional skills? How are they with, you know, leadership skills? Such as being in the classroom? Are they a good friend? Are they anxious? Are they solid? Are they—just like, kind of like the low-down.

They used that meeting to discuss which children would continue on to 5K, how those children were faring socially, emotionally, and academically, strategies that worked, ways to contact families, and equitable placement of students in 5K classrooms. This teacher also discussed her familiarity with the 5K teachers in the school, as well as the ease that she felt to check in with these teachers informally.

Another 4K teacher discussed how her principal moved the kindergarten classroom closer to the 4K room to promote more 4K–5K connections. The teacher said that this proximity has helped them connect in different ways.

Now that we're bridging more, I have some kids that are ready to read so I'm connecting with teachers and being like hey, do you have some resources I can have to help these kids continue moving forward... And we were taking some of their kids that maybe need to take a break to come over to play in our classrooms because they are dysregulated in the room and it's just, they're, they're done with whatever's going on in there.

In all the sites where 4K/5K shared the school, teachers spoke about the important relationships they developed with each other and their frequent informal conversations about children and families they knew would be staying with the school for the upcoming year. 5K teachers in various schools discussed how these partnerships were important in helping them connect with students and families, and better understand the 4K experience.

4K and 5K teachers who share school buildings also discussed the advantages of being able to share information that might help them build classrooms that optimized the balance among students with varied academic and social/emotional needs. One 4K teacher said,

One helpful thing we can mention (that happens in our school), is the kids that are in our building that go to kindergarten, we help place them in classrooms for the following year ... we just have a big chart. You know, there's four kindergartens, we split them up and then we split the kids up based on who works well together, who doesn't, where, what teacher might be a good connection.

Other 4K teachers in buildings with 5K also spoke of doing this with the 5K team, further strengthening connections and communication in the building. One 4K teacher noted that she

(does) talk to our kindergarten teachers about our students, so when we do our final placements on where children are going to go, I try to make a bridge between our room and their room and really talk to them about some of our students and some of their needs and what things they can do, like what strategies we've used in 4K that have worked. Because I think making that a continuum for children to move forward and know that they might have a different teacher, but they'll have the same strategies in place that they've just worked on all year.

She commented on how her conversations with 5K teachers in the building are both formal and informal, happening throughout the school year. 5K teachers near a 4K class spoke of the disadvantage students faced coming from 4K sites *outside* of the building, as well as perceived inequities that came along with those circumstances.

Some (5K students) attended 4K here. Not all of the students. But some. So, there's a benefit to that. That's a huge advantage. And something our district is lacking is the 4K's connections to kindergarten. Something we can do better, the, another problem with the 4K at (school), if you look at it, it doesn't look like the makeup of our 4K's. It's very white. And the way they register for 4K needs to be more equitable, so ... You see the achievement gap day one in kindergarten. I mean, the first weeks, they, you just know like who's had 4K. Who's been in a program that's been more of a preschool, early childhood, or

where they haven't done, you know, necessarily as much of a structure ... it is difficult sometimes for students, who weren't in the 4K here with (4K teacher in the building).

Stand-alone 4Ks. In contrast, stand-alone 4Ks in ECEs and Head Start programs reported having little to no communication with MMSD 5K teachers, although many of them discussed their wishes to connect. A 4K teacher at an ECE with years of experience said that she had “never been asked any information about any child” and a Head Start teacher mentioned that Head Start teachers “don't often get to talk to a 5K teacher.” The only instances we documented of conversations between 4K teachers from external sites and kindergarten were related to student crises after the year had begun. Head Start and kindergarten teachers spoke about contacting each other in these situations out of desperation, and looking for strategies that worked for students in 4K. 4K teachers at one community site said that they hardly hear from 5K teachers, “*We don't often get to talk to a 5K teacher ... often, when I get calls, it's from the school psychologist. ... I don't think I've ever talked to a 5K teacher.*” Many 4K teachers said they never heard from students or families again after leaving their 4K school location unless they were staying in the school for kindergarten.

4K teachers not physically present at public school sites spoke about wanting to have conversations with 5K teachers but didn't know how or whether these teachers even wanted to connect. A teacher from a community site spoke to this issue.

I'd actually tried to reach out through the district to let them know like, hey, these two like, two of the kiddos who are coming to you next year. Like, just big emotions and they basically were like, didn't want to hear it. And they put them in the same class. With the really big emotions, they put them in the same class. And I know that they ended up having to move one of them. ... I said how do I contact the 5K teachers at this school to let them know about kids coming in? And I was told, like, that they don't want to know information about the kids.

Teachers from a Head Start program across town reiterated this difficulty, stating “*instead of just plopping them into a new school and them having to recreate all of these wheels, that transition can be mitigated by at least some information. ... We just need to know how to give it.*”

Interestingly, Head Start teachers spoke more about reaching out to families than teachers, calling their families to offer support after their children completed 4K and entered public school. Head Start teachers discussed the wrap-around services families received, from translation help to assistance with doctor's appointments and job interviews, as well as medical and psychological referrals for students. Teachers spoke about how the sharp decrease in

support services after 4K contributed to difficulties for these families. Furthermore, because they had little to no contact with MMSD, the 4K Head Start teachers did not know how to support families in this transition and felt overwhelmed with assisting them and their new batches of students and families. One Head Start teacher noted that it would be useful for families to have a point person at the district to help bridge those gaps.

Just being able to give them a person to talk to. Because even families. Like, when we're doing spring home visits, they'll just simply ask well, can my child get the bus to go, when they go to 5K, will my child ride the bus? And it's, like ... I don't know. I don't know if they qualify to go on the bus. I mean, parents will just have simple questions like that. Especially if there are language barriers. And a lot of my families, like I said, the families do not speak English.

Head Start teachers wished that there were more connections between their organization and MMSD—connections that would allow teachers to be proactive and preventative, rather than reacting to crises as they arose.

In addition, 4K teachers at non-school sites were the only ones who had concerns about confidentiality and how they should share information with kindergarten teachers. One Head Start teacher worried about confidentiality issues with MMSD and whether 5K/MMSD was not connecting with them because of this. A 5K teacher (in a school without a 4K) also spoke about not knowing whether the school psychologist/social workers had important information about students that they weren't allowed to share. Another 4K Head Start teacher wondered about the releases parents signed to allow information to be shared with the schools their children would attend for kindergarten, " *We don't know once a release is done and the information is at the main office, does it ever make it to the elementary schools, does it not? Is it a confidentiality issue?*" A 4K ECE teacher noted that she didn't know if 5K teachers had access to her progress reports. " *I would hope so. I would assume so. I mean, it's through the district, like, an entry in through Infinite Campus. Like, they're posting grades ... but I don't know, for sure.*" We wonder if these questions and concerns come from the particularly disconnected relationship between stand-alone 4Ks and 5Ks, as the non-school sites have little to no contact with each other and often there are misunderstandings of processes and protocols between them.

4K teachers in school sites spoke very positively about their partnerships with 5K teachers. They also were able to connect with other 4K teachers through monthly district meetings off site. MMSD schools with no 4K had little to no contact with 4K teachers from other schools. Stand-alone 4Ks seemed the most isolated from MMSD and 5K curriculum/teachers, and teachers at those sites expressed the most uncertainty around the structures, protocols, and

curriculum in 5K. This sense of isolation is encapsulated in the following ECE teacher's statement,

I mean, my biggest thing is I wish that there was more communication between the school district and the community sites. Like, I'm the only 4K classroom here. Like, I have no idea what the school district is looking for. Even like professional development for teachers. Like, I don't have off on Mondays like the other 4K teachers do. ... I'm in my own little bubble here.

Assessment Misalignment

All teachers used various assessments throughout the year to gauge the academic and social/emotional development of their students over time. We found that both 4K and 5K teachers had little knowledge of, or perceived access to, assessments used in each other's classrooms. 4K teachers spoke about the assessment practices they used, such as PALS for literacy and the comprehensive Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD), as well as how this information was shared or not. 5K teachers expressed substantial uncertainty about 4K assessment data and whether the assessment data were available to them.

PALS/Report Card. All 4K teachers said they evaluated their students' academic literacy growth using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment and communicated successes and challenges with families through report cards. 5K teachers reported that they rarely looked at the PALS scores or report cards of incoming students. A focus group of 5K teachers who taught in a school without a 4K did not think they had access to that information. When speaking about PALS, one teacher said, "*I don't know why we don't [receive PALS], but no, we don't.*" A 5K teacher at another school echoed that confusion. When asked if they used the Infinite Campus database to access progress reports, the teacher said that they'd "never been told how to do it."

4K teachers were also dubious that 5K teachers were using this information in meaningful ways. One 4K teacher in a school with a 5K spoke about how she gave 5K teachers information from her progress reports and PALS but doubted teachers had time to look at it on their own. She said,

So yeah, and then when we meet with, when I meet with the 5K teachers, and we go over like, after they have their class list, and it's like, oh, okay, so [5K Teacher], you're going to get, like she got [student] last year, and [student] last year. ... If they have time, they can [read the PALS], but I do put the information on the report card.

Head Start teachers were also unsure if 5K teachers looked at incoming progress reports, stating that they put working strategies for students in them, but "*don't know if [teachers] [read*

them] anymore because 5K teachers, you know? It's hard. You don't have time to look through that."

Some 5K teachers mentioned that they felt as though the report cards were written with parents in mind and therefore may not have included information about children's behavioral and emotional challenges, or strategies that would help them in their new environment. A 5K teacher told us that,

[4K teachers are] not going to blatantly just put it out there in the report card that this kid is struggling or having trouble. And we do find out later that oftentimes their school psychologist and social worker have information on these kids that does not come to us.

Other 5K teachers spoke of the progress reports being "vague" or "*put in a professional way of their behaviors and different things, so parents only know, I think, so much as to what actually happened and whether or not they did succeed.*" One 4K Head Start teacher's comments about her progress report writing lined up with the concerns of these 5K teachers.

When discussing what she thought was appropriate for progress reports, this teacher said,

I'll have teachers call that next year if they're having a concern with the child or something. They'll call and, you know, talk with me about did I have those same concerns or what were some of the things that worked in the classroom? Because there are certain things that you can't put on a progress report.

Both 4K and 5K teachers understand the diplomacy used in progress report writing, leading 5K teachers to take those reports with a grain of salt—or ignore them entirely.

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD). 4K teachers at school sites, Head Start programs, and some ECEs are required to conduct comprehensive developmental and academic assessments through the TS GOLD online portal throughout the school year. Not a single 5K teacher spoke of using prior TS GOLD scores or even seeing them, and most 5K teachers didn't know they existed. 4K teachers were not sure if 5K teachers saw or used the TS GOLD data and wondered more generally what purpose TS GOLD served for the district.

Perceptions of Curriculum and Each Other

Throughout the interviews, we noticed that 4K and 5K teachers had a limited understanding of the curriculum used by teachers at the other level. This limited information sometimes contributed to negative evaluations of the approach to education taken by their counterparts. Limited understandings of pedagogical approaches and curricular demands across levels occurred even in buildings housing both 4K and 5K classrooms.

Curriculum Disconnects/Misunderstandings. Many 4K and 5K teachers spoke about the gaps they perceived between 4K and 5K academic curricula and social/emotional expectations. Some 4K teachers felt that the 5K curriculum was developmentally inappropriate and detrimental to young learners, and both 4K and 5K teachers from all schools spoke of the disconnection between expectations in 4K and kindergarten.

4K and 5K teachers felt there should be more play time in 5K, although 5K teachers consistently spoke of the pressure of MMSD-mandated expectations and wished 4K teachers would prepare students for that. One 5K teacher said that an aligned 4K "*would help them in kindergarten, but is it necessarily developmentally appropriate? Absolutely not. But it's just the rigor, the rigor is (too) high,*" while noting that "*we're being forced to do this, this, and this whether we think it's right or not.*"

With additional probing, 5K teachers identified some of the academic skills they wished more students brought to kindergarten, with a focus on literacy. In one 5K without a 4K in the building, teachers discussed perceived academic misalignment between 4K and 5K curriculum and assessment.

I mean they have their report card that should tell them, but it doesn't necessarily line up perfectly. I feel like they say they should know ten letters and they can know either the sound or the name. They just have to know ten of them. ... And the thing is they're focusing on uppercase letters, and they come into kindergarten and they tested in lowercase letters. So, it's a big disconnect that way, and even with handwriting, same thing. They're taught uppercase letters in 4K. We're focused on lowercase letters.

They further spoke about how these literacy gaps at the beginning of kindergarten stay with the children throughout the year.

Why am I having to teach them their letters because they should at least know their letters by the time they leave kindergarten, but if they go into kindergarten knowing zero, you know, it's not—the kindergarten teacher cannot teach you from, you know, from zero, you know, from nothing at all to reading in a year. So, it's just, I mean, we can't bridge the gap. But, you know, if they start in kindergarten knowing nothing and then, you know, we're expected to teach them from just to hold a pencil, what, then, you know, we're not actually teaching them what we're supposed to be teaching them, and then obviously that just keeps creating our gaps, but it's just been getting harder and harder each year. There's just more and more kids who aren't at the level they're supposed to begin at.

All 4K teachers spoke about the “Creative Curriculum” modules they use in Madison. These modules are designed with a focus on school readiness. However, no 5K teacher we asked knew much about the Creative Curriculum’s content and some speculated that much of a 4K student’s day was filled with unstructured playtime. One 5K teacher in a school with a 4K summarized this lack of information sharing. She said, “*that’s something I wonder is do they have a scope? Do they have a sequence of things that they follow throughout the school year? A plan. And if so, what is it? Can we see it? I guess I’d like to know what they did.*”

Even a 4K teacher with decades of early childhood teaching experience and working closely with the school’s 5K teachers spoke plainly about the incongruous nature of the transition.

And you know, we are very transparent (with parents) about (how) kindergarten’s hard, kindergarten’s really hard. There is a disconnect between the end of 4K and the beginning of kindergarten and it’s, some kids are ready and a lot of kids that we see are not. And so it’s, it’s tricky because that’s kind of like something that’s kind of out of our hands because we can’t just change the K curriculum and get it to like connect to ours better.

5K teachers reiterated these disconnects. A teacher in a 5K school with a 4K reported working to make the beginning of their year more play-centered to ease this curricular transition, with the support of their principal and 4K teaching colleague.

I very much appreciate that our principal comes from an early childhood background. And she fully embraces play. And so we are supported. But I know of other schools in the district where they’re being told to get the kitchen out, get the Legos out, get all of those toys out. Oh my gosh if I had to teach in an environment like that, I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t do it.

Some 4K teachers admitted not knowing much about the 5K curriculum or how to prepare students to access it successfully. Some felt that there was not much they could do, because the kindergarten expectations didn’t match theirs, and they felt that the system as a whole “kind of tends to stop early childhood thinking in 4K.”

Other Perceptions. 4K teachers at Head Start believed that MMSD and 5K teachers look down on them and their students. They worried that 5K teachers assumed the Head Start students were “terrible,” “have behaviors,” and did “not know much.” One Head Start teacher stated with emotion, “*Like, it’s not just, like, a free-for-all at Head Start. And I feel like people often think ... that they’re not learning anything here. And just please don’t make assumptions about them just because they come from Head Start.*” The perceptions of Head Start teachers are not entirely inaccurate. Some 5K teachers had concerns about expectations at Head Start not

being “at the same level that (they) have” at their schools, and mentioned that IEPs come from Head Start more frequently than from other 4Ks. More broadly, 5K teachers from schools without a 4K mentioned misalignment between their expectations of students at the end of 4K and what student had achieved at that point in time. Even in schools with 4Ks, 5K teachers were more positive about students coming from their own sites and wondered whether the expectations held by Head Start and other pre-kindergarten programs aligned with their own.

Discussion

This research aims to help 5K teachers better support incoming students and families as children transition to kindergarten. Through the voices of 4K and 5K teachers, we offer a comprehensive picture of how information flows between 4K and 5K teachers in MMSD, and what inhibits that flow. We also discuss what types of information 4K teachers would like to share and what information 5K teachers would like to receive to facilitate the transition. Considering that approximately two-thirds of kindergarteners attended 4K programs in the district prior to kindergarten (Graue et al., 2018), we believe that the information 4K teachers convey could help 5K teachers improve the level of support they can offer their students and families. In the following section, we summarize the types of information 4K and 5K teachers identified as useful to support the transition, as well as the institutional challenges teachers encountered in sharing such information.

Identifying Useful Information to Support the Transition

4K and 5K teachers agreed that information about **children’s coping strategies** and **family context** is valuable to share to support the transition to kindergarten. 5K teachers said that each child has different strategies to cope with social-emotional and behavioral challenges; therefore, having this key information at the beginning of the school year would save teachers a considerable amount of time figuring out how to understand and help children, and would reduce levels of anxiety in children experiencing difficulties. 4K teachers noted that some strategies can be as simple as using verbal and/or motion cues for a particular student, or using tools and/or artifacts that worked in 4K. Teachers also agreed that sharing information about the child’s family circumstances, including **family members, language, and parental employment**, would provide important context for children’s lives. In addition, 4K and 5K teachers said that information about **traumatic incidents** is important because of the substantial impact such incidents can have on children’s behaviors and attitudes toward learning in the classroom. At the same time, the teachers raised concerns about how and to what extent such sensitive information could be shared.

In addition to the areas of agreement between 4K and 5K teachers, 5K teachers uniquely identified **children’s 4K experiences, children’s skills and development, and communication strategies with parents** as beneficial information to support the transition. While 5K teachers

could ask parents directly about whether a child attended 4K and where he or she attended, 5K teachers preferred to receive the information in advance, including the 4K teacher's contact information, if possible. In addition, 5K teachers were more likely than 4K teachers to believe it was necessary to know children's specific skills prior to 5K. For example, 5K teachers noted that information about children's literacy skills would help them determine class lists and arrange students for group work within a class. While 4K teachers said that they preferred to provide information about a child's individual learning style and pace, 5K teachers identified self-care, socio-emotional, and academic skills as the most important aspects to better understand their students. This distinction might be a result of having more academic-oriented goals in kindergarten in contrast to 4K, where developmentally appropriate practice is highly valued. Lastly, 5K teachers desired more ways to communicate with parents both logistically and strategically, probably because they had fewer opportunities to engage in face-to-face interactions with the parents.

Challenges to Information Sharing

We noted several challenges teachers faced when giving or receiving information about students to support the transition to kindergarten. Some of the challenges relate to kindergarten teachers' perceived inability to access report cards and other academic assessments. We also found that some challenges to sharing information, or to trusting its worth, had more to do with the strength or absence of relationships between the 4K and 5K teachers involved in a child's transition. Below we discuss obstacles to sharing less sensitive data, including results of prior assessments and progress reports, some of which are accessible to all teachers through Infinite Campus. We also consider hurdles to sharing more personal information about children and families, including homelessness, abuse, and other traumas that are important for understanding the whole child, and how *relational trust* between 4K and 5K teachers can facilitate the sharing of such information.

Less Sensitive Information

We found that 4K teachers collect a lot of academic data throughout the school year that 5K teachers never see and may not even be aware of. 4K teachers in school sites and Head Start programs record information on children's literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development using TS GOLD, and store that information online. As we note above, most 5K teachers reported being completely unfamiliar with TS GOLD, where to find the information, and how they might use the data.

4K teachers also assess students' literacy skills in the fall and spring using the PALS assessment. PALS scores, like student report cards, are available through Infinite campus. Some 5K teachers spoke about the potential usefulness of receiving student's academic information before the beginning of the school year and using it to build more academically and socially balanced

classrooms. Despite reporting that they wanted this information, however, many 5K teachers were unaware that they had the ability to acquire progress reports and PALS scores through Infinite Campus. Some 5K teachers who knew how to obtain information on Infinite campus, wondered if they could actually trust the narratives about students included in report cards, noting that comments were “vague” or only contained the positive details about the students. Teachers in schools housing 4K classrooms were more likely than those lacking a 4K to report sharing and using some assessment information to make decisions about classroom rosters for students who stayed on site. All 4K and 5K teachers in these schools reported having close relationships with their early childhood counterparts, spending time before the beginning of the year going over which students would be in whose kindergarten classroom, which teacher would be the best fit, and which groups of children would work best together. Teachers also used these relationships to informally share academic information or strategies that worked for their students. These “meetings” took place in hallways or in impromptu moments before and after school. While some 5K teachers in schools with 4Ks were skeptical of report card information, which they perceived to be sugarcoated for parents, we found that teachers who spoke face-to-face with each other felt that the experience was meaningful to their understanding of incoming students. Relational trust between 4K and 5K teachers in the same school facilitates both sharing and confidence in information, and increases the likelihood that teachers will use information about students to make instructional choices.

Personal Information

In addition to information on children’s academic status, teachers also collect important data considered sensitive and private. Some of this information is formally collected. For example, Head Start family outreach workers (FOWs) connect closely with families to provide important social services and resources that go beyond the curriculum and classroom. FOWs also work with teachers to help students with families who are dealing with homelessness, financial strain, issues related to their immigration status, an incarcerated parent, past abuse, and other traumas. However, in other settings without those supports, this information is shared with 4K teachers through the relationships they carefully build with families and students throughout the year. Relational trust helps teachers and families collaborate on strategies that might ease academic and behavioral effects that personal circumstances might have on the child. We spoke with teachers about the importance of this information in developing more holistic understandings of students and families, and if or how this information gets transferred from 4K to kindergarten.

We found that the transfer of this information from 4K to 5K depended heavily on relational trust built among teachers over time. In schools where 4K and 5K cohabitated, and strong professional and personal relationships existed, information about the personal lives of students and families was both openly given and received. Teachers in these settings shared

personal information about students and their families in formal meetings before the start of the school year, when classrooms were being developed, and in informal hallway talks and check-ins. 5K teachers who know their 4K colleagues trust that this sensitive information is based less in preconceived biases, and instead is being shared to help teachers set up classrooms that are best suited for those students and families.

Conversely, we found that sensitive information was not always received readily by 5K teachers when received from schools outside of the district and/or from teachers they did not know. In those situations, 5K teachers reported worrying that information about students' behavioral issues due to trauma, a caregiver's past abuse, home instability, or other troubles outside of school might cloud their own judgement and contribute to harmful biases about a child or family before meeting them. On the information-giving end, some 4K teachers from Head Start programs and ECEs felt less comfortable sharing sensitive information, either because they had no connection to 5K teachers and didn't know how to contact them, or they perceived those teachers as having biases against Head Start students and families. 4K and 5K teachers who do not work in the same setting were also concerned about confidentiality issues and some chose not to share or receive sensitive information due to perceived legal obstacles.

This is a telling tension. On the one hand, 4K and 5K teachers agree that personal, potentially sensitive information about children's and families' circumstances is important for building relationships, as well as setting up classrooms that reflect the diverse needs of students and families. In schools that have both 4K and 5K classes, 4K teachers shared information with their 5K colleagues freely throughout the school year. However, due to the information's subjective and emotionally charged nature, teachers need to know and believe the person who delivers this knowledge before it can be useful. Relational trust between 4K and 5K teachers determines what and how information is shared, but trust can be difficult to develop and sustain when teachers don't have adequate opportunities to connect.

Recommendations

Creating structures to help 4K teachers share information about incoming kindergartners and their families with 5K teachers could improve the transition to 5K for students, their families, and teachers. Finding more efficient and effective ways of sharing information may be especially important for children coming from stand-alone ECEs and Head Start programs or switching schools, and for 5K settings that draw students from multiple 4Ks. With higher quality and more timely information about their entering students, 5K teachers could more effectively balance students' strengths and needs across the 5K classroom and tailor practices to the needs of students and families. Based on our discussions with 4K and 5K teachers, we recommend that the district (1) develop a prototype to share information and (2) do more to build relational trust between 4K and 5K teachers.

A Prototype for Sharing Information Among Teachers

The district should consider creating reports for 5K teachers based on evaluative data already entered by 4K teachers over the course of the year and brief narratives from 4K teachers about each of their students. These reports should draw primarily from the teacher who instructed incoming students over the prior academic year. However, teachers who instruct incoming kindergarteners in the summer before they enter kindergarten may also have valuable insights.²

Simple and easy access to student reports would facilitate information sharing. We suggest that the report be brief, no more than two pages per student, and the narrative requirements concise to minimize the added workload for 4K teachers. To protect sensitive information, the report could be stored and shared through the Infinite Campus staff portal but should be combined for each 5K class so that teachers do not need to generate reports manually for each student on their rosters. 5K teachers should need minimal guidance to access and make use of the reports.

The document should include the data points listed below, in a clear, concise, and preferably visual format. Most of the items are already populated in district databases, at least for 4Ks in school sites. Other information such as children's strengths, challenges, and coping strategies would be better delivered in a narrative form. Below we detail the information we believe would be most helpful in supporting the transition to 5K, marking with an asterisk (*) those elements that would require additional 4K teacher effort. Some of those elements would require only brief responses, others complete sentences.

Data about children:

- 4K attendance (yes/no), site, 4K teacher's name and contact information
- Allergies, special health conditions
- PALS Spring literacy scores
- TS GOLD scores for social-emotional, physical development, literacy, and mathematics skills
- Strengths and strategies to support the strengths *
- Socio-emotional/behavior challenges and coping strategies to address the challenges *

Data about the family context:

- Household members, each member's relationship to the student

² In addition to instructional staff, one teacher who reviewed this report raised the possibility of involving social workers and school psychologists for guidance on sharing sensitive information.

- Contact person, authorized drop-off/pick-up person for the student
- Language (if translation service needed)
- Primary caregivers' work schedules (part/full-time, nighttime) *
- Preferred timing and mode of communication (in-person, phone, text, email) *
- Family trauma (e.g., poverty, homelessness, violence, loss of or separation from a parent) and support the family received in 4K *

This prototype includes a wide range of information about incoming students and families, but it would not include information on the approximately one-third of entering students who did not attend 4K in the district. We acknowledge that our report does not address those students' needs and hope that, if the approaches we propose are successful, the district will consider how to broaden them to other 4K venues and to children who do not attend 4K in the future. The research team discussed if and to what extent teachers could share sensitive and personal information. Both 4K and 5K teachers agreed that information about family needs and traumatic incidents would hold substantial value for 5K teachers. Some teachers, however, were wary about how such information would be shared, received, and perceived. Given this concern, the absence of greater trust between 4K and 5K teachers could prevent 4K teachers from disclosing detailed information on shared documents. Thus, to make better use of the prototype, we argue that 4K and 5K teachers should engage in more interactions and opportunities to build trust and share sensitive information appropriately. In the following section, we propose several strategies for building relational trust between 4K and 5K teachers to complement and support information-sharing practices.

Building Relational Trust Between 4K and 5K Teachers

4K at School Sites

Schools vary in how they build kindergarten classroom rosters. Some 5K teachers reported working with 4K teachers to create 5K classroom rosters while other 5K teachers spoke of not having any idea who their students would be until the first day of class. For 4K classrooms that share a school with kindergartens, we recommend schools hold an official 4K–5K meeting before the beginning of the school year to build class rosters or, in schools where the principal creates class rosters, to advise the principal in doing so. This meeting should be a set time for ECE teachers to go over what they know about students and families who have been with them that year. Ideally, prior to this meeting, 5K teachers would have an opportunity to review the reports we outlined above and could then use the meeting for follow-up questions. Our hope is that 4K and 5K teachers will use this time together to review academic and socio-emotional information about students, and that the meeting will give 5K teachers space to ask deeper questions about children, families, and strategies that have worked academically and for relationship building. We recognize that this approach only works for students who will stay

in the school in which they attended 4K, but we believe that these institutional strategies supporting dialogue about 4K and 5K students represent an important start.

4K–5K Meetings That Include 4K at Head Start Programs and ECEs

For off-site 4Ks, we recommend strategies that work to build i) a deeper understanding of curriculum and assessment in both 5K classes, ii) relational trust to help build connection and ease the transfer of information. Some approaches to consider:

- i) 4K/5K Early Learning professional development (PD) sessions: We recommend a series of PDs whose participants include 4K teachers from both school and non-school sites and 5K teachers. In another Madison Education Partnership project, *Mathematize Your Class*, we were struck by how much teachers enjoyed engaging with one another across 4K sites. PD sessions could address important topics including the 4K and 5K curricula and their alignment with assessment. Ideally, 4K and 5K teachers would have time to observe each other’s classrooms and be able to debrief about what they are seeing. This is especially important for teachers in off-site ECEs who feel the most isolated and least informed about expectations and practices in 5K classrooms. We also hope that this would help teachers build deeper relationships and trust between schools and teachers outside of their own schools.
- ii) 4K/5K mixer: We recommend an informal 4K/5K mixer to be held in the late summer or early fall. Similar to a back-to-school night for just teachers, 4K and 5K teachers would have a chance to meet in a low-stakes setting, discuss the school year, and get to know each on a personal level. All 4K and 5K teachers in the district should be invited.

We acknowledge that building relational trust takes time. Some teachers who reviewed this report raised concerns about the time demands and wondered if and how teachers would be compensated for the time they spend meeting with and getting to know other teachers. If the district chooses to provide opportunities for teachers to spend time with one another, it also will need to address the issue of compensation.

Principal Training and Buy-In

5K teachers reported that principals were the first to receive logistical information about incoming students, using it to create class rosters. Some teachers reported that unless they were invited to help, the principal divvied up classes according to demographic attributes of students such as gender and age. Some principals were responsible for mandating formal meetings between 4K and 5K teachers in the same school to discuss rising kindergarteners who were staying on site, or for establishing opportunities for teachers to work together. Teachers participating in these collaborations spoke enthusiastically about the usefulness of these meetings for getting to know students’ needs before the start of the school year. In light of this, we recommend that administration have opportunities to learn what information is shared across 4K and 5K sites, including PALS, TS GOLD and report cards that can be found

on Infinite Campus, as well as how teachers share that information. We also recommend training for administration around how to use these data to make more informed decisions with their teachers about classroom divisions. We suggest that principals think about ways they can facilitate connections between 4K and 5K classrooms, for example, setting aside times during the year for teachers to meet and look at curriculum and data together, and/or placing 4K/5K classrooms close to each other in the school building.

References

- Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P. L., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J. E. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance? *Early childhood research quarterly, 26*(3), 295–302.
- Alatalo, T., Meier, J., & Frank, E. (2017). Information sharing on children's literacy learning in the transition from Swedish preschool to school. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 31*(2), 240–254.
- Cook, K. D., Dearing, E., & Zachrisson, H. D. (2017). Information sharing between teachers and early education programs during school entry in Norway: Associations with children's school adjustment and success in the first year. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 11*(1), 14.
- Graue, M.E., Woo, M., & Lee, J. (2018) Family Decision Making about 4K Enrollment in MMSD. Executive Research Summary for the Madison Education Partnership. Madison, WI.
- LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(1), 124–139.
- Pianta, R. C., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Gercke, N., & Higgins, T. (2001). Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The National Center for Early Development and Learning's Kindergarten Transition Intervention. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16*(1), 117–132.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 21*, 491–511.

Appendix 1: Interview Protocols

4K teacher focus group questions

1. Starting kindergarten can be exciting and challenging for both students and their families. What do you do to help students and their families make this transition?
 - a. PROBE: What works well? Can you give me an example of *how* it works well? If you could design the best transition for your students, what would it look like?
2. How do you share information with 5K teachers about your students? What time of year do you share that information?
 - a. PROBE: How is this different for children going to different 5K programs?
3. Can you think of any times when you WISH a 5K teacher had known more about a *specific* student before the school year started?
 - a. PROBE: Would you describe that for me?
4. What are some of the kinds of things you wish 5K teachers knew about your students before they start 5K?
5. What are some things you wish 5K teachers knew about families as children started school?

5K teacher focus group questions

1. Starting kindergarten can be exciting and challenging for both students and their families. What do you do to help students and their families make the transition to kindergarten?
 - a. PROBE: What works well? How could these practices [or enumerate them?] be improved?
2. Are there things you do to learn about your students before the school year begins? Where do you go for this information?
3. How do you learn about your students early in the school year? Where do you go for this information?
 - a. PROBE: Do you ever check in with 4K teachers about individual students in your class? Can you describe an instance when you did that?
4. Can you think of any times when you WISH you had known more about a *specific* student before the school year started?
 - a. PROBE: Would you describe that for me?
5. What are some things you'd like to know about your students before they start kindergarten?
6. If you had that information, how would you use it? What would you do differently?
7. What are some things you wish you knew about families as children started school?
8. How if at all would that influence your practice?

Appendix Table 1: Information relevant to the transition to kindergarten

Domain	Information	Exemplar
Child	Behavioral self-regulation	Follow classroom rules and routines, behave independently, sit still, stand in line
	Social-emotional	Play nicely with peers, maintain positive relationships and interactions with peers and adults, express and recognize emotions in self and others
	Language and literacy	Recognize letters (upper and lower case) and sound, write letters and names
	Mathematics	Count numbers
	4K experiences	Attend 4K or other center-based childcare centers
	School transport	Take a school bus or parents pick up
	IEP	Special needs
	Strengths	Learning prompts, interests, approaches to learning
	Coping strategies	Strategies to deal with emotional and behavioral issues
Family	Family dynamics	Siblings, single parent families, grandparent families
	Family culture	Traditions, values, languages
	Parental employment	Employment status, work schedules
	Communication style	Contact information, best contact person, communication preferences
	Trauma incidences	Any events that can cause traumatic stress
	Home insecurity	Homeless, living with extended family or in a motel/shelter
	Family needs	Food, clothing, technology shortage

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program

Appendix Table 2: Information teachers identified as important for supporting kindergarten transition

Information		5K Teachers						4K Teachers						
		Schoo I A	Schoo I B	Schoo I C	Schoo I D	Schoo I E	Schoo I F	School B	School G	School H	HS a	HS b	ECE a	ECE b
Child	4K experiences		x	x	x	x	X							x
	School transport		x		x									
	IEP	x	x		x		X		x					
	Strengths			x		x		x		x	x	x		x
	Coping strategies	x	x	x	x	x	X	x			x		x	x
	Behavioral self-regulation	x	x		x		X		x			x		
	Social-emotional	x	x	x	x		X						x	
	Language and literacy	x	x	x	x	x								
	Mathematics	x		x	x									
Family	Family dynamics	x	x		x	x	X		x		x		x	x
	Family culture	x	x	x			X	x	x			x		
	Parental employment			x	x					x		x		
	Communication style		x	x	x	x	X		x	x				
	Home insecurity		x	x	x		X			x				
	Trauma incidences	x		x			X					x		x
	Family needs			x							x	x	x	

Note. ECE = Early care education center; HS = Head Start program; IEP = Individualized Education Program