

RESEARCH

Brief



Strategies to Support Transition for Children with Special Needs

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Researchers at the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC) recently completed a series of focus groups across the country with families, practitioners, and administrators to identify strategies being used to support the transition of young children with special needs from early intervention to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten. Participants represented 18 different states and worked in a variety of settings. The critical findings are as follows.

INTERAGENCY STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS ARE CRITICAL TO THE TRANSITION PROCESS.

Strategies that Work:

A **Supportive infrastructure** to guide the transition process that includes written materials for staff and families, forms that support specific transition activities, transition plans, interagency agreements, specific transition policies that address parental choice and program options, dedicated personnel for transition planning, and support from administration for staff participation in transition planning and activities.

Attention to relationships and communication between agencies to help create a seamless system of transition by attending and participating in interagency meetings, staff meetings, and IFSP and IEP meetings; encouraging dialogue between agency staff; and providing training opportunities for staff that occur across agencies and programs.

Continuity and alignment between sending and receiving programs that includes coherence across programs in terms of curriculum and expectations, continuity of related services personnel from the sending to the receiving environment, and alignment in relation to the conscious and transparent connections that are made between program curriculum and expectations.

SPECIFIC TRANSITION PRACTICES AND ACTIVITIES MUST BE CLEARLY DEFINED AND SYSTEMATICALLY IMPLEMENTED.

Strategies that Work:

Preparation of families and children for transition that includes family participation in meetings, especially transition specific meetings, sharing of information with families as part of transition planning, and specific workshops designed for parents as a way of helping them better understand the transition process.

Program visitation that includes family visits to programs being considered for their child's placement, child visits to a receiving program, and staff visits between the receiving and sending programs which also promote communication between staff.

Instructional activities designed to help children and families with transition, including instructional activities to support the individual child's preparation for a new setting in terms of skills and competencies, and program-wide activities designed for both the child and family, such as home visits, formal orientation events, and written materials to support transition planning (e.g., transition packets, handbooks).

Community resources that strengthen the relationship of children and families to schools and help families understand their rights under IDEA, community and neighborhood resources to support the child and family in participating in general community activities, and support groups that help families meet other families who have children with special needs and can provide additional support during the transition process.

The full technical report of Focus Group Findings can be found on the NECTC website:
<http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hadden, D. S., & Fowler, S. A. (2000). Interagency agreements: A proactive tool for improving the transition from early intervention to preschool special education services. *Young Exceptional Children*, 3(4).

Hadden, S., Fowler, S. A., Fink, D. B., & Wischnowski, M. W. (1994). *Writing an Interagency Agreement on Transition: A Practical Guide*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.

Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (1999). *The Transition to Kindergarten*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Rosenkoetter, S., Hains, A., & Fowler, S. A. (1994). *Bridging Early Services for Children with Special Needs and Their Families*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Rous, B., & Myers, C. T. (2006). *Strategies for Supporting the Transition for Young Children with Special Needs: National Focus Group Findings, Technical Report #1*. Lexington, KY: Human Development Institute at University of Kentucky.



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