

Examining the Value of a Summer Kindergarten Transitioning Program for Children, Families, and Schools

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Abstract

The transition to more formal schooling in kindergarten can be difficult for young children and their families. However, preparing children for this transition can produce positive results. This article examines the qualitative results of a four- to six-week transition program for 715 children. Data include parent and school surveys as well as school personnel reports and discussions from two years of the program, involving two separate groups of children. This qualitative data suggested positive effects for children's social/emotional readiness for school. Children who attended the program became leaders in the classroom and experienced less anxiety. Because the transitions in the start of the school year were easier, teachers had more instructional time with the children early in the school year. Children with special needs received more support, and families became connected with the schools on multiple levels. Parents developed friendships with other families and overall felt less anxious about their child starting school.

Key Words: kindergarten, transition, social/emotional, families, parents, schools

Introduction

The transition to kindergarten is considered a significant event by families and children, and most feel they are not well prepared for it (Wildenger &

McIntyre, 2011). The move to more formal schooling involves many changes. When entering kindergarten, children move from an unstructured environment at home or in preschool to a more structured routine with a focus on academic instruction and seat work (La Paro et al., 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Sink et al., 2007). Legislation such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000) as well as the adoption by many states of the Common Core Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019) or similar standards for K–12 students have contributed to an increased emphasis on academic learning in kindergarten. Some children are away from family for the first time, and the school atmosphere is much more complex with large populations of students, noisy lunchrooms, and bigger buildings to maneuver.

This move to more formal schooling is described as a critical point potentially affecting outcomes of educational success or failure for children (Eckert et al., 2008; Pianta, 2007), and research shows that transitional programs to kindergarten can help offset risk factors for children (Maxwell et al., 2011). However, when Nelson (2004) examined the transition activities of over 3,000 kindergarten teachers, she determined that most schools do not have a comprehensive transition plan. Georgia is one state that does have a multifaceted kindergarten transition program similar to the program in the current study and has shown gains in academics, especially in vocabulary for children who attended (Early et al., 2016). In this study, we focused on social/emotional effects of a kindergarten transition program for children and their families and how that impacted schools. The questions guiding our research included: (1) Did the investment in a program focused on family, child, and school benefit the social/emotional development of children? and, if yes, what were the specific benefits? (2) What type of effect did this program have on the families? (3) What type of effect did this program have on the schools?

Theoretical Framework

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) takes into account the influences surrounding a child during the transition to formal schooling. These include the child, the family, the school, and the community in which the child lives. The child's experience of transition to kindergarten is defined by the relationships and interactions of these influences. This model also considers how these interactions develop over time and change from year to year (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), suggesting a strong, positive beginning at the transition to kindergarten is critical to later success in school. This model emphasizes that effective transition programs will involve families as well as children and foster strong family–school–community partnerships (Caspe et al., 2015) with the potential to create strong

relationships that continue to grow and develop as the child progresses through school. Taking into account the recommendations of the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) the kindergarten transition program in the current study emphasized the importance of interactions between the child, school, and family within the community to provide a smooth and sustaining transition to formal schooling.

Me and My School Transition Program

Funding for the Me and My School (MMS) Transition Program was provided through grants and funding from the local United Way/ Success by 6[®] program. Participating school districts also provided some funding to cover costs of the program. Schools completed an implementation plan that described the recruitment of children focusing on those who had not attended an early childhood setting prior to kindergarten. They also described how they would partner with at least one other community organization or business, such as the local library or zoo, for support. Schools also indicated how they would engage MMS families through targeted activities during the program as well as schoolwide events to facilitate transition to kindergarten. The children attended a four- to six-hour in-school program each day for four to six weeks (at least 56 hours) during the summer. Curriculum was not prescribed. Kindergarten and preschool teachers from the districts developed daily activities that included large group, literacy, math, and large motor time during morning programming. Lunch was provided in most of the programs, and parents were often invited to eat with their children. Schools were given the autonomy to develop aspects of the program such as the type of family events offered because each community had its own identity, and the principals and teachers were cognizant of what would work well for those families as well as community resources they could tap into. One example of this was that some schools provided programming at the end of the day around educational activities that could be done at home and ways for families to support their child's education. They brought in school personnel for the parents to meet and gave them tours of the school. One common feature of all schools who provided MMS was the Family Kindergarten Transition Kit. This was a child's backpack filled with learning materials and a set of six bingo-type cards. Each of these cards had different activities for the child and parent to complete in all developmental areas using the materials provided in the backpack (see Appendix). Parents checked off the activities they completed with their child and returned the card to school each week for a "prize." Some examples of these incentives (prizes) were books, school supplies, and vouchers for school clothes. These Family Kindergarten Transition Kits were developed to aid and support schools in engaging MMS families.

Literature Review

Children's Readiness

Children's school readiness capacity improves when they are beginning to experience what Tomlinson (2009) alludes to as the age "5 to 7 shift" in cognition. At age six, children's executive control changes qualitatively as well as quantitatively, resulting in a more efficient metacognitive monitoring of executive control (Chevalier & Blaye, 2016), thereby increasing children's ability to pay attention and regulate their thoughts and actions. Even though this shift can have a positive impact on their readiness for more formal schooling, children who are better prepared with higher academic and social/emotional skills prior to kindergarten still do better in school.

According to Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000), 48% of kindergarten children have experienced a moderately difficult or difficult transition into kindergarten. In particular, children whose mothers have lower education levels and have lower socioeconomic resources have been found to fall behind children from families with higher maternal education and higher socioeconomic levels at kindergarten (Lloyd & Hertzman, 2009). McWayne et al. (2012) found that in addition to the mother's education, parenting style and children's cognitive and social skills determined how well children transitioned and succeeded in kindergarten.

There is a direct connection between the learning that takes place in schools and children's social and emotional well-being (Durlak et al., 2011; Robinson & Diamond, 2014). Researchers have suggested that social/emotional and behavioral functioning are as important as the academic skills children bring to kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). In a recent survey by the District Leadership Forum, teachers and administrators alike report an alarming rise in behavioral disruptions in young elementary students (Manasiev et al., 2019). However, children who attended prekindergarten classrooms with teachers who implemented transition activities and discussed specific children with the kindergarten teachers were viewed as having more social competencies and fewer behavior issues in kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Social and self-regulation skills are predictive of children's ability to meet demands for focused engagement in kindergarten (Denham et al., 2014). Kindergarten teachers have indicated that skills such as following directions, listening, following routines, and self-regulation are behaviors essential for success in kindergarten (Graue, 2000; Lin et al., 2003). Children with higher abilities to pay attention, wait for a turn, and inhibit off-task behaviors are more successful in structured learning environments (Cadima et al., 2015; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Likewise, more children who exhibit behavior

problems begin kindergarten at a disadvantage in speech and language, motor, play, and school skills (Montes et al., 2012) and are also more likely to be retained later (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015). Thus, higher social and regulation skills matter for children and their future school success.

Family Impact on Readiness

Families play an important role in their child's adjustment to school, and transitioning to kindergarten affects the entire family (Morrison-Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Puccioni, 2015). Parents may not know how to support the transition to kindergarten despite their desire to be active participants (McIntyre & Wildenger, 2010). Family-school contacts are less frequent in kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). In addition, there are barriers such as work schedules, limited ability to speak English, low reading levels, lack of transportation, and need for childcare that may prevent families from being involved in the transition process (Turnbull et al., 2015). First-time parents encounter the most surprises during transitions (Miller, 2015). Parental concerns include the ability of their child to get along with peers as well as separating from family and getting along with the kindergarten teacher (McIntyre et al., 2007). For parents of children with special needs, concerns are significantly more than their children making friends; they want more information about academic expectations and what they can do to help their children prepare for this transition (McIntyre et al., 2010). Kindergarten transition practices can increase parent-initiated school involvement and this, in turn, leads to improvement in social interactions and academic achievement (Schulting et al., 2005). Parents' own conception of what school readiness entails, as well as their own expectations of school, shape what they do with their children to prepare them for kindergarten (Puccioni, 2015); therefore, any kindergarten transitioning program must include a strong family component (Miller, 2015).

School Role in Readiness

A school system is wise to actively communicate what children need to succeed in kindergarten in that community and to work with families to foster children's readiness skills (Protheroe, 2006). Teachers in the Puccioni (2018) study believed parent involvement was crucial to children's success. There is also a strong need for communication during the transition process to identify children who will need extra support at transition (Stormong et al., 2005). Primary schools need to be prepared to accept and work with kindergartners who are at many points on the developmental continuum and to support successful transitions to kindergarten (Daily et al., 2011). Families, especially those at risk, may need support to develop relationships with school personnel and other families (Christensen, 2004).

School-based transition programs, whether specifically targeted (e.g., Eisenhower et al., 2016) or holistic but systematic (e.g., Knaus et al., 2016) have provided evidence for helping children's adjustment to school. An analysis of 17,212 children from 992 schools in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten sample (ECLS-K) revealed that the number of transition activities provided by the kindergarten teachers was associated with more positive academic achievement at the end of kindergarten for all children, especially those of lower socioeconomic status and other demographic factors (Schulting et al., 2005). How ready children are at the entrance to school may also predict their school success (Gaynor, 2011/2012), and teacher perceptions of their students' competencies or readiness can affect the level of student learning. Goldstein, Eastwood, and Behuniak's (2014) study of kindergarten teachers in Connecticut found that a teacher's low rating of their students at the start of the kindergarten year correlated with increased likelihood for retention, especially with boys from low-income families. Additionally, the classroom context factors (e.g., class size and teacher–student interaction) and school context factors (e.g., poverty and achievement level of student body) impacted not only children's transition into kindergarten but also their continued schooling (Lee & Bierman, 2016). Thus, transition practices that focus on teacher, parent, and child needs are recommended to help with children's readiness level (La Paro et al., 2000).

Methods

Study Sample

During the summers of 2016 and 2017, nine school districts and 21 schools in Northern Kentucky implemented the MMS Kindergarten Transition Program. These schools were chosen based on their high rates of children eligible for free and reduced lunch and/or having low third grade reading scores. Each MMS classroom had a two-teacher team, and each district had a coordinator, resulting in total of 114 school personnel over the two years. All teachers were certified in either early childhood (7%), elementary (46%), special education (23%), or more than one certification area (23%).

A total of 715 4-year-olds were served, and 13.4% of the total children did not attend any early childhood setting prior to kindergarten. The gender average was 46% male and 50% female, with some families not reporting the student's gender. An average of 71% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch.

Parent surveys were completed by 158 family members. The average age of the family member completing the parent survey was 37, and the average

family size was five. About 66% indicated that they had some college education or a college degree, and 23% had a high school diploma. Most participants (73%) were Caucasian, and 5% were African American, which reflects the area demographics (90% Caucasian, 4% African American) according to regional profiles at the time of the study.

Data and Analysis

Data were collected from three sources, and triangulation was achieved through these multiple sources of data. First, teachers, coordinators, and administrators who participated in the program were asked to complete a program survey at the end of each year in which they reported on observations during the first weeks of kindergarten of children who attended MMS. The total number of program surveys completed was 21 in the summer of 2016 and 17 in the summer of 2017. Second, in addition to these reports, 33 school personnel from the program met for a group discussion of their observations of children who attended the program as well as challenges and successes of the program implementation. These discussions were recorded through field notes. A third source of data were parent surveys on which parents were asked questions pertaining to participation in the program for themselves and their children as well as to provide narrative comments. In 2016, 192 parent surveys were returned, a 60% return rate. In 2017, 158 surveys were received, a 40% return rate.

The qualitative data from these three sources were collected by the authors who had received IRB approval for research with human subjects. Each set of data (observations made by teachers on the program report and parents' responses to survey questions) were organized and analyzed using a deductive approach guided by strategies recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The data were, initially, identified as either school, child, or family category. Next, codes were derived from this initial analysis to identify specific, reoccurring themes in each data set. Finally, all three data sets were reviewed to cross-validate the codes and identify dimensions of the same phenomenon. Comments from schools in both the program survey and the group discussions and parent comments on the parent survey were also reviewed to identify common themes. From this data triangulation, reoccurring themes were identified. These themes are discussed below.

Findings

The results of the qualitative data analysis indicated benefits for the three entities targeted for the transition program: children, families, and schools.

Our research questions focused on the effects of a comprehensive transition program for children, families, and schools, and our findings are organized around these three categories. Pseudonyms have been used.

Children

Social/Emotional Readiness and Self-Regulation Skills

Teachers, schools, and parents reported that one of the most important benefits of the transition program for children was increased social/emotional readiness and self-regulation skills needed for school. The small group setting provided an opportunity for the teacher to help children with social skills prior to first day of kindergarten. They coached the children on routines and ways to regulate emotions with yoga, breathing, quiet spaces in the classroom, and other behavioral methods. One school had their social worker come to the class each day to implement a social skills program. Parents commented on parent surveys, “He needed to work on self-control, and he learned appropriate classroom expectations” and “David loved it. It really helped with his behavioral issues. Thank you!” The transition program enabled teachers to reach out to parents of children who continued to struggle with self-regulation. Parents gave the teachers ideas for what worked for their child at home, and teachers shared what they were doing at school, thus building a collaborative relationship with the parent to support the child. Many parents mentioned in their comments on parent surveys that children who were naturally shy and reluctant in social situations become more outgoing as a result of attending MMS. One parent noted: “This program was amazing. I felt the social aspect was as important as the [academics].” Children’s social/emotional readiness for kindergarten increased through this program when they became familiar with the school routines and people.

Anxiety

The exposure to group settings and the school building during the transition program resulted in teachers and parents reporting fewer children with anxiety during the first days of school. Teachers also reported that children who began the program with anxiety were successfully interacting with other children during first week of school. The children felt confident on the first day of kindergarten because they had already made friends and knew their teacher as well as the school building. One such parent commented on the parent survey, “Jonathon was very nervous about going to ‘camp’ [MMS] and did not want to go. He cried before he came the first day. He would also cry when we talked about him starting kindergarten in the fall. After he has been going to Me and My School, he brings up how he will be going to kindergarten soon and no longer feels anxious about it. Over the weekend he even asked when we would get

to go back to Me and My School.” Parents mentioned the decrease in anxiety most often in their comments about the program in the parent survey, for example: “My child had been very scared and anxious about starting school, but now he is excited!” and “My child had fears about kindergarten, but after she attended the 1st session [of MMS] she wanted to go to school even on weekends.” In addition, previously isolated children were exposed to other children in a group for the first time, allowing them to get comfortable being a member in a group setting: “Emily, not being in day care, this program has helped her open up.” The length of the program helped children make friends. Teachers stated in the program report that the transition program created “a sense of community and friendship among students that participated in the program.” Parents noted, “I liked the program and was glad it was more than just a few days. My son is shy and doesn’t adjust to new situations easily. I think having him for an extended time was beneficial.” The decreased anxiety about school that was experienced by children attending MMS allowed them to be comfortable about being away from home, some for the first time. They had made friends, knew their teachers, and knew the schools and the routine, which led to them becoming mentors to other children when entering kindergarten.

Schools

Student Leaders

The decreased anxiety and social/emotional preparedness resulted in MMS students being adjusted to the school environment and therefore becoming mentors and leaders in their kindergarten classrooms. This was the most frequently mentioned outcome from teachers reported both on the program surveys and during the school personnel discussion groups. The knowledge gained over the summer enabled MMS attendees to be role models to other students who did not attend the program. Students who attended the transition program were familiar with school routines and procedures and where school rooms were—gym, cafeteria, lavatory, and so on. Teachers commented that MMS students knew the school and seemed very confident helping other students get their year started. They helped other children understand the schedule, find their way, and reassured them when they were frightened. One kindergarten teacher explained the difference between her students before and after MMS program implementation in the program report:

In the past, kindergarten students have struggled so much at the beginning of the school year simply because of lack of structured setting experience. This program has allowed our whole climate to be more positive. Students who participated in the program are the leaders and role

models in the classroom immediately and are able to show the other students what is expected. We've had such less disruption in the beginning of the year. Students who have never been in school experience success at school right away because they know what to do and are familiar with their teachers and the expectations from day one.

Increased Instructional Time

As a result of MMS attendance, teachers reported having more instructional time with their students at the beginning of the school year. They could spend less time on procedures because most of the children were already familiar with the routines, rules, building, teachers, principal, and other school personnel. These children knew what was expected of them in a school setting before they even began the school year. One administrator indicated, "I believe our kindergarteners that attend MMS come in better equipped to manage kindergarten. They know expectations for behavior, performance, etc. These expectations allow them to come in the classroom with more confidence than they would normally have." The transition program gave kindergarten teachers a head start with routines that they normally spend the first couple of weeks practicing and reinforcing at the start of a new school year. As one teacher put it, "Students came to the first day of school ready to learn!"

Special Needs

Teachers and parents also reported advantages for children with special needs who attended the program. They noted how children with special needs were identified prior to the first day of school, allowing teachers to be proactive with the students. Teachers indicated on the end of year program survey, "If they had identified these needs on the first day [of kindergarten], they would have been behind." Parents of children with special needs agreed with the MMS program teachers as demonstrated in one parent's comment on the parent survey, "My autistic child is now excited for kindergarten!" Another example was having a child who was selectively mute at school, which allowed teachers to team with the parent and prepare interventions (e.g., teaching the child simple signs to communicate with). This information was passed on to her kindergarten teacher, and the parent shared on the parent survey the child "didn't miss a beat" entering school at the beginning of the year. Schools completed observations and basic skills assessments during the program which allowed them to build class lists to best meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs. As one school noted about a child with a developmental delay, "She consistently attended (MMS) so her learning and routine were not interrupted. This helped with the transition to kindergarten. She got to meet the K teacher, and the teacher was able to see her behaviors and how to manage them."

Teachers were able to help children already identified with disabilities become a part of the classroom community, implement interventions early, and help them get ready for a more structured environment. In addition, the children received continuous support from the school and home during MMS and that support was continued into the school year.

Family Engagement

As a result of the MMS program, some schools have begun to implement various events that encourage family involvement, especially for those with children ages birth–five years. The MMS transition program has motivated many school districts to also enhance early learning opportunities for birth to 5-year-olds and their families. Based on work with this program, school leaders and staff have begun to see the value of reaching out to children and families prior to kindergarten.

School staff also indicated there were increased participation rates at school events for families who participated in MMS. Parents similarly indicated they are more likely to participate in other school events after being a part of MMS. As one administrator described in the program report, “The increase in engagement [at MMS] has led to better communication and an increase in parent activity at the school.” Another administrator said, “The Me and My School program has reinforced the fact that our school is a resource. We have had several families that have accessed the Family Resource Center and other programs beyond Me and My School for services.

Families

Relationships With Teachers and Other Personnel

The families agreed that an impact of the transition program was a sense of connection to school. The parent surveys indicated parents felt they made good connections to the teachers. Parent comments such as “Loved the teacher interaction!” and “This has been a good experience for him and myself” on the parent surveys reflect the success of numerous efforts MMS schools implemented in reaching out to or including families to address one of the MMS program goals: engaging families. These school efforts included inviting family members to eat lunch and/or breakfast with the children, a time when many schools also integrated learning experiences or spent time talking with parents and developing relationships among families and teachers. Several school teams invited families to come to school at the end of the program day and participate in planned activities with the children using the Family Transition Kit materials (see Appendix). Some schools conducted home visits with the families to build relationships, learn more about the family, and talk about school

and the importance of parent engagement. Several schools held celebrations on the last day of the program when parents, teachers, and children could talk and participate in fun activities. Schools that did not provide transportation for the transition program had parent–teacher contact every day as families dropped off and picked up their child from the program. The teachers talked with the families about the progress and growth the child was making and answered any questions parents may have had during pick-up/drop-off times. One school team reported: “We had a family that had a negative school experience in the past. They were defensive. However, After Me and My school, they were positive and encouraging of their student and cooperative with the teacher.”

Relationships With Other Families

Parents and schools reported family networks were created during the MMS program. The parents indicated on the surveys that they made good connections to other families through events at the MMS program. One school team elaborated, “We had the unexpected result of families sharing experiences and getting to know one another through attendance in the weekly family activities throughout the program. Several of our parents who met for the first time at the program have found support from one another.” These new friendships and supports most likely also contributed to parents feeling better about sending their children to school.

Less Anxious Parents

Parent surveys indicated they felt less anxious and more comfortable sending children to school at the end of the MMS program. Parents mentioned this in their comments also:

My daughter absolutely loved this! I was nervous for my last child to start school and wanted her to do this to ease both of our minds, and it did! At Meet the Teacher night I tried to show her where to go and what to do and she said, “I know mom. Remember I came here already! It is already my school and I know what to do.”

Others said, “Thank you! This program has completely eased my mind! I was so afraid that this would be a difficult transition for her! Thank you!” and “This program was much better than I expected. It exceeded all expectations and has made me significantly more comfortable with [the school] and the teachers.” Observing children’s confidence level in knowing what to do and where to go in school through participation in MMS program helped lessen parent’s anxiety for their children’s first day of kindergarten as well as their own trepidation with their children’s next phase of education. The MMS program activities for families, such as inviting families to eat lunch with their children, contributed

to parents feeling comfortable with the school personnel and the education system as they engaged in conversations with MMS teachers and coordinators. The opportunity for adults (parents and school staff) to get to know each other that MMS program provided was as important as getting to know the children for facilitating smoother transition to kindergarten.

Conclusions

The results from this analysis of the MMS transition program indicate that the parents and school personnel perceived that this transition program, which provided 54 hours of educational opportunity, facilitated access to the culture of schools for children, allowing them to become prepared socially and emotionally to enter kindergarten. If, as research suggests, social/emotional skills at kindergarten transition help determine how well children succeed in school (Cadima et al., 2015; Denham et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Graue, 2000; Lin et al., 2003; McWayne et al., 2012; Robinson & Diamond, 2014), then a comprehensive program such as MMS may give children a greater chance of academic success in kindergarten and beyond. Teacher and parent perceptions indicated increased self-regulation in some children. Anxiety and shyness seem to have been overcome by many of the children, allowing them to not only have a positive experience on the first day of kindergarten, but also to help other children who had not attended the program become acclimated to school. A more formal assessment of social/emotional growth in children attending the program will help validate parent and teacher observations. In addition, longitudinal academic data will confirm whether these decreases in anxiety and shyness and increase in self-regulation at kindergarten transition influences academic success in school for these children.

Research suggests that family plays an important role in the child's adjustment to school and later school success (Morrison-Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Puccioni, 2015; Schulting et al., 2005), and this study proposes that a comprehensive transition program may result in better family–school relationships. The MMS family members felt more comfortable with the school system, the school building personnel, the kindergarten routine, and the kindergarten teacher. The families also established relationships with other families whose children were also attending the same school, thus making the transition to kindergarten or the “formal school” less scary. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) state that

a child's competence in a kindergarten classroom may not be the only and best outcome measure of a successful transition. Instead, the quality

of the parents' relationships with teacher and school staff, and their relationship with the child's schooling may be an equally valid indicator of transition outcome. (p. 501)

This study provides evidence that a comprehensive kindergarten transition program that also focuses on the family helps prepare the parents as well as the children for the move to more formal schooling and provides experiences that contribute to positive and engaged relationships between home and school. It has the potential to develop relationships that will influence a child's success in school over time. Follow-up research with parents can help determine if these effects of the MMS Kindergarten Transition Program sustain parent participation throughout their child's schooling.

Earlier research (Goldstein et al., 2014; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004) indicated that teacher perceptions of student competency or readiness can affect the level of student learning. Teachers in this study felt the children who attended MMS were more competent and ready for school, which could affect the children's learning through their kindergarten year. There also seemed to be benefits specifically for children with special needs and their families as well as the schools from this transition program. Parents indicated they were more comfortable with their child entering school, and parents and teachers agreed that the school was better prepared for the child with special needs. One primary benefit for schools was that children needed less social/emotional adjustment to kindergarten so teachers could address academics more comprehensively earlier in the school year. All of this needs to be studied in more detail to substantiate these findings based on parent and teacher perceptions.

While further investigation will be needed to determine what lasting effect this transition program will have for children, schools, and families, this study may still help persuade schools to invest in a transition program for children and families who are entering kindergarten because developing a system to "promote connectedness and flexibility among the social contexts that surround the child...characterized by high quality communication and contact among these social contexts" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 505) is critically important for healthy learning and development for all children.

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Her research focuses on improving early care and education to facilitate children's readiness. Research interest topics include professional development, family engagement, community engagement, and home-school-community partnerships.

Appendix. Transition Kit Contents

Me & My School Messenger Bag



(1) Stubby Paint Brush



Jumbo Crayons – 8 count



(1) Dual Lens Magnifying Glass



Alphabet Cards



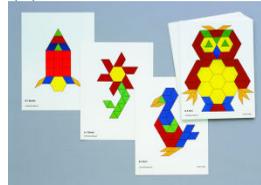
(1) Set of Pattern Blocks–Hollow Plastic



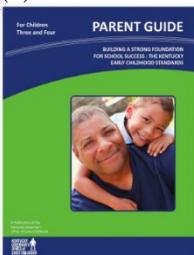
5" Spikey Ball- Inflated



(5) Pattern Block Activity Cards



(1) Parent Guide–Three to Four Years



(6) Activity Bingo Cards

