

Office of Early Learning Newsletter



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A Message from the Director, Jason Breslin, NBCT:

First and foremost, I want to wish everyone a Happy 2021! With a new year ahead of us, I am continually impressed by the resilience of our youngest learners, as well as the adaptability of the early learning workforce as schools move between in-person learning and remote learning due to the ongoing pandemic. I want to thank everyone for the continuous efforts to ensure the safety of our youngest learners every day. I am looking forward to when we can travel again so I can see all the great things going on in our Pre-K classrooms in NYS. Please remain to be safe and healthy.

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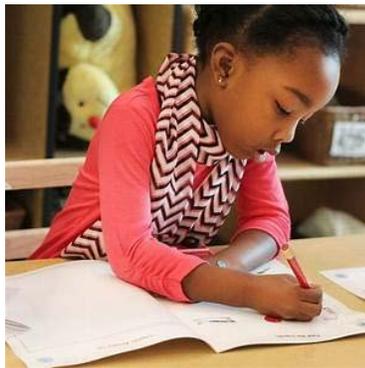
[Reminder to Submit FS-10-A Amendments for the 2020-2021 School Year](#)

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Planning for January to June 2021



Christine Herts and [Kristi Mraz](#), Authors of Kids First from Day One have created planning resources to support early childhood educators “[Plan for a Very Different Year.](#)” This link will provide planning charts for reflection on the physical environment, Social Emotional Environment and Responsive Teaching.



Transitions

It is never too early to begin thinking about transitioning prekindergarten students into the kindergarten program for the 2021-2022 program year. Below are some resources to get started!

- The Council on Children and Families NYSB5 grant webpage has [examples of virtual videos](#) and other resources that programs can use to plan for transitions.
- The Planning Tool to Support Effective Transitions from Prekindergarten to Kindergarten located on the NYSED OEL website will help to determine how complete the [school district's](#) or [program's](#) prekindergarten to kindergarten transition plan is. It may signal areas for improvement for the district or program and areas to work on to ensure a positive start for young children transitioning into the school community.
- This [December 2020 brief from the National P-3 Center](#) provides examples of pandemic related changes to learning context for families, staff, and administrators. The brief offers strategies for school districts in supporting young learners and their families and staff during pandemic related transitions.



Virtual Prekindergarten... One Teacher's Experience

Every morning at 9:00am Ana Banda-Wemple initiates her Google Meet. There the children appear on the screen with big smiles, dressed in their favorite clothing, wearing the headphones purchased with donations from her friends. They start their day by singing in Spanish:

“Mi escolita, mi escolita, Yo la quiero con amor, Porque en ella, porque en ella, Es que aprendo la lección.” “My little school, my little school, I love it so much, because in it, because in it, the fact is, I learn my lessons.”

By the time the song ends, the children have learned that it is time to start online school for the day.

Ana Banda-Wemple is a prekindergarten teacher in the City School District of Albany. She teaches at Delaware Community School which is home to the district's dual language program. Students in Ana's prekindergarten classroom are learning to be bilingual and biliterate in both English and Spanish. With over 30 years of experience in education (28 years in America and four years in her native country of Peru), she offers us a first-person account of what teaching is like for her during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been Ana's experience.

“Something that surprised me about my students is their willingness to be a part of this”, Ana said. She describes her students as happy, eager, and resilient. She says that every day, they are smiling and ready to learn.

She also considers herself lucky to have very involved families. “You have to have good relationships with the parents. Parents must believe that you want the best for their children. That’s it! Whatever you do after that, they will work with you. If the parents know you are invested, and they will support whatever you are doing because you want the best for their kids,” she said.

Each day Ana takes attendance by holding up a flash card with each child’s name. She may say for example, “¿Dónde está Andres?” “Where is Andres?”. The students say hello to each other in Spanish. Her circle routine includes many songs that build skills such as counting, the calendar, and the weather. These routines are like those in which Ana uses in an in-person setting. For example, after the final “shhh” in the song “La lechuza, la lechuza, hace shhh, hace shhh”, the children know they are about to listen to a story. After discussing the story, the children know there will be physical movement followed by closure to the activity. Ana stresses the importance of repetition and consistent routines to build comfort in both virtual and in-person settings. She advises that maintaining structure offers opportunities for contextualized and anticipated language learning.

Ana emphasizes the challenges that contradict her philosophy on educating four-year olds. Some challenges are a lack of play, not being able to assess or assess with validity, low peer-to-peer communication, and a lack of access to developmentally appropriate literature and other resources. As a bilingual teacher, she notes that in-person teaching creates many more opportunities for parallel talk and misses this strategy as she encourages growth in the new language.

She admits that teaching through technology is not only against her philosophy for early childhood education but like for many, there has been a professional and personal learning curve. Despite all of this, she has risen to the challenge and used the 2020 summer months to transform a bedroom in her home into a virtual classroom and get comfortable with media, programs, and online platforms. “I am surprised by the amount of learning that I have done this year,” she said. One tip she shares is to get two monitors if you can. This way you can use media and see the children interact.

All the students have their own weather wheel constructed during one of their weekly theme-based assignments. Each week, she assigns a project for the children to do outside of class because she believes hands-on learning is critical. The children work on their projects with materials disseminated to parents/guardians in September. By sharing photographs of their projects and sharing them on the screen, the children practice presenting orally.

Ana builds one-on-one time into her weekly schedule with her students. This gives her an opportunity to communicate with each child individually in English and/or Spanish, to complete required screenings and assess learning. At times, she will work with two students at once to

facilitate student-to-student interaction and promote new language use. As an example of how she has built community, Ana sent holiday greeting cards made with photographs of everyone in the class to each student at their home address. She says, “This small gesture made the students feel like they belong to a group” and gave them something that encapsulate their prekindergarten experience.

There is no doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has added unprecedented challenges to early childhood teachers, their students, and families. The expertise and judgment of educators are critically important to solving these challenges as the pandemic continues and in its aftermath. How educators like Ana continue to find joy and success amid existing obstacles is truly inspiring.

Ana shares that no matter what the setting (virtual or in-person), making connections, having consistent routines, and transitions are critical for success. To Pre-K educators who may be struggling with virtual teaching, Ana provides the following advice: “It gets better. Create routines. Involve the families. Create connections with the families. Be vulnerable. Tell the parents that this is new for you too. Remember, we are all in this together.” (From an interview with Ana Banda-Wemple, December 31, 2020).

Principal Baruti K. Kafele Supports Leaders



This summer [Principal Kafele](#) partnered with NYSED OEL and presented a webinar on leadership in an early childhood setting. Over the past few months he has continued to support the education field with a variety of writings, blogs and videos. In [this latest writing](#), Principal Kafele discusses mental health and leadership. “To be an effective leader, you must be intentional and deliberate about taking care of your mental and physical health.” Kafele provides thoughtful suggestions and reflective questions for leaders during the pandemic and a time of social change. You can also check out [Principal Kafele’s message to Early Childhood Educators](#) and follow him on [Twitter](#) @PrincipalKafele.

Save
the
Date

New York Association for the Education of Young Children

Promoting excellence in early care and education services for New York State children and families, through education, advocacy and the support of the profession.

Presents

NYAEYC Virtual Annual Conference

Write on, NY!

[Write on, NY!](#) is a New York State Education Department website and initiative that promotes and supports student writing in New York State. The initiative utilizes the Lifelong Practices for Readers and Writers to encourage students' engagement in writing. The Write on, NY! webpage highlights each practice, then links to key elements for writing, as well as classroom resources. The Department thanks the many [teachers and educators who are part of this partnership](#) and continue to assist with the work.

In an effort to promote this initiative, we invite students statewide to enter the [Write on, NY! Logo Design Contest](#). The contest is open to all New York State students in prekindergarten through grade 12. The deadline for entries is February 28, 2021. Winning logo designs will be announced in March 2021. The student's name, school, and district (if applicable) will be published with the design.

More resources will be developed and added in 2021!

Questions pertaining to the Write on, NY! initiative or the logo design contest can be directed to the Office of Curriculum and Instruction at emscurric@nysed.gov or (518) 474-5922.

Staying Connected Stories

“The 2020-2021 school year brought many challenges for educators all over the world. Teachers were challenged to adjust to a new way of teaching that was once unimaginable, and keep students engaged in a way we never would have expected.”

– Victoria Celenza, Prekindergarten Teacher, Catholic School Region of Rockland, Ulster, Sullivan and Orange

The Department is grateful to the dedicated educators and school personnel who are working so diligently to ensure that students are safe and well. We encourage you to [Submit Your Story](#) detailing how you continue to stay connected with your students and families throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

For additional ideas and inspiration, please see this [series of slides](#) describing early childhood virtual programming at Archdiocese of New York.

“Initially starting this school year, I thought it would be very difficult to make connections with the children. But right before Thanksgiving break, I told the children we would be having five no Zoom days. One little girl started crying and screaming, ‘I don't like that - I don't like that!’ I realized she was genuinely sad because she would not see me, and that, yes, it is possible to make strong connections with EPK children on Zoom.”

-Terri Walters, Lead EPK Teacher, Generations Child Care, Monroe County



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