



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Early Childhood Development



Early Childhood Development
CATALYSTS



SUPPORTING SMOOTH KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS

A report on PDG B-5 Renewal Grant
Applications

Acknowledgements

The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) grant program is co-administered by the Office of Child Care (OCC) at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of Early Learning in the U.S. Department of Education (ED). ACF's Office of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is supporting the implementation of PDG B-5 and other federal interagency partnerships to prioritize early childhood development across ACF and with federal partners. In the summer of 2020, Lauren McCarthy, MSW, LCSW, doctoral student with the University of Maryland, Baltimore, School of Social Work (UMB SSW) was placed with ECD for her Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) assignment through an agreement with UMB SSW and supervised by Melissa Brodowski, Deputy Director of ECD. As part of the GRA, Ms. McCarthy was asked to review, analyze, and summarize what states proposed to respond to the bonus points for supporting transition to school from early childhood programs in their funded PDG B-5 Renewal Grants from the fall of 2019. Lauren P. McCarthy is the primary author for this report, which was conducted with guidance from Richard Gonzales, PDG B-5 Project Manager, OCC and the ECD Team (Melissa Brodowski, Deputy Director; Rosie Gomez, Senior Program Specialist; and Kristin Kane, Senior Advisor). Many thanks to Shannon Christian, Director, OCC and Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director, ECD and Office of Head Start (OHS) for their guidance along the way. Special thanks to Alyssa Hobson, ECD intern from Michigan State University who assisted with the final formatting and graphics in the report.

Abstract

This report presents states' planned activities to support smooth transitions from early childhood care and education settings into kindergarten and the early grades. Data was gathered from PDG B-5 renewal applications funded in 2019. Additional data was gathered from selected state Needs Assessments and Strategic Plans that were accepted by OCC and available at the time this report was written. This report is not intended as a comprehensive review; rather, it includes examples from the applications to describe plans proposed by the states to support transition to school.

Introduction

Our understanding of the importance of early childhood for development across the lifespan has grown considerably in the past decade (Daelmans et al., 2017). Early childhood education provides key cognitive, social, and emotional support for healthy development (Essa, 2012). In recognition of the importance of early childhood education for ensuring healthy development and positive outcomes and the importance of supporting the state early childhood systems needed, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) released an initial funding announcement in 2018 for states to apply for Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) which included a requirement for conducting a needs assessment and developing a strategic plan.

In 2019, ACF gave states the opportunity to expand on the work they completed during the initial grant period by applying for Renewal funding. In these applications, states were asked to describe their progress on work proposed in the initial grant and identify new activities to support quality comprehensive early childhood education delivery systems. In FY2019, 46 states and territories received an initial PDG B-5 Grant Award and 23 states were awarded 3-year PDG B-5 Renewal Grants. The purpose of this report is to review states' plans to support smooth transitions from early childhood care and education settings into kindergarten as described in their renewal grant application.

Transitions are any point during the lifespan when an individual must adjust to a new environment (Elder, 1998) and are a natural part of any child's developmental trajectory. When children enter kindergarten and begin school, they experience a major transition during a key point in their development (Purtell et al., 2020). This move can be a difficult time for many children and families. The behavioral and academic standards in the kindergarten setting, as well as the environment, are often drastically different than those in early childhood education settings or the home (Mashburn et al., 2018). This

transition into kindergarten has been long recognized by the field of early childhood as a critical period for children’s development and future outcomes.

In an effort to understand how schools approach transitions, Purtell et al. (2020) conducted a series of interviews with teachers and administrators. Their study identified three areas of key coordination practices: *Knowledge transfer*, or the sharing of information about a child between a sending program and the receiving school; *Alignment*, involving sharing of information regarding readiness expectations or curricula content to ensure children are properly prepared for kindergarten; and finally *connecting families* to kindergarten programs so that they feel engaged and informed on how to prepare their child for this monumental change. To encourage support for this important time in a child’s life, grant applicants received bonus points for plans to pilot or expand existing efforts to facilitate transitions and align services for children and their families. These activities were to be focused on the following key areas:

1. **Parent knowledge of the options and transition processes and the alignment of services** that will support children’s individual progress and developmental needs.
2. **Ongoing collaboration** between Pre-k, kindergarten, and the early grades professionals.
3. **Partnerships between early childhood programs and local education districts and schools.**
4. **Aligned curricular strategies, comprehensive services and supports** and professional development.

The following section of the report provides a brief overview of findings from states’

Needs Assessments

States awarded an initial PDG B-5 grant were required to conduct a Needs Assessment that included an assessment of current transition practices and supports.

Out of the 26 states who were awarded renewal grants, 17 had an approved Needs Assessment at the writing of this report. Based on data from those needs assessments, states were able to identify strengths and resources related to transition practices that included guides for educators and activities for families such as home visits or summer orientations. Several states had existing efforts or legislation related to supporting transitions already in place. For example, Florida created a kindergarten transition guidance website after holding local focus groups and summits in 2018 and 2019. Other states, such as Kansas, have standardized assessments of kindergarten readiness already in use.

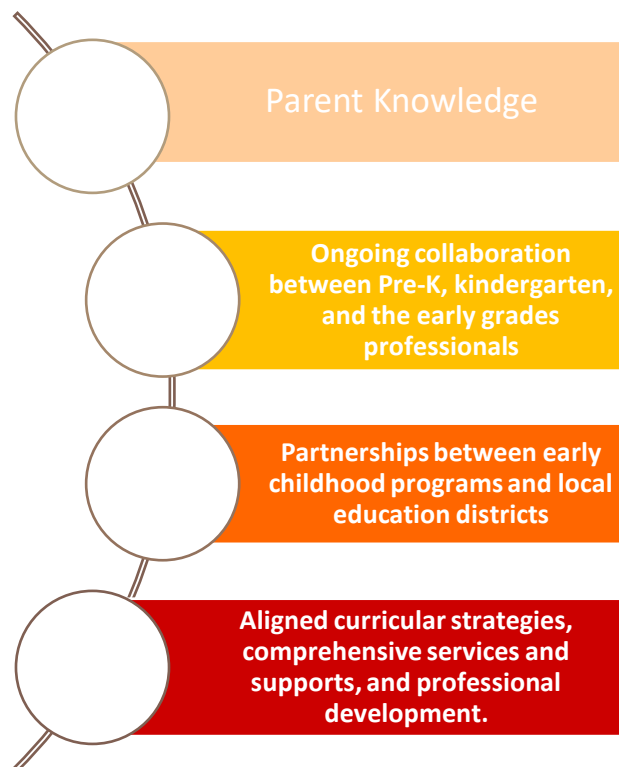
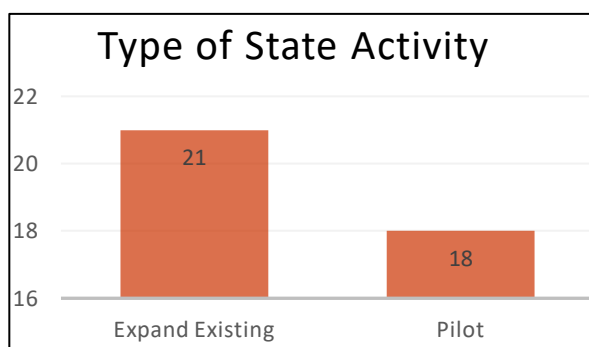
Despite these strengths, most states identified areas where transition practices could be improved. These opportunities for improvement fell into three general themes: *inconsistent practices, lack of knowledge, and barriers to accessing existing supports*. States that identified inconsistent transition practices found that while local districts or certain programs had strong transition supports in place, these were not experienced by all children and families. The larger theme of lack of knowledge included smaller sub-categories: lack of parent knowledge about enrollment or existing programs, lack of educator knowledge about best transition practices, and lack of educator knowledge about incoming students. Finally, states found that many families experienced barriers to accessing existing transition supports and programs. These barriers included a lack of information about programming available in their primary language, a lack of

transportation to existing transition programming, and programming only being offered during their work hours.

Renewal Grants

States proposed a variety of activities to support smooth transitions into kindergarten. These activities were reviewed for common themes, which are described below. The following visual will be used to demonstrate how these themes aligned with the requirements of the grant applications:

States addressed these requirements by creating pilot programs and expanding existing efforts:



Eight states demonstrated their commitment to improving transitions into kindergarten by using subgrants to support local partners. These subgrants included

A map of the United States highlighting the 12 states with the highest percentage of the population aged 65 and over. The highlighted states are California (CA), Nevada (NV), Arizona (AZ), Texas (TX), New Mexico (NM), Colorado (CO), Kansas (KS), Nebraska (NE), Oklahoma (OK), Missouri (MO), Iowa (IA), and Wisconsin (WI). The map also shows the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with state abbreviations labeled. The highlighted states are colored orange, while the other states are light gray.

A map of the United States highlighting the 12 states with the highest percentage of the population aged 65 and over. The highlighted states are California (CA), Nevada (NV), Arizona (AZ), Texas (TX), New Mexico (NM), Colorado (CO), Kansas (KS), Nebraska (NE), Oklahoma (OK), Missouri (MO), Iowa (IA), and Wisconsin (WI). The map also shows the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with state abbreviations labeled. The highlighted states are colored orange, while the other states are light gray.

<i>North Carolina</i>	Is creating materials to guide and support families through the transition from IDEA Part B to C
<i>Rhode Island</i>	Creating a Family Navigator program that will provide information to families and support them in accessing services, including the transition from IDEA Part C to B
<i>South Carolina</i>	Increase family's awareness of supports and transitions for children who are Deaf or hard of hearing moving from IDEA Part C to B, including a peer coaching program

State Activities

Readiness Support

Alignment

Parent Knowledge

States identified various strategies that supported kindergarten readiness, even if they did not directly target transition practices. Strategies that supported kindergarten readiness included public awareness campaigns, like Alabama's '[Born Ready](#)', that include information about kindergarten readiness and tips for preparing children for formal schooling. Other strategies included promoting early literacy, such as New York's '[Talking is Teaching](#)' public awareness campaign to promote parent involvement in readying their child for kindergarten. Virginia will be building a website in multiple languages that includes family-friendly resources and tools aligned to their new readiness assessment tool that will eventually expand to include text messaging. This tool, the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program, will be used at the beginning and end of the year and includes assessment of both academic such as literacy and math and socioemotional skills, such as self-regulation and social skills.

Other states committed to piloting or expanding home visiting programs to promote kindergarten readiness (Alabama, Rhode Island, and South Carolina). These evidence-based programs aim to increase parent engagement in their children's learning and development, creating active, empowered partners in preparing children for kindergarten and the early grades.

Additional strategies for promoting readiness included expanding assessment practices, adding an indicator of early childhood care and education providers' promotion of readiness to quality rating systems, and establishing statewide annual readiness benchmarks.

A closer look: Readiness Support

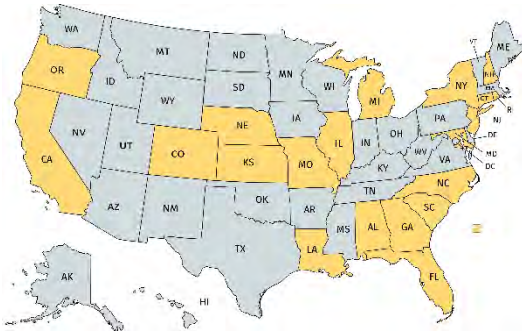
North Carolina will be helping children get ready for kindergarten using “**Ready Rosie**”: An evidence-based active family engagement system that promotes ready schools, educators, and families. Ready Rosie provides quick videos that portray ‘model moments’, or simple activities based in readiness learning goals to engage parents in their child's learning and development. Providers can create custom playlists for families to address their child's unique needs, and track engagement through an easy-to-use dashboard.

Professional Development

Alignment

Collaboration

Twenty states (highlighted on map in yellow) targeted improving transition supports through professional development. These states took a variety of approaches to using professional development opportunities to support smooth transitions. Two prominent strategies were adding training content on best practices for facilitating kindergarten transitions (California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) to holding joint professional



development with early childhood and elementary school educators to foster collaboration (Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New

Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Oregon). States that added or expanded content on transitions to professional development for early childhood educators targeted knowledge of evidence-based transition practices, ways to prepare and support families during the transition to kindergarten, ways to align curricula to kindergarten and the early grades, and assessment practices to ensure that receiving districts have a full picture of children entering kindergarten. South Carolina will be pairing training on how to engage families in the transition process with technical assistance to ensure quality implementation. Some states made completion of

transitions content a requirement for early childhood educators hoping to receive credentials (California, Illinois, Louisiana, and Missouri).

A closer look: Professional Development

States also committed to providing professional development on transition practices to elementary educators. For example, New Hampshire will be providing direct coaching to kindergarten teachers in using play-based learning techniques in the classroom to better align kindergarten with early childhood education. Another approach to targeting smooth transitions through professional development for elementary educators used by Missouri and Nebraska was hosting leadership academies for elementary school principals to build competency around transition practices or support implementation of new transition frameworks at the local level. States such as South Carolina also provided direct technical assistance for transitions to early childhood education programs. Other states, like North Carolina, paired this technical assistance with shared professional development on best practices for assessment and supporting transitions to provide support to both early childhood and elementary educators. Rhode Island committed to providing technical assistance to transitions between different early childhood care and education settings in addition to support for transitions into kindergarten. Other states planned to provide technical assistance to support other programs, such as introducing statewide transition planning guidelines or the use of

new data integration systems (Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Rhode Island).

Finally, states took several approaches to building collaboration between early childhood and elementary educators. These efforts included Michigan’s plan to create an ongoing learning community related to transition practices and annual joint conferences planned by Nebraska in addition to holding shared trainings. Illinois will be creating eight transition community partnership pilots. Joint professional development programs offered by states will target building knowledge about supporting families during the transition process, development, and implementation of core readiness standards, and creating aligned curriculums from PreK through third grade.

Transition Summits, Toolkits, and Guidelines

Parent Knowledge

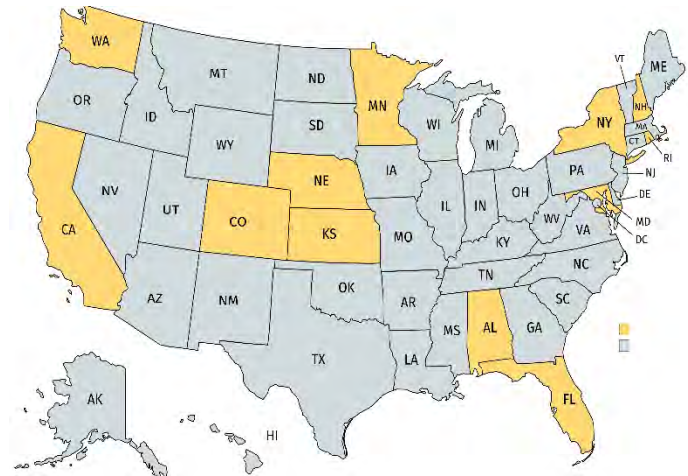
Collaboration

Partnership

Alignment

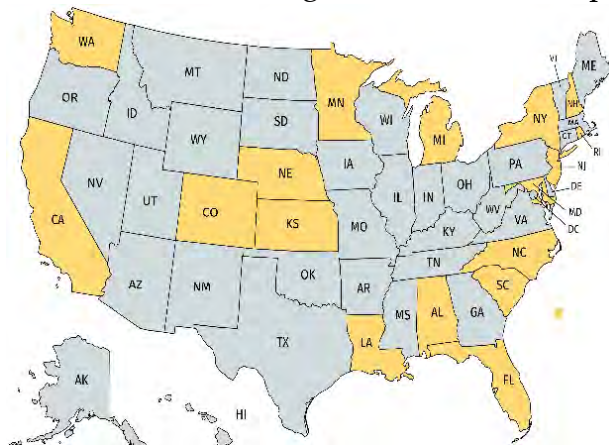
Twelve states (highlighted on map in yellow) will be holding state or district-level transition summits. Two of these states (Nebraska and New Hampshire) will be convening a transitions task force or workgroup. These activities involve bringing major stakeholders – including parents and both early childhood and elementary educators and administrators – together to identify opportunities to improve transitions into kindergarten, discuss best practices, and in some cases develop transition guidelines or

toolkits to be distributed throughout the state. In some states, like Colorado, these summits will be the second time stakeholders have come together in this fashion and will focus on furthering progress made toward implementation.



Other states, like Maryland, intend to hold these summits annually to foster ongoing collaboration between early childhood and elementary educators. Finally, states like Rhode Island intend to use grant funding to expand an existing transition summit pilot to additional communities throughout the course of the funding period.

Many states intend to use these summits or workgroups to create materials to support families and educators during transitions to kindergarten. Seventeen states total (highlighted on map in yellow) will be creating some form of transition guidelines, roadmaps, or toolkits. Transition guidelines or roadmaps are materials that are used to ensure that knowledge of best transition practices is available and implemented across a



state. In recognition of districts' diverse requirements, several states are developing these materials at the local level so that individual districts can have guidance that best meets their particular needs (Rhode

Island, New Jersey, and Maryland). Other states had existing guidelines being piloted in one region or district and intended to use PDGB-5 funds to scale use of these guidelines across the state (North Carolina, Missouri, and Louisiana).

Similar to transition guidelines, some states intend to create transition toolkits. States varied in their intention to target the toolkits to families, early childhood care and education providers, or elementary schools. Some states, like Nebraska, plan to develop toolkits for all three. These toolkits typically included readiness assessments or other methods for sharing information about children entering kindergarten, resources for parents to help prepare for the transition to kindergarten, and suggestions for activities that receiving schools can engage in to build relationships with children and parents before the new school year begins. Minnesota will be using PDG B-5 funds to make a transitions toolkit developed as part of their initial grant activities available to families across the state.

A Closer Look: Transition Summits and Toolkits

Washington recognized a need to make a successful transition to kindergarten accessible to all children in the state regardless of ability, race, or income. With this in mind, they intend to convene a cohort of stakeholders who will work together to develop and test approaches to creating more inclusive classrooms and transition practices. These efforts will include partnering with parents and community leaders to create culture-specific transition toolkits with a focus on supporting underserved populations such as tribal communities, children with disabilities and their families, and children in rural areas. These practices will be created and informed by the communities they aim to support, with a commitment to maintaining an active partnership as practices are implemented and evaluated.

Other Activities

Parent Knowledge

Collaboration

Partnership

Several activities described by states in their grant applications did not fall into any of the above categories. Many of these activities included expanding current data systems to include early childhood educational experiences and assessments to allow for better tracking of outcomes for children (Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington). Often these efforts were combined with training to improve data literacy so that local districts can use data to inform future transition practices and decision making. New York will be creating a Transition Coordinator position charged with leading efforts to improve transitions across the state. Another activity, planned by Connecticut, involves expansion of an existing home visiting program pilot where kindergarten teachers have several visits with incoming students in their home to connect with families in preparation for the move to more formal education. Nebraska and Oregon intend to require a similar home visiting program in all public pre-kindergarten programs.

Maryland plans to expand an existing project: Judy Centers, local education hubs across the state that support coordination between early childhood education and the early grades. The state will require that local districts increase their engagement with Judy Centers, and support increased outreach to families experiencing homelessness. Missouri intends to use similar regional education centers or hubs to help coordinate

transitions. New York will be piloting the ‘Strong by Six’ program at one location to build and strengthen relationships between elementary schools, home visitors, and early childhood educators to support smooth transitions.

Another strategy used by states like New Jersey is piloting or expanding programs for children and family held during the summer before a child transitions into kindergarten. This programming includes visits to a child’s new kindergarten so they can see their classroom and meet their new teacher and events held at the receiving school where parents can obtain resources while

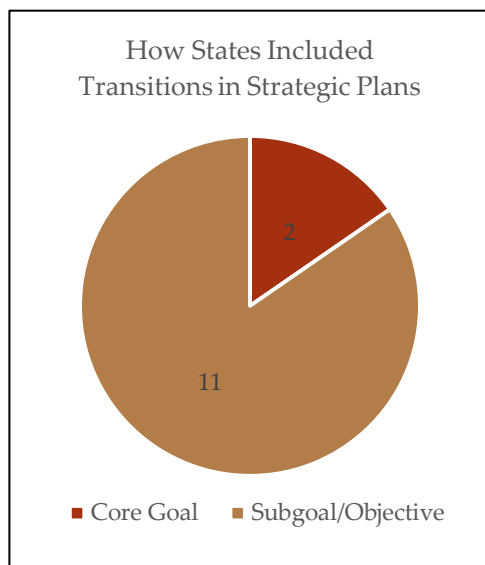
A closer look: Florida’s expansive efforts to support transitions

Florida described a wide-reaching project targeted at informing families about the importance of transitions into kindergarten and how to support and advocate for their child during this challenging time. This project includes the development of a website focused on the transition to kindergarten, a social media campaign including public service announcements, local summer transition programs, and translation of existing materials into Spanish. Florida’s commitment to creating smooth transitions does not stop with families: The state also intends to support districts in the creation and use of child portfolios that can be used to be sure all receiving programs have a full picture of incoming students’ needs and strengths.

children explore their new school and participate in fun activities in games to increase excitement for kindergarten. Finally, states like North Carolina, Florida, and New Jersey intend to expand the use of child portfolios so that receiving schools have all the information they need to support incoming students.

Strategic Plans

Twelve of the 26 states awarded renewal grants had finalized strategic plans at the time of this written report (Alabama, California, Florida, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and South Carolina). Each of these states presented detailed plans for how to improve their early childhood education delivery systems, but there was variety in how supporting smooth transitions into kindergarten fit into each states' larger goals and visions for the future. Some states (Alabama, Florida, Kansas, Maryland, North Carolina, and Rhode Island) included either improved transitions or improved kindergarten readiness as part of



their strategic plan's vision. Two states (Maryland and Missouri) included improved transitions as a core goal of their strategic plans, however the majority targeted kindergarten transitions through a sub-goal or objective under a larger strategic plan goal.

States had different approaches for addressing transitions in their strategic plans. California plans to use a multi-phase approach to improve coordination between early childhood education settings and receiving kindergartens, and Maryland will also take a multi-staged approach to strengthen transitions at the institutional, family, and professional level.

Florida, Kansas, Nebraska, North Carolina, and South Carolina all included plans to disseminate information about the importance of the transition to kindergarten and resources to support these transitions to families among their approaches to improving transitions. Alabama intends to create a statewide transition plan while Minnesota intends to implement an existing transitions toolkit. Missouri and Oregon will be improving their kindergarten readiness assessment tools and practices. Finally, Rhode Island's strategic plan included improving practices in information sharing between early childhood education providers and receiving kindergarten programs.

Conclusion

The transition into kindergarten is widely acknowledged by early childhood experts as a critical point in a child's development. Ensuring smooth transitions for children and their families is an important component of any plan to build a strong foundation for success across the lifespan. The 23 states that received PDG B – 5 renewal funding all presented unique strategies for supporting children and families during this critical time. The diversity of ways that states proposed to approach this important task reflect the diverse needs of children and families across the nation. States approached transitions from multiple angles to provide support and knowledge to families, improve practices by early childhood and elementary school educators, and create structural supports.

It is important to acknowledge that a few months after states were awarded their PDG B-5 2019 grant, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the entire early care and education system across the country and directly affected grantees' early implementation efforts. The Administration for Children and Families and the U.S. Department of Education continue to work closely with grantees to provide maximum flexibility and technical assistance to ensure that grant funds continue to be used for its intended purpose, while also identifying ways that can support their states' COVID-19 response with respect to their early childhood systems. Despite the many challenges presented by our ongoing global pandemic, implementation efforts are moving forward. State leaders and stakeholders from across multiple sectors involved in early childhood care and education systems continue to strategize and develop innovative ways to achieve the end goals of ensuring children are developing appropriately and entering kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.

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