

# Transition Practices Case Study

TOPPENISH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
AND ESD 105 ECEAP



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

## Case Study Purpose



Transition practices case studies reflect what we learned in 2019 about innovative approaches that cross sector partners use to support effective transitions for children in their communities. We offer these case studies to community-school partnerships exploring possibilities for strengthening transition approaches. Each community we have included has unique strengths and challenges. These case studies demonstrate not a one-size-fits-all approach, but a range of practices and strategies that best serve children and families in each community. For more transition ideas, see the publication *Seeds of Inspiration for Effective Transition Approaches* (EL\_0031) at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL\\_0031.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0031.pdf).

### Common and Unique Transition Strategy Characteristics

- Relationship-based Approaches
- Family Voice, Leadership and Advocacy
- Inclusionary Practices
- Culturally Sustaining Practices
- Coordinated Recruitment and Enrollment
- Program Alignment

Strategy Characteristics used in this case study:



Inclusionary Practices



Culturally Sustaining Practices



Program Alignment

## Background

Kirkwood Elementary share a campus with the Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Center, the one district early learning center. Enrique Romero, Principal of Kirkwood Elementary, and Anastasia Sanchez, Director of the Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Center, grew up in migrant families and attended high school in the area.





Of the four kindergarten teachers, one teacher had significant experience teaching kindergarten and first grade in a loop. The other teachers had a range of up to seven years of experience with previous positions such as para-professional, social worker, and/or teaching another grade in elementary school. Enrique Romero had been principal at Kirkwood Elementary since 2018 with 11 years of prior experience in the district's secondary schools.

Anastasia Sanchez, Director of the Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Center, had worked 27 years in the Toppenish School District with 13 years as a Head Start teacher and 13 years as Principal of Kirkwood Elementary. Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Center served 250 children in a 50-year-old elementary school building on the Kirkwood Elementary campus. All classrooms included children with disabilities. The Early Learning Center hosted one classroom, the “Wednesday Preview” where families of children with disabilities could experience an inclusive classroom with typically developing peers for three hours a week. Also, the Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Program served children off-campus in one in-home ECEAP program. In addition, Toppenish Preschool provided service to the Inspire Development Center for children with disabilities.

Toppenish School District developed and implemented a range of universal and strategic transition practices to meet the needs of all children and families in the district.

### Universal Practices:

- Toppenish ECEAP students took a spring field trip to visit an elementary school.
- The preschool had its own playground, and the preschoolers could see the elementary students through the fence.
- Toppenish Preschool and ECEAP used Creative Curriculum, which included a unit on kindergarten transitions in the last month of school.
- The Early Learning Director met with kindergarten teachers from the three elementary schools to share transition cards, which included child data from screening instruments, *GOLD*® data for ECEAP four-year-olds, samples of writing, information about learning styles, behavioral issues, strengths, and family needs.
- Kindergarten registration was held in the Toppenish ECEAP and Early Learning Center. District staff provided immunizations, screening, and other services while parents registered their children for kindergarten. Toppenish ECEAP carefully tracked how many children needed to register.

### Children with Disabilities

- Families of children with disabilities met with the elementary school principal, special education teacher, and the Preschool Special Education Liaison to see the variety of classroom settings – general education, inclusive, and self-contained. Elementary schools prioritized placement of children with disabilities in general education classrooms.
- Toppenish Early Learning Center staff also went to Inspire Development Center to share what it would be like in elementary school. This session offered families the opportunity to ask teachers questions and review the elementary school supply list.
- The proximity of Toppenish ECEAP and Kirkwood Elementary allowed the principal and teachers to observe students in their own preschool classrooms.



### Children of Tribal Heritage

- Toppenish School District hired a Tribal Family Liaison, whose office was located at Kirkwood Elementary. The Liaison offered broad support to tribal residents. Kirkwood Elementary had a large percentage of American Indian Alaskan Native students— 89 (18.5% of total students).

### Migrant Families

- Three out of four kindergarten teachers Kirkwood Elementary were Hispanic, and only one was not bilingual. Nine out of 11 para-educators were bilingual.
- ECEAP and kindergarten classrooms infused English and Spanish words in written labels and literature.

### Challenges

Two years ago, Toppenish School District changed the teaching positions at the Early Learning Center from certificated to non-certificated positions, while still providing full benefit packages. The Director increased the number of ECEAP slots with ESD 105 and hired new staff with strong ties to the school and community.

### Goals

- Kirkwood Elementary hoped to create consistent formalized family feedback and frequent communication with families, including more prevalent use of Classroom Dojo. In particular, the school aimed to increase frequency of communication with Native and migrant families, partnered with district coordinators.
- Toppenish ECEAP and elementary schools had a high percentage of bilingual staff members to meet needs of students, but the district aimed to hire more staff with tribal heritage and hoped to infuse tribal languages into early learning classrooms.
- Kirkwood Elementary aimed to use *GOLD*<sup>®</sup> with all kindergartners in Fall and Winter in Literacy and Math in 2019-20 and to use *GOLD*<sup>®</sup> with all kindergartners Fall and Winter in all areas in 2020-21.
- Toppenish School District provided consistent messaging about the importance of attendance from preschool to 12th grade, particularly in culturally specific communities. For example, a Yakama Nation elder who attended board meetings shared messages in tribal meetings, which improved attendance.
- Toppenish ECEAP and Kirkwood Elementary planned shared professional development on observational assessment and classroom environments among preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and preschool and elementary para-educators. The training could have included how to organize and use documentation to support student growth and modify classroom environments over time.

## Seeds of Inspiration

Many outstanding strategies and characteristics of effective transitions are visible in the collaboration of Kirkwood Elementary and Toppenish ECEAP. We chose to highlight this work in a case study to demonstrate the power of approaches that focus on inclusion and respect for differences, program alignment, culturally sustaining practices with committed leaders who are deeply rooted in the communities they serve.



Figure 1: Dramatic Play area in Toppenish ECEAP inclusive classroom

### Kirkwood Elementary School 2019-20

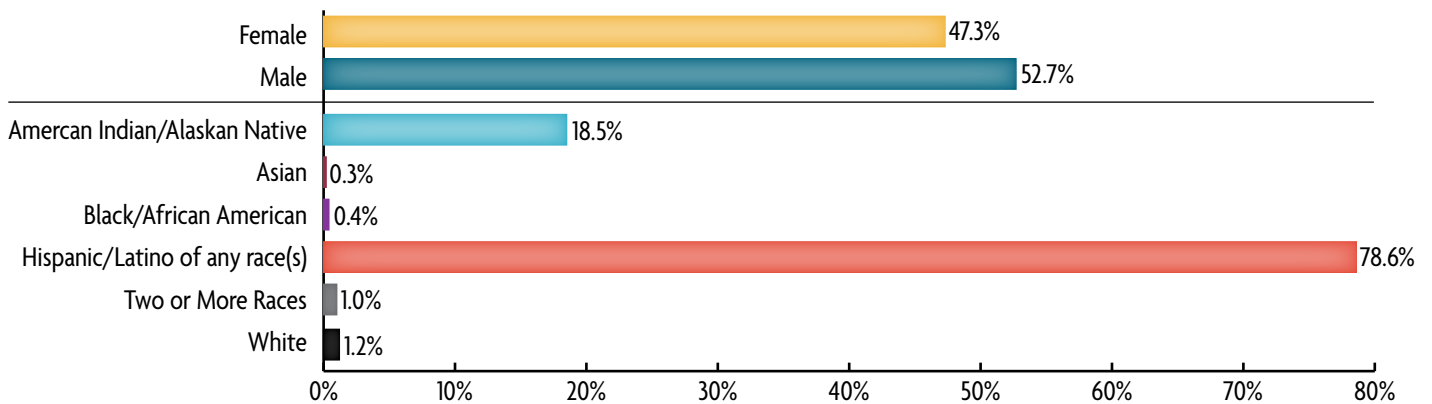


Figure 2: Kirkwood Elementary enrollment by ethnicity (OSPI, 2020)

### Kirkwood Elementary School 2019-20

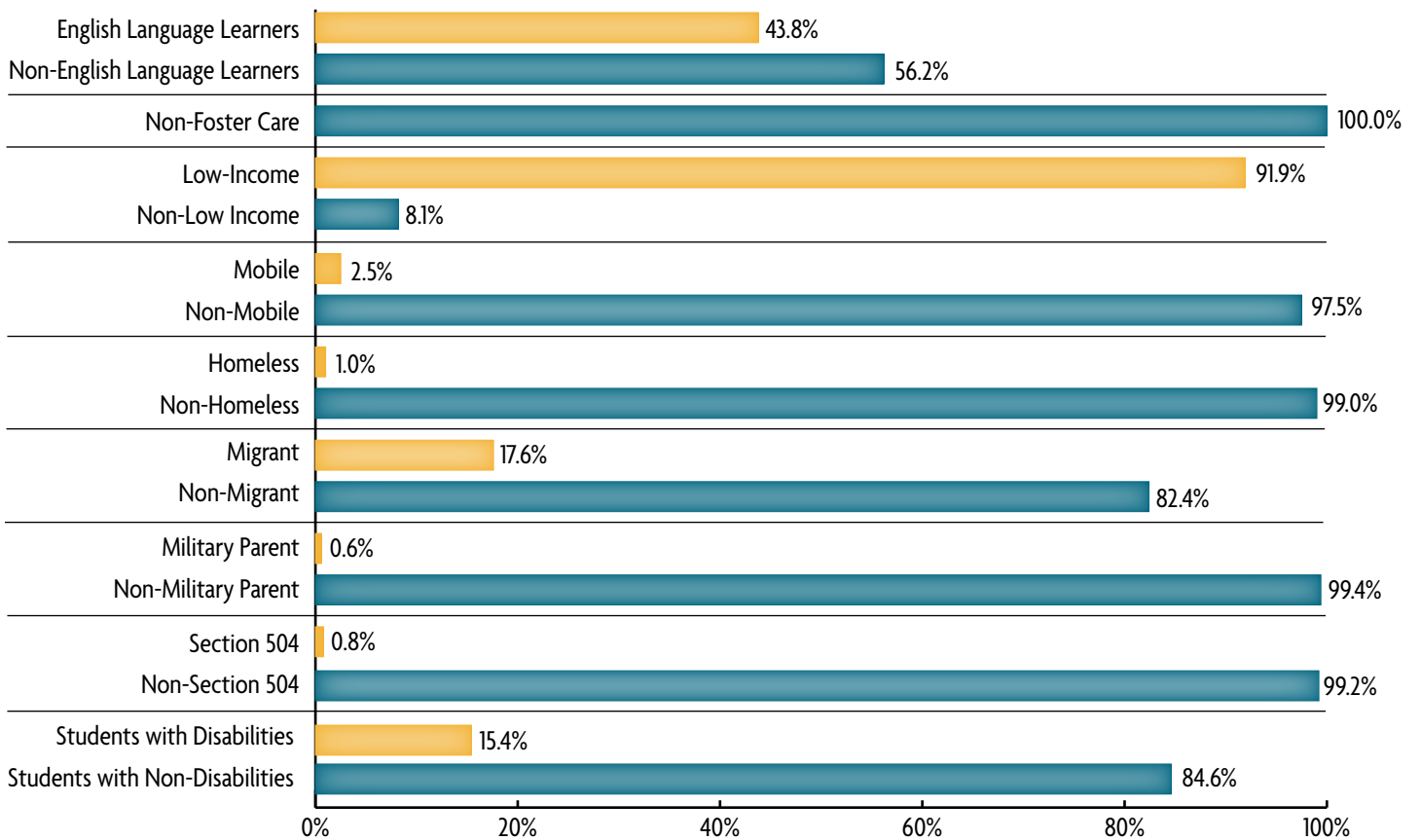


Figure 3: Kirkwood Elementary enrollment by program (OSPI, 2020)

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2020). Washington State Report Card. Retrieved from <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103255>