



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

September 7, 2023

Dear Colleague,

We join elementary school principals, teachers, and staff across the country in welcoming the class of 2036, our entering kindergarteners! We know that our youngest students are arriving with anticipation, curiosity, some nervousness, and excitement. For many students, this will mark the beginning of their elementary school journey. Parents share many of these same emotions as they trust our educators and schools with supporting the dreams, aspirations, and educational attainment of their children.

Ensuring that **Kindergarten is a sturdy bridge** between the early years and early grades is a foundational building block of the **Raise the Bar Initiative** to achieve academic excellence through accelerated learning and a well-rounded, rigorous education. This is because kindergarten is the first at-scale learning opportunity for students to receive many of the critical supports and interventions in a school setting that are essential for on-track development. Kindergarten is a key inflection point for early learning, early school success, and equity, as the achievement gap at the end of kindergarten is substantial and can persist into and through elementary school.¹

To support efforts for a transformational kindergarten year, the U.S Department of Education (Department) is launching a multistate community of practice: **Kindergarten Sturdy Bridge Learning Community**. State educational agencies and local educational agencies will have the opportunity to participate in peer learning, receive technical assistance, share and learn about best practices, and strengthen and build new collaborative networks to transform how students experience kindergarten.

The community of practice is designed around local implementation of evidence-based and innovative models of instructional and assessment practices to enhance students' access to a well-rounded education. Early childhood and early elementary school experts will facilitate monthly community of practice calls that include presentations, resources, and problem-solving around topics such as culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate practices; inclusion of children with disabilities; social, emotional, and behavioral supports; and authentic partnerships with parents, caregivers, and families. The community of practice will also include a focus on two key transitions important to reducing gaps and creating a more seamless learning experience between the early years and the early grades: the transition into kindergarten, and from kindergarten to first grade.

¹ [Improving Early Equity: From Evidence to Action. OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/improving-early-equity-from-evidence-to-action_9789264302622)

A community of practice invitation and [interest form](#) due October 6, 2023, will be sent to Chief State School Officers. Please contact KindergartenSturdyBridge@unc.edu with questions or for assistance.

The kindergarten year presents a crucial opportunity to build partnerships and trust with parents and families, and to work with them on nurturing the habits and routines, including everyday attendance, that are essential to accelerating learning recovery and assuring early school success. Thank you for all you do to make our first universal access point of public education a year of joyful discovery and play-based learning. Together, we can meet the unique developmental needs of every student and set them on pathway to success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Swati Adarkar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Swati Adarkar
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Policy and Early Learning