

# 4 Innovative, Local Programs Smooth Kindergarten Transitions

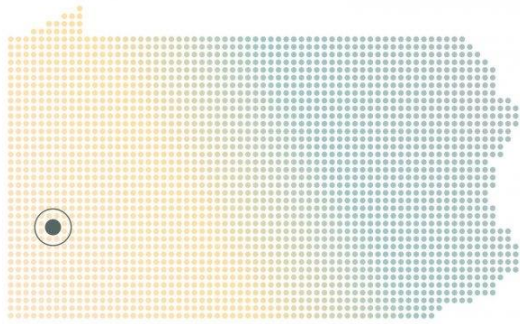
Starting school can be stressful for children, parents, and schools, but communities throughout the country are meeting the challenge head-on.

By [Nora Fleming](#)  
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## Community Alliances

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Pittsburgh Public Schools had a problem.

Despite the research proving the importance of kindergarten, parents of kindergarten-aged children were missing key district enrollment dates, or were completely unaware of their options and responsibilities as the school year approached.

Not surprisingly, some children were starting kindergarten partway through the year and losing out on critical lessons and developmental opportunities, which put them at a clear disadvantage. The issue seemed most pronounced among low-income parents and children in need of a strong foundation as they embarked on their early years of schooling.

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The inventive solution involved pizza delivery and a frog costume.

Starting with the low-income community of North View Heights, staff from the University of Pittsburgh's Office of Child Development began working with the Pittsburgh district to develop programming aimed at guiding parents through the registration process.

With parent input, the organizers quickly realized the outreach had to be locally driven to be effective. They reached out to a local pizza shop, which agreed to include important information about kindergarten—like enrollment dates and details about the registration process—on the pizza boxes when delivering to North View Heights. The organizers also held a free hair-braiding night for incoming kindergartners and parents at a local school.

[The Ready Freddy program](#)

Full Article: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/4-innovative-programs-support-kindergarten-transition-for-students-and-parents-nora-fleming>

Now in its eighth year, Ready Freddy, which adopted an amiable frog as its mascot, has worked with schools and families across the Pittsburgh district to help parents understand the importance of kindergarten.

Partnering schools develop kindergarten transition teams composed of school and Ready Freddy staff, parents, teachers, and community partners, and create welcome centers so parents feel more comfortable visiting schools. Each school also runs a Kindergarten Kickoff event on the first day to create a memorable, celebratory environment geared to both parents and their children—parents are even invited to stay all day.



A Pittsburgh kindergarten student high-fives Freddy the Frog as she walks into school.

Meanwhile, Freddy the Frog has become a minor celebrity: He’s now the official mascot for kindergarten throughout the district. Freddy appears at events like cookouts, carnivals, and tours to get kids excited about kindergarten, and frog prints line school hallways to guide parents to key spots within their child’s school.

At last count, the Ready Freddy program was working with 10 public elementary schools in the Pittsburgh district. Sixteen local schools also participate in the Kindergarten Kickoff. At the end of the year, the program will phase out as schools are expected to carry on the work independently.