

SPECIAL INSERT

Transition to Preschool Age Services for Children with Disabilities
Bill Rynn
Northwest Regional Consultant
Exceptional Children's Division
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Tel: 336-667-6059
Email: rynnb@charterinternet.com

Dear Parents,

The transition from Infant Toddler Services (birth to three) to public school services for preschool aged children with disabilities (ages 3-5 and those 5 year olds not yet eligible for kindergarten) is a major one, both for you and your child. Before preschool services can begin, an evaluation must be conducted, eligibility for those services must be determined, and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed for your child, if found to be eligible. As a parent, you will play a major role in both of those processes.

Before we outline that process, there are a couple of things to know.

If your child is currently receiving services in the Infant Toddler Program, you should ask your current Early Intervention Service Coordinator (EISC) to contact your local school system to begin this transition process when your child is **2 ½ years old**.

If your child is not currently receiving Infant Toddler services is **less than three years of age**, and you have concerns about his/her learning and development you should contact your local CDSA office.

If your child is **three years of age or older** and you have concerns about your child's development or learning, you should contact the Exceptional Children's Program Director in your home school system (Local Education Agency).

If after that contact you believe that an evaluation of your child is needed, put your request in writing to the director stating your concerns about your child and ask that appropriate evaluations be done.

The Exceptional Children's Program Directors are:

Alleghany: John Farrelly 336-372-4345 farrellyjd@alleghaney.k.12.nc.us
85 Peach Tree Street Sparta, NC 28675

Ashe: Jeannie Caviness 336-246-7175 jcaviness@ashe.k12.nc.us
PO Box 604 Jefferson, NC 28640

Avery: Jim Ciociola 828-733-6006 jimciociola@averyschools.net
PO Box 1360 Newland, NC 28657

Mitchell: Sherry Bell 828-688-4432 sbell@mcsnc.org
72 Ledger School Road Bakersville, NC 28705

Watauga: Randy Bentley 828-264-7190 bentleyra@watauga.k12.nc.us
PO Box 1790 Boone, NC 28607

Wilkes: Vickie Hugger 336-651-7080 huggerv@wilkes.k12.nc.us
613 Cherry Street North Wilkesboro, NC 28659

Yancey: Grace Whitson 828-682-6101 gcwhitson@yanceync.net
P.O. Box 90, Burnsville, NC 28714

Children's Developmental Services Agency of the Blue Ridge (CDSA)

Alleghany: 336/372-2905 **Ashe:** 336/982-4754
Avery: 828/737-7216 **Mitchell:** 828/682-4772
Watauga: 828/265-5391 **Wilkes:** 336/667-8978
Yancey: 828/682-4772

The key to a successful transition for your child is early and effective communication among your infant toddler providers, the public school preschool providers, and you. Please do not hesitate to initiate that contact!

Listed below are Steps to Effective Transition, adopted from a document created by the Transition Committee of the North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council. For a full copy of that document, including helpful hints, glossaries and other information, go to <http://www.ncei.org> and click on Publications.

Steps for Accessing Special Education Services from Your Local Education Agency (LEA)/School System (Ages 3 to 5 years)

Children who are eligible for special education and related services begin receiving those services from their school system (LEA) on their third birthday. If your child's birthday is during the summer, your child's services will start at the beginning of the next school year. The following information will serve as a guide to help you access services for your child.

STEP 1: Referring Your Child to the LEA/School System

If your child is currently receiving Early Intervention Services:

A transition plan needs to be written in your IFSP. This plan is a guide intended to help make the transition easier for you and your child. Your transition plan needs to include the steps necessary for obtaining Pre-school Program services at age three or services from other programs if your child is not eligible for the Pre-school Services.

Some of the steps include:

With your permission, the school system (LEA) will be contacted by your Early Intervention Service Coordinator six months before your child's third birthday to begin the transition to school services.

The transition planning meeting must occur at least 90 days before your child's third birthday, as required by federal regulation. (The transition planning meeting can occur up to 6 months prior to the third birthday, if all parties agree.) The purpose of the meeting is to develop a transition plan for your child and family.

If your child is 3 years or older and NOT receiving services:

If you have concerns about your child's development or learning you need to contact your school system (LEA) Exceptional Children's Director. That contact information is listed above.

Your initial contact can be by phone or email.

If after that contact you believe that an evaluation of your child is needed, put your request in writing describing your concerns about your child and requesting that appropriate evaluations be initiated. (Keep a copy for your records!) Receipt of your letter by the LEA begins the 90 day timeline to a placement decision.

The Exceptional Children's director will put you in contact with a preschool program coordinator who will assist you with the referral process.

Step 2: Gathering and Reviewing Information about Your Child

To determine if your child is eligible for special education and related services, a full individualized evaluation must be conducted in your child's native language or preferred mode of communication. The purpose of this evaluation is to decide whether your child has a disability that affects his or her learning. This evaluation cannot be done without your written consent.

Current, relevant evaluation information that may be used by the school. Any information you can provide regarding your child's medical, educational, or social history may be helpful. If you agree, you will need to sign release of information forms so these records can be sent to your LEA./School System

The Evaluation Process:

After the evaluations have been completed, a written report will be given to you. This report will include the evaluation results and recommendations, which should be explained to you in a way that you will understand.

Any needed evaluations for your child will be completed by a multi-disciplinary team. A variety of assessment tools, strategies, and techniques are required to gather information to establish your child's eligibility. If your child is eligible, the information will help in writing the Individual Education Program (IEP).

Step 3: Meeting with the Preschool IEP Team (Preschool Program) to Determine Eligibility

After all the evaluations have been completed, you will be contacted to meet with the Preschool IEP team to determine eligibility. You are a member of that team. The referral to placement process must not take more than 90 days. (If you as the parent began this process with your letter to the Exceptional Children's Director requesting appropriate evaluations your letter began the 90 day timeline).

If your child is eligible for Preschool Program services, an Individual Education Program (IEP) and placement decision may be made at this time, or an additional meeting may be scheduled. An IEP may be written 30 days before a child's third birthday, and must be implemented by your child's third birthday if your child is transitioning from Early Intervention Services.

After all the evaluations have been completed, your child may not qualify for these Preschool Services. In that case, the Preschool IEP team will suggest other possible services for your child. Options might be:

- Head Start
- Community preschools and child care centers
- Community recreation programs
- Library story hours
- Mom's morning out programs
- Cooperative play groups
- Staying at home
- Child Service Coordination Program (Health Department)

Step 4: The IEP (Individual Education Program) Meeting

Who Will Attend the IEP Meeting?

You are an important member of the Preschool IEP team and should attend the IEP meeting. Other members who must attend are as follows:

An LEA representative who may be the supervisor of special education, preschool coordinator, the principal, or another designee, who is able to provide or supervise provision of special education, is knowledgeable about the general curriculum, and is able to commit financial resources;

A teacher qualified to provide regular early childhood education (this may be the same person as the special education teacher if that teacher holds a birth to kindergarten license);

A teacher qualified to provide special education;

A person knowledgeable about evaluation results (may be the special education supervisor); and,

Additional members whom you or the school believes necessary. The school system (LEA) must invite your Early Intervention Child Service Coordinator or other agency representative if you request them to be there. This might include a teacher or therapist who is currently working with your child or who will be working with your child, a physician, a supportive friend, or other family members.

The school must inform you about the other people who are invited to the meeting.

Tasks of the Meeting:

Giving and explaining your rights under the Preschool Program (which becomes effective on your child's third birthday if your child qualifies)

Determining eligibility.

Developing and signing the IEP (if eligible) to become effective on your child's third birthday. IEP development includes making instructional and placement decisions. Placement refers to the type of

services to be delivered and the degree to which your child will be served in settings with their non disabled peers, and not the actual physical location (school, daycare, etc.)

The IEP

The Preschool IEP team will discuss and develop goals and objectives for your child. This team will decide what special education and related services are needed based upon the goals and objectives written on the IEP.

An IEP must be developed prior to placement in special education and must contain the following:

Your child's present level of performance – what your child is able to do and not able to do

Annual goals and benchmarks or short-term instructional objectives to meet the goals

The amount of special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services to be provided – usually stated as a number of minutes/hours per week

The extent to which your child will participate or not participate with non-disabled children in regular early childhood educational programs

Starting date and length of time the IEP will be in effect

The method or procedures which will be used to measure (determine) if the objectives have been met and how you will be regularly informed of your child's progress; and

Documentation of attendance of the IEP team members.

Before the Meeting

Many parents find it helpful to keep a notebook of important records. Whatever you decide to keep in this notebook will help your child, you, and the preschool personnel at the IEP meeting. Such notebooks may include:

Medical records that are important, including shot (immunization) record

Important documents like birth certificate, Medicaid card, Social Security number

Copies of previous evaluations and current IFSP under the Infant-Toddler Program

Pictures of the child.

In addition to keeping a notebook for your child's records, you might consider doing the following before the IEP meeting:

Review the education rights of your child and your rights as a parent or guardian;

Write down what you see as your child's strengths and areas of difficulty;

Make a short list of things you would like your child to be able to do now and throughout his or her life.

During the IEP Meeting

As the parent or guardian, you are a member of the Preschool IEP team. You have valuable information and advice to give. During the IEP meeting, feel free to:

Speak up about what you believe should be in your child's IEP; and

Ask questions about any part of the meeting or the IEP that is not clear to you.

Discuss thoroughly the placement for your child and the special education and related services that will be provided; and,

Request a copy of your child's IEP. (This will help you keep up with your child's progress as well as work with your child at home.)

After the IEP Meeting

It is important to continue the communication between you and the school after the IEP meeting.

Ask what types of parent activities are available at your child's school;

Talk with your child's teacher on a regular basis; and,

Do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions you might have.

If you and the LEA cannot agree on what is needed for your child, the LEA must make that decision. You can request mediation. If that does not settle the differences, you may proceed to a due process hearing. These procedures have been developed to protect the educational rights of your child. These procedures can help both you and the LEA work out a difference in opinion and come up with a solution. (See your copy of the *Handbook on Parent's Rights*.) Remember, a Due Process hearing is intended to be used as a last resort. Both you and the LEA can ask for a hearing when normal discussions and

mediations cannot produce a solution.

Helpful Hints for a Smoother Transition

Transition involves talking and working together with others in your home, school system, and community. The following activities and tips have been useful to North Carolina families involved in the transition process.

Start early. You can never begin a transition process too soon.

Keep a simple journal (notebook) about your child's activities, interests, and milestones. Medical reports and previous evaluation summaries are important. This notebook will quickly provide information to your child's service provider during that transitional period. Think about these early years as a time to learn more about the programs in your community.

Be prepared to share any ideas that have worked for you with your child (e.g., behavior strategies, communication systems, likes and dislikes).

Ask your child's teacher if your child can bring a comfort item from home (e.g., stuffed animal or favorite toy) during the transition period.

Explain to your child's teacher how you can be reached when questions arise.

Visit and tour your child's future school with and without your child.

Encourage communication between your school personnel and private providers who work with your child.

Find out what the Preschool Program offers for new families and choose how you will participate (e.g., open house, observation scheduling).

Meet as many school employees as you can who will be a part of your child's school day (e.g., secretary, bus driver, janitor, teacher, principal.)

Get to know your child's new teacher and meet him or her before school starts; let the teacher know how you could help your child in the classroom, or find other ways to help.

Ask your child's new teacher for a list of times when the two of you can talk during the year. Find out other ways you can communicate with each other on a regular basis (e.g., notebook system, phone calls, email).

If your child will have a teaching assistant, meet him or her before the start of the school year and watch how he or she works with other children. Be willing to share what you know about your child to help the teaching assistant understand your child's needs (e.g., positioning techniques, feeding, communication, as well as likes, dislikes).

Ask about ways to link with other families in your community (e.g., Parent-to-Parent Support Groups, Family Resource Center, Health Department resources, Cooperative Extension Services, etc.).

Ask about special transportation, if needed.

Check buildings to see if they are accessible. Look at how the room is arranged, restroom adaptations, etc.

Ask your child's new teacher or specialists to observe your child in his or her current program.

Talk with other families of children who have already moved into the Preschool Program.

If local support groups are not available, contact the Family Support Network (FSN) at 800-852-0042 or the Exceptional Children's Center (ECAC) at 800-962-6817.

Attend the PTA or PTO meetings of your school.

*Adapted from Families and the Transition Process: Primary Style
Kentucky Early Childhood Transition Project.*



Family Support Network-High Country is available to provide information and support to families who have children with special needs. Notebooks to help families organize their child's records are also available.

All services are free and confidential

**Please call our toll-free family line: 866/812-3122 or email:
hayeskl@appstate.edu**