

Combined Project Briefs

Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students, Families, and Teachers



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 the practices schools use to strengthen the transition into kindergarten and to see if home visits should be part of these strategies. We began work in spring of 2018 with funding from the [Spencer Foundation](#) and will continue through spring of 2020.

What did we do?

We have done two studies of the four-year-old kindergarten (4K) – five-year-old kindergarten (5K) transition. First, we studied transition practices at four elementary schools in Madison. We chose these sites intentionally to represent the wide variety of 4K to 5K transition implementation plans in our schools. Our team interviewed school staff, as well as 4K teachers whose students would attend these schools. We also reviewed transition plans and other resources created by school staff. This work took place in spring of 2018; we issued our final report in November 2018.

Second, we designed, implemented and analyzed a home visit intervention for incoming kindergarten students. We recruited 12 kindergarten teachers in seven elementary schools in Madison. Each teacher received training from our team (co-designed with MMSD staff and leadership) and then conducted two visits with up to eight randomly selected students and families. These visits took place in the summer of 2019 and teachers wrote reflections after each visit. In the fall of 2019, we interviewed teachers, families and students about their experiences. Our team analyzed the data and created two reports. The first focused on implementation of the home visit program (released November 2018); the second explored the experiences of teachers, families, and students (released in May 2019).

What did we learn?

About transition practices in our schools:

- Schools are engaging in some basic transition practices, such as kindergarten visit day, summer play dates, Ready-Set-Go conferences, and teacher-initiated informal activities.
- If a school had a transition planning team, the team included the principal as the point person and kindergarten teachers as core members, but other school staff (e.g., 4K teachers, instructional coach, and ESL teachers) were only sometimes members.
- Staff see the value of the transition practices as creating opportunities to build connections between home and school, provide an overview of kindergarten, reduce the families' anxiety and fears, and understand each student's strengths and needs.
- Schools have faced challenges to transition planning, including financial and human resource constraints, which they believe have limited their ability to make practices family-centered.

About the implementation of a summer home visit program:

- District leaders, teachers, and families share excitement about the potential of home visits.
- Participating teachers reported getting a lot out of the experience, learning more about students and families as well as hearing parent concerns prior to the first day of school.
- Recruitment and scheduling of home visits was challenging and emerged as the biggest logistical hurdle of the process.
- To make home visits equitable, the district would need to invest in translation to reach families who identify a language other than English as their preferred language at home.

About the experience of a summer home visit program:

- Teachers enriched their understanding of students and their families through home visits and used the knowledge to support their students' learning and address challenges in the classroom.
- Teachers, parents, and students believed the relationships built through home visits prior to the school year were valuable assets in the transition into kindergarten.
- Both teachers and parents strongly believed that they benefited from home visits, yet they recognized the logistical challenges of implementing visits district-wide.

Want to learn more?

Feel free to contact Amanda Kruger with any questions or find further information in the following reports:

Study 1: Examining Kindergarten Transition Practices

Authors: Moonjoo Woo, Beth Graue

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**Home Visits in the Kindergarten Transition:
Lessons Learned Thus Far from the MEP Project**

Authors: Amanda Jeppson, Beth Vaade

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**Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families:
Lessons Learned from the Home Visit Project**

Authors: Moonjoo Woo, Lauren Lauter

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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

Research Team included Beth Vaade, Culleen Witthuhn, Caroline Racine-Giles, and Amanda Jeppson from the Madison Metropolitan School District, in addition to those at the University of Wisconsin-Madison including Moonjoo Woo, Lauren Lauter, Beth Graue, Eric Grodsky, Katherine Magnuson, and Phoebe Jordan.

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Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families

Study 1: Examining Kindergarten Transition Practices in MMSD Schools

July 2018

Executive summary

This study explored how elementary schools in MMSD approach the transition into kindergarten by conducting interviews with principals and teachers in four-year-old (4K) and kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, we examined the schools' practices to strengthen the kindergarten transition and the planning process from spring to the start of the new school year.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What have schools done to facilitate kindergarten transition?
2. How does the school staff collaborate around kindergarten transition practices?
3. How does the school staff perceive the goal of the transition practices?
4. What challenges or barriers do schools encounter in the process of implementing the transition practices?

In this report, we address these questions using interview data collected between May and June 2018 from four schools in the district. We use Central, Harvey, Johnson, and Northeast to refer to these schools. Four principals, two 4K teachers, and three kindergarten teachers shared their knowledge and experiences regarding their school's kindergarten transition practices by answering the interview questions (Appendix 1).

This report presents the following key findings:

1. All four schools have been implementing the following transition practices on a yearly basis:
 - School-initiated practices including kindergarten visitation day in spring and play dates in summer;
 - District-initiated Ready, Set, Go conferences at the beginning of the school year;
 - Teacher-initiated informal activities in the year before kindergarten.
2. Transition planning teams where they existed included the principal as the point person and kindergarten teachers as core members. Other school staff (e.g., 4K teachers, instructional coach, and ESL teachers) were sometimes included in the planning team.
3. Staff have seen the value of the transition practices as creating opportunities (1) to build connections between home and school, (2) to provide an overview of kindergarten, (3) to reduce the families' anxiety and fears, and (4) to understand each student's strengths and needs.
4. Challenges the schools have faced include lack of financial and human resources to make the transition practices more family-centered especially for working families.

Recruitment

In April 2018, the school district sent an invitation to all principals asking if they and their teachers would be willing to participate in a project to improve kindergarten transition for students and their families. The project included two complementary studies with the following questions: 1)

How do schools approach transition to kindergarten? and 2) How can home visits support the transition to kindergarten? The schools were asked to participate in either or both of the studies and four schools volunteered to contribute to the study 1. In terms of data collection, a research assistant conducted interviews with four principals, two 4K and three 5K teachers.

Given the small sample size, the findings may not be representative of the whole district, but the four schools have much in common in their transition practices. Thus, these interviews provide a general sense of how kindergarten transition has been conducted across the district and provides some insights about what works and what has not been so successful in the schools.

Method

The transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software. We first coded the data thematically, and the code scheme can be summarized as follows: transition practices (planning, implementation, outcome), goals (for students, for parents, for teachers), collaboration (within schools, across schools), and challenges (attendance, scheduling, communication, resources). The next step was to examine the similarities and differences among the schools to identify the themes emerging from the data.

What have schools done to facilitate the kindergarten transition?

The four schools have worked for several years to facilitate the kindergarten transition process for students and to create feasible plans for transition practices starting in the spring before the new school year. All four schools had two school-initiated transition practices: “kindergarten visitation day” in the spring and “play dates” in the summer. Other strategic actions that complement the school-initiated ones include district- initiated Ready, Set, Go conferences, and other teacher-initiated informal activities in the year before kindergarten. Figure 1 is a monthly timeline illustrating the sequence of kindergarten enrollment dates, the first day of school, and approximate time period of the transition practices.

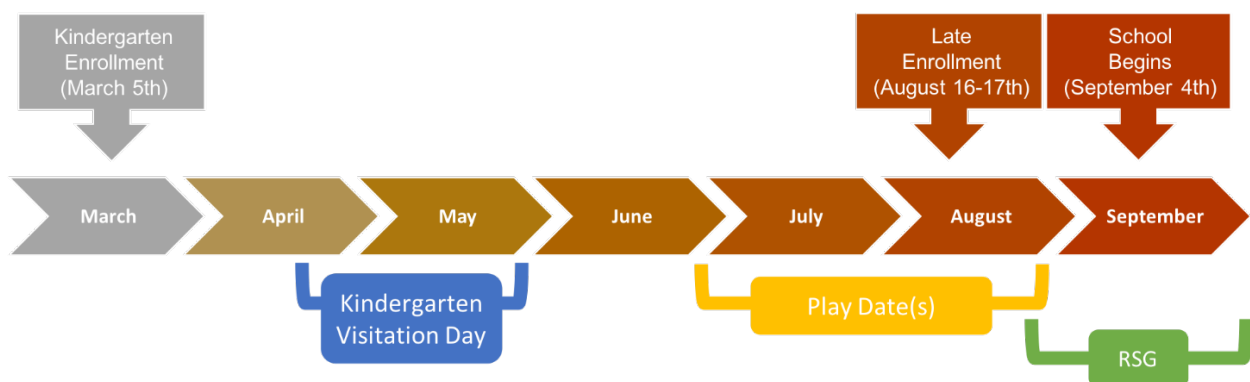


Figure 1: Monthly Timeline for 5K Transition in 2018

Kindergarten visitation day

On one afternoon in late April or early May, the schools invited families who had enrolled their children for kindergarten to kindergarten visitation day. The preferred day and time was Monday afternoons because kindergarten teachers were more flexible then or could have early releases. On the visitation day, the principals typically gave a tour of the building in a large group and a

then presented an overview of kindergarten, explaining basic issues such as bussing, school supplies, lunch, and kindergarten daily schedules. A question and answer session followed the presentation. While the parents were in the session, the students visited classrooms and spent about 45 minutes to an hour with kindergarten teachers. The teachers prepared a small project incorporating both large-group and individual activities. For example, one of the teachers read a book to the large group and then the students were split into several groups to complete activities related to the content of the book including cutting paper, drawing pictures, coloring, or writing names.

Play dates

Schools organized play dates where both incoming 4K and 5K families gathered with school staff at a playground or a park. A kindergarten teacher at Harvey indicated the purpose of having play dates (which usually included a picnic) was to create more space for interaction among staff, families, and students right before the school started. The days, times, and the degree of involvement from the PTO varied across the schools: Harvey, Johnson, and Northeast held one play date in late August and planned the event with the PTO, while Central held three play dates from June to August with no support from the PTO. Even if families registered their children through late enrollment in mid-August they could receive an invitation from the schools since the play date was scheduled in late August. The play dates usually had higher attendance than the kindergarten visitation day because the timing was closer to the school year and the families had more confidence in which school their children would attend for kindergarten. Another reason for higher attendance at the play dates could be the influx of new late-enrolled families.

Ready, Set, Go conferences

A Ready, Set, Go conference (RSG) is a district-mandated practice to establish a positive relationship between home and school and to maximize the student's learning experience in school. The four participating schools identified RSGs as a key transition practice that creates opportunities for both families and teachers to get to know each other. Most of the RSGs took place in the kindergarten classroom where the student would attend; however, the times and locations were subject to the families' needs and requests. The teachers are contractually required and paid to set a 15-minute conference with each family with an additional 15 minutes of preparation time. In 2018, the RSGs took place between August 20th to October 4th and the teachers were required to submit a summary sheet by October 5th, indicating how many hours they spent with which families. The district provided general guidelines including the purposes and suggested content of the meetings, but the teachers mostly had discretion about how to organize the meetings, what kinds of questions to ask, and what to discuss during their 15 minutes. The staff at Harvey and Johnson elementary schools noted that they used to have "open house" event, which had been held in late August for parents to come to school, fill out paperwork, and drop off supplies.

Informal transition practices within the school in the year before kindergarten

In addition to the school-wide practices, the staff at Harvey and Northeast schools told us that the informal transition practices initiated by 4K and kindergarten teachers benefitted students. For example, the 4K teachers at both schools set up a day in May for the incoming students to have lunch in the big cafeteria. They found that it helped 4K students better understand what it would

be like to eat lunch with other grades when they went to kindergarten. Visiting other places within the school such as the library, computer lab, or music room was also part of the informal practices. A little more collaboration was evident at Harvey: a panel of kindergarten students visited the 4K classroom to share their kindergarten experiences. Other than deciding on an appropriate day and time, these informal practices required less planning than school-wide events. These practices were also more flexible since they occur periodically and are subject to change based on teachers' willingness and availability. Principals recognized the teachers' efforts in coordinating the informal transition practices and hoped to have them on a regular basis.

How do schools make plans for the transition practices?

Transition planning started with forming the transition team at each school. Once families enrolled incoming kindergarteners on-site or online in early March, the schools began to identify the transition team members (Table 1). The principal served as the point person for the transition team in all four schools, which meant they took responsibility for encouraging the work process and initiated meetings. The kindergarten teachers served as the core members of the transition teams with a few variations. Central school included an instructional coach and ESL teachers since they work closely with the kindergarten team. Northeast was the only school that included 4K teachers in the transition team. Without a transition team at Harvey, the principal coordinated the transition planning with a senior member of the kindergarten team.

Other kindergarten teachers at Harvey appreciated their principal stepping up to minimize the work for them since it was during their busy time of year.

Table 1: Transition team members across four schools

School	Staff
Central school	Principal, kindergarten teachers, instructional coach, ESL teachers
Harvey school	Transition team doesn't exist (Principal & a designated kindergarten teacher)
Johnson school	Principal, kindergarten teachers
Northeast school	Principal, kindergarten teachers, 4K teachers

After the transition teams were formed, they met at least once to plan the transition activities especially just before the kindergarten visitation day in late April or early May. However, it is unclear how many times they met. With the kindergarten teachers as core members of the transition teams, the agenda for the visitation day was usually a key topic at the regular kindergarten team meetings. The number of members who met varied across schools since the teams held meetings only as needed, and the meeting schedule was adjusted based on the principal's and other support staff's availability. At the meeting, the transition team made action plans based on their reflection and evaluation from the previous year. They discussed what their school did last year, what worked well, and things they needed to improve. They also identified critical elements of kindergarten that parents should know about, so the principal knew what to emphasize in the presentation for the parents.

Kindergarten visitation day was a school-initiated practice with minimal support from the PTO. The principals, with support from the principals' office staff, were responsible for all matters related to outreach since they had contact information for prospective kindergarteners. Typically, the office personnel or a designated teacher created a flier and sent it to families via e-mail and asked the PTO to put it on their Facebook page. Principals gave building tours on visitation day and kindergarten teachers created and led projects for the incoming kindergarteners while their parents were with the principals. Central and Johnson also invited current parents of kindergarteners to serve on panels to share their own experiences on visitation day.

There was considerably more involvement from the PTO for play dates in the summer. Harvey, Johnson, and Northeast school staff collaborated with their PTOs to plan and implement the one-day play date in late August, and the PTOs took the lead in organizing the event at Harvey and Johnson. The principals closely communicated with the president of their PTOs to start the work, and also reached out to the teachers to find their availability. Johnson school, where the school staff had monthly meetings with their PTO, used those times to create a specific plan for the event. Central school, where the principal coordinated three different play dates in June, July, and August with a little help from teachers, looked for more collaboration with the PTO in the near future since they had a close relationship with the PTO president.

In preparation for the play date, Harvey, Johnson, and Northeast schools gave the tentative class lists to their PTOs and split up the work into tasks such as posting fliers, making nametags, preparing refreshments, reaching out to families via e-mail and snail mail, and helping at the registration booth during the event. Rather than designating these tasks to either the PTO or the schools, they discussed who would be responsible for which task in each year. The teachers were strongly encouraged to attend the event because their names would (usually) be released to the families and it would be a great opportunity to meet families before the school year started. Teachers took a minimal role in organizing the event at three schools; teachers at Northeast were responsible for contacting their students' families directly to invite them.

How does the school staff perceive the goal of the transition practices?

First and foremost, the school staff considered "making connections with the students and parents" to be one of the most important outcomes of the transition practices.

The staff were aware of incoming families' sense of anxiety or nervousness, and tried to create a welcoming school climate where the families would feel more comfortable.

The visitation day helped teachers and administrators answer parents' questions about kindergarten and gave them an opportunity to identify the needs of incoming Kindergarten students in order to place them in the most appropriate classes. Play dates created an opportunity to get to know the school community as a whole. Ready-Set-Go conferences promoted interaction with individual families. Finally, informal practices in the year before kindergarten helped the students have a sense of what would be happening in kindergarten and introduced them to the physical environments of the kindergarten classrooms. During the interviews, the school staff described the utility of the transition practices for students, families, and teachers:

"I think there's a lot of questions, especially for new families. Families with their first kid coming into school. Transition does start prior to the week before the school year started.

Having connections before day one make it successful for our teachers" [Principal at Central]

"Answering some of those jittery questions. Like, "Where do I drop off?" and "How do they choose their lunch?" and "Who's watching the outside?" and "How much recess do they get?" and "What art classes do they have?" Answering those questions would ease the feelings that a lot of parents had." [Principal at Harvey]

"It's a big unknown. It's something new. It can be stressful or an anxious kind of thing. Seeing a kindergarten room would make it less scary. There's something to be said about just being with the other kids that are going through the same thing. They're not alone. It gives a general sense of 'this is okay' or 'it's going to be okay'. Same thing with the playground play date. Seeing another area of school and being able to experience it first hand and be familiar with it is important or successful." [Kindergarten teacher at Harvey]

"It's like a good majority of them we don't even know. So that's a good chance to get to know the kids. We notice a kid who has a problem following directions or isn't really playing well with others, then, sometimes there are red flags. And then we try to be mindful of that. We might tweak some of our placements depending on what we know" [Kindergarten teacher at Harvey]

"I like having the transition closer to when actually school starts. I think the play date is a wonderful time for families to come and check out the school and meet the teacher" [Kindergarten teacher at Johnson]

What challenges do schools face in planning and implementing transition practices?

The principals at Harvey and Northeast indicated that the low attendance at the kindergarten visitation day was a complicated issue. Only a couple of families showed up at Northeast this year; at Harvey, low-income families were less likely than middle- and high-income families to come to visitation day due to the day and time of the event. The event usually took place on a weekday afternoon to accommodate teachers' time constraints. Scheduling the event at different times to incorporate working families and providing transportation to school would be ideal accommodations; however, it would require a substantially larger share of the budget.

Both 4K and kindergarten teachers acknowledged that promoting collaboration was a challenge. Because of the different planning times, the 4K and 5K teams did not have many opportunities to come up with strategies for the transition practices. One teacher at Johnson mentioned that this scheduling issue was one reason the informal transition practices within the school were more likely to change every year. The kindergarten teachers also noted that they seldom communicated with 4K teachers from other sites and were totally uninformed about the incoming kindergartners who were unable to participate in transition activities. Although it would be possible for kindergarten teachers to contact a student's 4K teacher, they found it complicated. Kindergarten teachers would have to go into the school system to find each student's provider, then find out who the student's 4K teacher was, and then get the contact information to initiate a conversation. For teachers, this procedure is complex enough to present a barrier to cross-site teacher collaboration. The quotes below reflect some of the common challenges that the schools

reported:

"We miss our low-income families in general at the visitation day. We get some but in general, they're not making it here and I don't know if it's the time of day. Not understanding what it is. I would like to get more of our families here. But I don't know exactly how to do that." [Principal at Harvey]

"Last year at the visitation day, we had probably about 12-15 families, not many more. So any help we can get into what other schools do would be appreciated. I've been researching, listening, trying to figure out what we could do. For us, it's the constraints of teachers' time" [Principal at Northeast]

"I would love some best practices in transition and even an idea like a calendar or a scope of what is best practice and when would you start it and how would you build until the first day that they're in kindergarten. We're slowly adding pieces in considering what we think is important." [Principal at Central]

"I have the confidence that kindergarten teachers are going to take care of the kids and that they're going to make it a welcoming transition. My hope is that if they have questions, they reach out to whatever teacher their child had to make the transition easier. I have had a few teachers that have called me and said, "Can you come talk to me?" and we've had meetings. One year, a principal from other school actually come in and we talked about the kids before the class placement so that they could have a better idea of the incoming students. I mean, they didn't know these kids." [4K teacher at Harvey]

"Kindergarten team could have coordinated with 4K teachers, but I think it is tricky. One of the tricky pieces about this transition practice. This has come up before. We've kind of talked about it, but it's hard because, you know, 4K teachers' planning time is different from our planning time." [Kindergarten teacher at Johnson]

Implications of the findings for MMSD practices

This study examined various school-based transition practices and the way school staff collaborated around transition planning and implementation. The schools started to invest time and efforts to ease the transition into kindergarten once the incoming families' names appear on the rosters. We found some variations in the degree of collaboration with other school staff and support from the PTOs of each school; however, the characteristics of current transition practices were very similar across the schools. Both principals and teachers recognized the value of the home-school connections that are built through a number of practices as a starting point to work together with parents to enhance students' learning experiences in school.

One implication for the district is to acknowledge how difficult it is to attract more working families to the kindergarten visitation day in the spring. Some schools experienced a lack of resources to reach out to those populations and adjust the time/day of the event to a family-centered schedule. Another implication is to be aware of the need for increased collaboration between kindergarten teachers and offsite 4K teachers to get a better sense of incoming kindergartners from other 4K sites. Information-sharing systems could link those teachers to

ensure that these children have a smooth transition between offsite 4K to kindergarten in a new school. While the transition practices have already been evolving and adjusting according to the needs of families, practical, step-by-step guidelines from the district would be a great resource to the schools so they could answer the following questions: Who should be part of the transition team and how should school staff collaborate around the transition practice? What makes the transition practices successful? What would be the best way to reach out to families to increase attendance?

How is this study related to the next step – home visits in the summer to support the transition to kindergarten?

As a new addition to current transition practices, we are also working with MMSD to explore how a more intensive set of practices can enhance instruction, family engagement and smooth transition into 5K: home visits. Our approach to home visits is guided by the idea of Funds of Knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992); teachers come to students' homes with a "learner" identity to gain an appreciation of the ways resources in the child's family and home life can support her learning in the classroom. The type of home visits creates unique opportunities for teachers to gain an appreciation for the assets that the families and children bring into the classroom. Since most of the school-based transition practices take place when the new school year is approaching, meeting students through home visits in the summer would allow the teachers to build even stronger rapport with individual children and families.

Appendix 1: MEP Spencer Study 1 Interview

Protocols Semi-structured Interview Questions – Principals

Introductory questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself
PROBES: (how long an educator, at the current school etc.)
2. How would you describe your school?
3. How about the community it serves?

General Thoughts on Transition

4. There's been a lot of talk about transitions in school. And 4K-5K is the first. What has your school done in the past to support the transition from 4K-5K?
 - a. What would you say the goals were for these activities?
 - b. How were they successful?
 - c. What didn't work so well?
5. What do you hope that families get out of the 4k-5K transition?
 - a. Students
 - b. Teachers
6. What have you done this past year for 4K-5K transition planning?
7. How do you design successful transitions activities for families, students and teachers?
PROBE: As part of this design, is there a written document?
PROBE: Do you track who has received a transition and who has not?
PROBE: How do you address transitions for students who enroll during the school year?
8. Where do you get ideas for planning your school's approach to 4K-5K transition?
9. Do you engage parents in planning your school's 4K-5K transitions?
PROBE: How has that shaped your transition planning?
10. Do you work with other community supports or organizations to facilitate the transition?
PROBE: What do they bring to your transition work?
11. How do you communicate with staff, students, and families around the plan and its purposes?

Role of Teachers

12. How do you expect 4K teachers in your school to support students and families in the transition to 5K?
PROBE: What do you hope 4K teachers from other sites do to support the transition to 5K?
13. What do you expect your 5K teachers to support students and families in the transition to 5K?
14. Are there opportunities for 4K and 5K teachers to share information with each other to facilitate that transition?
 - a. IF YES: How do they share information?
 - i. What kind of information do they share?

b. If NO: What sort of information would you like them to share?

Other Questions

15. What do you perceive as your strengths in facilitating transition for entering 5K students?

16. If you could have more resources dedicated to transition planning, what would you do differently?

17. What would a successful transition plan look like for students?

PROBE: What about for families?

PROBE: What about for teachers?

Appendix 1: MEP Spencer Study 1 Interview Protocols (Continued) Semi-structured Interview Questions – 4K/5K Teachers

Introductory questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself
PROBES: (how long an educator, at the current school etc.)
2. How would you describe your school?
3. How about the community it serves?

General Thoughts on Transition

4. There's been a lot of talk about transitions in school and the transition from 4K- 5K is the first.
 - a. What have you done to help families and students make the transitions from 4-5k?
 - i. How were these activities successful?
 - ii. What didn't work so well?
5. What do you hope that families and students get out of the 4-5K transition?
6. Where do you look to get ideas about transition activities?
7. How do you communicate with families around the plan and its purposes?
PROBE: Have parents been part of your transition planning? If yes, how have they been involved?

Role of 4K/5K Teachers

8. How do you hope that 4K/5K teachers in your school will support students and families in the transition to kindergarten?
PROBE: What do you hope 4K/5K teachers from other sites do to support the transition to kindergarten?
9. Are there opportunities for 4K and 5K teachers to share information to facilitate that transition?
 - a. IF YES: How do you share information?
 - i. What kind of information do you share?
 - b. If NO: What sort of information would be helpful?

Other Questions

10. If you could have more resources dedicated to transition planning, what would you do differently?
11. What would a successful transition plan look like for students?
PROBE: What about for families?
PROBE: What about for teachers?

Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families

HOME VISITS IN THE KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION: LESSONS LEARNED THUS FAR FROM THE MEP PROJECT

November 2018

THE PROJECT

With a Spencer Foundation grant, the Madison Education Partnership (MEP) set out to understand current school practices related to the 4K-5K transition and test whether home visits between teachers, students, and families could improve this transition. In the summer 2018 and the fall of the 2018-19 school year, a self-selected group of MMSD kindergarten teachers conducted two home visits with a random sample of students from their rosters.

This brief is a reflection on what the team has learned thus far from the project. It relies on document analysis of logs and notes from the participating teachers and research team members, as well as grant descriptions and interviews with research team members. We share this in-progress work with MMSD to inform any decisions that might be underway regarding 4K-5K transition work and home visiting.

We are currently scheduling interviews with participating teachers and families, as well as with a sample of teacher who did not conduct home visits, in order to understand how if at all the experience of home visits contributed to the transition to kindergarten.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED THUS FAR?

- District leaders, teachers, and families share excitement about home visits. The district was supportive, as were teachers and families. When asked what worked well in executing the project as a whole, a co-Principal Investigator (co-PI) indicated, "The willingness of the district to engage in this kind of work is really exciting. The collaboration across actor groups generated lots of energy."
- Participating teachers appeared to get a lot out of the experience. Teachers were able to learn more about their students (and their families) before the first day of school. For example, teachers were able to hear about students' needs, support systems, personalities, and interests, and students present in the home visits were eager to share their interests (sometimes after a period of shyness). Families were able to express concerns; for instance, they were able to share concerns about transitions or challenges their child faced.
- Scheduling home visits was challenging and time-consuming. Recruitment and scheduling of visits seemed to be one of the bigger logistical hurdles of the process. The time to recruit and schedule for each family, from the RA perspective, was approximately 20-30 minutes per family. This challenge was a result of how district rostering works (e.g., the time by which classroom rosters are set) and the difficulty of reaching parents. "Teachers had a hard time scheduling with families," one RA explained, "it was difficult having rosters set so late." As a testament to this, of the 144 families invited to participate, 19 (13%) included students that either switched classrooms, switched MMSD schools, switched after one visit, switched after two visits, or transferred out of district.
- To make home visits possible, the district would need to invest in translation – While translation support was provided through the grant, the district needs to provide this support to bring other families in and make families feel more comfortable. For example, of the 144 total families contacted to participate in this study, 22 (15%) report to the state as speaking Spanish as a primary language, and 14 (10%) indicated corresponding primarily in Spanish.

WHAT DID WE DO?

Part of the goal of this work was to learn how home visits could be implemented and what barriers existed. Below we outline the strategy underlying the research plan, and then we document how that plan was implemented. We divided the research work into four buckets: Recruitment, Training, Home Visits, and Logistics.

QUICK FACTS

- All kindergarten teachers in MMSD were contacted to participate
- 12 teachers from 7 schools conducted home visits as part of the treatment condition
- Teachers had the option of having their RA partner assist with recruitment and scheduling
 - 6 teachers elected to recruit families and schedule home visits on their own
 - 6 teachers relied on their RA partners for scheduling
- 144 families were invited to participate, and 82 families participated
- 82 summer home visits happened between July 26, 2018 and August 29, 2018
- Second home visits in the fall replaced participating students' Ready-Set-Go conferences
- Teachers were compensated for their time (\$25/hour)

Recruitment

RECRUITING TEACHERS

Strategy: Recruit 20 kindergarten teachers to treatment condition. Teachers will be compensated for their participation, which should be around 20 hours (training, recruitment, scheduling, conducting home visits, writing reflections).

Implementation: Eighteen kindergarten teachers expressed interest in participating in some capacity. In the treatment condition, with attrition, 12 current teachers completed at least one home visit. Attrition in this group occurred due to a lack of principal support related to concerns with rostering, staff concerns related to time commitment, and some staff leaving or being surplus out of their classroom.

RECRUITING FAMILIES

Strategy: Teachers will send postcards to the child's home introducing themselves to the family. These postcards will include a photo of the teacher and a note that will be typed, unless the teacher elects to handwrite them. Three to four days after sending the postcards, teachers will follow up by email. After another 3-4 days, teachers may reach out via telephone. If a voicemail is left, teachers may follow up with a text message. If teachers experience difficulty reaching families by phone, they should vary the times that they reach out. Finally, teachers could stop by the house with an RA – they should be prepared to conduct a home visit then or schedule one for a different time.

Implementation: Teachers sent out postcards to introduce themselves, then followed up with emails, phone calls, and text messages. A few families expressed some concerns about how random selection worked, and there were difficulties around rostering changes that emerged as the teachers were provided with their rosters before they were set. Hopes for a more diverse sample were not realized – see Appendix A for the demographic information of participating students.

Training

Training RAs & Teachers

Strategy: The goal of the training is to frame the task of home visiting as a way for teachers to learn about the resources that children and families have at home and then

build on those resources while teaching. It will be designed to help teachers see the funds of knowledge that students and families bring into their classrooms.

Implementation: Beth Graue designed and led the three-hour training with support from RAs. The training was held at the University of Wisconsin's South Madison space with participating teachers and RAs sitting together. Home visits and funds of knowledge were discussed. Participants read a document that showed differing approaches to home visits to demonstrate a funds of knowledge based approach versus a deficit approach. Videos were shown, and the group worked through a training guide that participants took with them. Sample questions to be used in home visits were part of that guide, and at each table, teachers and RAs partnered up to practice asking questions. At the end, participants discussed logistics and asked questions.

Home Visits

SCHEDULING HOME VISITS

Strategy: Teachers will recruit and schedule their own home visits. In total, teachers should spend 20 hours on this project (recruitment, scheduling, conducting the home visits, and writing their reflections). Home visits should take place in the home or another location at the convenience of the family.

Implementation: Teachers expressed concerns that 20 hours was not enough time to recruit, schedule, and execute two home visits per student (with accompanying home visit reflection notes); in response, teachers could have RAs assist them with recruitment and/or scheduling home visits. Not all home visits occurred in the home – some were in a public place, such as a library, at the request of families.

CONDUCTING HOME VISITS

Strategy: Home visits will be 45 minutes and will occur with a random sample of 8 students of each teacher. The visits will be informal, allowing teachers to get to know the child and family. During home visits, teachers will meet with families and students to learn about the personal, social, and cultural resources in the home (called "funds of knowledge") in order to learn more about how families support their child's learning and how similar resources can be drawn on in the classroom. Questions could be about the child, the family, or about hopes, dreams, and preferences. After each home visit, teachers will fill out a reflection log including information about interactions with the child and family, observations about the home itself, and personal reflection on the visits. RAs will attend and observe some first and some second home visits to serve as a fidelity check.

Implementation: Teachers had visits with a range of students depending on the teacher (between 3 and 9 students) – the average was 7 students per teacher. The first home visit focused on teachers learning about the family and student, with specific attention paid to funds of knowledge. The second visit was an extension of the first visit, with a focus on what had been happening in the classroom. After each visit, teachers filled out a detailed reflection log – the reflection questions differed depending on which visit was being reflected upon. When they observed, RAs wrote observation notes focused on interactions, questions, and responses for home visits.

Logistics

TIMING OF WORK

Strategy: Recruitment of teachers for home visits will occur in March through May 2018, with both teacher home visits happening in July and August. Teachers were guaranteed hourly payment for up to 20 hours to recruit, schedule, and execute home visits with a random selection of 7-9 of their students.

Implementation: A slight delay in recruitment of families occurred due to translation

accommodations and some logistical challenges (e.g., delays in teacher recruitment; roster changes; challenges contacting, recruiting, and scheduling visits with families). As such, second home visits were not wrapped up before the beginning of school, so second home visits replaced Ready, Set, Go conferences that take place August-October. Absent consistent timesheets, we cannot determine exactly how long specific parts of this process took. For RAs who were asked to help recruit and schedule, timing per family was between 20-30 minutes – this is an *estimate*.

COST OF PROJECT

Strategy: Teachers are paid extended employment for their work done during the summer. At \$25 per hour for the full 20 hours, each teacher will be paid approximately \$500 total for their participation. The estimated total cost was \$10,000 from the district – \$5,000 came from summer school funds and \$5,000 came from Ready, Set, Go funds.

Implementation: As of October 5, the 12 treatment condition teachers had invested 259.5 hours of work, totaling \$6,487.50. Some teachers went over their 20 hours and some worked less than 20 hours depending on the number of families that responded with interest and how many visits were scheduled.

THE PARTNERSHIP AND THE RESEARCH TEAM

The Madison Education Partnership (MEP) is a research-practice partnership between the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). For more information on MEP, see their [website](#).

Principal Investigators: Eric Grodsky, Culleen Witthuhn, Beth Vaade

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Home Visit Reflection: Visit 1

Student ID (not name)		Date	
Location (home, library, park,		Time	
1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.			
2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.			
3. How would you describe the child? Include impressions about his/her likes and dislikes, assets and challenges, and at least one thing you will find memorable about him/her.			
4. What did you learn about the child's <u>family</u> while you were there? Who lives there and what are they like? What strengths do they bring to support the student?			
5. Write a note to this student that describes your first meeting and what you hope for him/her this year. Put it away and refer to it in the Spring of 2019.			

Home Visit Reflection: Visit 2

Student ID (not name)

Date

Location
(home, library, park,
etc.)

Time

1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.

2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.

3. Take a moment to think about what you would like to help your student accomplish this year. What are the most important funds of knowledge you can build on to ensure success in school? How can you use these funds of knowledge to address challenges you think he or she will face?

4. Review the note you wrote after your first visit. Make any changes or additions you would like to make.

Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families:

Lessons Learned from the Home Visit Project

May 2019

Executive Summary

The Madison Education Partnership (MEP) brought together Madison Metropolitan School District staff and UW-Madison researchers to develop and study home visits to support the transition into five-year-old kindergarten (5K) in the 2018-19 school year. Twelve 5K teachers conducted two home visits with a random sample of eight of their students. The first visit occurred between July and early August and the second between early September and mid-October in 2018. After the second round of home visits, our research team conducted interviews from November 2018 to January 2019 with teachers and randomly selected parent-student pairs to learn about their experiences of home visits and the transition into kindergarten.

This paper builds on our interim report released in October 2018, in which we described the design of the teacher training, 5K family sampling and recruitment procedures, and the implementation of home visits.

In this report, we summarize evidence on the benefits and costs of home visits as part of a strategy around supporting the transition to kindergarten. The evidence comes from interviews with teachers, parents and students, teacher reflections on their home visits and direct observation. Some of the key findings of this report are as follows:

1. Teachers enriched their understanding of students and their families through home visits and used the knowledge to support their students' learning or address challenges in the classroom.
2. Teachers, parents, and students believed the relationships built through home visits prior to the school year were valuable assets in the transition into kindergarten.
3. Both teachers and parents strongly believed that they benefited from home visits, yet they recognized the logistical challenges of implementing it district-wide

Background

MMSD schools have worked to ease the transition into kindergarten for families and students. Prior to the start of kindergarten, schools engage in transition practices such as kindergarten orientation, school-based play date(s), and open houses. Teachers schedule Ready, Set, Go conferences with parent(s) between one week before the school year and the end of September to discuss parents' hopes and concerns about their children. Because most of these events take place during the work day at schools or in community places, some schools have attempted to figure out how to better serve families whose schedules do not allow them to participate.

With support from the Spencer Foundation, MEP and Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (CRECE) teamed up with MMSD to design and pilot home visits to support the transition to kindergarten for students, families, and teachers. The research team invited all kindergarten teachers in the MMSD to participate in the project with compensation for their time (\$25/hour). We also conducted targeted outreach to specific principals and kindergarten teacher teams to gauge their interest in participating as a group. In total, 20 teachers self-selected to participate in the study by attending the initial training. Although home visiting programs have often targeted disadvantaged families (Sama-Miller et al., 2017), we randomly selected students and families from participating teachers' classrooms. Choosing students at random was fair

because everyone had a chance of being selected. Randomization also helped us to recruit participants that were, on average, representative of the district. A total of 80 families were engaged in the project. We include student demographics in Appendix A on page 41.

The home visits were designed based on a theory called Funds of Knowledge, which is an approach to facilitate instructional practices that build on family cultural experiences and home resources (Moll et al., 1992). Funds of Knowledge can be thought of as knowledge and skills that are accumulated over time, culturally developed and essential for functioning and well-being. The purpose of this approach is to create higher quality instruction by raising expectations and reflecting children's experience in school (Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge can impact instruction in different ways, including through their direct knowledge of individual students and their families and by breaking down stereotypes and misperceptions teachers may have groups of students different from people the teacher knows well.

In the same vein, the planning team, which included UW researchers and MMSD teachers and administrators, saw home visiting as a way to help teachers recognize the assets and capabilities that their students and families bring into their classrooms. They also hoped the home visits could jump-start the relationship-building process between the teachers and parents, which would eventually help the students' learning.

Procedures

We developed the general objectives and structure of the home visit program in consultation with a design team that included four MMSD teachers, a principal and a social worker in addition to the principal and co-investigators from UW and MMSD. We emphasized the utility of home visits for gaining rather than disseminating information. We hoped that teachers would learn about families' hopes and concerns for their child's education, personal and cultural resources and the day-to-day experiences of the rising kindergarteners. We settled on two home visits, with the first oriented toward observing and learning from families and the second a mix of learning and some dissemination of information on the logistics and expectations of kindergarten.

Starting with ideas generated by the design team and Moll et al.'s theory of Funds of Knowledge, the research team took the lead in designing a three-hour professional development session for participating teachers. The goal of this session was to orient teachers to the goals of the home visits and to provide them with a foundation they might use to structure their home visit practice. Twenty teachers participated in this professional development. During the three-hour session, we asked teachers to think about their own assumptions about families and how that might affect their ability to conduct visits with a Funds of Knowledge perspective. In addition to learning about Funds of Knowledge and the objectives of home visits, we led teachers in role-plays of home visits and reviewed logistics of contacting and meeting with families and the structure of the home visit reflection writing exercise to be completed by teachers after each home visit. The reflection included a section for teachers to articulate strengths they saw in children and their family's Funds of Knowledge.

Data

We base this report on observations of a sample of home visits, teachers' written reflections on individual home visits, and interviews with teachers, parents, and students. The 126 home visit reflections written by the teachers shortly after each home visit helped teachers organize their thoughts and impressions and allowed the team to understand what the teachers learned from the child's home environment and communication with the parent(s). The 39 observations of home visits, written by the research assistants, recorded the interactions and conversations among parents, teachers and children during these visits. The research assistants also conducted interviews

with ten teachers, nineteen parents, and seventeen kindergartners. We include the interview protocols in the Appendix of this report.

Method

We employed both inductive and deductive coding to understand the teachers', parents', and students' experiences with home visits and the transition into kindergarten. Initially, two research assistants generated the main codes reflecting the elements that were addressed in the interview questions. The elements included (1) experiences of home visits, (2) experiences of kindergarten transition, (3) perspectives on relationship building between families and teachers, (4) teachers' recognition of the Funds of Knowledge theory, and (5) policy implications for home visiting. As the research assistants analyzed the data, they created additional codes to reflect new insights about the participants' experiences.

Findings

We organize our findings around the experiences of each set of participants: teachers, parents and children. Their voices provide different perspectives on how home visits might have contributed the transition to kindergarten. After describing their experiences by group, we discuss challenges and opportunities we see for home visits in the district.

Teachers' experiences

Kindergarten teachers joined the study for a variety of reasons. Some teachers wanted to conduct home visits because they already believed in the power of home visits, and the research project gave teachers financial and structural supports to do them. Other teachers worked in schools where the principal required home visits and decided to conduct them through the study. Regardless of initial motivation, all twelve participating teachers reported overwhelmingly positive home visit experiences.¹ In the following examples, we present teacher experiences based on what we learned in the focus groups, individual interviews and teacher reflections.

Home visits helped teachers get to know children and families in ways that felt meaningful to teachers: Participating teachers said that the home visits helped them to connect more deeply with families. For teachers like Ms. Carney², home visits reduced the time it took her to create relationships with families.

Having that background knowledge of the students I had visited was a little bit different, I just knew a little bit more about them. So that's about it. Otherwise I get to know them all the same way. It's just I have that head start kind of. -Ms. Carney

Like Ms. Carney, Ms. McDougal thought that home visits gave her the advantage of getting to know families right away. Ms. McDougal values her relationships with families and, consistent with Funds of Knowledge theory she felt that home visits helped her connect with all of her families, even the ones she didn't visit through the study.

I think upfront home visits were huge help because, I mean, at the beginning of the year, especially for kindergarten, it is a lot of getting to know you type of things. And so, to have that knowledge already gained with so many of my kids allowed me to really use them as

¹ Note that 20 teachers indicated an interest in working with MEP to do home visits and participated in the home visit training. After the training, four teachers withdrew at the request of the building principal. Three additional teachers decided that they did not want to commit to the time required to do home visits over the summer and another received word she was no longer teaching kindergarten in the fall.

² All names of teachers, parents and students are pseudonyms.

examples, like as experts on how to do certain activities. It also helped right up- front with communications with families right off the bat, to be familiar. It freed up my time to dive deeper with the families I didn't get to do home visits with because I already had a (rapport) with them. -Ms. McDougal

With home visits scheduled before the beginning of the kindergarten year, teachers reported feeling perceptible differences in the depth of the relationship they had with home visit families. Teachers noted that they felt like they understood the child in a more multifaceted way by seeing student strengths and personalities outside of the school walls. Ms. Grier remarked that she thought this deeper connection helped her temper her own reactions to children, with more empathy and understanding as the school year unfolded.

What I like about home visits is that I get to know the child in a way that you don't get to know them when they are just coming into the school and you meet them here. I often find that right up until the couple weeks before parent teacher conferences I really feel like I am losing my cool and then I meet with the parents and it re-centers me and I'm like okay, this is why I do this. And that is just kind of supercharged when you do a home visit. So, going to people's homes allows you to understand the child at a level that someone who, not a family member because it is not that deep, but more of a like a friend. Because you have been invited into their home. -Ms. Grier

Overall, many teachers like Ms. Schmidt and Ms. McDougal observed that their relationships with visited families felt distinctly more comfortable than the relationships they had with families that they did not visit, even two months after the second visit.

Whereas the other ones I've visited and they feel comfortable, there's a comfort level that they may not have had, had I not visited their home twice, you know? They're like, "Yeah, I know you. You know me!" -Ms. Schmidt

For some of the families I did home visits with, there's definitely a different comfort in conversing. So, I feel like especially with families that I have already been in their homes, our interactions are a lot more warm. They're a lot more personable like "we know each other a little bit." And then for the ones that I haven't, I've been able to like, obviously over time, build warm relationships but it just took longer, and then some of them are just more strictly- they feel more professional, rather than warm and personable. -Ms. McDougal

Home visits helped families and children build trust with teachers and the school: In addition to feeling more comfortable with visited families, teachers saw home visits as a tool to build trust. Teachers noticed a distinctive rapport in their interactions with home-visit families, sometimes in ways that assisted them with difficult conversations about students and home life. Teachers reported that families seemed more willing to reach out to them with questions and concerns about their child as a result of the rapport they had with the teacher after the home visit.

I think some of those parents seem more comfortable earlier with me. Their comfort level is similar to parents I have had before... so that initial comfort level is kind of sped up some and they're not as hesitant with stuff and they understand me and so there is less, there's that trust factor too, where they kind of get where I am coming from. -Mr. Washington

Teachers like Ms. Fried believed that families felt closer to her after the home visit. She considers

this kind of relationship important in mitigating uncomfortable conversations with parents about their child.

(In) the home visits I got to know eight families quite well. And it made that trust piece so good, so strong. And so when things have come up, like I've gotten emails from families saying, "(student) came home today and said this happened, and do you know anything about it?" ... And I think because families know me from those visits they got a vibe for how I would handle things and they aren't upset. I think in years past when I haven't had strong relationships with families and school started and something maybe went wrong or their child said something that startled them or concerned them that their reaction was very, "what are you doing about this?" This year the families I just think they're (calmer). It's like we have a relationship. I trust you. I know you care about my child, and I know you know our beliefs and what we practice as a family, and tell me what's going on, though. So I think that has been a big change. - Ms. Fried

Some teachers noted that they typically don't get to interact with families who live outside of the school neighborhood in the same way as families who have the ability to walk to school and meet with teachers informally. Teachers remarked that home visits with them helped to deepen relationships with geographically distant families as well.

The people I've home visited, there's more of like a comfort. We know each other on a different level than just the ordinary parent-teacher relationship of, I'll shoot you a random email or I'll see you at back to school nights. Especially my bussers, where I never, really ever see the parents, except for if they show up to a school thing or a conference. -Ms. Johnson

Teachers in the focus groups discussed how this trust was especially important for building relationships with families and communities that they believed felt most marginalized. When Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested a number of people in Madison last year, teachers reported that families were afraid to leave their homes and send their children to school. Teachers commented on how deepening trust through home visits could help families cope in these kinds of situations.

We do them (home visits) because they're valuable, when, ICE was here, arresting a lot of people, our whole staff like, came together and brought food, and checked on families, and made sure that they were okay because they weren't coming out of their houses. So those visits were just like, amazing, and to the teachers just saying, thank you thank you for keeping our kids safe at school. -Focus Group³

Teachers and students greatly benefit from strong relationships with families, yet are constantly working with communities that feel geographically, culturally and emotionally distant from them (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Ms. McDougal and Ms. Schmidt articulated what felt like discernible differences between professional and personal relationships with families, which they believed were positively impacted by home visits. They felt the home visits were a reason that trust and warmth entered their interactions, particularly with families that may have needed that connection the most. In the prior examples, teachers perceived that home visits made bonds with these families closer.

³ Note that while visits to check on families and offer them meals may have occurred at the same time as visits for this project, it was not the intent of the project to engage in home visits for these purposes.

Home visits helped teachers to identify both student challenges and accommodations for IEP needs before the start of the school year: Home visits gave teachers important information about a child's and/or family's needs and struggles. While kindergarten teachers may receive a child's IEP from their previous preschool, many children arrive to Kindergarten without the teacher knowing much about them or their families. Families used the home visit as an opportunity to discuss their child's specific needs; physically, socially and emotionally. Teachers felt that the limitations of fifteen-minute Ready, Set, Go conferences make it difficult to have intimate conversations of this nature. Some teachers like Ms. McDougal and Ms. Halverson said having this knowledge allowed them to make preparations in their classrooms that would help their student's transition from day one.

Specifically, with teaching too, there were like a few kids that I got to do home visits with where parents expressed right away certain concerns about learning. I felt like that really gave me a head start on knowing how to approach that kiddo right away. -Ms. McDougal

My one that is a kid who came in with an IEP, I (was able to) know what she was like. I knew what she was like, physically going to need and stuff before. I was like "I'm going to need a weighted vest and I'm going to need specific stuff." -Ms. Halverson

Through the home visits, teachers sometimes learned about challenges families were confronting that teachers otherwise would not have known about, circumstances teachers reported may have helped them to be more empathic towards students dealing with these issues. One teacher, Ms. Carney, discussed the health issues her student's mother was dealing with.

One of my home visits, I knew that mom was having some health issues. So just being aware that that might affect the child day to day if mom wasn't feeling well (was helpful). - Ms. Carney

Mr. Washington was able to go into depth with a parent around the amount of progress their autistic child had made preceding kindergarten. That information helped him to see the strength and resilience of that child through her journey, and the effect it had on her family.

Mom was emotional when talking about the progress Zoe has made over the last couple of years. She filled me in on more of the difficulties they had in the past getting her services and how happy and grateful she was when they were able to get things set up for her daughter. She talked about how lucky she was to have figured things out early in her daughter's life so she could get help and begin making gains. It's incredible to think how far she has come. -Mr. Washington

Some families felt comfortable enough to share personal information about their own challenges, ranging from debilitating illnesses to divorce and financial hardship. Teachers said that information like this informed their understanding of the child's whole experience and helped them identify specific supports for students before the beginning of the year, rather than in response to a crisis.

Teachers used Funds of Knowledge to inform teaching practices and curriculum development: Some teachers reported using what they learned about children and families during home visits to make instructional and pedagogical choices that would benefit student learning, and many said that they used the information they got from home visits to build stronger relationships with students.

Teachers made tweaks to the curriculum using knowledge they gained through home visits during morning meetings, writer's workshop, social studies and in informal conversations with children. Teachers' understandings of Funds of Knowledge touched a range of topics. In the examples below, different "flavors" of Funds of Knowledge came up; from student interests to a family's cultural background, teachers learned a lot about students through their visits and tried to connect that learning in the classroom. Ms. Hanson used information she collected to push a child in his writing.

Anything you know about kids really helps, helps you teach them. The more I learn about the students, I feel like the better I'm able to reach them or talk to them, if a kid doesn't know what to write about, I can be like "you can write about your fish!" or something that I saw on the home visit. -Ms. Hanson

Ms. Johnson saw strengths in her student at home that she may not have been able to see as clearly during the school day. The student she spoke of showed her blueprints he had drawn, and a vast, complex network of buildings and trains he had put together. His parents told Ms. Johnson that they call him their "engineer." Ms. Johnson took the knowledge and passion of her student with her into the first day of class, already appreciating and supporting this student's interests and skills.

There were students who I got a sense of- definitely got a sense of their strengths where- I'm thinking about a particular student. I got a sense of really how clever and how wonderfully they can work in a certain way. Like sort of in a mechanical sort of way... Like I knew he had a lot different way and he could offer a lot in the way he thinks about stuff. So I wanted to reach out to him to get him to share that with the class when we were talking about mathematical thinking for example. I knew he was probably going to be able to- if he can verbalize this, there's a lot- and it turns out he can do that very well.
-Ms. Johnson

Other teachers like Ms. McDougal and Ms. Testa spoke about how they used awareness of a child's family structure and appreciation of their cultural practices gained during home visits, in order to enhance learning and participation.

For a couple families where I knew that like they celebrated certain holidays and stuff, it definitely helped me even now, when I go through my holiday lessons for like winter time, to know which families to pull from. Those kiddos got to even bring in certain things that they use in their family's traditions. -Ms. McDougal

It's helpful in so many ways when I'm teaching and we talk about our family unit is one of our first social studies units in September. And then, so much of what I learn from the home visits I already knew about students' families and could help them when they needed to write about their family. I could help them, remember, all the pets that they had or the family members that they have or what happened at their house. It was really useful. -Ms. Testa

Home visits require a lot of work and time and resources need to be allocated to support home visits if they are to be possible and sustainable. While all twelve teachers who participated in home visits found them to be positive and helpful to students' kindergarten transitions, they also talked about the amount of time and resources it took to complete them. Even with financial compensation and scheduling support from

research assistants, some teachers were skeptical that the district could support them in a way that might lead to home visits as a sustainable practice.

Overall, teachers echoed Ms. Johnson, who called for training, time and money in order to conduct the kind of home visits that the study undertook. She felt that merely suggesting that home visits are best practice, without a substantial commitment supporting them, would undermine teacher buy-in.

The money needs to be there. Teachers need to be paid for the time they spend doing these things. Because, otherwise they wouldn't get anything out of them because they wouldn't feel like it was- that the district really valued it. -Ms. Johnson

In addition, some teachers were skeptical that the district would actually follow through in subsidizing such an endeavor, even if teachers and the district advocated for it as a best practice. One teacher wondered about the amount of control they would have to decide and influence the potential implementation of home visits district-wide.

It's been hard when our Ready, Set, Gos are only a certain amount of time, and the district would never pay extra for families, like for teachers to go and do home visits. We still do them a lot, but it ends up being all on your own time. -Focus Group

But (the home visit process) is time consuming. And all the different components of it- like the coordination, plus doing it, are all time consuming....and do we know what we are getting into, what things look like, how much control do we actually have over this situation, like what would it look like, is this something, is this a model that the district is looking to go to full time? Is this something we can endorse? -Mr. Washington

Parents' experiences

All nineteen parents we interviewed reported positive aspects of their initial home visiting experience. They decided to participate in the project mostly based on their belief that it would benefit their child. Many discovered that meeting the teacher in advance helped their own transition to being a parent of a kindergartener and communicating with the teacher. In the following section, we use our interviews to discuss how parents experienced home visits.

Home visits helped my child's transition: First and foremost, parents emphasized the impact of home visiting by emphasizing how it helped their children's transition to kindergarten. Some parents indicated that the meetings changed their children's perspectives from worry to raising excitement about kindergarten.

After the teacher came to visit, my child didn't have those fears of, "what if something goes wrong?" and "what if this doesn't -- what if I don't like it?" And she wasn't expressing those fears. It was more of how excited she was to go to school and how excited she was to see her teacher again because she had already met her and she knew that she had that to look forward to on her first day of school. -Ms. Howard

Having attended a 4K program in a community site rather than a school, her daughter worried that she would not know any of her classmates in kindergarten. In addition, the family missed all the other transition activities due to scheduling conflicts. Ms. Howard noted that her daughter's anxiety seemed to disappear after the first visit, which she thought was the biggest benefit of the home visiting. Another parent, Ms. Fates, described how the first day of school went smoothly

because her daughter had already met the teacher.

When we got to school for the first day, she was like, "Oh! It's my teacher!" and she got to go right away – like she wasn't scared; it wasn't like her trying to get to meet someone new, she was just automatically there. She knew where she had to go, and it was really, really helpful. Especially with her health condition, we didn't want her getting scared. -Ms. Fates

The home visit also helped address the parents' other concerns about their children. For example, Ms. Rose said her son was confused about teachers and classmates changing every year and struggled to accept the fact that he would soon leave his 4K. For this reason, she decided to participate in the project to help her son even though she was not initially comfortable with agreeing to a home visit.

I thought it was kind of weird at first. A teacher in your house. But I gave it a try because I thought it would be good for my child. It was a good idea. I did it because I wanted him to be more open and to realize that it's going to change each year. So, I thought that was good. -Ms. Rose

Parents felt more comfortable approaching teachers: The parents reported that they felt more connected with the teachers on a personal level through the home visits. It was a benefit for them because some parents recognized the barrier of having less face-to-face communication in kindergarten compared to their previous experiences with child care providers. Specifically, Ms. Stager and Ms. Howard mentioned that they only had "blind trust" in their children's teachers before they built a stronger relationship with the teachers over the course of the school year. The home visits, however, made it much easier for parents to communicate with and approach the teachers. Ms. Stager articulated that the way she interacted with the teacher helped her have more intimate conversations with the teacher. Ms. Howard also highlighted her closer rapport with the teacher by comparing her experience with her other child's teachers.

It breaks down that wall with the teacher and how you interact. That's the feeling I got right off the bat. I much appreciated knowing her ahead of time, knowing that we had communication with her. And you didn't have to worry about – those like weird, "Hey, I'm [name], nice to meet you." It breaks down that barrier much quicker if you have already kind of hit the ground running and you know them before that other stuff starts. But I'm also very much like, "Hey! What's up?" - Ms. Stager

Something about this meeting ahead of time helped me feel more of a sense of trust. It's kind of like we've already done the first layer. Usually at school, you have so little interaction with the teachers that I feel like it takes many months to build that first layer. If I think about my older child's teacher, it took us a long time to feel like she kind of had a sense of our child, versus I think this really sped up that process. -Ms. Howard

Home visits were a great addition to current transition practices: Parents felt home visits complemented other efforts undertaken by the district and schools to support the transition for families and students. Ms. Paine said the first home visit enriched her later experience at the open house event at school because of the personal rapport between herself and the teacher.

I'm trying to picture if we didn't have that home visit, we would have had the prior interaction at the open house (for the first time). But I don't think we would have had even

near the level of comfort. - Ms. Paine

Ms. Paine believed that these two different transition practices created great synergy because they raised different expectations about starting school. The home visit built comfort and eased anxiety about starting school. The open house event got her son excited about the school itself. Ms. Paine felt they were able to focus more on exploring the building and classroom at the event because they had already established a base trust with the teacher through the home visit.

Ms. Mandell and Ms. Stager distinguished home visiting from other transition events they attended. While they appreciated the district-initiated transition practice of the Ready, Set, Go conference, they both felt rushed given the limited time. Meeting the teacher at home improved the quality of communication and made them more comfortable so they could focus solely on each other.

It was definitely a little more relaxed than the first Ready, Set, Go conference when there were other parents waiting to talk to her and the kids running around. It was much more relaxed and easier for us to actually have a conversation with each other. -Ms. Mandell

At conferences, you meet with the teacher for maybe 15 minutes, and it's a busy day for them but for the parents it's like, "Wow, yeah I wish there was a little bit more time, like 20 minutes, 25 minutes." - Ms. Stager

Parents appreciated the teachers' efforts and time for home visits: Most of the parents felt privileged to be randomly selected to participate in the project and appreciated the amount of work the teachers invested in home visits. They believed that meeting teachers prior to the school year would benefit other families who did not participate. When asked what advice they would give the district, a couple of parents, including Ms. Dante, mentioned compensating the teachers for their time and work and having other personnel support their work. Another parent, Ms. Sherr, recognized the logistical challenges of implementing this practice in the whole district and noted that home visiting requires mutual effort for both the teachers and parents.

It's been great for us, and I imagine it would be helpful for a lot of people. I imagine it would take a lot of time and resources. I don't know how many people are doing what we're doing right now, but when the teacher came to our house, that was part of that initial surprise, "Oh! I didn't know, like, her teacher was actually coming. This is great! Is she doing this for everyone in the class, because that would be a lot of evenings and sacrifice. - Ms. Dante

It's important, obviously, to plan ahead with people's schedules and making sure that there's plenty of time in advance of school starting to be able to make sure it can work for people. We had some scheduling conflicts that we had to work through. But it worked out eventually. It was a good thing, and I think it would benefit other families. - Ms. Sherr

The parents also gratefully acknowledged teachers' flexibility and open-mindedness in response to their working schedules and those who didn't feel comfortable having teachers in their homes. As expected, a couple of the participating families asked to arrange the visit in public places. Ms. Mandell indicated her appreciation for her teacher's willingness to meet at a public library, which was a familiar place for the student.

The only thing I would say is to keep it like this, so that if there's a family that maybe is not

as comfortable having people come to the home, if you could meet in the community, I think that's a plus. We're a little leery about having, you know, guests in the home. So, it's easier for us to come, and the kids know the library. They come here all the time. So, it's a place where they're comfortable, and we feel a little more comfortable. - Ms. Mandell

Students' experiences

The research team conducted interviews with seventeen participating kindergarteners to understand their home visit experience and their transition to kindergarten. Around half of the interviews followed shortly after their parents' interviews, but the research assistants tried to talk only to the children without parental involvement. The other half took place at school during the day.

The research team conducted student interviews from November 2018 to January 2019, which was four to six months after the first home visits. Not every student had vivid memories of the teacher visiting their home; however, all students remembered the fact that their teacher had visited their home.

Positive experiences: The students brought up pleasant memories of their teacher's home visits when asked about their experiences. They used words such as "good," "excited," and "happy" to describe their emotions about the visit. The following statements from Mia and Aria are illustrative of the children's experience:

When I met my teacher the first time, she was really beautiful and I had a good time. And I made sandwiches with my cousin and my mom made some breakfast. I was excited. -Mia

They (parents) talked to my teacher and I was so happy that I was at school. -Aria

According to Mia's mother, her daughter waited for the teacher by the window when the time for the appointment was close, which showed how she looked forward to the visit. For Aria, meeting her teacher increased her anticipation about going to the "big school" with her siblings. Unlike Mia and Aria, Brooklyn was neutral about her experience: "I wanted to sit on my mom's lap and do nothing. I was bored. Kind of like... I'm not sure it made any difference." Brooklyn also added that knowing her teacher beforehand may or may not have helped her feel better on the first day of kindergarten.

Memorable moments of the home visits included the students' and parents' interactions with the teachers. As shown in the teachers' reflections, the students expressed intimacy by showing their teacher their personal space (e.g., bedroom) or belongings. Those were the moments teachers reflected on even six months later.

It was fun. She was really kind. She was very quiet when I read a book to her. I love reading books. I just make up my own words. We showed her around the house. We went in the room. I went to read the story. -Camila

Camila's mother appreciated that the teacher spent some quality reading time one-on-one with her daughter. Camila still remembered those moments, doing what she liked to do in what might have been the most comfortable place for her. Mia and Samuel remembered the content of the conversations about themselves and the school.

We talked about stuff that I'm going to do at school. They asked questions about me and said people are going to be nice to me.... She saw my bedroom. She saw my pet cat. -Mia

She asked a little bit of some questions. But I forgot the other things because it was like the fourth day I was in school... I was asking about my classroom – what it would look like. - Samuel

During the home visits, teachers mostly initiated the conversation by asking questions about the students and families and ended it by answering any questions that the families had. These exchanges might have given the students an impression of the school and the way their parents and teachers would collaborate around them.

Easing anxiety and improving comfort level: The first home visit helped reduce some children's concerns and fears about transitioning to kindergarten. Aria, Madison, and Mia described how the home visit eased their anxiety. Although the quotes do not pinpoint exactly what the students were afraid of, their parents indicated that the anxieties came from the idea of separating from friends and previous teachers or day care providers, going to a big school, and meeting new people.

I was afraid but I wasn't afraid anymore. -Aria

I was feeling kind of scared and I had a really good time and then I turned happy and I kept moving around and jumping on my mom. -Mia

It was kind of scary but it wasn't scary at all... Feel good later. -Madison

The interviewer followed up with Madison asking if she was afraid on the first day and she stated very clearly that she was not worried because, "I got to know a little bit." Getting more comfortable with each other through the visits was one of the recurring themes from both the teachers and parents. We received similar responses from students. Camila and Madison differentiated between the first and second visits by indicating their improved comfort level during the second visit.

They (first and second visits) were different because I knew her better and I really like her. -Camila

I was scared at the first one but not the other one. -Madison

The purpose of the visits: When asked why the teachers came to meet them, the students generally understood the positive intention of the visits. The students indicated that it was about getting to know each other before starting kindergarten. Camila, who was going to attend a bilingual kindergarten, thought it was important for her teacher to know what her first language was.

Because I'm very important to her. And I would know her better... (And my teacher knew that) I know English because I talked in English. -Camila

So that when school was starting, you know your teacher. -Brooklyn

Unlike Camila and Brooklyn, Samuel seemed to still wonder why his teacher had visited him. He said, "No idea. Because my dad just told me, and he didn't tell me why." For him, the visit was a surprise without further explanation from his father.

Challenges of the Home Visit Program

The home visit project did not proceed without challenges. However, we believe that what was

learned from these obstacles could help districts, policy makers and schools structure a supportive, equitable home visit program. Below, we lay out some of the obstacles encountered throughout the project and how we would address those issues:

- I. Engaging parents to participate: Although participating families reported positive outcomes after the fact, we found it hard to engage some parents. After trying to contact some parents several times, we had to draw more potential participants from class rosters. Approximately 56% of families we selected chose to participate. As shown in Table 1, of the 64 selected families that did not participate, 13 families refused the invitation, 33 families were not reachable (e.g., no responses or moved), 11 families switched to another school, 4 families switched classes, and 2 families moved out of the district. Shifting rosters throughout the summer caused some of the challenges we encountered. Since class rosters often don't get finalized by the end of August due to late entrants and student mobility, this is likely to continue to be a challenge for visiting families the summer before kindergarten. We recommend moving the timing of the visits to begin in mid-August after class rosters are more stable, rather than having them between July and early August when rosters remain unsettled.

Table 1: Home visit project recruitment results

		Numbe	%
Participated		80	56
Not participated	Refused	13	9
	Not reachable	33	23
	Switch schools	11	8
	Switch classes	4	3
	Switch districts	2	1
	Unknown	1	1
Total		14	100

Beyond the issue of timing, we wondered about why we struggled to hit higher percentages of families willing to participate. One possible reason could be confusion over who was chosen to participate and why. For example, a few of the more advantaged families expressed confusion as to why they were chosen to participate; they thought of home visits as a tool for children and families experiencing challenges that they did not experience. It may be possible that less advantaged families share this misperception and that they believe a home visit from a teacher is similar in reason and perhaps even in potential consequence to a home visit from a social worker. While we can only speculate as to why families chose not to participate, digging into that issue could help uncover some latent perceptions and motivations. We recommend further investigation into the reasons about one third of families either refused to participate in home visits outright or did not respond to our repeated attempts to contact them.

- II. Training and maintaining fidelity to the Funds of Knowledge approach: We espoused a Funds of Knowledge approach to home visits, in order to promote building relationships of mutual trust and appreciation between teachers and families. Due to time constraints of the project, the three-hour "one and done" training may have only scratched the surface around addressing biases and confronting deficit-based orientations. We think that this work might best be integrated into teacher mindset and practice through a longer term, collaborative training structure. We recommend future home visits include weekly or monthly group meetings with

home visiting teachers, mentored by an individual trained in the Funds of Knowledge approach, in order to help teachers think together about what they learned from their visits and ways to integrate the information into classroom practice.

- III. Increasing efficiency and securing adequate resources to support the work: As stated on our interim report released in October 2018, we have faced logistical hurdles in the implementation of home visits (e.g., time-consuming work, delays in family recruitment, scheduling visits) and teachers and parents echoed these challenges in our interviews. One teacher spent approximately 21 hours conducting home visits for eight students, traveling and writing reflections. Research assistants estimated 30 minutes for recruiting and scheduling home visits for each family. Taking these together, we estimate it took this teachers three hours of time per family; translating that to a class of 20+ students may be daunting for staff. Recognizing these challenges, we have solicited input from the teachers and families to make home visits less demanding and thus more sustainable. Here we present the list of their suggestions:
- Continue to offer time and money for teachers to do this work
 - Have other school personnel support the scheduling of visits for teachers
 - If it is not feasible to visit with every kindergarten family, consider targeting families who live outside of the neighborhood and don't have consistent face-to-face contact with teachers
 - Spread out the visits more by having the initial visit a few weeks prior to school and the second visit in the spring to prepare for first grade
 - Provide translators for teacher who would otherwise be unable to communicate with families for whom English is not a language in which they feel comfortable communicating

Conclusion

Overall, we found that teachers, parents and students strongly believed that the home visit experiences were positive, playing an important role in building trust and gaining comfort. Parents and teachers reported that they thought the home visits contributed to deepening mutually beneficial relationships and easing both children's and parent's transition from 4K to kindergarten. Some teachers also expressed that it assisted in their own transition into the school year as well. While children had fewer memories of the experience, many reported positively on the home visit. The observations, reflections and parent interviews also communicated children's enthusiasm for the visits. The challenges of home visits were real, and included a variety of logistical issues. We hope that our experiences give insight into the potentially powerful benefits of teacher home visits, as well as a road map for restructuring future efforts.

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Appendix A: Student Demographics of the Home Visit Project (N=80)

Variable	N	%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	50	63
Black/African American	10	12
Hispanic/Latino	12	15
Asian	5	6
Multiracial	3	4
Gender		
Female	42	53
Male	38	47
Free/reduced Lunch Eligibility		
Yes	26	33
No	54	67
English Language Learner		
Yes	12	15
No	68	85
Special Education Needs		
Yes	7	9
No	73	91

Appendix B-1: Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Teacher Focus Group Interview

Thanks for meeting with me. We are very excited to be working with kindergarten teachers to explore ways to better connect home and school. I'd like to talk with you today about what you think about transitions to 5K, your orientation to working with families, and, generally and more specifically, about your experiences doing home visits. We'll end with time for you to clarify anything you think is important for me to understand about your work as a kindergarten teacher.

Do you have any questions about the study?

1. Let's start by going around the circle and telling us your name, where you teach, and how long you've taught kindergarten. All names will be changed to pseudonyms.
2. The transition into 5K has a big symbolic impact – to children and families and to teachers. What transition activities do you already do?
3. How do you typically connect with your students' families?
 - a. What challenges and successes have you had?
4. One of the big puzzles as a teacher is getting to know each child—it requires patience and persistence to get to the heart of the matter. How do you get to know your students?
5. What drew you to the Home Visit project?
 - a. What were you hoping to learn?
6. We're going to pass out cards that are either positive things or challenges about home visits.
7. What questions didn't I ask you that I should have?

Appendix B-2: Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Individual Interview

Thanks so much for meeting with me. We learned so much from our focus groups with the home visit teachers and wanted to do more of a deep dive into your experience in a space that is less public so you can talk about your interactions with children and families in their homes.

1. Let's start with a general overview about you.
 - a. What is it like to be a K teacher at x school?
 - i. Curriculum, team, students
 - b. We know that schools develop personalities that reflect all kinds of things. How would you describe x school and the community it serves?
2. Think back to the home visit training you participated in before you started doing visits this past summer. How did the training help you think about doing a home visit? How did you use the ideas presented (or not)?
3. How are you thinking about using the information you learned through the home visit in your teaching?
 - a. In a context where instruction is increasingly specified for teachers, how can you weave this knowledge into the curriculum?
4. How have you built a relationship with [child's name] as the year begins? How is that process the same or different from children who didn't receive home visits?
5. How has relationship building proceeded with [child's name] family?
6. How have the home visits shaped your communication with families?
7. What kinds of positive experiences did you have doing home visits?
 - a. How about challenges?
8. If the district announced that it was going to make home visits a part of the transition into 5K, what advice would you have? What resources do you think you'd need to make this work?
9. What didn't I ask you that I should have?

Appendix C: Parent Interview Protocol

Home Visit Parent Interview

Thanks for being willing to talk with me today – we are so excited about this project and the opportunity to learn from parents and teachers about home visiting. You've gotten information about the research project in general. What I'd like to do today is to find out about how you see your role in your child's education in and out of school, what you thought about the home visits this summer, and how things are going with (child's name) in K this year.

1. Let's start generally. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family
 - a. Description of people in the family, work, experience with schooling
 - b. Is (child's name) your first kindergartner?
2. Tell me about (child's name). What are some of (his/her) strengths and what are some things (he/she) is working on?
 - a. Probe: interests, passions
3. How have you communicated with your child's teachers/caregivers in the past?
4. How did you like having (child's name)'s kindergarten teacher visit this past summer?
 - a. Probe: Are there things you wish he or she had done differently? Other things he or she could have done to make the experience better for you or your child?
5. What do you think your child thought about having his/her kindergarten teacher visit this past summer?
 - a. Comfort, relationship building, learning
 - b. Were there any positive experiences, outcomes and/or challenges to being a part of this for you or your child?
6. How has this transition to 5K been for (child's name)?
 - a. Describe, surprises, exciting things, challenges
7. Sometimes a child's transition to kindergarten is also a challenge for parents. How has this transition to 5K been for you?
 - a. How is being a parent different for a kindergartner than for a child in 4K?
8. How would you describe your relationship with (child's name) teacher?
 - a. Communication, information sharing, goal setting, comparison to other relationships with educators
 - b. How do you think that the home visits shaped that relationship?
9. If the school district were considering bringing home visits to all kindergarten families next year, what advice would you have?
10. I have peppered you with many questions. Are there things I haven't asked you that you think I should know about (child's name) transition to K and home visits?

Appendix D: Child Interview Protocol

Home Visit Child Interview Protocol

Hi, my name is NAME and I'd like a chance to talk with you about your teacher coming to your house to visit last summer, what it's been like to start kindergarten, and what you think your parents and your teacher know about you. That sounds like a lot but I know that you are a kindergartner and kindergartners know a lot.

So -- I'd love to learn from you but you don't have to if you don't want to. I'll use this audio recorder to record our conversation. How about we give it a try? [show recorder and buttons. Ask child to push record, then ask to give his/her name and his school. Then play it back]. There are no right or wrong answers, so this isn't a test. I think it'll take us about 20 minutes. Are you willing to have this short chat with me?

- I'll start with the hardest question: tell me all about you
 - Name, age, family, where were you before K? What you are good at, What you want to learn

HOME VISIT

- This summer someone special came to your house to visit –your teacher came to your house. Tell me about that visit. What do you remember when you met your teacher for the first time?
 - Who was there, what did they do, their reaction
 - She came 2 times, right? The first time you didn't know her. What was that like? You did know her when you visited the second time. How were those two visits different?
 - Why do you think s/he came to visit? What do you think your teacher learned about you by coming to your house? What does she know about you now that you are in K?

TRANSITION TO K

- How is kindergarten different from (preschool, 4K, Head Start, being at home)?
- What's easy? What's hard?

PARENTS & TEACHERS

- Going to kindergarten is a big thing, and teachers, parents, and kids have to work together to help children learn.
 - How does your family and your teacher work together to help you learn? Have you ever seen that?