

Kids in Transition to School Highlights from Summer 2016

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What is the KITS Program?



In June and July 2016, Lane County launched an ambitious project to expand the evidence-based Kids in Transition to School (KITS) Program in 12 school districts. KITS is an intensive, 16 week program that provides biweekly group-based kindergarten readiness activities to children (“School Readiness Groups”) and weekly parenting groups for family members. As part of this effort, Portland State University is conducting an evaluation of the KITS implementation and outcomes. Information presented here includes data from: (1) KITS teacher and facilitator surveys; (2) Baseline surveys with 256 participating parents; (3) Qualitative interviews with school and district

staff; (4) Parent focus groups held in four participating schools. Some key early learnings from these sources are summarized below. Program outcomes will be shared in Spring 2017.

Baseline Parent Survey Findings

Multiple Ways of “Getting the Word Out” are Important. Families heard about KITS a number of different ways:

- 56% of families learned about KITS at their local kindergarten round up
- 26% learned from their Head Start or PreK partner
- 23% got flyers or other information from the elementary school
- 13% heard about it from other parents,
- 4-10% heard about it from other community advertisements (e.g., radio, Facebook, community flyers, posters, etc.)

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PARENTS ABOUT BENEFITS TO CHILDREN

“My daughter was in Head Start, which was a great school as well. I think this just pushed her even farther because she had the summer off. Having that extra time in KITS before school started made the transition really easy. It just kind of opened up the door and made it easier to just walk in school and she is ready to go!”

“My daughter had high anxiety. Because of what [KITS] was teaching, her anxiety lessened and she was able to open up more around the class...it was awesome to see her not be afraid”.

“Riding the bus was a huge thing. He loves that. He will not let me take him to school. He loves the independence and he knows what he is doing. It really boosted his confidence”.

“Before this, because both me and my husband are stay-at-home, [my son] never got much socialization....so I was very happy with the program”.

PARENTS BENEFITED FROM KITS AS WELL

Programs Recruited Families with Relatively Diverse Experiences & Characteristics

- 83% of children were white; 17% were Latino/Hispanic, 6% Alaska Native/Native American, and 5% African American
- About half (54%) of children had participated in Head Start or another Preschool prior to KITS
- About a quarter (24%) had experienced no regular childcare from persons other than the parent/guardian
- 30% of parents had a high school diploma or less education; 22% had a bachelor's degree or higher
- Two thirds (62%) of parents were married

At Enrollment, Many Children Would Benefit from Additional Support for Kindergarten Readiness

Parents varied in how much developmental support they provided in the home before the KITS Program:

- One in four parents (24%) engaged in relatively few developmentally supportive activities with children (e.g., singing, reading, doing shopping, playing games)
- 30% reported reading to the child 1-2 times per week or less, and only 35% reported daily reading to their child
- Most families have access to books, although 1 in 5 had fewer than 25 books at home, and 5% had fewer than 10 books at home
- Only about half of parents felt their child was “very ready” to start school, and 37% reported being worried about their child starting school
- Parents were least confident in their own ability to support children's math learning at home; more felt confident supporting reading and most reported understanding the importance of attendance
- About 25% of parents reported challenges setting boundaries for children and using consistent discipline



At Enrollment, Many Children Could Benefit from Support to Develop Self-Regulation and Social Skills

- Parents were most likely to report that children had problems with self-control and paying attention. These critical dimensions of self-regulation are a central focus of the KITS program

“Just approaching her more gently versus getting frustrated myself. That just helped remind me of everything I’ve already learned, and to use those strategies versus getting frustrated.”

“Being with other parents and hearing everybody’s struggles and achievements in a safe place, and knowing we are all in the same boat together and we are not alone in this...”

“Getting ideas from advice from other parents helped me a lot, because [my son] can be a little difficult”.

“There were things I said, ‘oh, this isn’t going to work’, but I gave it a shot. One of them was time outs – this isn’t going to work, we’ve tried this.

Within two days of doing it, it was like, ‘wow, this is working and we are still implementing that now. Wow, it worked!’

- Most children had relatively strong social skills, however, and relatively infrequent externalizing behaviors (e.g., tantrums, hitting, etc.)

Teachers in the child School Readiness Groups were generally very positive about the KITS model. The more beneficial parts of the program were it's:

- Strengths-based approach,
- Strategies and approach to teaching social-emotional skills,
- Emphasis on supporting structure and routine,
- Support for and attention to transitions, and
- Strategies for teaching self-regulation skills.

Consistent attendance was the challenge most often reported: close to half of teachers reported that consistent attendance had been very challenging or somewhat challenging.

KITS Teacher & Facilitator Survey Findings

Parent Group Facilitators were likewise enthusiastic about the program, and saw the biggest success in terms of:

- The content and strategies for weekly topic instruction,
- The weekly group discussions,
- Use of raffles and incentives for parent participation.

Teachers and Facilitators reported that consistent attendance was the biggest challenge, especially for KITS workshops in the Fall.

Over three-quarters (78%) of KITS staff would like to return in Year 2.

TEACHERS LEARNED NEW SKILLS

"I'm really grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of such a fantastic program! I have learned so much in the short time I've been involved with KITS, and I am truly a better teacher for it!"

"I feel the KITS training and approach has given the school staff involved better skills for managing student behavior and for supporting students to help them with self-regulation skills. I like that it gives them skills to encourage positive behavior rather than working from a deficit model"

"I was involved in KITS several years ago, and it's actually what convinced me to go into teaching. The behavior management strategies really work, and I love how structured the program is. It's really hard to fail when you have so much structure and support."

"KITS has given me tools to support student learning and manage group and classroom behavior. I am much more effective in my school district job since participating in KITS training."