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State Efforts to Meet the Early Childhood Transition Requirements of IDEA

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the early childhood years, children with disabilities and their families undergo a variety of transitions between various agencies, settings and providers. Evidence suggests that the quality of the early childhood transition process, particularly the transition from Part C early intervention to Part B preschool, has significant implications for children's later success (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998). In an effort to improve the quality of early childhood transitions, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supported the National Early Childhood Transition Initiative, which involved collaboration on the part of the Regional Resource Center Program (RRCP), the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC), the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC), the Data Accountability Center (DAC) and state level Part C and Part B, Section 619 Coordinators.

In March 2008, the National Early Childhood Transition Initiative released a document developed collaboratively over several months titled *Designing and Implementing Effective Early Childhood Transition Processes*. The document was created as a resource for improving state and local performance on the State Performance Plans (SPP) and Annual Performance Reports (APR) indicators specifically related to transition (Part C Indicator 8 and Part B Indicator 12), as well as other related indicators; and to promote the connection between effective transition planning practices and child and family outcomes. The document identified eight essential components of state- and local-level infrastructure necessary to ensure effective transitions for young children and their families.

The purpose of this Project Forum document is to

- summarize the recommendations included in the transition initiative's document; and
- highlight some of the policies/practices adopted by six states undertaken to meet the early childhood transition requirements of IDEA.

This document represents a collaboration among Project Forum staff, NECTAC staff and NECTC staff and was prepared as part of Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education's (NASDSE) cooperative agreement with OSEP.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TRANSITION INITIATIVE'S DOCUMENT

The document titled *Designing and Implementing Effective Early Childhood Transition Processes* (2008) recommends eight essential components for an effective infrastructure to develop and maintain early childhood transition practices as well as providing a list of sub-components for each of the eight components. The following section of this document briefly summarizes these components and elements¹:

1) Content and Scope of Service System

- Families have access to a broad array of child developmental and educational services, supports, and/or settings to meet the individual child and family needs.
- Families have access to a broad array of health and medical services to promote overall well-being in order to meet individual child and family needs.
- Families have access to a broad array of services to support their needs.

2) Interagency Structure

- An interagency entity (or entities) exists and has membership with the authority to influence agencies' transition policies and procedures.
- A shared philosophy serves as a foundation for transition policies, procedures and the determination of responsibilities and actions.
- A primary contact person for transition is identified within each program or agency at the state and local level.

3) Interagency Communication and Relationships

- Effective, ongoing mechanisms for communication exist between and across agencies/programs are developed.
- Working relationships among agencies/programs and staff are effective.
- Parent organizations and family consumers meaningfully participate as partners in transition planning efforts at all levels.

4) Interagency Agreements

- The Interagency Agreement provides clear statements of transition processes in compliance with federal and state regulations.
- Agency roles and responsibilities related to transition are clearly assigned.
- Policies and procedures describing financial responsibilities of all appropriate agencies are included.
- Mechanisms for resolving disputes are described.

¹ This summary of components and elements comes from "Table 1 – Key Components and Elements" (pp. 5-6), of *Designing and Implementing Effective Early Childhood Transition Processes* (2008). To download a copy of the document, go to: <http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/topics/transition/ECTransitionPaper.pdf>. For additional information on each of the recommended components and elements, see pp. 7-41.

- Critical policies are specified in the Interagency Agreement.
- Format, content, and level of specificity of state-level agreements serve as a model for local agreements.
- Interagency agreements are routinely reviewed and revised based on data/input from stakeholders.

5) Policy Alignment and Congruence

- Transition requirements and timelines are aligned across agencies.
- Curriculum development and expectations for child interventions and performance are delineated and aligned across agencies.
- Procedures for coordination of services are implemented effectively.
- Mechanisms to minimize disruption in services before, during, and after transitions are developed.

6) Personnel Development, Staff Training and Resources

- Designated personnel or entities at state, regional and local levels share responsibility for interagency training and technical assistance.
- Personnel development activities are jointly designed, implemented, and evaluated by agencies and programs involved.
- Parents are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development.
- Mechanisms exist at the local level to inform personnel development activities and promote networking and problem solving.
- A variety of personnel development strategies are used to promote development of knowledge and skills over time.
- Programs require and support participation of cross agency representation at joint training activities.

7) Data System and Processes

- Data system capacity allows for the collection of necessary data to support effective transition within programs.
- Programs have protocols for data entry to support accurate and timely collection of data.
- Protocols and procedures for data sharing across agencies are clearly defined.
- Analysis and use of transition data improves performance across agencies and addresses interagency transition issues.
- Data collected through monitoring regarding transition are analyzed and used for decision-making within and across programs.

8) Monitoring and Evaluation

- State monitoring of federal and state transition requirements is aligned across agencies.
- Interagency participation is an integral part of state monitoring activities.
- Evaluation is an integral part of all components of the transition system.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In collaboration with NECTAC and NECTC, Project Forum selected six states with a history of interagency systems development work in the area of early childhood (EC) transition: *Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, New Hampshire, New Mexico* and *West Virginia*.² Because it is beyond the scope of this document to describe what these states are doing in terms of all eight recommended components, we have chosen to focus exclusively on what these states are doing in terms of three of these highly interrelated components, interagency structure, interagency communication and relationships, and interagency agreements. Information was gathered during December 2008 and January 2009 using a combination of extant data reviews and interviews with NECTAC and NECTC staff and reviewed by Part C and Section 619 Coordinators for accuracy. Brief descriptions of each state's work in terms of these three inter-related components of EC transition follow.

HIGHLIGHTS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN SIX STATES

Four of the six states originally developed an infrastructure for EC transition as a response to their involvement with Project STEPS.³ Project STEPS was funded under the Part D discretionary program as a Demonstration Project beginning in 1983 under the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) and as an Outreach Project (1989-1999) through the Early Education Program for Children with Disabilities (EEPCD). The EEPCD discretionary program was significantly changed by the amendments to IDEA in 1997 and no longer exists as a freestanding program. Project STEPS provided intensive outreach services and model development to *Florida, Kentucky, Indiana* and at the local level in *New Mexico*. *West Virginia* did not work directly with Project STEPS, but the development of its infrastructure was directly influenced by the Project STEPS model through technical assistance provided by the former Project STEPS director who was working at the Mid-South Regional Resource Center. *New Hampshire's* infrastructure was designed with stakeholder input as part of a strategic planning process with the Northeast Regional Resource Center and NECTAC. For each of these six states, the development of interagency structures, interagency communication and relationships, and interagency agreements has played an essential role in their EC transition efforts.

Florida

Florida has created a number of interagency structures to support EC transition. The state has a transition coordinator, a state interagency transition team, and *Florida's* Transition Project. *Florida's* Transition Project helps communities organize local transition teams in order to develop a seamless transition system among agencies providing services to young

² OSEP reports that these states either have high levels of compliance or have made improvements toward compliance on the SPP/APR transition indicators.

³ Project STEPS was "a federally funded project designed to develop a community-wide interagency service delivery model for facilitating the successful transition of handicapped children from preschool programs to the least restrictive environment in the public schools. The model addresses four major components critical for an effective transition program. These include: (1) administrative procedures; (2) staff training and involvement; (3) parent involvement and linkage to the public schools; and (4) child instruction geared toward the acquisition of entry level skills." For more information on Project STEPS, go to:

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/8b/ac.pdf.

children with disabilities (birth to six years of age) and their families. *Florida's* Transition Project offers community training and technical assistance in the following areas:

- leadership in developing community-wide transition systems;
- development of comprehensive interagency agreements to address all aspects of transition within the system of services;
- information and resources (both traditional and web-based), including tools to improve transition experiences for children, families and staff who work with them;
- team-building activities;
- effective meeting strategies;
- interagency issues;
- facilitation to resolve interagency issues and follow up through local team action planning;
- conflict resolution for interagency teams;
- training in areas identified by local teams; and
- transition self-assessment and checklist.

Florida's Transition Project is funded through the Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) by the *Florida* Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services.⁴

Florida's approach to EC transition involves extensive interagency collaboration at the state level. In 1995 a self-formed, state-level team began to address the need for improved training and technical assistance for local communities in the area of EC transition. The team included representatives from many state agencies, and eventually evolved into what is now the State Interagency Transition Team, that includes representatives from the Agency for Healthcare Administration, Medicaid Program; Agency for Persons with Disabilities; *Florida* Children's Forum; Department of Children and Families, Child Care Services; Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services; Division of Blind Services; *Florida* Diagnostic and Learning Resources System; Department of Health, Office of Family Health Services; and Children's Medical Services, Early Steps; *Florida* Head Start Collaboration Project; Agency for Workforce Innovation, Office of Early Learning; and TATS Project. The State Interagency Transition Team meets on a monthly basis, and, since its inception, has sought to "model" the model by creating the same type of interagency structure at the state level that it encourages at the local level. The team serves as an advisory board to the *Florida* Transition Project.

In addition to being guided by a state-level interagency agreement, *Florida's* Transition Project has developed a guidebook for communities on how to develop local-level interagency agreements⁵, a transition self-study module, and a tool for assistance in evaluating the implementation of local-level interagency agreements as well as other technical assistance documents.⁶

⁴ For more information on *Florida's* Transition Project, go to: www.floridatransitionproject.com.

⁵ For a copy of the *Guidebook to Build Better Community-wide Transition Systems*, go to: <http://www.floridatransitionproject.ucf.edu/downloads.html>.

⁶ For a copy of *Developing Interagency Agreements: The Road Map for Transition*, go to: <http://www.floridatransitionproject.ucf.edu/resources/TheRoadMapforTransition.pdf>.

Indiana

In addition to supporting a state-level Transition Initiative, *Indiana's* EC transition infrastructure includes a state-level transition team, transition coordinator and support staff. The Transition Initiative has worked to develop and support community teams throughout the state, and uses transition coaches to provide as-needed support to these teams. The Transition Initiative is jointly funded by the Part B and Part C lead agencies.

Indiana's Transition Initiative for Young Children and Families provides information, resources, training and facilitation support to administrators, staff, providers and families collaborating to ensure successful transitions across systems for families and young children birth to third grade.⁷ The purpose of the Transition Initiative is to:

- assist Head Start, schools, First Steps and child care to form local transition teams;
- assist local teams with development of annual plans to address local transition issues;
- facilitate community transition team meetings;
- facilitate development of local interagency Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs);
- provide training to enhance effectiveness of transition teams;
- offer ongoing technical assistance;
- provide access to state and local teams' annual plans, meeting minutes and locally developed products through the statewide transition website; and
- provide resources and information on best practices.

Indiana's Transition Initiative for Young Children and Families includes representatives from the following agencies and/or stakeholder groups: Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, First Steps Early Intervention; *Indiana* Association for Child Care Resource and Referral; *Indiana* Department of Education, Division of Exceptional Learners; Division of Prime Time/Reading First; and McKinney Vento Children and Youth Consultant; Department of Health, Division of Maternal and Children's Special Health Care Services; Head Start Association; Head Start Collaboration Office; parent representatives; Riley Hospital, Family Support; and the *Indiana* Transition Initiative State Coordinator.

Indiana recently updated its state interagency MOA regarding EC services which includes sections addressing the following: purpose of MOA, fundamental principles/values, roles of agencies in system coordination and implementation; specific roles and responsibilities for transition, and resolution of disputes.⁸

Many of these agencies and/or stakeholder groups participated in drafting a joint position statement on EC transition.⁹ The document affirmed the need for providers and families to be community partners in developing a smooth and effective transition system as well as

⁷ For additional information on *Indiana's* Transition Initiative for Young Children and Families, go to:

<http://www.indianatransition.org/>.

⁸ A copy of this document, titled *Indiana's Interagency Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Provision of Services to Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families* (2006), can be found at:

<http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/specd/docs/2007-08-02-InterMemoAgree.pdf>.

⁹ A copy of *Indiana's* joint position statement, titled *Smooth and Effective Transition of Young Children* (2003), can be found on NECTAC's website at: <http://www.nectac.org/topics/transition/stateex.asp#stateint>.

the belief that transition planning requires a community team with all involved stakeholders that focus on transition to develop effective practices for transition preparation, implementation and follow-up for children and families and for all agencies and staff who serve them. The joint position statement was sent to local special education directors and EC administrators, First Steps local planning and coordinating councils, elementary school principals, Head Start grantees, and child care resource and referral agencies—inviting them to take advantage of the resources and supports made available through the Transition Initiative.

Kentucky

Kentucky has a long history of collaboration in planning for EC transition. As the original demonstration site for the development of the STEPS model, the state funded the *Kentucky* Early Childhood Transition Project (KECTP) in 1992 to continue these efforts on a statewide level. In 2001, an EC Transition Summit was held with broad representation from state-level agencies to extend the work of the KECTP and develop a state plan to integrate transition into the state's broader early childhood initiative, KIDS NOW. *Kentucky* has had a longstanding EC Workgroup which advises KECTP and provides resources to support interagency collaboration at the local level. KECTP provides technical assistance to regions and communities that includes implementation of community transition planning and conversion of current interagency transition agreements (i.e., agreements which originally covered only First Steps [early intervention] to preschool, but will now cover prenatal to age six). KECTP provides the following training and technical assistance opportunities:

- informational sessions;
- in-depth trainings;
- conference sessions;
- individualized trainings upon request to the KECTP office;
- online transition trainings available through www.transitiononestop.org; and the Department on Public Health TRAIN <https://ky.train.org>.

Kentucky's EC Transition Workgroup advises KECTP and currently includes representatives from the Family Resource Center, Eastern Kentucky Child Care Coalition, local school districts, Department of Public Health, Division of Child Care, First Steps, Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs, Lincoln Trail Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, Head Start, University of *Kentucky*, the *Kentucky* Department of Education Division of Community Based Services, the Early Childhood Mental Health Program and the Division of Early Childhood Development.¹⁰

Stakeholders throughout *Kentucky* worked together to create a state agreement that clearly articulates specific state agency roles and responsibilities relating to EC transition.¹¹ Regions use the state agreement to guide decision making and local teams use both the state and regional agreements to determine additional procedures unique to their community agencies, children and families. *Kentucky's* EC transition planning process includes interagency transition agreements (ITA) that document policies and procedures with roles

¹⁰ For more information on *Kentucky's* EC Transition Workgroup, go to: <http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/kectp/>.

¹¹ To download a copy of *Transition Planning for Early Childhood: Kentucky Interagency Agreement for Providing Programs and Services to all Children*, go to: <http://www.transitiononestop.org/GetFile.aspx?File=KYTransition%20Agreement%208-06.pdf>.

and responsibilities (who does what when); interagency transition plans (ITP) that document needs/activities (training, cross-program visitation schedule, etc.) across the agency programs; and interagency transition self assessments (ITSA) that allow communities to discuss and agree upon the current level of recommended transition practice implementation across the community.¹²

New Hampshire

New Hampshire's interagency structure related to EC transition includes a transition project, Supporting Successful Early Childhood Transitions (SSECT), a project coordinator and support staff and an interagency advisory board that includes parental input. SSECT provides education and support for family-centered Early Supports and Services (ESS) providers, schools, parents and others to ensure that the transition process from ESS to preschool special education and/or other community resources is a positive experience for all and is consistent with state and federal guidelines. New Hampshire's jointly funded and sponsored transition project is unique in that is located in and operated through a contract with the state's Parent Training and Information Center. SSECT provides three levels of services:

- *Universal Services*—including trainings and workshops, telephone assistance, and printed materials;
- *Targeted Services*—all of the above provided to communities identified by the advisory board, including individualized technical assistance and trainings; and
- *Intensive Services*—all of the above including individual action planning, regional action planning, MOA development, and monetary support for technical assistance and training resources to achieve goals in individual and regional action plans.¹³

SSECT has brought together two state departments (*New Hampshire* Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services) to model what they expect from the field. The project's advisory group includes representatives from these two funding agencies, project staff, ESS providers, preschool special education coordinators, the Preschool Technical Assistance Network (PTAN), the Early Education and Intervention Network (EEIN) and families, thus assuring that all perspectives are equally represented.

New Mexico

New Mexico's interagency infrastructure includes an EC transition initiative with an interagency steering committee. The *New Mexico* Early Childhood Transition Initiative provides coaching that is designed to support community teams in developing and/or improving their system of transitioning children and families from early intervention services to other services and supports.¹⁴ The Initiative is housed at the University of *New Mexico's* Health Sciences Center for Development and Disability (CDD) and is jointly funded by the *New Mexico* Public Education Department and the State Department of Health, Family Infant Toddler Program. The Initiative's website clearly articulates the respective roles of the

¹² For more information on these resources, go to:

<http://www.transitionestop.org/HHInteragencyCollaboration.ashx>.

¹³ For more information on SSECT, go to: <http://www.picnh.org/ssect/index.html>.

¹⁴ For more information on New Mexico's Early Childhood Transition Initiative, go to:

<http://cdd.unm.edu/ecspd/Transition/about.asp>.

statewide transition coordinator, transition coaches and local transition team leaders. For example, responsibilities include (but are not limited to):

- *Statewide Transition Coordinator*—coordinate statewide initiative; recruit, train and support transition coaches; maintain documentation relating to status of local team development; evaluate efficacy of initiative and facilitate information sharing among state-level stakeholders;
- *Transition Coaches*—provide technical assistance to local teams; facilitate interagency process and partnerships; assist in the development of local-level interagency agreements; and
- *Local Transition Team Leaders*—ensure appropriate interagency representation on team; foster parent involvement; manage meeting logistics; and communicate with transition coach.¹⁵

The Initiative is guided by a steering committee with parent representation as well as interagency representation. Members include Public Education Department, Special Education Bureau; Department of Health, Family Infant Toddler Program; Parents Reaching Out; Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs; University of *New Mexico* Health Sciences Center; Children Youth and Families Department, Office of Child Development; Head Start State Collaboration Office; and Office of Indian Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

New Mexico's interagency agreement has recently been updated, although it is not yet available online. The new agreement added clarity regarding data-sharing provisions. Transition coaches also emphasize the importance of establishing interagency agreements as a technical assistance strategy at the local level for ensuring successful EC transition outcomes.

West Virginia

West Virginia's state-level interagency infrastructure for EC transition includes a jointly-funded training and technical assistance project called *West Virginia* Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources (WVECTCR) that is governed by an interagency steering committee. According to its website, the purpose of WVECTCR is to provide supports for effective EC transitions at the local level, especially to local interagency EC transition teams and local agency administrative and program staff. Its work includes:

- an annual statewide conference;
- products, training and technical assistance materials; and
- information dissemination via WVECTCR and/or individual agency training.¹⁶

The key agencies participating in the Early Childhood Transition Steering Committee are *West Virginia* Birth to Three, Department of Education, Head Start, Division of Early Care and Education, and *West Virginia* Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

A number of documents supporting interagency collaboration at the local level can be found on the website. For example, WVECTCR offers local EC transition teams a link to templates

¹⁵ For more information on roles and responsibilities, go to:

http://cdd.unm.edu/ecspd/Transition/Roles_and_Responsibilities.html.

¹⁶ For more information on WVECTCR, go to: <http://www.wvearlychildhood.org/index.asp>.

and related resources for the development of interagency agreements and collaborative procedures.¹⁷ Additional documents supporting local-level interagency collaboration have also been listed, including one which profiles local transition teams' accomplishments and goals for the upcoming year.¹⁸

COMMON THEMES

Although interagency structure, interagency communication and relationships, and interagency agreements pertaining to EC transition vary somewhat from state to state, the following themes are common to all or most of the six states described:

- Five of the six states have a special statewide EC transition project or initiative, and the remaining state includes transition under a more general statewide EC project.
- There is dedicated space and supports for each of these projects/initiatives, although they are often housed within other training and technical assistance projects.
- Transition projects/initiatives are jointly funded.
- Although the structure of the advisory entity for each project/initiative varies from state to state (e.g., advisory boards, steering committees, state teams), all advisory entities are interagency in nature.
- There is parent participation on all six advisory entities.
- In most cases, EC transition projects/initiatives are responsible for personnel development and technical assistance at the local level.
- Most programs/initiatives focus on the establishment and implementation of local-level EC transition teams.
- All state-level projects/initiatives are governed by state-level interagency MOAs.
- All six states have a contact person for EC transition activities within the state (see Appendix A for a list of these states' transition coordinators).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

EC transition has been a longstanding area of focus for programs serving young children with disabilities. Successful efforts to address this transition require close attention to the interagency relationships between and among providers and agencies. As demonstrated through these state efforts, continued, focused attention and formalized processes have provided these states with mechanisms to address concerns and support program improvements in EC transition services.

¹⁷ To access these resources, go to: <http://www.wvearlychildhood.org/CollaborativeAgreementsandProcedures.asp>.

¹⁸ For access to these documents, titled *West Virginia Early Childhood Community Collaboration Strategies; Tasks, Tips and Tools for Promoting Community Teams*; and *Early Childhood Collaborative Team Profiles*, go to: <http://www.wvearlychildhood.org/EffectiveCommunityTeams.asp>.

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Appendix A – State-level EC Transition Coordinators and/or Project Directors

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