The First Eight Years

Scaling and Sustaining the Summer Start Kindergarten Transition Program
Summer Start Kindergarten Transition Program

Each year, thousands of young children in Hawai‘i enter kindergarten with a wide range of prior early learning experiences. During the 2021-2022 school year, Hawai‘i public schools enrolled over 11,000 kindergartners, nearly 50 percent of whom had no formal early learning experiences. Regardless of their background, transition into kindergarten is an important educational milestone in the formative years of every child.

As children enter kindergarten, they must learn to navigate new rules and routines, different ways of learning, relationships with unknown peers and adults, and unfamiliar physical surroundings. An effective kindergarten transition program can lessen stress and decrease the time needed for the children to adapt to a new learning environment. Research shows that successful transitions are more likely to lead to “...increased family engagement during kindergarten, enhanced social skills, and higher academic performance in math, language and literacy in kindergarten and beyond.” Transition programs are especially critical for children with limited experience in a classroom setting.

"Summer Start plays a very specific role as a bridge between home, early learning programs, and kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten can be difficult for both families and students. Programs like Summer Start are critical to ensure that our students start feeling comfortable so they are ready to learn and play."

Stephen Schatz
Executive Director
Hawai‘i P-20 Partnerships for Education

References
Recognizing the need for successful kindergarten transitions, Hawai’i P-20 Partnerships for Education (Hawai’i P-20), in collaboration with Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation and Hawai’i State Department of Education (HIDOE), launched the Summer Start Kindergarten Transition Program (Summer Start) in 2018 to support children and families. Summer Start is a three-week program that promotes positive student behaviors, school routines, and developmentally appropriate instruction, and also includes family engagement opportunities to strengthen the family-school connection.
### Parent Satisfaction Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am glad my child attended the summer program</td>
<td>Agree/Strongly Agree 97%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My child likes going to school everyday</td>
<td>Agree/Strongly Agree 96%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My child has friends at school</td>
<td>Agree/Strongly Agree 95%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My child wants to learn/read</td>
<td>Agree/Strongly Agree 95%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher(s) helped my child be ready for kindergarten</td>
<td>Agree/Strongly Agree 95%</td>
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When asked about their child’s experiences, some families documented surprise and relief, describing how their child “at first cried going to school but to my surprise the next day, he wakes up early even Saturday, Sunday he thinks get school.”

Others described how their child, “...was having anxiety about kindergarten but now she loves school.” Nearly all families reported that they were glad that their children went to the Summer Start program and expressed their appreciation.

“This is a[n] awesome program. My child did not go to preschool so this program really helped [child] and myself get ready...to start school. Thank you!”

“Great summer program for incoming kindergarteners. My child got to know her teachers, classmates, and the school. She is ready for kindergarten! Please continue this program in the future.”
Summer Start Program
Key Data Insights

The Summer Start teachers provided information related to their own expectations, as well as the children’s skills, knowledge, and disposition at the beginning and at the end of the program. The following represents more than 75% of teacher responses about the program from the beginning to end. **Teachers had clear curricular goals related to developing social skills and behaviors as a focus of the three-week program:**

- Teachers wanted children to learn social skills and interact appropriately with peers, and understand and follow school and classroom rules and routines.

- By the end of the third week, the teachers found that the children were more confident and independent, and knew what was expected of them.

- Children were also more comfortable interacting and working with each other.

Overall the teachers felt that the transition program was “a necessity” for their incoming kindergarten students. The program gave “these little ones a jump start into kinder, confidence building, and they were able to make new friends.”

"Summer Start is a great opportunity for students and families to adapt to their new learning environment prior to the start of the school year. It allows students to build relationships with their peers, teachers and school, which helps to set a positive foundation for future learning.”

Keith Hayashi
Superintendent, Hawai‘i State Department of Education
Summer Start was launched as a pilot program in 2018 with funding from the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation at two low-income elementary schools. In 2019, HIDOE allocated funds and expanded Summer Start to 13 schools. With the provision of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER), the program was offered statewide and was implemented at 82 schools in 2021 and 2022.

Prior to Summer Start, a number of schools financed their own summer kindergarten transition programming using Title I funds and/or private grants. Implementation of the pre-Summer Start programs varied from a two-hour orientation to a two-week class.

HIDOE has designated a liaison to manage and coordinate Summer Start since 2019 and with the availability of the ESSER funding, Summer Start has been made available to all schools. This state-level oversight presented an opportunity to institutionalize Summer Start as a viable kindergarten transition program in HIDOE. The Summer Start program is now identified as one of the approved summer extended learning programs and has been provided state administrative support for funding and teacher training.

“Summer Start is an effective and vital program to help our most vulnerable and least-advantaged keiki to get a start on kindergarten. Early education is key to a child’s success in K-12, and we continue in our work to see that all children have access to high-quality early learning in Hawai‘i.”

Al Castle
President
Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation
Sustaining
Summer Start Kindergarten Transition Program

Alignment and Connection
Connection, alignment, and coordination between the early learning and K-12 system is necessary to ensure seamless learning experiences for young children from early childhood to elementary education. A summer transition program prior to kindergarten, such as Summer Start, functions as a bridge between the home or early learning environment and the K-12 system.

Maintaining Consistent Funding
HIDOE has been able to leverage different public and private funding sources to scale up the Summer Start program. Leaders are exploring ways to identify and allocate more stable funding for this successful kindergarten transition program.

Yuuko Arikawa-Cross
Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

"This opportunity helps to ease the transition into kindergarten, especially for families and children who may have faced challenges with enrolling in early education or prekindergarten settings. Summer Start is one program, and we look forward to securing more resources to extend access to early learning opportunities for children and families across Hawai'i."