The Building Better Bridges (BBB) intervention was created to help autistic students from under-resourced families move successfully through transitions from preschool to kindergarten; or elementary to middle or high school.

"...Families are engaged with members of the research team with designated modules around what steps do they need to take to develop the relationship with the new school. It puts a lot of power in the feet of the family so they can drive this positive successful transition."

— Suzannah Iadarola; Peds Psychologist & Asst. Prof. of Peds, URMC

From: Democrat and Chronicle: [UR researchers aim to close gap in autism support services in low-income districts](UR researchers aim to close gap in autism support services in low-income districts)

**Why we need to build better bridges**

Switching between grades or schools can be really stressful for autistic kids. It’s tough for teachers and parents to give enough support during these times. We’re mainly looking at the big changes, like moving from one school to another, such as preschool to Kindergarten. For autistic children, these changes can mean losing important help. Without support before, during, and after these switches, they might lose important progress they’ve made. How do we create that support?
Strategies to support a smooth transition are multi-faceted:

**Student Strategies**
- **Exposure**: Visiting the new school before school starts can familiarize them with the environment and reduce anxiety.
- **Predictability**: Visual aids like schedules, maps, and Social Narratives (personalized stories where the student is the character and the new school is the setting) can help students understand routines and expectations.
- **Social Support**: Peer buddies and designated safe spaces can provide comfort and support.
- **Self-regulation**: Teaching coping mechanisms to manage emotions is crucial.

**Parent Strategies**
- **Information gathering**: Attending workshops and creating transition binders can keep them informed and organized.
- **Communication**: Maintaining open communication with teachers can ensure everyone is on the same page.
- **Support networks**: Connecting with support groups can provide guidance and resources.
- **Advocacy**: Parents may need to advocate for their child’s specific needs to be met.

**Teacher Strategies**
- **Communication**: Collaboration between old and new schools, and frequent communication with parents, is essential.
- **Planning**: Individualized planning that considers the student’s specific needs. A key tool is Student Snapshots: a profile of the student that current teachers fill in; and give to new teachers who use it to get to know the student and their needs.
- **Knowledge and Training**: Educating themselves about ASD and implementing appropriate accommodations is vital.
- **Sensory adaptations**: Creating a sensory-friendly environment can improve the student’s comfort level.

**Transitions are a team effort.** Through implementing these strategies and fostering collaboration between parents, teachers, and students, schools can create a smoother transition process and a more supportive learning environment for autistic students.

REFERENCE: Nuske, H. J., et al., 2019
PULLING TOOLS FROM SUGGESTIONS

The research team created a passport for parents and teachers to record a student’s strengths and interests, aiding in communication with new teachers and transitions between classrooms. Called the “student snapshot”, families wrote it with the pre-transition teacher, which was then handed over to post-transition teacher. Importantly, this snapshot could be duplicated and used for students with multiple teachers in higher grades. Please look at the livebinder for other resources created (examples below).

Parent Transitioning Checklist
What to Expect
Understanding the Educational Team
Know Your Rights
Gather Info about New School
Prepare Child over Summer

OUTCOMES: COACHING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Results show that BBB caregiver coaching, compared to caregivers receiving modules and resource binder without coaching, improves overall transition planning and success for under-resourced families and racially/ethnically diverse autistic students (Nuske, H.J. et al., 2024).
Additional Resources

Building Better Bridges Livebinders and PDFS

Available in both english and spanish for kindergarten. BBB can be found on airbnetwork.org and the link below.

Note: Use the access key BBB.

Go to BBB Links, or use camera on QR code below:

REFERENCES