



# The Transition Facilitator For The First School Transition

Reference Document

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**Coordination and content (Janie-Claude St-Yves and Éloïse Lavoie)**

Direction de la formation générale des jeunes  
Direction générale des services à l'enseignement  
Soutien aux élèves, pédagogie et services à l'enseignement

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**For further information, please contact:**

Renseignements généraux  
Ministère de l'Éducation  
1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 21<sup>e</sup> étage  
Québec (Québec) G1R 5A5  
Telephone: 418-643-7095  
Toll-free: 1- 866-747-6626

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The objective: Working together to ensure a successful first school transition .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of budgetary measures and rules.....	2
Contextualization .....	2
The first school transition .....	2
<b>The role of the transition facilitator .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Qualifications .....	5
Essential knowledge .....	5
Skills, competencies and responsibilities .....	5
<b>A few possible courses of action for transition facilitators .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Table 1: Examples of possible objectives set by transition facilitators, along with some courses of action.....	8
<b>Support and training for transition facilitators .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>11</b>

*It appears that children and their families benefit greatly from the implementation of quality interventions when children start preschool, especially in the case of families living in disadvantaged areas.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

This document is a reference tool for guiding practices that promote a harmonious first school transition for preschool children<sup>2</sup> and their families. It is intended to support the school environment in developing collaborative practices with the various early childhood stakeholders. Transition facilitators for the first school transition can use this reference tool to co-construct a service path for the entry into kindergarten of young children in Québec.

In order to establish a shared vision throughout the territory of the school boards or the school service centres, it is important that only one person be designated to act as a transition facilitator for overseeing efforts in this regard.

## The objective: Working together to ensure a successful first school transition

In 2018 it was announced that transition facilitators would be enlisted to help make the entry into kindergarten easier for all Québec preschoolers and their families. These transition facilitators will enhance the work of the Passe-Partout program coordinators in supporting parents. The facilitators' role would be to support the school environment in establishing collaboration with early childhood services, community organizations and the early childhood health and educational services network in order to foster a smooth first transition for preschool children and their families. The cohesion of all stakeholders is important to ensure the continuity of quality services and a shared vision of the global development and schooling of young children. The purpose of this reference document is to unify practices without standardizing them. In addition, the Ministère also offers online training sessions for schools.

Facilitators are subject to a measure that appears in the budgetary rules for school boards and school service centres. The statement of this measure is available in French on pages 58- 60.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruel et al., 2015, 2 [*translation*].

<sup>2</sup> Preschool education for 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds.

## Statement of budgetary measures and rules

### Mesure 15001 – Seuil minimal de services aux élèves – organismes scolaires

## Contextualization

Research shows that, if the first school transition is a smooth one, it will serve as a foundation for future transitions. It will also have an impact on children’s motivation and commitment to school and, by extension, will encourage them to stay in school and help them achieve academic success. By working with families and agencies in the early years, we are ensuring that children get a good start. The challenge of an inclusive transition, which takes into account the diversity of all children and their families, is broad and collective: to ensure greater equity and concern for the trajectory of every child, for the benefit of all families and society as a whole. The health needs, development, well-being, inclusion and educational success of all children are the subject of ever more sophisticated statistical surveys and monitoring. The data invite us to objectify our social progress and define our particular challenges. In Québec, innovative steps to support children in their first school transition have been emerging and gaining in depth and scope, as have flagship projects.<sup>3</sup>

Even with its many structural variations, the family essentially remains a safe space for children and the place where they make their first discoveries. Continuity in education requires attention to existing connections and agreements among various contributors—a system of supportive stakeholders who develop adapted and consistent methods and attitudes, strongly consider parents to be primarily responsible for their children’s education and strive to bring together the available resources and expertise. One thing is certain: the first school transition shines a light on transition-support practices as well as the quality of alliances among families, the school, childcare facilities and local community organizations. The transition facilitator plays a key role in fostering the application of transition-support practices in the schools and in implementing a beneficial network of resources.

## The first school transition

The term “transition” refers to the tension between change and stability. The concepts of passage and imbalance often used to define this transition are particularly interesting in that they acknowledge the importance of offering transition strategies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Avenir d’enfants, 2017; Cotnoir, 2015; Horizon 0-5, 2014; Lehrer, 2018; Ruel et al., 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2010; Ruel et al., 2015.

According to the available literature, the first school transition extends over a 16-month period, running from August of the previous year to November of the year in which the child starts kindergarten.<sup>5</sup> This is a period in which children and their families are gradually adjusting to a new physical, social and human environment.<sup>6</sup> Children and families build their own education paths with the school and community by considering the options available to them and any related constraints that may apply.<sup>7</sup> It is important to recognize and build on the fundamental contribution of parents to their children's success in school, as well as to strengthen or consolidate the links between the school environment, the community stakeholders and families.

By improving the practices that support children in their first school transition, the aim is to reduce any discrepancies that may exist between expectations with regard to success and the conditions conducive to its achievement. Children arrive at school with their own personal stories. They also bring with them many expectations: their own and those of their families. They learn to deal with rules that inevitably vary from one community to another.

The first school transition is a crucial moment. It involves accommodating and supporting all children and their families at a critical juncture. Kindergarten is the first of many years in school for the vast majority of Québec children. As such, all school stakeholders are front and centre in the first school transition experience of children and their families. The facilitator must appreciate the role of these active stakeholders and support them in the development, implementation and maintenance of good transition practices. The transition from the family context and childcare facilities to school is an experience that involves major changes for children. As examples of such changes, we need only mention integration into a large class and adaptation to a new set of rules and expectations.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Guide for Supporting a Successful School Transition*, jointly produced by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec (2010), the authors point out that a successful transition enables the children to:

- have a sense of well-being and security in the new school environment
- develop positive attitudes and emotions towards school and learning
- develop a sense of confidence in their ability to do well in school
- benefit from an educational experience that fosters optimum development and the recognition of their abilities

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<sup>5</sup> Ruel et al., 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Legendre, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Lehrer, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Lehrer, 2018.

For parents, a child's first school transition raises issues associated with equally significant changes in identity and context. A child starting school is a family event that has an impact on the organization of daily life (schedules, routines and specific requirements) and on alliances with formal institutions in the community. When parents become parents of students, they share their educational responsibilities and have to establish new relationships of trust and mutual concern. The first school transition can raise intense emotions for parents, or revive positive or difficult memories from their own lives. A welcoming attitude towards all parents and the provision of helpful information and support help make this a more positive experience for the child. The importance of social support for families has been documented in the *Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants à la maternelle* (Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten), conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec in 2012 and in 2017.

Although the great majority of studies focus on the stages of child development and parents' ability to adequately prepare their children for the transition to school, it is still absolutely essential to put more emphasis on support practices that facilitate the first school transition and the quality of networking among the partners concerned.<sup>9</sup>

## The role of the transition facilitator

Facilitators support the design, dissemination, adoption and implementation of transition practices by promoting cooperative action. They help to plan, lead and document initiatives aimed at providing children and their families with support during the first school transition. This role is key to enable coordination of actions. This is seen as a valuable contribution for administrators, preschool teachers and support services. In addition, transition facilitators support Passe-Partout activity leaders who have made meaningful connections with families and with childcare and community partners who are educational allies closely associated with these families. Transition facilitators must recognize the separate as well as complementary contributions of these stakeholders and promote the exercise of collective responsibility. This approach is bolstered by the strengths of the educational community, which remains attentive to the particular characteristics of each context and to the feasibility of initiatives.

Given the variety of needs to be met, the work of transition facilitators can vary considerably from one school board or school service centre to another. Facilitators must have a broad range of knowledge and skills to carry out their work. Ideally, in order to optimize efforts and avoid duplicating actions, only one person per school board or school service centre should be assigned to this position.

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<sup>9</sup> Ruel et al., 2015.

## Qualifications

Transition facilitators must have a **bachelor's** degree or an equivalent diploma in psychoeducation, psychology, social work, sociocultural animation, or in a related field considered relevant by the school board or school service centre.

The importance of consistency and continuity in interventions makes it essential that staff have both initial and ongoing training.

## Essential knowledge

In carrying out their duties, transition facilitators must ensure that they are aware of:

- the family environment, culture and resources as well as the communities in which families live
- the school system, its structures and values
- the various childcare service providers and community organizations
- the various programs (early childhood educational services, preschool education, etc.)
- the developmental and ecosystemic approaches
- the complexity of the tasks involved in working with vulnerable or marginalized families

## Skills, competencies and responsibilities

In order to perform their role effectively and to mobilize resources likely to foster a quality first transition to school, transition facilitators must show initiative and give priority to:

- cooperation as well as the design and planning of activities appropriate for the objectives in question
- relationships of trust and confidence with partners and showing appreciation for partners' input by drawing on each one's competencies and expertise
- teamwork and the ability to express ideas in layman's terms
- sensitivity to cultural diversity
- partner networking
- analysis, reflection and individual or group questioning

Some examples of objectives set by transition facilitators :

- have good interpersonal skills
- be a proactive and dynamic individual
- communicate effectively
- have organizational skills
- be familiar with strategies for facilitating active meetings
- have skills related to cross-sectoral engagement work
- be up to date with the latest research in education, particularly in the area of collaborative work
- exercise leadership, have the ability to bring people together when issues arise
- have mediation skills

- demonstrate a high degree of autonomy and resourcefulness
- be familiar with the global development of children
- know how to conduct reflective practice sessions
- have computer skills (e.g. conducting surveys, organization, group work and document production)
- collaborate in the planning and implementation of promotion and prevention activities in the school environment, in particular by liaising with the resources in their sector
- help raise awareness of the services offered and ensure the dissemination of best practices in terms of support for the first school transition
- use survey reports to develop a situational picture to guide action planning related to children's needs
- recommend actions based on best practices and recognized conditions of effectiveness in relation to different themes
- make the most of diversified expertise
- take a critical look at the actions implemented in the schools in order to optimize their quality
- contribute to the creation of supportive environments in schools
- develop, propose or make available training and knowledge transfer activities to support the development of professional resource skills in relation to various topics
- participate in the regulation of actions and suggest adjustments in a perspective of continuous improvement

## A few possible courses of action for transition facilitators

*Schools are encouraged to adopt a shift in perspective, to make the school ready to welcome children and families in all their diversity. (Bailey, 1999; Broström, 2002)<sup>10</sup>*

The various actions implemented or supported by transition facilitators help to create environments conducive to the well-being of both students and parents during the first school transition. These actions are usually implemented during a specific period, namely, from August of the previous year to November of the year in which the child starts school. The actions must be continuous but can take various forms, depending on the objectives pursued.

In addition, although the challenges of welcoming, informing and accompanying children result in a more intense period of activity, it is possible that children, due to particular situations (e.g. recent immigration, moving or change of parental custody), must get used to a new school environment during the year. The school community should be sensitive to the needs of these children and their families.

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<sup>10</sup> Ruel et al., 2015.

**Table 1: Examples of possible objectives set by transition facilitators, along with some courses of action**

Objectives	Actions
<b>Networking and mobilization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a resource review</li> <li>• Determine the needs of each environment (e.g. conduct systematic data collection, organize data, conduct surveys and interpret data)</li> <li>• Establish a timeline of actions and activities to be implemented during the year</li> <li>• Develop, through intersectoral collaborative work, a picture of the services offered in the region and the service trajectory for children and families experiencing a transition</li> <li>• Draw up, and keep current, a profile of the school territory that provides the following information: sociodemographic setting; the needs of young children and families; and an overview of local and regional mobilization efforts to ensure a successful first school transition</li> </ul>
<b>Research and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a literature review on transition, collaborative work and group facilitation</li> <li>• Consult the latest research in education</li> <li>• Inform the network of key points</li> </ul>
<b>Welcoming and supporting children and their families during the year</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help families become familiar with the school team and plan a visit to the school</li> <li>• Develop a transition plan with partners</li> <li>• Follow up with the family within the first few weeks of school entry. to understand and address different needs (e.g. appropriate winter clothing)</li> <li>• Promote the creation of a support network for families</li> </ul>
<b>Awareness-raising and training activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with staff in different settings to promote quality transitions</li> <li>• Prepare training sessions on different topics for partners</li> <li>• Record practices in order to keep track of them, but also to ensure their regulation</li> <li>• Pursue further professional development to increase knowledge and broaden skills (continuing education)</li> <li>• Become familiar with and recognize initiatives that schools have taken to support the first school transition</li> <li>• Mobilize around a shared vision (e.g. common language and objectives)</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation and sharing of practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a common mission, vision and values in consultation with partners</li> <li>• Ensure a presence in the various networks</li> <li>• Set up collaborative work sessions</li> <li>• Document effective practices</li> <li>• Organize networking activities</li> <li>• Foster a culture of collaboration (e.g. sharing of tools and documents, teamwork)</li> </ul>

Objectives	Actions
<b>Analysis and recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulate, analyze and adjust practices</li> <li>• Evaluate actions</li> <li>• Modify certain actions as needed</li> <li>• Recommend effective practices</li> </ul>
<b>Planning and implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define any issues related to the first school transition</li> <li>• Choose the most effective approaches collectively</li> <li>• Ensure consistency in transition practices</li> <li>• Define and select the key actions that will enable the network to achieve its objectives</li> <li>• Support existing activities</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting partners in the various settings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as the point person in regard to the transition</li> <li>• Establish links between partners in settings where there is no collaborative approach to transition</li> <li>• Meet with members of the school team to make them aware of the importance of their role and the issues involved in ensuring a transition that is well adapted to the realities of the various settings</li> </ul>

## Support and training for transition facilitators

To consolidate their expertise, acquire new knowledge or enrich their practice, transition facilitators should allow time in their schedule for professional development. They would also benefit from pooling their efforts within a community of practitioners or with the members of other local or provincial organizations. Participation in the training sessions offered by the Ministère de l'Éducation will also enable transition facilitators to better understand their role and learn about different forms of co-operation. These training sessions are a way to update knowledge, skills and know-how and to learn about the latest research on the first school transition.

## Acknowledgements

Many stakeholders from different communities and with different responsibilities met a number of times to share their experience and ideas regarding the first school transition and the role of the transition facilitator. This reference document was written by Jean-Pierre Gagnier following the conclusion of the meetings. It has since been updated by Janie-Claude St-Yves and Éloïse Lavoie in September of 2021.

### Contributors to the Reference Document in June 2018

**Jean-Pierre Gagnier**, professor, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

**Daniel Allard**, preschool education consultant, Commission scolaire de la Riveraine (Service Passe-Partout)

**Danièle Beaudoin**, teacher, kindergarten for 5-year-olds, Commission scolaire de la Capitale

**Gino Beaulieu**, teacher, kindergarten for 4-year-olds, Commission scolaire de Saint-Hyacinthe

**Julie Corriveau Wilson**, co-ordinator, Eastern Townships School Board

**Johanne Cyr**, resource person, Une école montréalaise pour tous

**Maggie St-Georges**, support services officer and liaison, SAC-Centre, Avenir d'enfants

**Janie-Claude St-Yves**, preschool education consultant, Commission scolaire des Samares

**Chantal Hamel**, coordinator, First School Transition, Commission scolaire du Val-des-Cerfs, and collaborator with the Ministère de l'Éducation

**Éloïse Lavoie**, coordinator, Educational Services in Kindergarten for 4-year-olds, and contributor to Preschool Education Programs at the Ministère de l'Éducation

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