

Transition to Kindergarten for Students Receiving Special Education



Life is a series of transitions. We experience many small transitions (from crawling to creeping) and many big transitions (from childhood to adulthood, from life as a single person to life as a married person, from being childless to being a parent). Many transitions are gradual. We are so immersed in the process of changing we don't realize we have changed. Other transitions are marked with a ritual and ceremony – high school commencement, wedding, a christening. There are transitions we choose and others are thrust upon us.

Some of us enjoy change – we thrive on it and are energized by it. Others of us dread, protest, and delay any change. For all of us, some changes are welcome and celebrated; others are losses that we mourn. Experiencing change is an integral part of being alive. Perhaps one of the most valuable skills we can give our children is the ability to cope and adjust to change.

When your preschooler moves on to Kindergarten he or she will be joining an elementary program and may begin attending the neighborhood school. As a parent you enter the world of PTAs, school bulletins, back to school night, etc. Kindergarten is a lot more advanced than it was when most parents were enrolled in Kindergarten. Thus Kindergarten readiness is an important component to consider as children finish preschool and get ready for the next step.

Your child's transition to Kindergarten represents the ending of one stage of development and the beginning of another. As your child changes, your child's special education needs may change as well. There are new structures in an Elementary School and new experiences.

What happens when my child starts Kindergarten?



- ◇ Who provides Special Education for your child will change. In some counties Pre-school Special Education services are provided by the County Office of Education. In Elementary School, typically the Special Education services are provided by your local school district. In some situations the County Office of Education will provide certain types of services. Either way, your local school district is still responsible for making sure your children receives F.A.P.E. (Free and Appropriate Public Education).
- ◇ In Elementary School, related services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy are provided within the context of the educational setting
- ◇ An IEP meeting will be held to discuss the transition to Kindergarten (often called a Transition IEP meeting). REMEMBER: the IEP team includes YOU and your input.
- ◇ The team should discuss if any changes are needed to your IEP such as:
 - new goals
 - new services
 - changes to existing services either frequency of how they are should be delivered (i.e. being “pulled out” for speech and language or OT instead of having it provided in the classroom)
- ◇ The team should also review your child’s areas of strengths and needs so the elementary school team can learn about your child.
- ◇ Services are usually delivered at the school site. However, there are other ways services can be delivered. Discuss your thoughts at the IEP meeting.
- ◇ **KEY: Your consent is required for your child to receive proposed services. The Individual Education Plan must be reviewed at least once a year.**

How will I know what services my child will need?



- ◇ You are the expert on your child. You know your child better than anyone else. You have much to contribute.
- ◇ Ask yourself what your child may need to continue to learn and develop.
- ◇ Write down any observations that support what you think is needed. Try to give specific examples. Write down any concerns or needs and prioritize them.
- ◇ The people who have been working with you and your child should ask you about your priorities and concerns. If not, be sure you make your voice heard!
- ◇ It might be decided that new assessments and evaluations are needed to look at the progress your child has made and to plan for future services. If any assessments are done, be sure to ask for a copy of written reports BEFORE the meeting. This gives you time to formulate your questions.
- ◇ The staff at the proposed placement for your child might be in contact with other agencies that have provided your child with services such as Regional Center or County Office of Education. If you want this to happen, then make this an official request. Your written consent is needed for professionals to talk with each other.
- ◇ Use the information and forms on the next few pages to help organize your ideas about your child and his or her needs.

What happens when my child starts Kindergarten?



Three of my child's strengths or talents:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activities I think my child likes best:

Three things my child accomplished this past year:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My child learns best when:

Types of discipline I find most effective with my child:

What happens when my child starts Kindergarten?



Hopes I have for my child:

Three goals I would like my child to accomplish this next year:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My concerns about my child:

At home: _____

At school: _____

Other: _____

Three things that motivate my child:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I am proud of my child when:

What happens when my child starts Kindergarten?



Needs Area	Has Accomplished	Emerging	Goal	1 – 5 Priority
1. Language Skills				
2. Self-help Skills (dressing, eating toileting)				
3. Gross Motor & Fine Motor Skills				
4. Social Skills				
5. Academic Skills				
Behavior Skills				

Placement options... what is LRE?



After the IEP team (which includes YOU and your input) discusses your child's needs, next IEP goals and services are determined and then the School District listening to input from the team will make an offer of what they think is the appropriate placement for your child to receive services.

Some children will attend a Special Day Class (SDC) where students spend the majority of their day with a Special Education teacher and other students receiving services.

Other children may be enrolled in a General Education Kindergarten leaving the class for specific Special Education services. The options for your child need to meet your child's needs. Sometimes creative ideas can be the best solution for schools and children.

Education law requires each child be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means he or she is educated to the greatest extent appropriate (with supports and services) with non-disabled peers. Maximum integration of children with special needs with children into the general education classroom is called "inclusion". Inclusion can provide experiences with peers modeling learning and positive behavior. Sometimes inclusion is stressful for children with special needs as the setting places too many demands on them even with supports and services.

Some children require highly specialized direct instruction that is more easily taught in Special Education setting by Special Education staff. A decision on what type of setting is most appropriate should reflect your child's needs.

To sum up program options may include:

- A General Education setting (with or without related services such as occupational, speech/language or physical therapy)
- Resource Specialist Program (along with a General Education classroom)
- A Special Day Class (SDC) with planned inclusion opportunities
- A Non-Public School (NPS) that serves Special Education students

How do I find out what programs are available?



- ◇ The School District is required to tell you what they think is the appropriate placement. After they make their recommendation, you could ask what other placements options they considered and why they ruled those out.
- ◇ Visit the recommended program before you provide your written consent. If you don't think this program will meet your child's needs, call an IEP meeting to discuss your thoughts. Be as specific as possible with your concerns. Link what you saw in the program to your child's needs and why they don't match.
- ◇ If the District will not change their placement offer, which is part of their offer of FAPE (free and appropriate public education), there are mechanisms to resolve disputes (see the Matrix Resolving Disagreements Information packet).
- ◇ Always keep your child's needs and your family's needs in mind when you are observing the classes and making your choice.

What is the most "appropriate" program for my child?

- ◇ Before you decide about a program for your child, listen to the recommendations of the specialists in your child's life. Although you are the primary "expert" in your child's life, you will gain valuable information from all of the people working closely with your child.
- ◇ Evaluate how your child's strengths and needs fit with a particular program. Since you are aware of situations in which your child feels more comfortable you can assess how a program matches with your child. Do not forget your needs as a parent and what will work for you and your family.
- ◇ A classroom that encourages frequent communication between parents and teachers is very important. In this way you can follow through at home. Consistency at school and home will ensure more effective and positive growth.

Suggestions for Visiting the Proposed Program



Prior to visiting any Kindergarten class, usually your Special Education Director or Program Manager will let the program know you will be visiting. They should tell you how to arrange the visit. As school staff are busy, work to find a mutually convenient time.

Remember that you are making the site visit to see what this class would have to offer. It is very possible that the teacher you are observing will not be your child's teacher as classroom assignments as well as class locations change from year to year. Students change from year to year as well.

However, you should be able to get an understanding of the:

- learning environment and structure of the class
- type of learning activities that the children engage in
- level and type of staffing or personnel
- type and extent of family activities

Use the "Parent Observation Guidelines for Kindergarten Programs" to assist you during your site visit. (next page)

Parent Observation Guidelines for Kindergarten Programs



Name of Program: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Name of Teacher: _____

Location: _____

Name of administrator: _____

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Activities I saw included:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> fine motor activities | <input type="checkbox"/> art activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> circle time (group activities and songs) | <input type="checkbox"/> books and stories |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gross motor activities | <input type="checkbox"/> academics: literacy, math, science |

Comments: _____

PROGRAM AND ACTIVITIES

There is a daily schedule ___Yes ___No

The activities I see are appropriate for my child ___Yes ___No

There are opportunities to learn and play with non-disabled peers ___Yes ___No

Children are allowed to make choices ___Yes ___No

Comments: _____

Parent Observation Guidelines for Kindergarten Programs



FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Parents may volunteer in the class Yes No

There is a system for home/school communication Yes No

The teacher communicates with parents using:

Notebooks Yes No

Email Yes No

Phone calls Yes No

Parent conferences Yes No

Comments:

Questions:

PROGRAM STAFF

Program staff are knowledgeable of the special needs of children with disabilities Yes No

Parent Observation Guidelines for Kindergarten Programs



PROGRAM STAFF (continued)

I am comfortable with the number of staff and the number of children in the class ___ Yes ___ No

The staff are sensitive to the cultural needs of the children ___ Yes ___ No

Are there aides working in the classroom? ___ Yes ___ No

Do volunteers help in the class room? ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

Questions for Follow Up:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Suggestions for Visiting the Proposed Program

