



unconference:  
2026

# Kindergarten Transition

**Monday, February 16, 2026**

8 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

**Allegheny Intermediate Unit**

475 E. Waterfront Drive, Homestead, PA 15120

Tickets: \$25

For more information and to register, visit:

<https://bit.ly/Feb2026UnConference>



Trying Together, in partnership with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, United Way of SWPA, and Hi5! is excited to present *UnConference: Kindergarten Transition*.

This UnConference will highlight multiple aspects of preparing early learners for Kindergarten, from early intervention practices and engaging parents to play-based learning and emotional regulation.

Our keynote speaker is Swati Adarkar, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary, Policy and Early Learning, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for the Department of Education under the Biden administration.

This will be followed by an insightful panel, and attendees can choose from five sessions led by local and national early childhood organizations.

HOST



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# UnConference: Kindergarten Transition

## Session information

### How Community Partnerships Strengthen Kindergarten Readiness Efforts

Amber Humbert, Kinder Care

The transition to Kindergarten is so much more than moving from preschool to "big school." It's an event that involves families, schools, and local organizations working together to support a child's academic, emotional, and social readiness. During this session, we will explore how partnerships between early childhood programs, elementary schools, and community organizations can bridge gaps and improve kindergarten readiness outcomes.

### A K.I.N.D. Framework for Engaging Parents

Katelyn Collins, Educational Consultant and Facilitator

Brooke Klaus, Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Mental Health Coach

In this session, participants will explore a four-part approach to engaging families throughout the pre-Kindergarten year. K.I.N.D. stands for Kindness, Information, Navigation, and Decision-Making, four essential elements for building strong partnerships with parents. Together, we'll unpack each component, equipping educators and professionals with practical strategies to support families and navigate challenges with confidence and connection as they move through the Kindergarten transition year.

### Preparing for Kindergarten with Fred Rogers Productions

Mallory Mbalia, Fred Rogers Productions

Join Fred Rogers Productions for a session featuring its current television series and the strategies and skills that they model. In the "Neighborhood of Make Believe," Daniel Tiger and his friends practice strategies for emotional regulation, navigating new situations, working, playing with friends, and more. In "Someplace Else," Donkey Hodie and her pals' resilience, persistence, and problem solving are featured. Alma's Way models how to think things through and make responsible decisions. Participants will walk away with free resources and activities they can use right away to help young learners get ready for kindergarten!

### Strengthening My Early Learner: A Parent's Journey

Nancy Villarreal and Maria Rosales, Parent Organization Network

Parent Organization Network (PON) developed the 4ELS (For The Success Of English Learners), considering the needs, concerns, problems, and interests of their parents, to train and strengthen their commitment, empowerment, and roles as parents, leaders, and advocates for their children. PON strives to support families with young children who have not yet entered the school system. In this session, we will share how to provide parents with information to make informed decisions about language development milestones, the importance of multilingualism, school readiness, the identification and reclassification process for English learners, and their options for ELD (English Language Development) and academic progress monitoring. This early knowledge empowers families to seek high-quality preschool programs, engage in enriching language activities at home, and build strong collaborations with educators.

PON emphasizes early intervention to ensure English learners have a strong foundation for long-term academic success and equal access to opportunities.

### The Power of Play

Ann Brandt, Supporting Kids in Play (SKIP)

Increasing academic demands have significantly diminished play opportunities in early childhood education, yet play remains essential for children's development. This session examines the current landscape of play in early childhood and explores its critical role in supporting physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and creative growth. Participants will analyze contemporary barriers limiting play while reviewing research demonstrating that play serves as a vital vehicle for learning and whole child development. The session presents an actionable case study showcasing successful integration of increased play opportunities in an early childhood setting, equipping attendees with practical implementation strategies and advocacy tools to champion play-based practices in their educational contexts.