

**Self-Reported Early Intervention Transition Practices of Special Education Directors in
Southwestern Pennsylvania: Implications for Policy and Practice**

by

Kathleen M. Foster

Bachelor of Science, University of Pittsburgh, 1970

Master of Education, University of Pittsburgh, 1974

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School of Education

This dissertation was presented

by

Kathleen M. Foster

It was defended on

December 9, 2013

and approved by

Dr. Rita Bean, Emerita Faculty, Department of Instruction and Learning

Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr, Chairperson, Department of Administrative and Policy Studies

Dr. Diane Kirk, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Administrative and Policy
Studies

Dr. Charlene Trovato, Dissertation Advisor, Clinical Associate Professor and Associate
Chair, Department of Administrative and Policies

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Kathleen M. Foster, EdD

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Young children with identified disabilities face many transitions in their lives. One of these transitions occurs when the child moves from preschool services to school-age special education programs in kindergarten. A review of the literature showed special education directors' perspectives on this issue to be underexplored; hence, this research study explored the transition process from the perspective of school district special education directors. The study relied on the theoretical framework that the quality of a child's transition relates to the transition practices in which the child and family are engaged prior to kindergarten entrance. An online, structured survey was disseminated to 125 school district special education coordinators in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Survey questions related to the frequency of usage and perceived effectiveness of high intensity transition practices. The constructs guiding the survey questions included communication between sending and receiving programs, family involvement, professional development and the involvement of all service providers in the transition process. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data in addition to a correlational analysis based on school district size and the socio-economic status of the student population.

Results indicated that high intensity transition activities were implemented to varying degrees based on the nature of the practices. Program collaboration showed an imbalance in communication efforts between providers. Family involvement reflected lower levels of participation in more individualized activities where parents and students visit school district programs and meet staff prior to school beginning. Professional development for staff on topics related to best practices in transition and the relationship of transition to later school

achievement were reported by fewer than half of the respondents. Correlations existed between SES, school size, and some transition practices. Discrepancies between frequency of practice and perceived effectiveness existed for communication between programs, professional development, and family involvement. Implications for policy and practice include the need for state, regional, and local agency efforts to build capacity among early intervention providers and school districts to ensure the delivery of high intensity and individualized practices for all students transitioning from preschool to school-age services.

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PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Transitions occur regularly over the lifetime of individuals. Some of these transitions may be small in scope and seemingly inconsequential. Others encompass events of great magnitude with significant implications for those involved. While some people experience the changes brought about by transitions with no apparent difficulties, others are affected on many levels. Children also experience transitions involving changes within families, at the community level, in systems of care, and in their schools. Entering school, moving between grades, meeting new teachers, and adjusting to increasing independence from caretakers define a few of these transition points.

Children born with special needs face significantly more transitions and at younger ages than their non-exceptional peers. Many experience a variety of systems of care during infancy. Physicians, speech therapists, physical/occupational therapists, community agency providers, and families support early intervention services in hospitals, daycare programs, and in the homes of this population of children. Defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), special education entitlements mandate early intervention services for both infants and toddlers and for young children ages three through five. Movement between these programs and into the public education settings at age five involves significant transitioning as service providers, program locations, and the amount and type of services change. The purpose of this study is to examine the prevalence, perceived effectiveness, and barriers to implementation of the practices

surrounding the transition of young children with identified disabilities from the perspective of public school district special education directors.

1.1 TRANSITION REQUIREMENTS

Each year, children with disabilities and their families transition from preschool programming to kindergarten. These students, with disabilities ranging from mild to severe, present to continue their education in the K-12 public school setting from various early childhood programs, service agencies, and from their home environment. Early intervention transition involves interactions among the preschool special education providers, public school special education coordinators, various sending and receiving staff members, providers of specialized therapies, children, families, and for some, agency service personnel.

A review of the literature showed the evolution of the transition process with the advent of federal and state laws. In Pennsylvania, the Early Intervention Services Act (2003) prescribed procedures for implementing the requirements of IDEA with reference to transition from preschool to school-age programming for students with disabilities. This Early Intervention Services Act required the state of Pennsylvania, through its designated agencies, to provide services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities. The Act conferred implementation responsibilities for children with disabilities upon the Department of Public Welfare for those ages birth through two, and with the Department of Education for those ages three through five (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning & Pennsylvania Early Intervention, 2009). The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) administers the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's programs for early intervention (OCDEL & Pennsylvania Early Intervention,

2009). In counties within Pennsylvania, OCDEL administers early intervention programs for infants through age two. For children ages three through five, OCDEL contracts services through Modified Agency Written Arrangement (MAWA) holders (e.g., Intermediate units, school districts, and private agencies) to regulate local services for preschoolers (see Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (2010) for more information regarding these services).

Young children and their families experience transitions as they age out of one program and into another. Entrance to kindergarten at age five for children with special needs represents one of these transition periods as they move from early intervention services to K-12 public schools. Although the transition process and procedures are defined in state legislation (see Early Intervention Transitions: Preschool Programs to School-Age Programs, 2009), specific transition practices implemented by sending and receiving programs are not prescribed.

1.2 TRANSITION PERSPECTIVES

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) considered the links among the child, home, school, and peers as factors in a network of relationships influencing successful transitions to kindergarten. Kraft-Sayre and Pianta's (2000) Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition also viewed social connections as a primary source of transition support for young children. Multiple social connections support children and families during kindergarten transitions. Collaborative relationships among parents, teachers, students, peers, and community agencies are resources facilitating smooth transitions. An illustration of these relationships for students receiving early intervention services appear in Figure 1.

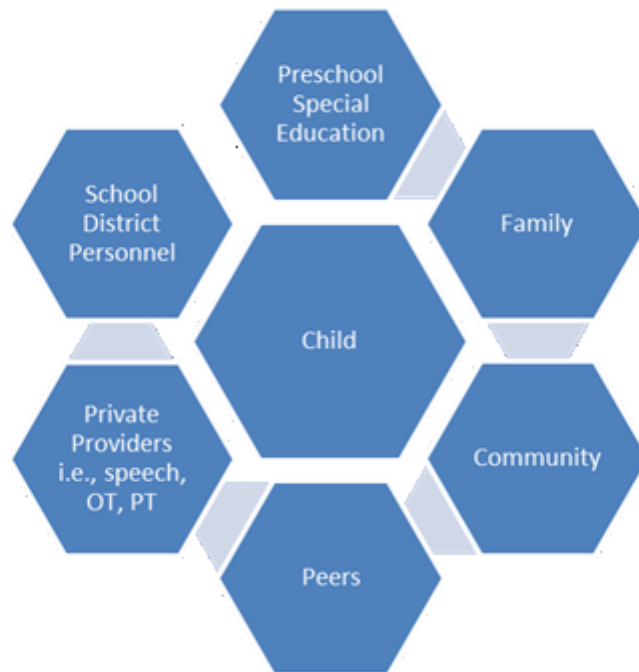


Figure 1. Dynamic Model of Transition

The fostering of relationships among all individuals within systems involving a child promotes continuity in the transition from preschool to kindergarten as noted by Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (2000). Focusing on the needs of the child, utilizing family strengths, forming collaborative relationships, and designing individualized practices are all facets of the transition process.

When examining practices associated with children having special needs during the kindergarten transition process, Rous, Teeters, Myers, and Stricklin (2007) conducted a series of focus groups on effective transition practices. Based on interviews of teachers, administrators, and families, several effective transition practices emerged. These practices included strategies supporting interagency collaboration, addressing the needs of the child and family during transition, defining the role of staff, establishing program parameters, and involving community agencies (Rous, Teeters, et al., 2007). Other strategies included, but were not limited to, dedicated

transition personnel, administrative support, family participation, sharing of information, child and staff program visits, continuity across programs, and interagency collaboration. Looking at transition from another perspective, Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, and Jung (2007) examined the early childhood transition process in terms of child outcomes, citing successful social and developmental adjustment, and the relationship of these factors to academic success in school. Successful transition outcomes related to participation in a process that included the implementation of strategies addressing a child's adjustment to new services and settings (Rous, Hallam, et al., 2007). A supportive infrastructure, with guidelines for transition, written policies, dedicated personnel, and support from school administrators, is a key variable along with interagency collaboration and alignment of preschool and school-aged student expectations.

Currently, planning and supports for young children with disabilities as they move from one level of programming into another is mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). Based on IDEA (2004), the number of children identified with disabilities and receiving services as preschoolers has increased, and early care and education programs have expanded proportionally. In Pennsylvania alone during 2012, over 88,000 children state-wide participated in these services through infant/toddler programs or in preschool early intervention settings for ages three through five (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2012). For these children, the goal of the transition process is a successful adjustment to the new school environment both socially, developmentally, and academically. A transition process encompassing activities that promote these adjustments is pivotal. When key dimensions of positive transition outcomes are known, practices that support these ends can be implemented by K-12 public schools as students with disabilities transition from preschool.

1.2.1 Transition Perspective in Public Schools

During my 12 years of service in a public school district as a Pupil Services Coordinator and in my current position as an Assistant Superintendent, I have both participated in and facilitated the early intervention transition process to school-age programming for children with identified disabilities and their families. Although transition procedures are mandated by law, these practices, in my experience, vary based on the nature of disabilities, willingness of families to engage in the process, accessibility of student records, timing of IEP transition meetings, skill levels of sending and receiving staff, and inter-agency collaboration to define only a few. For transition facilitators and staff members in public school settings, both knowing and implementing researched-based transition practices affect their ability to provide a quality bridge between preschool and school-age programs.

In Pennsylvania, Intermediate Units operate as the state education agencies, overseeing the early intervention services for children ages three through five with identified disabilities. Intermediate Units contract with private providers for preschool special education services in addition to serving as the liaison agency between these providers and public school districts during the preschool transition process. Special education directors within public schools customarily serve as school district liaisons in this process, and school district personnel play a role in the transition of preschool special education students to school-age programs. An awareness on the part of special education directors related to researched-based transition strategies and how these practices are implemented will provide insight into the quality of preschool transition practices in Pennsylvania.

1.3 CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF EARLY INTERVENTION TRANSITION

The historical perspective of special education in the United States shows the progress of a system of services for individuals with disabilities from one of segregation to one of access and accountability. Following the example set by segregated institutions for the deaf, blind, and mentally challenged (Osgood, 2008), segregated educational programs within the public school system gradually began to emerge (Winzer, 1993). The growth of parent advocacy through legal challenges around exclusionary practices in public schools further promoted access to public education for individuals with disabilities. With the advent of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975), all public schools were mandated to educate students with disabilities, no matter the significance of these disabilities or the cost of their education. In 1986, the Early Intervention amendments to this law lowered the age for publically funded special education services to three years of age. Another amendment to the EAHCA in 1990 changed the name and focus of the legislation. Renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, transition services became a required component of a student's Individualized Education Program at age 16, while expanding the entitlement for services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families (Yell, Rodgers, & Rodgers, 1998).

Bolstered by subsequent amendments to IDEA in 1997 and 2004, outcomes and accountability became part of the fabric of special education services for all individuals with disabilities ages birth through 21. A system initially characterized by segregation and isolation now provided access, entitlements, and accountability to those eligible for services. Because of these laws, children with disabilities are able to receive special education services from birth through age 21. As these children move from preschool services to the public schools across Pennsylvania, the transition process comes into play. Effective transitions require special

education directors to coordinate the implementation of transition practices, which facilitate school adjustment for students with special needs and their families. This study will examine the transition process for early intervention students from their perspective.

1.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSITION

A review of the literature suggested that specific transition practices have improved the quality of the process whereby children with disabilities move from one point of service delivery to another. According to the landmark Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), children with disabilities who received high intensity transition practices (i.e., opportunities to visit the kindergarten classroom prior to transition) performed better on academic and adaptive assessments than those who receiving low intensity practices (Carlson et al., 2009). Additionally, a match between the sending and receiving environments and the teaching of pre-requisite skills needed for kindergarten in preschool facilitated the transition process by increasing school readiness of students with disabilities (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). In fact, Rule, Fiechtl & Innocenti (1990) reported benefits of teaching a survival skills curriculum to children with moderate disabilities in preschool embedded with opportunities to learn independent work skills, practice with following directions, and participate in group activities. Survey results as reported by kindergarten teachers indicated this group of students as able to work independently or with little assistance when compared to other students with disabilities not exposed to the specialized curriculum (Rule et al., 1990). More recent research (i.e., Kemp & Carter, 2000; Le Ager & Shapiro, 1995) showed similar results when preschool students with disabilities received specialized practice with kindergarten readiness skills prior to entering the K-12 environment.

Despite the clear benefits associated with high intensity transition processes, Pianta, Cox, Taylor, and Early (1999) found that low intensity transition practices (e.g., generic parental contacts by way of general letters, brochures, and open house opportunities) were available more often than high intensity ones. The National Transition Study examined the kinds/numbers of transition practices, the socio-economic status of the family, and the communication between both the sending and receiving programs as children entered kindergarten. The implementation of transition activities was not commonplace nor was the involvement of parents in schools with a low poverty level (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992). The Pre-Elementary Educational Longitudinal Study related the children's academic achievement and adaptive performance over time to the amount and kind of transition services provided (Carlson et. al., 2009). Children were reported to have more ease with transitions when sending and receiving teachers reported more involvement in the transition process (Carlson et al., 2009). When discussing beneficial transition practices, Carlson et al. (2009) cited the importance of the ability of a receiving school to give academic and social support to transitioning children as they entered kindergarten and the necessity of providing professional development to teachers about strategies to address the needs of students with disabilities.

Further enhancing the theoretical perspective that certain practices facilitate quality transitions, actions taken by teachers in preschool special education programs to ensure that transitioning students have prerequisite readiness skills provide another area of consideration. Creating a match between the sending preschool and the receiving kindergarten environments regarding skills such as working in a group, working independently, and following directions are practices supporting this perspective. As previously discussed, Rule et al. (1990) showed the relationship of teaching a survival skills curriculum in preschool to a better kindergarten

adjustment. In addition, Le Ager and Shapiro (1995) found positive correlations between developing a template of expectations in a kindergarten classroom, using this template to facilitate the development of prekindergarten readiness in the preschool classroom, and quality transitions and a quicker kindergarten adjustment. Furthermore, researchers have illustrated a positive correlation between structured preschool transition activities and the development of social, behavioral, and functional skills to quality kindergarten transitions (Kemp & Carter, 2000; Troup & Malone, 2002).

Another aspect of the theoretical framework that specific actions taken prior to and during transition improve the quality of the process is the engagement of the family. Low levels of family involvement constitute a barrier to successful preschool to kindergarten transitions as noted by Bohan-Baker & Little (2002). Parents not engaged in transition activities when preschoolers with disabilities move to kindergarten miss opportunities for collaboration, support, and planning that exist between systems of care/preschool early intervention and K-12 education programs. High levels of family involvement in the process, on the other hand, accounted for increased parental support in subsequent years (Kang, 2010) and positive effects on school achievement (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). As part of the Harvard Family Research Project, Bohan-Baker and Little (2002) reported that reaching out to families when children are in early intervention programs, reaching back to families at the start of kindergarten, and reaching with appropriate intensity were all promising transition strategies. Actions initiated by school district special education directors in facilitating a connected transition process prior to a child leaving preschool services, at transition IEP meetings, and prior to school entrance are all strategies supporting parental involvement

Transition activities supporting interactions among all systems in which a child is involved including the family, schools, community, peers, and service agencies supports research illustrating that specific actions taken during transition periods can improve their quality. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) and Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) conceptualized transition as an ecological process based on the relationship between all of the surrounding contexts in which a child and their family are involved. Strong interagency structures and supports along with clearly defined transition practices were found to reduce barriers as children with disabilities move from preschool to kindergarten (Rous & Myers, 2007). The involvement of multiple agencies and individuals in the process likewise requires transition facilitators in both sending and receiving schools to support communication between special and regular education staff, families, and outside agency service providers (e.g., speech/language therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral mental health staff). In addition to facilitating high intensity and personalized transition practices, the involvement of the appropriate agencies and individuals in the transition process increases the likelihood of a quality transition from preschool services to kindergarten for children with disabilities and their families (Rous, Myers & Stricklin, 2007). This framework, supported by these researchers and based on my own experiences as a school district Pupil Services Director, indicates that specific transition practices effect a quality transition from preschool services for young children with disabilities as they move to kindergarten.

Effective transitions for preschool students with disabilities position them to more readily adapt to the kindergarten environment. Lessening adjustment time increases the ability of these students to become engaged in the learning process, just as engagement in the learning process and the support of involved families has the potential to increase later school achievement (Schulting et al., 2005). This theoretical perspective supports the rationale for conducting this

research and provides insight on the kinds of transition practices that allow entering kindergarten students with special needs to adapt to their new environment effectively.

1.5 GAPS IN THE TRANSITION LITERATURE

While research on transition process of young children with disabilities exists in the literature, it focuses mainly on the teaching and practicing of pre-requisite skills (LeAger & Shapiro, 1995)), the significance of family involvement (Kang, 2010), and the importance of an ecological approach involving all systems of care and education in which the transitioning child is involved (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). The role and perceptions of public school personnel in the transition process is absent in the literature reviewed by this researcher. Examining the transition process from the perspective of school district special education directors will provide insight into this process from a new perspective.

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to examine transition practices from the perspective of school district special education directors. Questions guiding the research include the following:

1. What kinds of transition practices and strategies are used in school districts as students with disabilities move from preschool services to kindergarten, and to what degree are these implemented?;

2. How do school district special education directors perceive the effectiveness of these strategies?; and
3. What barriers to the transition process exist as related to the implementation of transition practices and strategies from the perspective of the school district special education director?

Special education services and supports have expanded significantly over the last 50 years. Federal and state legislation requires an education of all students with disabilities from ages birth through 21 in the least restrictive environment and at public expense. Access, entitlements, and accountability form the foundation for this education. Children born with disabilities face numerous transitions in their lifetime as they move between and among systems of care and education. To derive maximum benefit from their educational programs, these transition periods require supports that facilitate a seamless process. School district special education personnel are participants in this transition process. Their perspective on the use of transition practices, effectiveness of these practices, and potential barriers related to implementation will contribute to the research in this field.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following key terms used in this study are defined as listed below. Providing a standardized definition allows for a common basis of understanding as these are referenced in the study.

Behavioral Mental Health Agencies

Agencies that evaluate children and families with mental health needs and provide outside or home-based services as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.

Chapter 14 of the PA Code

State regulations pertaining to the delivery of special education services and programs.

Early Intervention

A system of supports and services for families of young children with disabilities. EI for children ages birth through two in Pennsylvania is overseen by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), while services for children ages three through five is regulated through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Early Intervention is a system of services providing resources and supports to children with identified disabilities to allow them to maximize their potential.

Early Intervention Preschool Services

Services provided for children with disabilities ages three through five, prior to beginning K-12 programming.

Early Intervention Transition

A move from preschool special education services to public school kindergarten programming when a child reaches school-age. A transition, without interruption in program, and with appropriate procedural protections, is required under 20 U.S.C. §1419 (IDEA, 2004).

IDEA

A federal law that governs the provision of special education services and protects the rights of children with disabilities and their parents.

Individualized Education Plan

A plan designed by educators and parents to help children with delayed skills or other disabilities to succeed in school.

Pennsylvania Intermediate Units

Part of the state governance structure of public education in Pennsylvania. These units serve as liaisons between the state education agency and school districts, providing specialized services to local schools, to promoting efficient operations on a regional basis.

MAWA

Act 212 of 1990 designates PA Department of Education (PDE) as the responsible entity for providing services to eligible preschool children. The MAWA is the Act's terminology for a contract between PDE and a local intermediate unit, school district, or agency to provide Early Intervention services locally to eligible children on behalf of PDE.

NCEDL

National Center for Early Development and Learning.

NECTC

National Early Childhood Transition Center.

Occupational Therapy

Activities supporting children in developing and improving self-care, motor function, sensory processing, oral motor function, and visual/perceptual abilities.

Office of Child Development & Early Learning (OCDEL)

Agency overseen by the PA Departments of Education and Public Welfare, providing policy and procedural oversight of early care and education programs for children and families.

PEELS

Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study.

Physical Therapy

Services provided to address gross motor deficits involving mobility and physical functioning.

School-age Programming

Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Socio-Economic Status

This is a measure of a family's economic status, education level and occupation.

Special Education Director

Individual within a public school district whose responsibility it is to coordinate special education for students Kindergarten through 21 years old. These responsibilities include oversight of the early intervention process.

Transition to Kindergarten

The process of moving from preschool services to the K-12 public school for children with disabilities and their families.

Transition Practices

Key elements of transition planning supporting the move of children with disabilities and their families from early intervention services to school-age programs.

- *High Intensity Transition Practices* – Practices requiring significant involvement of all agencies serving children with disabilities as they move from one service delivery system to another. Such practices may include the following: visits to preschool programs by school staff, visits by preschool staff to public school kindergartens, opportunities for parents and children to visit public school programs prior to school beginning, phone calls to families of transitioning students prior to the start of school, initiating contact with families by public school staff while child is still receiving preschool services, home visits by public school staff prior to start of school, etc.

- *Low Intensity Transition Practices* – Practices requiring minimal involvement of service providers including: letters sent home to parents, reading student records, open house opportunities to visit the public school after classes begin, etc.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The word transition evokes thoughts of changes or passages from one state to another. Grammar transitions link words and phrases for the writer. Composers connect musical compositions with transitions from one section of a movement to another. Transitions between states of matter from solids to liquids and from liquids to gases are of interest to the chemist, while those involving losses or gains in a single quantum of electromagnetic radiation intrigue the nuclear physicist.

In the field of education, transitions connote a specific meaning related to a student's movement from one stage of education or activity to another. High school graduation signifies the transition of students from K-12 public schools to post-secondary education, into the workforce, or to life in a branch of the military. Other transition points include movement of students from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. The other end of the transition spectrum involves the passage of preschoolers from nursery school programs and early care settings, to kindergarten. Each passage involves changes in educational expectations, social interactions, and emotional maturity.

Increased independence and self-determination characterize the academic and behavioral expectations of students as they transition through school (Martin & Marshall, 1995). While discussing the process of reading comprehension, Pearson (1985) described this kind of increasing independence in terms of a "gradual release of responsibility" in his instructional literacy model (p. 732). In this model, teachers gradually shift responsibility from themselves to their students by moving from high teacher support and low student involvement to low teacher support and high student involvement in the reading process (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Likewise, as students transition from one level to another within the public school setting, they assume more

responsibility for their own learning with the ultimate goal of sustaining a productive life as a contributing member of a community.

Similarly, children just entering the K-12 school setting have individualized experiences when transitioning. Independence from caretakers, ability to work cooperatively in a group, and sustaining attention for academic instruction are expected transition behaviors for this group of students. Although arbitrary in nature and not always coinciding with patterns of child development, these changes or passages from one state to another in an educational setting are customarily associated with academic growth and increasing social/emotional maturity (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Although fraught with some trepidation and challenged by fear of the unknown, most students pass seamlessly through these pivotal transition periods in public education. However, for others, that passage produces challenges that may result in less than desirable long-term outcomes for some students.

2.1 SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITIONS

Students who are eligible for and receive special education services have historically evidenced challenges associated with school transitions. In the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) of Special Education Students, researchers examined post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities and collected data for an analysis of the effectiveness of transition practices upon graduation (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010). The initial wave of this study considered outcomes for the first generation of students to go from elementary through high school under the provisions of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. When examining a cohort of students with disabilities who had been out of high school three to

five years using indicators of post-secondary education and employment, the data revealed disparate results when compared to individuals without identified disabilities (Newman et al., 2010).

Blackorby & Wagner (1996) examined data indicators including dropout rates, post-secondary education, employment, and income for students with disabilities. One data indicator from the first wave of the NLTS showed dropout rates of 30% for students with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Post-secondary enrollment in educational programs showed that 37% of the population of students with disabilities were active in some type of schooling as opposed to 78% of high school graduates in general (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Relatedly, lower rates of competitive employment and lower median earnings than non-exceptional peers characterized the post-secondary lives of students with disabilities. Studies conducted in the 1980s further documented the challenges faced by students with disabilities as they transition into their adult lives (e.g., Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985).

A focus on the transition process and the needs of students with disabilities has been a recent addition to special education law. Winzer (1993) described this absence of information, stating that “little is known about the experiences of disabled adults in nineteenth-century society. History tells us little about the living experiences, occupations, marriages....of the averaged disabled adult. Only sparse and scatter data exists” (pp. 220 – 221).

Between the mid-1960s and 1975, state legislatures, federal courts, and the U.S. Congress defined a growing cadre of special education rights for students with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Students with special needs transitioning from the public school setting into the workforce, military, or post-secondary education as well as students moving from special education pre-school programs into public school settings have significantly enjoyed the protection

of special education legislation enacted since the 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010). Formerly known as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) included the addition of transition services as part of special education requirements. Likewise, the legal requirements that public schools even provide services to all children with disabilities are recent ones.

The evolution of the special education transition process was an outgrowth of the legislative and litigation history surrounding special education in this country. Increasing emphasis on protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities, meeting their specialized needs, and improving long-term outcomes prompted the development of an infrastructure of federal and state supports to guarantee these services. The history of special education traces its roots to providing these protections for students with disabilities in the public school setting. A review of this history in the United States illustrates the evolution of special education from a system of access to one of accountability (Osgood, 2008). Students with disabilities who initially lacked access to public education now are entitled to both a public education and support services based on special education eligibility. Federal and state legislation has provided the entitlements whereby eligible students access these benefits based on their disabilities. Understanding the development of the special education system in this country provides the framework for examining the evolution of a system from one of limited access to one of entitlement, unrestricted access, and accountability.

A gradual increase of legislative initiatives at the federal and state levels provided access to special education services where such services had not previously existed. A system of entitlement, based on legislation, has evolved to one that now examines outcomes and

accountability. Accountability expectations have required school districts to examine how services address the needs of students with disabilities. Considering outcomes as students transition from K-12 programs to their post-secondary lives is one pivotal examination point (Landmark, Zu, & Zhang, 2010). Other transition points for students with disabilities may include movement from programs serving infants and toddlers to those serving children between three and five years of age, while yet another examines children moving from preschool special education services into K-12 school-age programming.

At each transition point, accountability for providing support to sustain effective transition practices has been a part of special education law since the 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA (2004) required state performance reporting on federally required indicators of compliance. Special education transition requirements for both young children and those ages 16 and above are part of these indicators. Students with disabilities have guaranteed access to services and benefit from transition requirements from Pre-K-12, spanning across their educational careers (Martin et al., 1996). States must report progress on meeting targets related to their individual state performance plans, and in Pennsylvania, the statistics and performance indicators appear in the State Performance Plan as presented by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education (2007).

Knowledge of the structure of special education and the impact of supported transitions within that system affect long-term outcomes for students with disabilities (Landmark et al., 2010). Supporting transitions within the special education system enhances opportunities for success for all students from preschool through graduation. Understanding how and why the special education system in the United States progressed from an institution allowing access to one requiring accountability provides a framework that underscores the role of transition services on student

outcomes. During the last few decades, the public special education system in this country has progressed from one of limited or no access to one of entitlement and accountability, premised on constantly evolving federal and state legislative initiatives. Examining the evolution of this system supports an understanding of the significance of the transition process as it relates to accountability and positive student outcomes in adulthood. Effective transition practices support accountability and lead to positive student outcomes for special education students (Edelman, 2005). Developing an awareness of what effective transition practices encompass leads to their utilization for special education students from early intervention through early adulthood.

This literature review examines facets of the transition process for children with special needs as they move from pre-school to school-age programming. The intent of the review is to examine research on transition using a conceptual framework that focuses on the following: practices related to child-centered transitions, practices associated with family engagement and those involving ecological transition activities as these relate to systems of care and education in which children and families interact. Developing knowledge of best practices as detailed in the research will define what effective transition practices are and reflect how these practices affect the child, the family, and the systems in which they interact. This analysis will support the inquiry as to the level of awareness that transition coordinators in public school districts have regarding effective transition practices and if activities reflecting these practices are implemented in the preschool to kindergarten process for children with disabilities and their families.

Guiding the investigation of the literature will be questions on transition practices that are child-centered, family-based, and those with a social-ecological framework. Questions that will guide the literature review include:

1. How did the concept of transition and outcomes evolve from the special education system which developed in this country?;
2. Why were transition requirements for early intervention special education students made a component of IDEA?;
3. What rationale underlies the conceptual framework related to the child, families, and systems in which the child and family are involved?; and
4. What transition practices are effective, and how is effectiveness measured?

Examining the significance of the transition process for early intervention students using a conceptual framework of child, family, and systems practices will provide a basis for developing an awareness of effective practices in the early intervention to kindergarten transition process.

2.2 HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

2.2.1 Early History of Special Education

The early history of children with disabilities reflects the magnitude of social, industrial, and economic changes in this country during the early 19th century. Throughout the 1800s, cities grew as the result of migration from rural to urban areas and from the influx of immigrants, predominantly from Northern Europe (Osgood, 2008). Propelled by an increased awareness of social responsibility and the expansion of the public education system, the needs of individuals with disabilities to acquire a skill level that would enable them to become contributing members of society gradually began to be recognized (Winzer, 1993).

Osgood (2008) detailed how progressivism increased the role of the government in addressing problems associated with an influx of immigrants, the rapid growth of cities, and increased industrialization. Progressivism in the years between approximately 1840 and the early 1920s focused on the increased role of government, especially in the area of public welfare and political reform (Osgood, 2008). Legislation that was an outgrowth of this movement focused on child labor laws, truancy, and compulsory school attendance. Individuals with disabilities who might have previously been kept at home with their families became a concern of local and state policy makers (Osgood, 2008). The growth of urban populations and the compulsory attendance laws forced public schools to acknowledge and address children with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). This era ushered in the advent of segregated institutions for children where students with disabilities received education in isolated school settings along with others of similar disabilities (Winzer, 1993).

Likewise, Osgood (2008) described some major events in the institutional era beginning in 1817 when Thomas Gallaudet opened The Asylum for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Additionally, Samuel Howe opened the Asylum for the Blind in 1832 in Massachusetts, and the Asylum for Idiotic and Feeble-minded Youth was founded in 1884 (Osgood, 2008). During the mid- to late 1800's, schools for the deaf and blind were opened in 23 states while 12 states initiated operation of institutions for mentally retarded persons (Winzer, 1993). These institutions focused on custodial care for the most part, with residents of those facilities living in segregated and frequently isolated settings (Winzer, 1993).

In addition to these institutions, public school systems in urban areas developed segregated programs for children with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). These public school programs, originally established for immigrant students, became repositories for children with a variety of special needs

(Winzer, 1993). Rural schools provided few options for children with disabilities and consequently the students received limited services in relation to their level of need, or they did not attend school at all. By the 1930s, students with disabilities experienced a varying array of services from segregated public school programs in urban areas to one-room schoolhouse settings with multi-age and multi-grade groupings in others (Winzer, 1993). Specialized institutions for the blind, deaf, physically handicapped or mentally deficient served these individuals.

Following decades of institutional education and segregated instruction in public schools, a new worldview on the place and role of individuals with disabilities began to emerge during the late 1930s and early 1940s (Osgood, 2008). In describing this worldview, Osgood (2008) noted this shift in focus as educators of that time began to consider the uniqueness of each child with a disability and the potential contributions of these individuals to society. Harrison Allen Dobbs, a professor of social welfare at Louisiana State University with a focus on children with disabilities, published a series of articles in the *Peabody Journal* examining special education policy and practices (Dobbs, 1953). Stressing the importance of multiple resources when addressing disabilities, Dobbs (1953) highlighted the need for families to work with both family support agencies and schools in obtaining available services to enhance the welfare of their children. Although on a limited level, the needs of this marginalized population were given some consideration.

Between the 1940s and 1960s, segregated approaches to special education for students with a variety of disabilities continued as a widespread practice in American public schools and in institutional facilities (Osgood, 2008). Yell et al. (1998) described the impact of compulsory education laws, the Civil Rights movement, and the role of advocacy groups in improving educational options for individuals with disabilities. The authors noted that, despite the enactment

of compulsory education laws, children with disabilities suffered exclusion from the public school system (Yell et al., 1998). State supreme courts in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Illinois, and North Carolina upheld state statutes that authorized these kinds of exclusions although they did acknowledge the conflict between compulsory education requirements and the exclusionary provisions (Yell et al., 1998).

Although some states did enact requirements for students with disabilities to be educated, lack of funding and inconsistent enforcement of existing laws existed (Yell et al., 1998). However, judicial decisions emulating from the Civil Rights movement provided minority groups, including students with disabilities, equality of educational opportunity. The landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) stipulated that states had no rights to deny its citizens equal protection under the law. Although related to segregation issues, the decision “opened a number of legal avenues for those seeking redress for students with disabilities” (Yell et al., 1998, p. 221).

The application of the concept of equal educational opportunity concerning students with disabilities resulted from challenges to state statutes and policies related to exclusionary practices against children with disabilities. Russo (2008) described two landmark cases related to equality of educational opportunities for these students. *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children [PARC] v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) were two separate class action suits brought on behalf of students with disabilities involving exclusionary practices. In both cases, parents challenged school systems to gain access to public education for their children who experienced denial of services (Itkonen, 2007). In *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971), PARC argued that students with mental retardation were not receiving publically supported education, thus violating the Equal

Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. According to Yell et al. (1998),

PARC was resolved by consent agreement specifying that all children with mental retardation between the ages of 6 and 21 must be provided a free public education and that it was most desirable to educate children with mental retardation in a program most like the programs provided for their non-disabled peers. (p. 223)

The Mills suit (1972) involved a group of parents in the District of Columbia who had children with varying disabilities. Parents contended that their children experienced exclusion from public education in the District of Columbia's public school system (Russo, 2008). As in the PARC case, the parents in Mills prevailed in their legal contention. In addition to requiring that the District provide a public education for all children with disabilities, the Mills court also outlined due process procedures for identifying and placing children with disabilities in programs. These due process procedures became the framework for special education procedural safeguards of today (Russo & Osborne, 2008).

In addition to judicial decisions, the role of parent advocacy was essential in promoting awareness of exclusionary tactics employed by public schools in both the PARC and Mills court decisions. Informal parent groups in a number of states became active as they looked for support based on their common needs related to having children with disabilities. Parents in these groups looked towards one another for support. Special interest groups comprised of parents having children with special needs lobbied Congress for their causes (Yell et al., 1998). In fact, Osgood (2008) explained that "the National Association of Parents and Friends of Retarded Children arose through the consolidated efforts of local advocacy groups and gained formal status in 1950" (p. 96), and this association was later renamed the National Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC).

The United Cerebral Palsy Association, founded in 1949, the National Association for Down Syndrome, founded in 1961, and the National Society for Autistic Children founded in 1961 were some of the groups instrumental at local, state, and national levels in advocating for the public education of children with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). The dichotomy presented by state compulsory education laws and the education of students with disabilities, the impact of judicial decisions related to Civil rights and equality of opportunity, and the strength of special education advocacy groups reflected a growing need to address the issue of educating all children with disabilities.

In the early 1960s, the legality of denying the right of public school entry to children with special needs had diminishing support, and a door opened to begin improving access to these services. Citing the 14th amendment and fueled by civil rights legislation, the advocacy movements led by parents across the country challenged the legality of excluding children from school with compulsory attendance laws in effect. Providing access to public schools for all students began, albeit on a limited basis (Yell, et.al., 1998). Eligibility and entitlement laws for these services developed over the next few decades while accountability requirements ensued later in the evolution of the special education system in this country (Yell et al., 1998).

2.2.2 The Advent of Special Education Legislation

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the advent of the special education movement began in earnest at both the federal and state levels. At the federal level, the government made initial strides in their attempts to provide a free, appropriate, public education to students with disabilities (Osgood, 2008). During the Kennedy and Johnson presidential administrations, federal legislation on behalf of children with disabilities was accelerated (Osgood, 2005). In 1963, the Maternal and Child

Health and Mental Retardation Planning Act, which supported state planning efforts for individuals with mental retardation, was passed. During the same year, Congress also passed the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Construction Act (1963). This Act designated federal funding for research related to special education and for the training of teachers.

As part of Lyndon Johnson's 'war on poverty' in 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Osgood, 2005). Although the initial intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged children, the Act and its subsequent amendments became one of the building blocks of special education law as it exists today (ESEA, 1965). One of the original intents of ESEA (1965) was to address educational inequality. To address these inequalities, ESEA (1965) mandated the allocation of primary and secondary education funds for professional development, provision of instructional materials, allocation of resources for educational programs, and the initiation of activities to promote parental involvement for all students. The Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, created in 1965 as part of ESEA (now the Office of Special Education Programs), conducted research and provided education and staff training. During the mid-1960s, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped supported the provision of Federal resources to states primarily for training teachers, conducting research, and developing model programs as noted by Osgood (2005)

Following the initial passage of the ESEA (1965), a series of amendments were passed throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. These amendments focused on the education of students with disabilities, producing a number of initiatives that earmarked Federal funds to serve students with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). State institutions targeting programs for children with disabilities received federal grants under the State Schools Act. In 1966, local

schools had an opportunity to receive federal grants for the education of students with disabilities as opposed to grants going only to state-operated programs or institutions under an amendment to Title IV of ESEA (Osgood, 2005). Amendments to the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act illustrated governmental support for persons with disabilities, particularly in terms of education.

As the number of Federal initiatives that earmarked small amounts of Federal funds for serving children with disabilities grew, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped recommended their codification under a single law. In 1970, these federal initiatives became a single law, the Education of the Handicapped Act (Michigan Transition Services Association & Michigan Transition Outcomes Project Collaborative Work Group, 2007). Educational options for students with disabilities proliferated as federal legislation during this time initiated funding options to increase access to services and to provide some equity of opportunity for all children.

Despite legislative initiatives, compulsory attendance laws, and parent advocacy, segregation and isolation marked the early history of special education. Access to services for individuals with disabilities was limited, segregated, or non-existent. Equity for children with disabilities existed on an inconsistent basis throughout the country. Since no laws prior to the mid-1970s required that special education services be made available to all children with disabilities, tracking of these students through their educational programming years and beyond was not a requirement of disability law. With no requirement to assist students in transitioning from K-12 public schools to post-secondary work and community living, little to no formalized data tracking occurred regarding the outcome of the limited special education options that did exist. Limited access and discretionary funding characterized the education of children with disabilities. However, the advent of a significant piece of federal legislation, the passage of the Education of

All Handicapped Children Act (1975) changed the landscape of special education in this country in significant ways. Legal entitlement to special education was on the horizon.

2.2.3 Advances in Special Education Legislation

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act “fundamentally changed the lives of children with disabilities, families, and professionals” (Itkonen, 2007, p. 7). The law was an outgrowth of court decisions where parent challenges to the right of educational access for their children with disabilities served as the catalyst. These challenges resulted in two significant Supreme Court decisions: *PARC v. Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972). The Mills and PARC courts applied the equal protection argument in both cases. In PARC, parents contested a state’s right to deny public school services to children with mental retardation. Similarly, in Mills, parents challenged the District of Columbia’s public school system for expelling and refusing to enroll children based solely on their disabilities (Martin et al., 1996). Ruling in favor of the parents, the Supreme Court took the position that children with disabilities have an equal right to access education as their non-disabled peers. Although no federal law existed at the time to mandate public education for all children with disabilities, this ruling laid the groundwork for the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided access to federally assisted rehabilitation programs to persons with disabilities (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2009). The intent of the amendment was to provide access for any individual with a disability, not just an educational disability. The Section 504 amendment was intended to give individuals with disabilities protection from discrimination, and it was applicable to these individuals throughout their lifetime, not just during their public school years (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). It

required accommodations for those with disabilities, including physical access to buildings and structures.

At the time of its passage, however, Section 504 garnered little attention in public education. “It included no funding and no monitoring, and so was virtually ignored by local and state education agencies for 20 years” (Martin et al., 1996, p. 29). Additionally, it was not initially clear what protections actually extended to persons with disabilities through the statute. Many individuals saw Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as a way to correct problems in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, making its initial significance for public schools minimal as noted by Martin, et. al. (1996). Section 504 required the provision of reasonable accommodations for all individuals with disabilities in employment, education and other settings, allowing them full access to and the ability to participate meaningfully in activities of these agencies similar to those enjoyed by individuals without disabilities. Eligibility requirements to access services under Section 504 were defined as “the existence of an identified physical or mental condition that substantially limits a major life activity” (deBettencourt, 2002, p. 18). With no specified federal monitoring component, long term data on the outcome of students served by Section 504 as they transitioned out of the public school sector into adult life was not required. The evolution of subsequent special education law enacted following the passage of Section 504 led to increased awareness on the part of educational institutions as to the requirements of this statute. The evolution of services for individuals with both physical and educational disabilities was on an upward trajectory as the passage of legislation continued at the federal level. Achieving positive long-term outcomes for these individuals served as the catalyst.

In 1975, Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975). Known as EAHCA, it was the predecessor to the current Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (Itkonen, 2007). This “federal legislation brought the various pieces of state and federal legislation into one comprehensive law regarding the education for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998, p. 220). EAHCA (1975) mandated that all school districts educate students with disabilities regardless of how significant these disabilities were. This landmark piece of legislation marked a pivotal point in efforts to support all children with disabilities by including them in public schools. EAHCA (1975) required that all students of school age (i.e., aged 5–21) with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education. The law also provided a federal funding mechanism to support the excess costs incurred by states in complying with these requirements (Martin et al., 1996). States developing plans for educating students with disabilities and receiving approval from the Federal Bureau of Education for the Handicapped were eligible for this funding (Martin et al., 1996). Mandates in EAHCA (1975) included student rights to:

- nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures;
- education in the least restrictive environment;
- procedural due process, including parent involvement;
- free and appropriate education; and
- an Individualized Education Program.

Subsequent revisions of EAHCA included broad mandates providing services to all children with disabilities from those with intellectual disabilities to others with speech impairments. This legislation provided the foundation for a special education system that continues to evolve today.

“To achieve national goals for access to education for all children with disabilities, a number of special issues and special populations....required federal attention” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2010, p. 6). Subsequent amendments to EAHCA provided for this access. The amendments enacted in the 1980s improved

the quality of services provided under the law and expanded opportunities for the provision of services to younger children with disabilities. In 1983, PL 98-199 amended EAHCA in order to “expand incentives for preschool special education programs, early intervention and transition programs” (Horne, 1996, p. 7). Federal funding provided for parent training centers and financial incentive for states to expand special education services to children from birth through three years of age (Horne, 1996). An initiative for transition from school to adult living was also part of the 1983 amendment with funding opportunities for research and demonstration projects related to the post-secondary lives of individuals with special needs. All programs under the jurisdiction of EAHCA moved to oversight by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that had replaced the original Bureau of Education for the Handicapped.

Another amendment to EAHCA came in 1986. Known as the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendment of 1986 or the Early Intervention Amendments, it moved the education of preschoolers with special needs to the forefront of special education legislation. Significantly, this amendment mandated a lowering of the age of eligibility for special education services to three years old, a change that schools were required to implement by 1991. In Section 619 Part H of the same amendment, a new grant program for infants and toddlers with special needs began. It established a new grant program for infants and toddlers with special needs. It likewise allowed for the provision of supports to families of these children. Each child or family served was entitled to an Individual Family Service Plan (*EHA Amendments of 1986 Becomes Law; Establishes New Partnerships for Early Intervention Programs*, 1986).

Parental rights expanded with another amendment to EAHCA known as the Handicapped Children’s Protection Act (1986). Under this Act, parents or guardians were eligible for reimbursement for reasonable legal costs if they prevailed in a hearing or court action regarding

contested special education services for their child. To be able to collect attorney's fees, however, parents needed to seek remedies through existing legislation, such as the Rehabilitation Act. This amendment clarified the rights of students and their parents under both this law and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

With the goal of access to special education having been addressed through a progression of special education laws and amendments through the 70s and 80s, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) initiated a focus on the equality of opportunity. The name of the law changed from Education of the Handicapped to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Yell et al. (1998) captured the significance of the changes to IDEA:

The language of the law was changed to emphasize the person first, included the renaming of the law to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as well as changing the terms handicapped student and handicapped to child/student/individual with a disability. (p. 226)

In addition to changes in the name of the law and the language used to describe disabilities, discretionary initiatives funded by federal grants for parent training, staff development, research, and technical assistance expanded as did programs on transition and services for students with emotional disturbance. Transition services were now a required component of a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) by the time a child reached 16 years of age. In addition, a specific transition plan for post-secondary employment was an IEP requirement. Definitions for assistive technology devices and services were developed and included in the law, and students with autism and traumatic brain injury became eligible for special education services. IDEA supported earlier amendments to EAHCA that expanded the entitlement in all states for children

with disabilities from ages 3-21 in addition to providing funding for infant and toddler early intervention programs (Osgood, 2008).

Subsequently, IDEA of 1990 reaffirmed earlier legislative requirements for a free, appropriate, public education along with the requirements of an IEP with related services, and the provision of due process procedures. With the passage of IDEA in 1990, special education legislation began to move from one providing access to one with a focus on the specific needs individuals receiving those services and during transition times between and among those programs. With the advent of the transition component, individual student plans and prospective outcomes for post-secondary education, employment, or independent living became part of IDEA.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 continued the focus of viewing special education law not just as one providing access to education, but as “a quality and outcomes statute” (Itkonen, 2007, p. 7). IDEA now required the participation of students with disabilities in both school district assessments and statewide exams. Another requirement of the 1997 IDEA amendment required the presence of a general education teacher at IEP meetings. During the reauthorization process, Congress noted the success of IDEA in providing access but viewed the need to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with disabilities as a critical issue (Gartner & Lipsky, 1998).

Other changes in the IDEA 1997 amendment included a requirement that IEP goals and objectives be written in measurable terms to facilitate the ability of educators to ascertain student progress. The reauthorization also included requirements for proactively addressing disciplinary issues involving students with disabilities. Functional behavior assessments, behavior management plans, and positive behavior supports were required for students whose disabilities manifested in behavioral issues. Requirements addressing disciplinary suspensions and exclusions

were determined. In addition, voluntary mediation became part of the 1997 amendments and was a potential remedy for special education disputes between parents of special education students and school districts (Vohs & Landau, 1999).

In 2001, a continued emphasis on accountability for a student's educational progress was evident in the reauthorization of another piece of legislation: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This reauthorization, better known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), applied to all students receiving both regular and special education services and increased state accountability for student progress. Under the requirements of NCLB (2002), all students were required to meet challenging standards on state assessments in reading and math. Assessment results and state progress objectives for the areas assessed were to be examined in regards to a child's poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group was, in essence, left behind (Education Trust, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008):

The law [NCLB] prohibits schools from excluding students with disabilities from the state accountability system, a practice some have used to mask the fact that certain children are not learning. Excluding students with disabilities from testing is also a violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act. (p. 1)

Under the terms of NCLB (2002), all students were to demonstrate proficiency in both reading and math by 2014 (Linn, Baker, & Betebetter, 2002). Handler (2006) noted the commonality of the goals in NCLB and IDEA as "improved educational outcomes for all students through shared responsibility and accountability articulated in the language of the statutes" (p. 6).

This continuing emphasis on accountability is evident in the subsequent reauthorization of IDEA in 2004. IDEA (2004) was signed into law by President George W. Bush and stated, among

other changes, that all students with disabilities participate in annual state or district testing or alternate assessments. IDEA 2004 also defined an expansive methodology for identifying students with learning disabilities. Certification requirements for teachers included a four-year degree and competence in core academic subjects taught (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). With its latest reauthorization, IDEA (2004) represented a comprehensive system of supports available for students with special needs and their families.

Table 1. Components of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004)

Component	Title	Summary
Part A	General Provisions	Description of key definitions; findings of Congress; rationale and purpose of IDEA
Part B	Assistance for the Education of All Children with Disabilities	Process for identification of children with disabilities three through twenty-one years of age; procedural safeguards for students and parents
Part C	Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities	Description of state responsibilities for early intervention for babies and toddlers with disabilities birth through two years of age
Part D	National Activities to Improve the Education of Children with Disabilities	Discretionary programs to improve outcomes for children with disabilities; parent/teacher training, technical assistance for states to support IDEA implementation

With the expansion of special education services through a series of amendments to EAHCA (1975), including IDEA (2004), significant legislation existed to support the needs of students with disabilities. Table 1 illustrates each component part of IDEA (2004). These IDEA (2004) mandates for students with disabilities align closely with NCLB (2002), as both hold schools and districts responsible for the performance of all students, including students with

disabilities (United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2010). Handler (2006) described the purpose of both acts as a shared responsibility between special and regular educators: both IDEA and NCLB necessitate collaboration to improve educational outcomes for all students. With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 and NCLB in 2001, Itokenen (2007) noted the progress of special education legislation from a civil rights statute to an education law. In addition to the IDEA components

Table 2. Major U.S. Special Education Laws: 1965 - Present

Legislation	Year	Law	Focus
Elementary and Secondary Education Act	1965	P.L. 89-10	Improved educational opportunities for disadvantaged students; basis for all special education legislation
Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendment 1965	1965	P.L. 89-313	Grants to states for operating schools for students with disabilities
ESEA Amendment	1966	P.L. 89-750	Grants to local schools for operating schools for students with disabilities
Education for Handicapped Act	1970	P.L. 91-20	Core grant program for LEAs for special education programs
Rehabilitation Act Amendment	1973	Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act	Discrimination prohibited in programs receiving federal funds
Education for All Handicapped Children	1975	P.L. 94-142	Required FAPE, Due Process, educated in LRE
Education of All Handicapped Children Amendment	1990	P.L. 101-478	Law now known as Individual with Disabilities Education Act; transition services now required at 16 years old
IDEA Reauthorization	1997	P.L. 105-17	Focus on education in the general education environment; regular education teachers required at IEP meetings
Reauthorization of ESEA as No Child Left Behind	2001	P.L. 107-110	Students with disabilities required to meet standards on state assessments

IDEA to IDEIA Reauthorization	2004	P.L. 108-446	All students with disabilities must participate in state assessment or alternate assessment; accountability similar to NCLB
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identified in Table 1, Table 2 provides a summary of major special education law in the U.S. since 1965.

From its early beginning as a system of services initially characterized by isolation and segregation, the field of special education grew from the mid-60s with states receiving funding for discretionary services to a system of access and entitlement with the passage of EAHCA (1975). The Early Intervention Amendment passed in 1986 as PL 99-457 lowered the age of access for children with disabilities to three years of age. Renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990 and reauthorized in both 1997 and 2004, the law refined eligibility requirements for services. Accountability for progress in special education classrooms and in post-secondary programs enhanced outcomes for eligible students. Eligibility, entitlement, access, and accountability defined the evolution of special education history from the early 1900's until the present day. An examination of how special education laws are implemented provides a framework for examining effective transition practices for young children between these programs.

2.3 EARLY INTERVENTION: NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS

The history of special education for young children is an evolution of the recent past at the national, state, and local levels. Dunlap, Kaiser, Hemmeter, & Wolery (2012) detailed the proliferation of knowledge developed during the relatively short life of the field of special education for young

children. Developmental domains, intervention strategies, and contextual understanding of these services have grown significantly since approximately 1986 (Dunlap et al., 2012). Federal legislation has guided the development of state and local practices. Over the last 25 years, special education services for young children have developed prolifically in comparison to the small, incremental advances historically made in this field (Dunlap et al., 2012). From discretionary programs to mandated requirements, an examination of the federal legislative chronology supports an understanding of current practices at the Pennsylvania state level and regionally in western Pennsylvania.

2.3.1 National Level

In examining the evolution of special education legislation, laws addressing the education of young children with disabilities came into focus in the mid-1980s, although some earlier legislation reflected its initial beginnings. EAHCA (1975) allowed states serving children ages three through five with disabilities to receive federal funding. In 1983, amendments to EAHCA authorized state grants for the development of comprehensive service plans for children with disabilities ages birth through five (Kunesh, 1990). In 1986, Congress again amended EAHCA, and this amendment, known as the Education of the Handicapped Amendment (1986), extended rights and protections provided by EAHCA to children age three through five under Part B of IDEA. The law required that by the 1990-1991 school year, all states applying for federal funds must guarantee a free, appropriate, public education for all students with disabilities from ages three through five. Congress likewise added Part C to IDEA under this amendment. Part C established a new discretionary program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Under this

section, the Federal government provided discretionary funding for states to establish programs for children with disabilities from birth through two years of age (Danaher, 2007).

In 1990, the Education of the Handicapped Act was amended as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Amendments to IDEA followed in 1991 that addressed special education for young children. This amendment provided Federal assistance for states to support the establishment of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities under IDEA Part C. Part C provided for the establishment of a statewide, interagency system of services for children from birth to age three with disabilities or developmental delays (Danaher, 2007). State governors designated administrative responsibility for these lead agencies within

Table 3. Early Intervention Legislation

Legislation	Year	Law	Focus
PL 94-142	1975	Education of All Handicapped Children Act	Federal funds for states opting to serve students with disabilities ages three through five
PL 98-199	1983	Amendments to PL 94-142	State grants available for the development of comprehensive plans for students with disabilities from birth through age five
PL 99-457	1986	Education of Handicapped Act Amendments also known as The Early Intervention Amendments	States applying for funds under PL 94-142 must guarantee FAPE for all students with disabilities ages three through five; state grants were also established for infants and toddlers with disabilities (Part C)

their jurisdiction. Another facet of this amendment provided preschool grants for states to provide special education services to children with disabilities between ages three and five. State education and local education agencies assumed administrative responsibility for the development and implementation of programs to serve this population. PL 105-17 passed in 1997 allowed for the discretionary expansion of the disability category developmental delay for use with children ages

three through nine (*EHA Amendments of 1986 Become Law*, 1986) Table 3 illustrates the history of early intervention legislation.

2.3.2 Pennsylvania State Level

Early intervention services for young children with disabilities in all states consist of those specialized supports designed to assist students and their families. The principles of early intervention build on the natural learning environment in which children develop during their early years. Federal and state authorizations for early intervention programs guide service delivery in Pennsylvania.

IDEA 2004 reauthorized Assistance for the Education of all Children with Disabilities) and Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Parts B and C, respectively (IDEA, 2004). In Pennsylvania, the Early Intervention Services Act (2003) required the state to provide services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and conferred these powers upon the Department of Public Welfare for children birth through two and the Department of Education for those ages three through five (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning & Pennsylvania Early Intervention, 2009). The requirements of both programs are detailed in the Pennsylvania Code, the official body of documents having the force of law in the state. Title 55 of the Code addresses the Department of Public Welfare, in which specific requirements regarding early intervention services within § 4226 (Early Intervention Services Act, 2003) are found. Additionally, Title 22 of the Code addresses Education in the Commonwealth and specifies the requirements for special education for children ages three through twenty-one in § 14-151-158 (Special Education Services and Programs, 2001 & Supp. 2008).

Program administration of these services comes under the jurisdiction of state and local agencies. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) administers the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's programs for early intervention (Pennsylvania OCDEL & Pennsylvania Early Intervention, 2009). These services are part of a collaborative effort between the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Department of Public Welfare (DPW). Eligible infants, toddlers, and preschoolers receive services through these programs. At the state level, infants from birth through two years of age receive services through the DPW, while eligible children three through five years of age receive supports through the PDE.

State involvement also guides early intervention at the local level. At the local level, each county's early intervention programs administer services provided for infants through age two under the OCDEL umbrella. For children ages three through five, OCDEL contracts services through Intermediate units, school districts, and private agencies for local services for preschoolers in this age range (Pennsylvania OCDEL & Pennsylvania Early Intervention, 2009).

2.3.3 Early Intervention System in Allegheny County

Within Allegheny County, the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers is the service coordination unit serving as a single point of contact for entry into the Pennsylvania Early Intervention System (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, n.d.). Infants and toddlers who demonstrate significant delays in development or have physical or mental conditions known to produce developmental delays are eligible for services. Service coordinators assist families in arranging for both assessment and supports such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, vision services, hearing services, developmental therapy, and social work. The home or a community setting such as a day care center may serve as the location in which infants and toddlers

receive these required services. Service coordination also includes child and family support during the transition process as toddlers approach their third birthday.

From three through five years of age in Allegheny County, children with special education needs are served through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit Early Intervention Program. Known as DART (Discovery, Assessment, Referral, Tracking), the program screens and provides services for children with developmental delays (25% delay on a standardized assessment) and disabilities (“What is DART?”, n.d.). Services include speech/language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, vision, hearing, and family services (“What is DART?”, n.d.). Children receive these services in the least restrictive environment including preschools and child care centers. Others are serviced in Federal Head Start classrooms for students ages three through five from low-income families designed to promote school readiness. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Classrooms programs service additional students ages three to the age of kindergarten entry at risk for school failure based on economic status, ESL or special education needs.

2.4 TRANSITION PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

With the progression of special education legislation, the system shifted its emphasis from access to accountability. Children with disabilities were not only eligible for special education supports, but they were also entitled to these services under federal and state law. The delivery of special education services for students in the educational setting provided access, while an examination of post-school outcomes for these individuals placed an emphasis on accountability. Eligibility requirements for accessing services emerged, and lawmakers began defining entitlements for children and families. With the growth of special education legislation and services arose a need

to address outcomes of students as they progressed through the K-12 educational system and beyond. Examining transition practices and outcomes for special education students provided a way to do this task.

Initially, the focus of special education transition practices centered on special education students who were graduating and moving into post-secondary employment or training. In an examination of these transition practices, Landmark et al. (2010) described the initiation of the transition movement as a response to post-school problems experienced by students with disabilities. Positive outcomes such as continuous employment, community integration, and independent living were lacking for students with disabilities (Hasazi et al., 1985). Amendments to IDEA reflected this emphasis as transition requirements expanded from the mid-1980s through the 2004 reauthorization. The 1983 amendments to Education of All Handicapped Children's Act authorized spending for transition-focused research along with model demonstration grants and contracts (Kohler & Field, 2003). More specificity in transition requirements became apparent in a definition given as part of an amendment to IDEA in 1990:

...a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives. (PL 101-476, Section 1401 A)

IEPs for students ages 16 and older were likewise required to include specific transition components, such as details on services needed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary living based on the 1990 reauthorization of IDEA. Information on agencies outside of the school system was also required to be included in the transition component of an IEP, specifying how their supports would enhance the achievement of transition goals. While transition practices for students approaching post-secondary living were mandated, special education services and transition practices were likewise required for younger children moving from special education preschool programs to the K-12 public school setting (IDEA, 2004).

2.4.1 Transition Practices In Early Intervention

Transition planning for young children has been a long-time requirement of special education law. PL 99-457 amended the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1986 to include service requirements for preschoolers. Sometimes known as the Preschool Act, this law extended a free and appropriate public education to preschoolers ages three to five with disabilities (Part B of IDEA) in addition to establishing a new discretionary program for infants, toddlers and their families ages birth through age two (later known as Part C of IDEA). All states were required to extend the provisions of the Education of the Handicapped Act to young children with disabilities between the ages of 3-5 (Horne, 1996). As part of each state's federal eligibility determination for special education funding, a description of early intervention transition procedures was required as part of the funding application process. With reauthorization of the Education of the Handicapped Act as P.L. 94-142, transition planning became one of the few 100% compliance indicators for IDEA services required in the mandatory yearly State Performance Plan reports to the federal Office of Special Education Programs (*PA State Performance Plan and Annual Report*, 2011). This state

reporting applied to early intervention for children birth through two and to preschool services for children ages three through five.

Federal legislation and research on effective transition practices illustrated the importance of these activities at all levels. Effective transition procedures for children both with and without disabilities have been shown to set the stage for future positive or negative transition experiences (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, 1994) and for optimal learning experiences in school (O'Brien, 1991). An examination of research on effective practices that support transition across the early childhood years revealed literature containing both child-focused and family-focused practices along with those that are ecological in nature, involved systems of care and education and the interplay between both (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). Transition practices for special education students at the early childhood level illustrate the growth of system from limited access to one of entitlement and accountability.

2.4.2 Landmark Transition Studies

Examining early childhood transition practices from a systems perspective provides a framework for understanding best practice in serving young children both with and without special needs. An examination of three landmark transition studies looks at transition practices for preschool and kindergarten students in these groups. Several landmark transition studies involving students moving from preschool to kindergarten reflected data on transition practices for these age groups beginning in the later part of the 1980s. These studies involved children both with and without special needs, their families, and service providers in both preschool and kindergarten programs. Data from the studies examined transition practices and their relationship to continuity between programs, kinds of transition practices implemented, and barriers to implementation. Continuing

the benefits of preschool programs into kindergarten and beyond by identifying practices that support smooth transitions encompassed the scope of these large-scale studies.

2.4.2.1 The National Transition Study

In 1988, the U.S. Department of Education Study conducted the National Transition Study to investigate how public schools supported young children moving from preschool, day care settings, and home to public kindergarten programs (Love et al., 1992). The study surveyed a nationally representative sample of 830 school districts and 1,169 schools with kindergarten classes at the mid-semester point of the 1989-1990 school year (Love et al., 1992). Survey data included information on transition practices, public school characteristics, and difficulties displayed by second semester kindergarten students related to school adjustment.

Only 21% of surveyed districts reported a wide range of transition activities in use (Love et al., 1992). Ten percent of these schools reported systematic communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers while only 12% of the schools aligned kindergarten curricula with preschool programs (Love et al., 1992). Less than half of the 1,169 schools reported having a formal program for school visitation by parents of incoming kindergarten students (Love et al., 1992). Likewise, school size influenced transition practices with 84% of large districts in comparison to 60% of small districts reporting at least some transition activities (Love et al., 1992). The implementation of more transition activities occurred if both the preschool and kindergarten programs operated in the same building and if the population of entering students were in the high poverty range (Love et al., 1992). The National Transition Study concluded that appropriate transition activities depended on factors related to the needs of the child, socio-economic status of the family, size of the receiving school, and the alignment of developmentally appropriate kindergarten curricula with that of the sending preschool or daycare program.

2.4.2.2 National Center for Early Development and Learning Study

Similar in focus to the National Transition Study, a study conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) in 1996-1997 also examined transition practices and barriers to their implementation (Pianta et al., 1999). In the NCEDL study, a national sample of 3600 kindergarten teachers detailed their use of 21 practices related to the transition of children to kindergarten in the 1996-1997 school year (Pianta et al., 1999). Those surveyed also described 15 barriers to implementing these practices. The most frequently reported practices were low intensity, generic contact (e.g., letters home, brochures, open house opportunities) as opposed to those described as high intensity such as in-person contact with children or families (Pianta et al., 1999). Teachers in more urban districts with higher percentages of minority and/or lower SES students reported these factors as barriers to implementing more personal transition activities (Pianta et al., 1999). In response to the NCEDL findings, Pianta and Cox (2002) recommended stronger relationships between preschool programs and kindergartens, school district transition teams, and increased teacher training in building partnerships with families of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

2.4.2.3 Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study

To assess the effectiveness of special education services for young children, the U.S. Department of Education funded another landmark early intervention study to examine “the characteristics of children receiving preschool special education services, the services they receive, their transitions across educational levels, and their performance over time on assessments of academic and adaptive skills” (Carlson et al., 2009, p. xi). Started in 2003, the Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS) involved over 3,104 children with disabilities, their caregivers, and teachers (Carlson et al., 2009). The mixed-methods study included a nationally representative

sample of children with disabilities who were ages three through five years of age when the study began (Carlson et al., 2009). As these students progressed through school, researchers collected data in yearly waves on their academic and adaptive skills up through 2009. Collected via several different instruments, data included one-on-one assessment of children, phone interviews with parents, and written questionnaires for teachers or service providers for each child (Carlson et al., 2009).

Research questions focused on the characteristics of students and programs in addition to the nature of their transitions between preschool and kindergarten (Carlson et al., 2009). Researchers correlated data to determine which child, service, and program characteristics were associated with children's academic and adaptive performance over time (Carlson et al., 2009). Study methodology included one-on-one student assessment, telephone interviews with parents, and surveys mailed to teachers, service providers, school principals, district administrators, and state education administrators (Carlson et al., 2009). Data collection began in the fall of 2003 with follow-ups in the winters of 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009.

Data from the third wave of the PEELS revealed that school readiness skills and the nature of impairment affect the ease of a child's transition to kindergarten (Carlson et al., 2009). Children whose parents reported an ease in transition to kindergarten had adequate receptive vocabulary skills, higher scores in letter and word identification, better-developed social skills, and stronger problem solving/math analysis skills as measured by standardized assessment (Carlson et al., 2009). Similarly, children whose parents rated the significance of their impairment as more severe had difficult kindergarten transitions reported by their parents than did students whose disabilities were less significant (Carlson et al., 2009).

Furthermore, PEELS data indicated both parents and teachers reported that the ease of transition to kindergarten was associated with the receiving school's ability to initiate actions that supported the transition process along with the capacity of that school to provide support to its teachers (Carlson et al., 2009). The importance of the receiving school's readiness was a critical factor in transition success. The school's initiation of transition activities, the involvement and support of teachers during transition planning, and supports provided directly to the child and family to enhance transition denote some of the highly rated practices (Carlson et al., 2009). Eighty-five percent of the parents who reported an easy transition for their child participated fully in the transition process (Carlson et al., 2009). The significance of the readiness of a receiving school to support transition was also one of the recommendations made in an earlier report by the National Education Goals Panel (1998). This report emphasized the importance of striving for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools (National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

According to the PEELS, teachers of students with disabilities upon their entrance to kindergarten used a variety of strategies to facilitate the transition process, while special educators reportedly used more strategies to facilitate this process than did regular education staff members (Carlson et al., 2009). Teachers with students having ease with kindergarten transition used more transition supports than those who reported difficult adjustment (Carlson et al., 2009). Both parents and teachers reported the use of more transition strategies in medium-sized suburban districts than in large urban schools.

The PEELS Wave 3 data showed that the support and involvement of schools in the process of transitioning to kindergarten was significantly associated with the ease of transition as perceived by parents and teachers (Carlson et al., 2009). Although the use of more strategies by teachers and

parents was associated with reports of easy transition, this varied by district size, metropolitan status, and district wealth. Larger, less wealthy urban districts had staff members reporting not only transitions that were more difficult, but also the use of fewer transition supports, raising concerns over the equity of transition services (Carlson et al., 2009). Likewise, there were significant differences in parental reports regarding ease of transition based on race/ethnicity and family income. Twenty-six percent of Hispanic parents reported transition difficulties as did 16% of Black parents in comparison to 13% of White parents (Carlson et al., 2009). In an earlier study of Wave 1 PEELS data, Markowitz et al. (2006) reported that more than one-third of preschool transition coordinators and almost 40% of K-12 public school administrators when surveyed selected “Improvement of Transition Practices” as an area of focus in both their states and in their schools. These administrators noted the impact of transition practices on student success both upon and following their entrance to kindergarten (Markowitz et al., 2006). Although a significant percentage of public school administrators expressed the need to improve transition practices, the literature continued to show a paucity of studies around the topic.

Daley, Munk, & Carlson (2011) used PEELS data to examine transition practices for children with disabilities as they moved to kindergarten, based on a survey of receiving kindergarten teachers. Daley et al. (2011) examined child, family, school, and district factors to predict which children and families received high or low intensity transition supports and what kinds of supports they received. High intensity practices included home visits and visits to a child’s preschool setting from kindergarten teachers, phone calls to parents’ homes, and participation in the development of a child’s IEP (Daley et al., 2011). Review of records and the sending of written information to a child’s home from the receiving school encompassed some of the low intensity practices (Daley et al., 2011).

An examination of data showed that teachers utilized 2.5 high intensity practices and 3.5 low intensity practices to support transition to kindergarten for children with special needs (Daley et al., 2011). Teachers of children with disabilities expressed more concern about the ability of these students to transition without difficulty. Characteristics related to the child and family, the school and district, and the kindergarten classroom were predictors of transition practices that were used (Daley et al., 2011). Larger districts provided fewer and less intense practices than did smaller ones, and children with more severe disabilities appeared to receive more high intensity supports. Families of higher SES had children who received more high intensity supports. Additionally, students who attended both preschool and kindergarten in the same setting received more of both high and low intensity supports than those who transitioned to kindergarten from another preschool setting. Preschool teachers interacted daily with kindergarten teachers in these settings, accounting for the use of more high intensity supports. Four direct predictors of a child's likelihood as to whether or not they received high or low intensity transition supports included the overall size of the school district, the district urbanicity, the district poverty level, and whether a child moved from preschool to kindergarten in the same setting or in a different one (Daley et al., 2011). Table 4 summarizes the landmark transition studies for early education programs.

Table 4. Landmark Transition Studies for Early Education Programs

Study	Year	Purpose	Conducted By
National Transition Study	1988	Determine how public school supported transition from preschool, day care, and home to public school kindergarten for regular and special education students	U.S. Department of Education
Kindergarten Transition National Survey	1996	National Survey of 3,600 kindergarten teachers to examine transition practices	National Center for Early Development and Learning

into kindergarten of regular and special
education students

Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS)	2003	Determine characteristics of children receiving preschool special education services, services received, transition across education levels, performance on academic and adaptive assessments	U.S. Department of Education
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2.5 THEORETICAL MODELS FOR EXAMINING TRANSITION PRACTICES

A review of the literature on effective transition practices revealed the focus of theoretical frameworks around the process. While some practices relate directly to activities involving preparatory transition interactions between teachers and students, others focus on the engagement of families in the process. A number of studies have approached transition from an ecological systems approach, examining the interaction of the systems of relationships found in a child's environment such the family, community, and the school. Within each of the theoretical frameworks, transition practices that enhance the process for children and families were noted.

Rosenkoetter et al. (2009) conducted a review of referred research between January 1990 and March 2006 on early childhood transition with a specific focus on findings related to transitions of young children with disabilities and their families. Conducted as part of research done by the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs sponsored the study. Rosenkoetter et al. (2009) reviewed 50 studies that focused on children in transition and families of young children involved in the transition process. The majority of the studies reviewed were descriptive or correlational

rather than experimental. Studies included more than 40,000 children from diverse racial and ethnic groups across the United States (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Results included proximal findings (data collected less than one school term after the transition) and distal findings (data collected one to five years after the transition). Based on their review of these referred studies, Rosenkoetter et al. (2009) identified three relevant theoretical models for examining transition practices: practices with activities related directly to children/teachers; practices focusing primarily on families; and practices related to ecological systems or the interaction of the system of relationships that form a child's environment such as family, school, and community.

The major findings on effective transition practices related to children and teachers from the NECTC study included a match between the sending and receiving environments and the teaching of pre-requisite skills necessary for kindergarten (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Other effective practices included developmentally appropriate classrooms in both preschool and kindergarten and positive teacher-child relationships in these programs (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Teachers and principals in these studies viewed the acquisition of social skills as a more important readiness factor for kindergarten entrance than academic knowledge (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). In addition to child/teacher focused perspectives on transition, these studies showed that a variety of ecological factors (e.g., socio-economic status and family psychosocial dynamics) were associated with successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten for students with disabilities (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009).

Findings related to effective transition practices for families from the NECTC study showed the significance of positive relationships between families and service providers and the importance of family participation in transition activities (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). The theoretical basis for the transition factors related to families addressed the complexity of the

process and the cohesion of the family on the success of the process (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). A parental sense of self-efficacy supported this school-related involvement. The involvement of parents in transition activities increased their subsequent engagement in the school lives of their children, thus promoting stronger academic skills in students with disabilities (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009).

In categorizing the theoretical frameworks that guided each of the studies reviewed, Rosenkoetter et al. (2009) noted that the most predominant theoretical basis found in a majority of the studies related to an ecological frame of reference. Within this framework, child development theoretically occurs within the course of customary daily activities. Multiple contextual factors influence this development including families, schools, and peers. Effective practices stemmed from relationships among a wide variety of contexts and people in a child's environment. The interaction of an individual child's characteristics, such as temperament and motivation, within these multiple contexts affect learning and development over time. In the ecological framework, the community, sending and receiving schools, child, peers, family, and teachers, along with the continuity or discontinuity of these relationships over time all interact to affect the child's adjustment during transition (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Examining the theoretical basis of transition from a child/teacher perspective, family perspective, and ecological frame of reference provides an overview of both transition practices and their effectiveness. Table 5 categorizes theoretical frameworks for examining these early childhood transition practices.

Table 5. Theoretical Framework for Early Childhood Transition Practices

Focus	Practices	Rationale
Child-Teacher	Teach Pre-requisite skills; Match sending/receiving environments	Acquisition of skills for new environment

Family	Engage family participation; Support parental self-efficacy	Engagement enhances family academic support for child
Ecological	Interaction of multiple systems including child, home schools, and community	Transition support from all contexts in which a child interacts

Note. Theoretical frameworks as outlined in Rosenkoetter et al. (2009).

2.5.1 Child-Focused Transition Practices

A child-focused descriptive study conducted by Rule et al. (1990) examined the benefits of instructing preschool students in what the authors termed a “survival skills” curriculum to facilitate the transition process between preschool and kindergarten. Using observational data, Rule et al. (1990) examined teacher expectations and setting variables of kindergarten and first grade teachers in inclusive classrooms to define a skill set required by entering kindergarten students. The ability to work independently, participate in groups, follow directions, and use varied materials provided the framework for a curriculum developed by the researchers (Rule et al., 1990).

Approximately 20 preschool students per year with mild to moderate disabilities received instruction in a survival skills curriculum over a two-year period while in their preschool program (Rule et al., 1990). With inter-rater reliability at 80% or above, preschool teachers used an observational skills checklist to track acquisition and application of skills during the course of instruction (Rule et al., 1990). A paired-sample t-test design indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between children’s pre- and post-test scores over a 6-month instructional period (Rule et al., 1990). Survey results gleaned from receiving kindergarten teachers likewise indicated that approximately 50% students instructed in the survival skills curriculum performed

defined readiness skills either independently or with little or no assistance, although the study authors noted the limitations of drawing conclusions based on a limited sample of data (Rule et al., 1990).

A similar Australian child-focused transition study conducted by Kemp and Carter (2000) compared preschool students with intellectual disabilities attending a structured preschool transition program against typical peers upon entrance to kindergarten. The purpose of the study was to determine the efficacy of teaching classroom skills such as on-task behavior and the direction following as part of an early intervention special education program (Kemp & Carter, 2000). Over a five-year period, 37 preschool special education students participated in a developmental program that created a simulated kindergarten environment within the preschool program (Kemp & Carter, 2000). The program included whole class instruction, small group activities, and independent work periods. Upon kindergarten entrance, kindergarten teachers matched students who participated in the preschool transition practice activities with students determined to be typically developing (Kemp & Carter, 2000). Behaviors targeted for observation by researchers using commercial observation instruments included on-task behaviors and the ability to follow teacher directions (Kemp & Carter, 2000). Although the typically developing students outperformed those with intellectual disabilities for time on task skills, students with disabilities did rank at the lower end of the average range (Kemp & Carter, 2000). There was, however, a statistically significant difference between the two groups in response to teacher directions. According to observational data, typically developing children demonstrated more responsiveness to teacher directions as evidenced by the need for fewer directional prompts (Kemp & Carter, 2000).

Preparation for participation in the next educational environment for preschool students with disabilities also comprised the theoretical basis for a child-focused transition study reported by Le Ager and Shapiro (1995). In this study, Le Ager and Shapiro (1995) developed templates to evaluate instructional environments in sending preschools and in receiving kindergartens. Using a template-matching strategy, investigators determined differences between the two environments and developed interventions to address these differences. Discrepancies between the preschool environment and kindergarten settings included factors such as types of activities, materials, groupings & locations of students, and amount of teacher prompting (Le Ager & Shapiro, 1995). Sixty-one preschoolers, divided into intervention and control groups, from two urban Pennsylvania settings participated in the transition interventions (Le Ager & Shapiro, 1995). Follow-up observations during their kindergarten year showed that students with disabilities who participated in the interventions in preschool were within the range of their average peers on active engagement, amount of prompting required and off-task behaviors (Le Ager & Shapiro, 1995).

In contrast to the template-matching intervention strategies applied by Le Ager & Shapiro, 1995), Troup and Malone (2002) questioned the extent to which a template of kindergarten readiness requirements would be appropriate for any young child. By describing characteristics of 11 inclusive kindergartens in Ohio based on observational checklists, Troup and Malone (2002) examined facets of the kindergarten environment such as seating routines, group activities, seatwork, curriculum, and expectations for the entering kindergarten child. Based on these observations, Troup and Malone (2002) noted the formalized structure of the kindergarten environment might not provide developmentally appropriate activities for any young child, especially those with special needs. In addition to kindergarten academic routines, these researchers studied other domains in the classroom that impact a child's readiness for the

kindergarten program. Rather than focus on academic transition strategies in special education preschool settings, Troup and Malone (2002) suggested transition activities related to social, behavioral, and functional skills as a means to address both developmentally appropriate curriculum and a seamless transition from one educational setting to the next.

Child-focused transition practices provide preschoolers, both with and without disabilities, instruction and practice in skills matching those required in kindergarten. Taking a skill, analyzing the steps needed to acquire the skill, and giving preschoolers practice with each of the discrete steps define the process used. Conducting observations in kindergarten classrooms allowed preschool teachers the exposure necessary to develop the templates. Teaching a preschool “survival skills” curriculum and presenting activities and instruction to improve on-task behavior and a child’s ability to follow teacher directions reflect some of these practices. Determining how preschools and kindergartens differ, based on the template-matching process, provided the basis for developing these transition interventions, although the developmental appropriateness of such practices have been questioned by some researchers. The studies examined as part of child-focused transition practices all provided children with an opportunity to participate in some type of transition activity related to expectations in the kindergarten classroom. Table 6 summarizes research studies with an emphasis on child-focused transition practices.

Table 6. Child-Focused Transition Practices

Researchers	Year	Transition Focus
Rule, Fiechtl, & Innocenti	1990	Survival skills curriculum to provide practice with independent and group work
Le Ager & Shapiro	1995	Template matching strategy between preschool and kindergarten instructional environments

Kemp & Carter	2000	Structured preschool transition activities to support on-task behavior and the ability to follow directions
Troup & Malone	2002	Preschool transition practice activities to enhance social, behavioral, and functional skills using developmentally appropriate practices

2.5.2 Teacher-Focused Transition Practices

In addition to child-focused transition research where practices addressed perceived deficits in the readiness skills of preschoolers along with interventions to correct these, other studies were more teacher-focused, relating to practices implemented by a teacher to facilitate kindergarten transition. Early, Pianta, Taylor, and Cox (2001) described kindergarten transition practices employed by teachers in making schools ready to receive all children. Using information from the NCEDL Transition Practices Survey, Early et al. (2001) summarized data returned from a stratified random sample of over 3,000 kindergarten teachers. Survey results indicated the implementation of the most common transition practices occurred with the entire entering kindergarten class, and implementation happened after school began rather than before it started (Early et al., 2001). As reported by kindergarten teachers responding to this survey, individualized transition practices implemented by the receiving kindergarten teacher and directed towards children still in preschool just prior to kindergarten entrance happened infrequently or not at all (Early et al., 2001). Furthermore, coordination between preschool and kindergarten programs occurred sporadically. Barriers to effective transition practices included a lack of adequate time to plan, little to no information on incoming students prior to the beginning of the kindergarten year, large

kindergarten classes, and lack of teacher training on the relationship of effective transition practices to school success (Early et al., 2001).

Analyzing data from the same NCEDL study, La Paro, Pianta, and Cox (2000) compared the transition practices of kindergarten and first grade teachers with typical students and those with identified special needs. Overall, teachers reported that transition practices extended to the entire class rather than these practices being directed towards children receiving special education services (La Paro et al., 2000). Two of the most frequently described transition practices included reading written records and contacting the preschool teacher (La Paro et al., 2000). However, an examination of data from 3,600 surveys indicated that 24% of kindergarten teachers read only the written records of their students with special needs prior to kindergarten while 30% of those responding indicating that they did this for all of their students (La Paro et al., 2000). Concerning frequency of transition activities by grade level, La Paro et al. (2000) found that more kindergarten teachers reported the use of these practices (80%) than did receiving first grade teachers (50%). La Paro et al. (2000) also noted that an ecological model of transition, which includes teachers, administrators, related services personnel, families, service providers, communities, and peers, is a consideration for the transition needs of the increasing numbers of students with identified disabilities as they move into public school programs.

Similar to the ecological model of transition proposed by La Paro et al. (2000), Myers (2007) examined the involvement of independent therapy providers and the role they play in a trans-disciplinary team approach to transition. Occupational, physical, and speech/language therapists who provided services to students in early intervention responded to a survey about their role in the transition process and the factors perceived as influencing their participation (Myers, 2007). Forty-five percent of over 300 surveys were completed and returned to the researcher.

Over half of the responding therapy providers indicated that they participated in the transition process, and those respondents who did not participate cited time restraints as influencing their non-participation (Myers, 2007). Of those who participated in transition activities, 84% of these therapists viewed their main role as one of providing support for families (Myers, 2007). Participants ranked working with families and consulting with receiving therapists on the needs of early intervention students as main components of their roles (Myers, 2007). Three themes emerged from an analysis of the survey data and included systems issues around the transition process, family support, and collaboration/communication. Lack of training in the transition process, minimal amounts of time allocated for transition meetings, and the inconsistencies found in the structure of trans-disciplinary transition teams were some of the factors noted as limiting the participation of independent service providers in the transition process (Myers, 2007).

In another exploration of the role of the independent provider in the transition process, Rosenkoetter, Hains, and Dogaru (2007) reported on the linkages fostered by social workers during the transition process. In a report on the role of social workers in successful transitions for young children with disabilities and their families, Rosenkoetter et al. (2007) noted that social workers possess the requisite skills and are well prepared to bridge gaps between people and programs. Their ability to facilitate collaboration early in the process and to maintain continuous communication between providers from sending and receiving agencies enhanced a successful transition as children with disabilities enter kindergarten (Rosenkoetter et al., 2007).

Transition practices employed by pre-kindergarten teachers were the focus of a study by LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, and Pianta (2008). Utilizing the same data from the NCEDL Multi-State Pre-kindergarten Study, these researchers examined the use of transition

practices by preschool teachers followed by an investigation of receiving kindergarten teachers' judgments of the social, self-regulatory, and academic skills of their students who participated in preschool transition programs (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Study participants included over 700 regular education preschool children from 214 pre-kindergarten classrooms across six states (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). At the end of the pre-kindergarten year, preschool teachers took the NCEDL pre-kindergarten teacher survey on transition practices usage (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Based on these results, researchers developed a transition composite index of implemented transition activities. In the fall of their kindergarten year, receiving teachers of these same students also completed a survey known as the Teacher-Child Rating Scale. Teacher responses to questions on the scale reflected their perception of elements related to social and emotional maturity as displayed by their students. In addition, the kindergarten teachers completed an academic rating scale, measuring student proficiency in language and literacy skills.

Preschool teachers reported implementation on an average of six out of the nine transition activities listed on the composite, with the most frequently implemented activity being that of record sharing with kindergarten teachers (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). After controlling for variables including gender, ethnicity, family poverty level, and maternal education level, an analysis of the data indicated a positive correlation between transition activities implemented by pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers' reporting of social competency (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). One transition activity involving communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers about a child and/or curricula correlated positively with kindergarten teachers' perceptions of positive social competencies and less behavioral problems (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). The total number of kindergarten transitions experienced by children who were at risk

socially and economically did moderate the effect of risk factors (e.g., poverty) on kindergarten teachers' perceptions of academic and social competence (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Other researchers examined risk factors associated with transitioning students when looking at both practices employed by and the experiences of teachers and families related to the transition process. Quintero and McIntyre (2011) investigated risk factors associated with the transition process of students with more significant disabilities. Teachers and parents of 95 students diagnosed with either autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or developmental delays (DD) responded to survey questions on teacher concerns and teacher/parent involvement regarding transition practices (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Collection of survey responses occurred in the spring of each student's final year in preschool and during the first month of his or her kindergarten year.

Quintero and McIntyre (2011) found that although teachers reported higher overall concerns regarding transition for students with ASD than those with DD, there was no significant difference in the number of transition practices implemented by either teachers of students with ASD or teachers of students with DD students upon their preschool exit or during their initial entrance to kindergarten. However, teachers of students with ASD did endorse the practice of having these students and parents visit the kindergarten classroom prior to the start of school (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Parents indicated more involvement on the part of preschool teachers in transition activities than that of kindergarten teachers in this study (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Quintero and McIntyre (2011) concluded that generalized rather than individualized transition practices appeared to be the norm.

Research on teacher-focused transition practices indicated the use of generalized rather than individualized activities for entering kindergarten students both with and without special

needs across the studies reviewed. Data reflected that the usage of low intensity practices (e.g., reading records of incoming students) occurred more frequently than consultation between sending and receiving program staff members. The involvement of kindergarten teachers alone produced more low intensity practices than when related service providers participated in the process. Table 7 summarizes teacher-focused transition practices.

Table 7. Teacher-Focused Transition Studies

Researchers	Year	Transition Focus
La Paro, Pianta, & Cox	2000	Comparison of transition practices for students with and without special needs upon kindergarten entry; practices are generalized, not individualized and implemented by about 24% of receiving teachers
Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox	2001	Survey data of kindergarten teachers showed generalized rather than individualized practices and sporadic communication between sending and receiving programs to be common
Myers	2007	Role of independent therapy providers in trans-disciplinary approach to transition illustrated family support and consultation with receiving therapists; participation barriers include lack of training and adequate time for collaboration
Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Dogaru	2007	Role of social workers in transition process creates a bridge between families and receiving programs; facilitation of communication is the primary role
LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta	2008	Positive correlation between transition activities implemented in preschool and social competency skills of entering kindergarten students as rated by the receiving kindergarten teachers

Quintero & McIntyre	2011	Risk factors examined for transitioning children with significant disabilities; no significant difference reported in the number of transition activities for these students; parental reports of more preschool teacher involvement in transition activities
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2.5.3 Family-Focused Transition Practices

In addition to child-focused and teacher-focused transition practices, the role of families in the transition process is a requirement of federal special education law under IDEA (2004) and the Pennsylvania Code (Special Education Services and Programs, 2001 & Supp. 2008). As the main provider in the transitioning child's system of care, the family serves as a supportive link between prekindergarten education and the K-12 public school setting. Researchers have examined transition practices in relation to families of students both with and without disabilities.

2.5.3.1 Transition of Students and Family Involvement

Positive academic and adjustment outcomes correlate to the development of family-school connections during the kindergarten transition process (Kang, 2010; Schulting et al., 2005). Researchers have examined the effect of this connection for students both with and without disabilities as they transition to kindergarten. Kang's (2010) interviews with families of entering kindergarten students illustrated the value families placed on their involvement in the transition process. Through in-depth interviews conducted with seven families, Kang (2010) noted that families perceived having improved abilities to both provide support for and to reduce anxiety in their children during the transition process. Families cited visits to kindergarten classrooms prior

to the start of school along with an opportunity to meet the kindergarten teacher during transition activities as factors facilitating the adjustment of their children (Kang, 2010). However, Kang's (2010) qualitative research indicated that the number of transition activities in which a family participated was not the only predictor for a child's early school adjustment. Other factors such as socio-economic status, the nature of a child's disability, and English language proficiency also influenced the transition process. Likewise, Pianta et al. (1999) noted that barriers to transition occur with increasing frequency as schools became more urban, have high minority populations, or are comprised of families with low socio-economic status. Family involvement in transition to kindergarten is one component of a system of interacting components in which a child is involved, including sending and receiving schools, service providers, agencies, communities, and peers.

In 2002, Bohan-Baker and Little conducted a review of promising practices in kindergarten transition related to family involvement that addressed similar barriers to the transition process as noted by Pianta et al. (1999). As part of the Harvard Family Research Project to promote well-being of children with and without disabilities and their families, Bohan-Baker and Little (2002) developed a research brief validating the importance of continuity between systems of care and education. The three inter-related practices of reaching out to families while children are in preschool, reaching back to families prior to the start of kindergarten, and reaching with appropriate intensity provided the foundation for various family involvement techniques (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Yet, practices such as reaching out to parents of children in preschool and reaching back during the summer prior to kindergarten were those high intensity transition activities that Pianta et al. (1999) reported as occurring least frequently.

Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, and Hughes (2008) considered the severity of a child's disability and the family's perception of transition services upon entry to either preschool or

kindergarten. Janus et al. (2008) utilized surveys and semi-structured interviews to gather data from 40 families. Parents of children with special needs entering preschool reported significantly more family involvement based on their child's disability and more satisfaction with the level of transition support received than did parents of entering kindergarten students (Janus et al., 2008). Parents of students with identified disabilities who were entering kindergarten reported less positive transition experiences regardless of the severity of their child's disability (Janus et al., 2008). Problematic issues reportedly existed around delay of special education services in kindergarten, inconsistent communication between service providers in preschool and kindergarten, and adequate time for staff/parent interactions upon entrance to the program (Janus et al., 2008). Janus et al. (2008) illustrated a gap in what is required for transition as mandated by special education law and parental perceptions of what actually transpires.

While the studies of Kang (2010), Bohan-Baker and Little (2002), and Pianta et al. (1999) involved families of students both with and without disabilities, Wildenger and McIntyre (2010) examined parental concerns, perceived needs, and level of involvement of parents with typically developing students upon transition to kindergarten. Approximately 90 families with entering kindergarten students in three school districts completed a questionnaire on transition activities offered to parents. A descriptive analysis of the data revealed that the majority of parents (70%) expressed very few concerns about the transition process (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). Families similarly reported being involved with at least six transition practices such as visiting classroom, attending orientation, and receiving written information regarding kindergarten procedures (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). Only 5% of the questionnaire respondents reported participation in more high intensity transition practices (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010); however, similar to the reaching back to preschool to establish family relationships as noted in the Bohan-Baker & Little

(2002) research brief, the role of preschool and kindergarten teachers in involving families in the process remains pivotal.

The need expressed by parents for more frequent and more intense levels of involvement in the transition process is a consistent theme across research studies, which include students with and without identified disabilities. McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) examined the experiences and involvement of 132 caregivers whose children with and without disabilities transitioned to kindergarten from preschool programs in addition to exploring environmental variables that may affect family participation in this process. Ten percent of the respondents reported participating on a transition team to give input about their child, while one-fourth of the caregivers noted that a transition meeting had occurred (McIntyre et al., 2007). Participants also indicated the need for more information about kindergarten academics (80%) and information on the future kindergarten teacher (75%), while 68% indicated a need for strategies to help at home with kindergarten preparation (McIntyre et al., 2007). Similar to findings from a qualitative research study on parental involvement in transition conducted by Hanson et al. (2000), parents viewed transition as a one-time “event” rather than a process extending from preschool into kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2007). In relation to transition barriers, McIntyre et al. (2007) also reported that caregivers in lower socio-economic brackets reported less overall involvement in transition when compared to respondents in higher income groups.

Extending the work for McIntyre et al. (2007), Burford (2005) surveyed families of students with disabilities upon entrance to kindergarten and examined parental appraisal of the transition process. Supporting the data produced by McIntyre et al. (2007), Burford (2005) found that of the 202 survey responses, parents who graduated from high school or above provided more positive appraisals of the process than those with less education. In addition to education level,

parents made higher appraisals of the transition process if they perceived themselves as receiving transition support from teachers in either the preschool or the kindergarten programs (Burford, 2005).

Schulting et al. (2005) examined the effect of transition policies and practices on academic outcomes of kindergarten students both with and without disabilities. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-5), the researchers examined the relationship between student achievement and family participation in transition in over 900 schools. Using composite academic achievement scores from fall and spring assessments and parent survey data, Schulting et al. (2005) demonstrated that kindergarten transition policies had a modest positive effect on student academic achievement and on parent initiated school involvement during the kindergarten year. Hierarchical linear modeling indicated that the number of school-based transition practices executed in the fall were associated with more positive academic outcomes at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al. 2005). This finding was true even when other variables such as SES and other demographic factors were controlled.

Dogaru, Rosenkoetter, and Rous (2009) used the critical incident research strategy to collect data from families whose children with disabilities ages three through five transitioned from one service system to another. Sponsored by the National Early Childhood Transition Center, the study identified effective and ineffective practices (Dogaru et al., 2009). Parents related their experiences with the transition process for themselves and their children (Dogaru et al., 2009). The practices and strategies identified in the critical incident reports focused on collaboration, communication, support, and planning. Twenty-one families cited a majority of positive transition outcomes including the increased knowledge and skills parents acquired to support their children through the transition process and the empowerment they felt relative to successfully interacting

with the new service system (Dogaru et al., 2009). However, 37 families reported an overall negative impact with the process (Dogaru et al., 2009). Negative experiences related to emotional responses associated with the process where families expressed concerns, uncertainties, and fears associated with the move from one system of service providers to another (Dogaru et al., 2009). Table 8 summarizes both positive aspects of the transition process from the family perspective in addition to noting perceived barriers.

Table 8. Family-Focused Transition Practices: Perceived Strengths and Barriers

Author	Year	Focus
Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early	1999	Barriers to transition impede family participation
Hanson et al.	2001	Barriers to transition related to family SES; one time event and not a process
Bohan-Baker & Little	2002	Importance of continuity in systems of care and education focused on transition
Burford	2005	More education equated to more positive appraisals of transition process
Schulting, Malone, & Dodge	2005	Modest effect on achievement related to parental participation in transition activities
McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger	2007	Low level of family involvement reported
Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes	2008	Gap perceived by parents between what law requires for transition and what occurs
Dogaru, Rosenkoetter & Rous	2009	Family concerns with transition related to involvement and participation in the process
Kang	2010	Involvement of parents in transition increase parental support of students in kindergarten
Wildenger & McIntyre	2010	Family reported involvement in transition but not high intensity transition practices

2.6 ECOLOGICALLY-FOCUSED TRANSITION PRACTICES

Examining transition from the perspective of the child, the teacher, and the family compartmentalizes the dynamic process that, in essence, involves the interaction of all these systems and others as students both with and without disabilities move from preschool settings to kindergarten. An ecological model of transition involving the dynamic interaction among all systems in which a child develops including the family, school, community, and peers acknowledges the complexity of the process.

To understand the interactions of complex multiple systems and their influence on the transition process, it is imperative to understand the basis of these ecological theories. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2001) provided a theoretical framework for examining human development with a bioecological model. This model characterized a child's development in the context of reciprocal interaction between persons and objects in their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2001). Within a developing child's environment, Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2001) viewed spheres of influence (e.g., the family, school, peer group, and surrounding community) as interacting dynamically to influence a child's ability to adjust to a new environment. These kinds of environmental changes mirror the process that occurs during transition from preschool settings to kindergarten for all children.

In addition to the influence of bioecological theories on the transition process, organizational theory also provides a context for examining it. Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, and Richert (1996) suggested an ecological rather than a hierarchical and bureaucratic framework for a basis in understanding how organizations function. Both of these theoretical frameworks involving human development and organizational structure form the

Table 9. Theoretical Frameworks Supporting an Ecological Context for Transition

Authors	Year	Focus
Bronfenbrenner & Evans	2000	Human development theory that change results from reciprocal interactions of persons and objects in their environment
Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, & Richert	1997	Organizational theory that organization change is ecological in nature rather than hierarchical and bureaucratic

rationale for an ecological systems model for transition. Table 9 summarizes these contextual frameworks.

With this ecological framework in mind, it becomes evident that a child's transition to school "takes place in an environment defined by the many changing interactions among child, school, classroom, family, and community factors" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 499). Transitions from preschool settings into school-age programs for children with identified disabilities require interactions among sending programs, receiving programs, children, families, and community service providers in most instances. These interactions are not separate from one another but are mutually dependent. Strong interagency structures and supports along with clearly defined and systematically implemented transition practices are essential to a successful transition process (Rous & Myers, 2007). Conceptual models of the transition process include those related to skill development in transitioning children, teacher practices, and family interactions. Using a conceptual model focusing on the complex interactions of multiple factors in the transition process is another framework for examining these practices.

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) provided an ecologically informed approach to conceptualizing the transition to formal schooling in a paper developed for the National Center for

Early Development and Learning. The authors noted the need to conceptualize transition to school for all children in terms of the relationships between children and all facets of their surrounding contexts including family, peers, neighborhoods, and schools (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) viewed a child's school readiness as resulting from the combined influence of these contexts and the relationship among them and considered effective transitions as resulting from an understanding of how contexts and relationships change over time. The authors also noted that stability in such relationships was a key component as all children enter formal school programs.

Furthermore, Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) proposed an ecological conceptual framework for understanding transitions for young children with disabilities based on the human development theory of Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2001) and the organizational theory of Lambert et al. (1997). Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) examined the organizational complexities that surround students and families during the transition from preschool settings to kindergarten. This ecological framework considers the interaction of multiple factors that influence the transition process and affect the goal of a child's successful kindergarten entry.

Factors related to the child, family, community, individual programs, local service systems, and state policies along with the interplay between them comprised Rous, Hallam et al.'s (2007) ecological contextual framework. The nature of a child's disability along with family culture, income, and composition influenced the transition process. The ecological perspective also supported the relationship of children, families and service providers to the communities in which these are situated (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). Community resources and community economics have often determined the availability of programs of care and education. Transition planning, according to this model, must also involve an understanding of individual programs of care and

education in addition to the local services systems in a community (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). Rous, Hallam, et al.'s (2007) ecological contextual model of transition also considers policies, procedures and the service delivery system as defined by individual states.

Moreover, Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) noted the significance of three critical factors specifically related to the transition process itself. The first of these factors was the significance of communication and relationships among the child, family, community, and the agencies that serve them (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) also noted the importance of strong interagency infrastructures outlining specific roles and responsibilities of staff involved with transition. Another factor noted by Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) was the need for some degree of continuity between sending and receiving programs to increase the likelihood of a successful transition. In addition to communication factors and interagency infrastructures within the ecological contextual framework for examining transition practices, specific strategies supporting transition practices also came under consideration.

Strategies for supporting transitions of young children with special needs and their families provided the basis for a study conducted by Rous, Teeters et al. (2007). The study utilized focus groups composed of school administrators, practitioners, and family members to identify effective transition practices (Rous, Teeters et al., 2007). Based on a purposeful sample of participants who attended a national early childhood conference, 10 focus groups comprised of 43 individuals identified transition issues along with suggesting strategies to address these concerns. Two themes emerged from the study. The first theme included critical interagency agency variables that supported a transition process involving multiple parties including families and agencies that serve them (Rous, Teeters et al., 2007). Both intra- and inter-agency coordination comprised a part of the critical variables identified by the focus groups. The second theme emphasized the need for a

strong infrastructure including supportive administrators, agency personnel dedication to transition support, and policies clearly defining transition requirements (Rous, Teeters et al., 2007). The outcome of the transition process was dependent upon the successful interaction of all variables in the contextual framework surrounding young children with disabilities and their families (Rous, Teeters et al., 2007).

To enhance the interaction of all systems involving a young child with disabilities during their transition to kindergarten, collaboration among all of the service providers is essential to the process. In 2001, Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, and Higgins published research on collaboration among partners and its effect on the kindergarten transition process for children with and without disabilities. Based on a conceptual model that recognized ecological theories of child development, Pianta et al. (2001) gathered data that characterized the relationships among the collaborators during the transition process. Using questionnaires, rating scales, and structured interviews, the researchers interviewed preschool teachers, parents, and other outside service providers working with families. Over 100 families, ten preschool teachers, and seven community agency providers gave input during the spring prior to the kindergarten transition. Analysis of the interview data indicated that parents and teachers in the preschool year shared mutually positive views of one another in relation to their ability to collaborate effectively (Pianta et al., 2001). Preschool staff were endorsed by parents as the most important and helpful source of support during transition activities (Pianta et al., 2001). Parents likewise indicated that the receiving kindergarten teachers appeared to be less engaged in the transition process and less involved in collaboration either with the preschool teachers or with the families (Pianta et al., 2001). Researchers concluded that positive perceptions among the participants of the roles and

contributions of sending and receiving teachers, families, and outside service providers enhance the collaborative process (Pianta et al., 2001).

The importance of collaboration among all individuals and agencies involved in transition is one of the critical interagency variables noted by Rous, Hallam et al. (2007). A case study conducted by Boyer (2001) described the significance of collaboration as a factor contributing to a successful kindergarten transition for children exiting early childhood special education programs and entering kindergarten. In a qualitative study of two children transitioning from an early childhood special education program to kindergarten, Boyer (2001) conducted interviews with parents, administrators, and both sending and receiving teachers. Data supported the importance of collaboration among the school staff from both the sending and receiving programs with families and the supportive role of school administrators in planning and executing transition activities (Boyer, 2001).

Another case study done by DeVore and Russell (2007) illustrated the significance of the collaborative roles of early care and childhood education providers in facilitating a smooth transition for children with disabilities upon entrance to kindergarten. While examining inclusive programming for preschoolers with disabilities, DeVore and Russell (2007) identified key practices that supported smooth kindergarten transition, including opportunities for collaboration among special and regular education teachers, families, and service providers such as speech-language therapists. Reciprocity in sharing of information, the development of concepts of trust and equality among service providers, and the designation of a transition coordinator contributed towards a successful transition as reported by parents in this study (DeVore & Russell, 2007). Table 10 provides an overview of these ecologically focused transition studies.

Table 10. Ecologically Focused Transition Studies

Researcher	Year	Transition Focus
Pianta, Kraft-Sayer, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins	1999	Research study on collaborative interactions between transition partners; parental perception of positive preschool support with transition; positive perception on the roles played by transition partners correlates with stronger transitions for children
Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta	2000	Provided a conceptual framework for transition; transition is ecological in that it is based on relationships between a child and their surrounding contexts of family, peers, community, and systems of care and education
Rous & Myers	2006	Research brief on the relationship between strong inter-agency structures and supports along with clearly defined transition practices in the reduction of barriers as children move from preschool to kindergarten
DeVore & Russell	2007	Case study on the collaborative roles of early care and education providers in facilitating transition of children with disabilities to kindergarten; information exchange between special/regular education staff and the need for designated transition coordinators defined as essential components
Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung	2007	Ecological framework for viewing transition from preschool to kindergarten based on human development theory and organizational theory
Rous, Myers, & Strickland	2007	Focus group study on critical interagency variables supporting the interaction of multiple parties in the transition process including families, community agencies, and sending/ receiving schools

2.7 SUMMARY

Understanding the phenomenon associated with the transition process and determining ways to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families has evolved since the mid-1980s with the passage of amendments to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. Rous & Hallam (2012) synthesized the transition literature beginning with the inception of this law, noting that with the passage of P.L. 99-457 (i.e., the Early Childhood Amendments to EAHCA), students with disabilities faced multiple transition points. Rice and O'Brien (1990) defined these points as times of change in services and the personnel who provide these services.

The advent of early intervention services for infants and toddlers moved the transition age for students with disabilities to two years of age. Young children with disabilities have the potential to transition into infant/toddler intervention programs before age two, transition to early intervention services at age three, and transition again at age five to K-12 public schools. Services and supports available to these students and their families have increased across the states. The development of state and federal policies ensures that children with disabilities receive support during the transitions which they make between and among programs. Conceptual models for examining transition include those that are child-focused, teacher-focused, family-oriented, or ecologically based. Knowledge of these practices in terms of what supports strong transitions for young children with disabilities entering the K-12 public school system provides sending and receiving schools with a research basis for developing effective practices. Effective transition practices facilitate school adjustment and enhance later school achievement.

The current body of literature addressing early intervention transition practices reflects the perspective of kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, parents, and researchers. Observational data, survey information, and student assessments inform the research as it relates to types and

effectiveness of these practices. The studies presented in this literature review illustrate the significance of collaboration among agencies involved with transitioning children/families, the importance of family involvement in the process, and the participation of both sending and receiving schools in supporting effective transitions.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, prescribed transition requirements from preschool services to school-age programs exist for students identified with special education needs. In public school districts in Pennsylvania, school district staff members, whose responsibilities involve the coordination and direction of special education services, customarily coordinate this transition process. The perspective of these individuals directing these services within public school districts is an unidentified component in the literature reviewed by this researcher. In addition to knowing what is required during the early intervention transition process, special education directors are in the unique position to provide additional input on the kinds of transition practice implemented, the frequency of implementation, and their perceived effectiveness. Examining transition practices from this perspective can identify potential barriers to the success of the process. Input from their perspective will contribute to the literature on effective practices as school districts strive to give all students, especially those identified with special education needs prior to entry, a strong start in kindergarten and support the need for this study.

3.0 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

With access to special education services available from birth through age 21, students with identified needs experience transitions between and among programs throughout their educational years. A pivotal transition point is the one between preschool services and school-age programs. A review of the literature illustrated that some transition practices are more likely than others to enhance the quality of this process. Some of these more effective transition practices, however, appeared to be those used less frequently.

High intensity practices related to the ecological interaction of multiple systems in a child's environment provide higher quality transitions than low intensity generic practices (Early et al., 2001). Dynamic interactions between staff of sending and receiving programs, high levels of family involvement, inclusion of private service providers in transition activities, and professional development for teachers reflect some of the more high intensity practices. However, a number of research studies showed the use of more generic, less interactive, and more impersonal practices to be common (e.g., Pianta & Cox, 1999; Rous & Myers, 2006). Quality transitions build on children's social, academic, and emotional readiness for kindergarten and provide a platform for their success in the new environment (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Knowledge and use of high quality transition practices implemented by preschool and school-age personnel enhance opportunities for the success of children with identified special education needs in this process.

3.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Special education services and supports have expanded significantly over the last 50 years. Federal and state legislation require the education of all students with disabilities from birth through age 21 in the least restrictive environment and at public expense. Access, entitlements, and accountability form the foundation for this education. Children born with disabilities face numerous transitions in their lifetime as they move between and among systems of care and education. To derive maximum benefit from their educational programs, these transition periods require supports that promote a seamless process as children experience these moves.

The quality of the early intervention transition process is dependent upon multiple factors including the level and type of involvement related to school personnel, families and their children, and the engagement of outside providers who service these students (Rous & Hallam, 2012). Factors including academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive competencies are associated with quality transition practices (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006). The provision of information by preschool service providers to kindergarten staff regarding the cognitive and adaptive competencies of incoming students with disabilities is another indicator of quality transitions (Rous, Teeters, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007). Acquiring the support and involvement of parents of entering kindergarten students, a factor correlated to higher academic achievement at the end of kindergarten is yet another contributor to strong transitions (Schulting et al., 2005). Children entering kindergarten from preschool are open to new influences (Pianta & Cox, 1999) while the responsibility for providing a quality transition process resides with the staff from sending and receiving programs in order for this to happen. Examining early intervention transition from the perspective of school district special education directors forms the basis for this

inquiry into kinds of practices, frequency of implementation, perceived effectiveness, and possible barriers to the process related to practice usage.

3.2 PARADIGM

The research illustrating the significance of a quality transition process from preschool to kindergarten for children with disabilities provides a foundation for the paradigm reflecting this researcher's view. Children experiencing a quality transition to school-age programs enter developmentally appropriate settings staffed by informed teachers who are cognizant of their individualized needs, have support from involved families, and possess the cognitive and adaptive skills required for their success. The postpositivist paradigm described by Mertens (2010) provided the foundation for this investigation into factors that contribute successful transitions. Factors contributing to successful transitions can be studied and observed by examining the frequency of high intensity transition practices to determine the probability of a quality transition occurring.

3.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The theoretical perspective underlying this examination of transition practices focuses on the premise that some practices are more likely than others to enhance the quality of the process. Specific transition practices related to interactions between the children and teachers, family involvement, and the ecological interaction of multiple systems in a child's environment are

theorized to provide higher quality transitions as students with disabilities move from preschool to kindergarten.

3.3.1 Quality and Types of Transition Practices

Low intensity transition practices, such as generic parental contacts by way of general letters, school brochures, and open house opportunities tend to be available more often than high intensity practices such as in-person contact (Pianta & Cox, 1999). The National Transition Study correlated the significance of the disability, the socio-economic status of the family, and the size of both the sending and receiving programs to the amount and kinds of transition practices made available (Love et al., 1992). One finding indicated that high poverty schools have less family involvement in the transition to kindergarten process.

The Pre-Elementary Educational Longitudinal Study (PEELS) related children's academic achievement and adaptive performance over time to the amount and kinds of transition services provided (Carlson et al., 2009). Children shown to have more ease with transitions were those whose sending and receiving teachers reported more involvement in the transition process than those who did not report as high a level of involvement. The ability of a receiving school to give academic and social support to transitioning children as they entered kindergarten in addition to providing professional development to teachers on strategies to address the needs of students with disabilities were cited in PEELS as beneficial practices.

3.3.2 School Environment and Transition

Further enhancing the theoretical perspective that certain practices facilitate quality transition, actions taken by sending teachers in preschool special education programs to ensure that transitioning students have prerequisite readiness skills provide another area of consideration. Such practices involve creating a match between the sending preschool and the receiving kindergarten environment with reference to prerequisite skills such as working in a group, working independently, and following directions. Rule et al. (1990) showed the relationship of teaching a survival skills curriculum in preschool to a better kindergarten adjustment. Le Ager & Shapiro (1995) showed the correlation between the development of a template of expectations in a kindergarten classroom and the use of this template to facilitate the development of pre-kindergarten readiness in the preschool classroom to higher quality transitions and better kindergarten adjustment. Troup & Malone (2002) and Kemp & Carter (2000) illustrated the positive correlation between structured preschool transition activities related to the development of social, behavioral, and functional skills and quality kindergarten transitions.

3.3.3 Family Role in Transition

Another aspect of the theoretical framework that specific actions taken prior to and during transition improve the quality of the process is the engagement of a child's family in the process. Low levels of family involvement constitute a barrier to successful preschool to kindergarten transitions. Parents not engaged in transition activities when preschoolers with disabilities move to kindergarten miss opportunities for collaboration, support, and planning that do exist between systems of care/preschool early intervention and the K-12 education programs (McIntyre, et al.,

2007). High levels of family involvement in the process, however, account for increased parental support in subsequent years (Kang, 2010) along with a positive effect on school achievement (Schulting et al., 2005). Bohan-Baker and Little (2002) highlighted three important strategies for the transition process: reaching out to families when children are receiving early intervention services, reaching back to families at the start of kindergarten, and reaching with appropriate intensity. Actions initiated by Pennsylvania Intermediate Units and school district transition staff work towards establishing a connected transition process prior to a child leaving preschool services, at transition IEP meetings, and prior to school entrance.

3.3.4 Ecological Framework and Transition

Facilitating a transition process in which the various spheres of a child's ecological system interact (including the family, schools, community, peers, and private service providers) supplies additional support for the theoretical framework that specific actions taken during transition periods improve their quality. The research of Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) and Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) conceptualized transition as an ecological process based on the relationships among all of the surrounding contexts in which transitioning students are involved.

Strong interagency structures and supports along with clearly defined transition practices reduce barriers as children with disabilities move from preschool to kindergarten (Rous & Myers, 2007). The involvement of multiple agencies and individuals in the process likewise requires transition facilitators in both sending and receiving schools to support communication between special and regular education staff, families, and outside agency service providers such as speech/language therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral mental health staff. Involving the appropriate agencies and individuals in the process and facilitating high intensity, personalized

transition practices increases the likelihood of a quality transition from preschool services to kindergarten for children with disabilities and their families (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The theoretical framework, supported by researchers and my own experience as a school district Pupil Services Director, indicates that specific transition practices affect a quality transition from special education preschool services for young children with disabilities as they move to kindergarten in the K-12 public school setting. An effective transition from early



Figure 2. Effective Transition Components

intervention services to kindergarten, as illustrated in Figure 2, originates with a child having a disability, incorporates the family's needs and aspirations for the child, and involves all of the multiple systems in which a child interacts.

3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To operationalize the theoretical framework on the significance of transition strategies, this study examined these activities within the parameters of kinds of practices, frequency of use, and perceived effectiveness, in addition to potential barriers to the process, based on usage. Through the use of an instrument adapted from National Early Childhood Transition Center's transition

practices survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.), an examination of transition practices and strategies which are implemented when preschool students with special education needs move from early intervention to kindergarten programs were investigated. High intensity transition practices addressing the needs of both transitioning children and their families, providing opportunities for the involvement of the agencies serving these children, and involving staff members from both sending and receiving programs are linked to effective transitions as reported by Rous, Hallam et al. (2005). These transition practices also provided the foundation for survey questionnaire. In addition to kinds of practices and frequency of implementation, survey items also included questions on perceived effectiveness of such practices. Successful transition outcomes, based on specific transition practices allowing children with disabilities and their families to move from preschool to kindergarten prepared and ready to adjust to the new environment, was the construct underlying this research.

3.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive cross-sectional survey of targeted school district special education directors in ten counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania to examine transition practices for students with disabilities as they move from preschool special education services to school-age programming in kindergarten. It examined the kinds of transition practices used, frequency of use, and the effectiveness of these practices as perceived by school district transition coordinators. Additional analysis related to barriers to transition related to practice implementation was also done.

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

This study incorporated survey research as part of a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional examination of transition practices used by school district special education coordinators as students move from preschool to kindergarten. Survey data collection was completed via Survey Monkey, a web-based online survey tool. This tool allowed for convenient access to school-district personnel, increased the potential for a larger sample group, and provided automated data collection, although online inquiries may have potential for a lower response rate than a smaller scaled survey, disseminated by other means (Dillman, 2007). Use of an online, self-administered survey, however, rather than an individual interview allows for a greater number of sample participants to respond honestly to questions regarding the frequency and effectiveness of transition practice without precipitating the potential reluctance to respond caused by the presence of an interviewer (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000).

3.6.1 Survey Process

The survey process involved contacting the K-12 public school district special education directors in 125 school districts in Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties in Western Pennsylvania by email. To increase the response rate, the following steps were used as indicated in research (Cook, Heath & Thompson (2000):

- An introductory email was sent to sample participants, and copied to the district superintendent. This initial email indicated that a letter explaining the research and survey

would follow. It also allowed an accuracy check on the email address of special education directors.

- A second email was sent to special education directors in public school districts in the 10 sample counties, with the superintendents copied. This letter reviewed the purpose of the research, detailed the context of the items, and indicated the approximate time needed to respond to the survey. It also included a link to the survey and an additional link to a letter of support. This letter of support came from the Director of Early Intervention Services at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit in Pittsburgh. Both this second email and the letter of support are contained in Appendices A and B, respectively.
- Within one week of deploying the survey, an email reminder was sent to all participants either thanking them for participating or reminding them that the survey was still open for input if they had not already responded. All responses were collected confidentially.

3.6.2 Survey Respondents

Public school district special education coordinators/directors in Pennsylvania school districts are those individuals customarily involved in the transition process of young children with disabilities as they transition from early intervention programs to kindergarten. School district special education directors interact with outside providers of special services during the transition process such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral mental health therapists. School district special education coordinators/directors become involved with transition as young children with special education needs and their families approach kindergarten enrollment in the public school

system. Survey responses from this targeted group of special education directors reflected kinds of transition practices in use, frequency of that usage, and perceived effectiveness, in addition to providing a basis for exploring potential barriers to the transition process.

3.6.3 Early Intervention Transition

In Pennsylvania, the State Code's guidelines on Special Education Services and Programs (2001 & Supp. 2008) require that the IEPs of children in early intervention services who are within one year of transitioning to a school-age program include goals and objectives related to transition. The transition process begins in February of each year, as required by the PA Code, with the scheduling of transition meetings that include early intervention providers, Intermediate Unit (IU) representatives, and school district special education directors. Parents indicate their intent to register children for kindergarten and sign PA Department of Education Intent to Register forms. Public school districts become involved in the process at this point with district special education personnel reviewing preschool IEPs and early intervention records, conducting reevaluations if required, observing children in preschool settings, and providing parents with opportunities to observe district programs and meet staff. Transition practices vary between and among early intervention providers and school districts. The intent of this researcher's survey was to determine the quantity and nature of transition practices that occur during this process from the perspective of school district special education coordinators/directors, to ascertain their perceptions of the effectiveness of these transition practices, and to define barriers to successful implementation of such practices

3.6.4 Sampling

The sampling included a targeted population of school district special education directors who are involved in the early intervention to school-age transition process in Pennsylvania public schools. These individuals serve as contacts in their respective school districts for families of students transitioning into kindergarten. Special education directors customarily attend a transition meeting scheduled by Intermediate Unit staff during the month of February where the transition process is described to parents. During this introductory session, special education directors have the opportunity to meet families and explain district special and regular education programs. When parents indicate an intent to register their child in kindergarten, this information, along with the child's updated special education records, is forwarded to the school district. Special education directors across Pennsylvania share similar responsibilities related to the transition process, such as the attendance at transition meetings, review of early intervention records, discussing transition options with families, coordinating reevaluations of the child if required, and facilitating the development or revision of IEPs. By the nature of these responsibilities, special education directors have the qualifications to provide information on the usage and perceived effectiveness of transition practices.

Based on the roles of these respondents in a population of special education directors in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the study results should have generalizability for those involved with early intervention across Pennsylvania public school districts, thus providing for the sample population validity. The population of students receiving special education early intervention services across the state, by county, is illustrated in Figure 3. The majority of these students, upon attaining kindergarten age, transition to public schools in their communities. School district special education directors coordinate this process.

The sampling group for this survey included special education directors in the counties of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland. Contact information for these school districts and for the names of special education directors was obtained from the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN) and verified by accessing school district websites to ensure up-to-date email addresses. Numbers of early intervention students receiving services was obtained from the

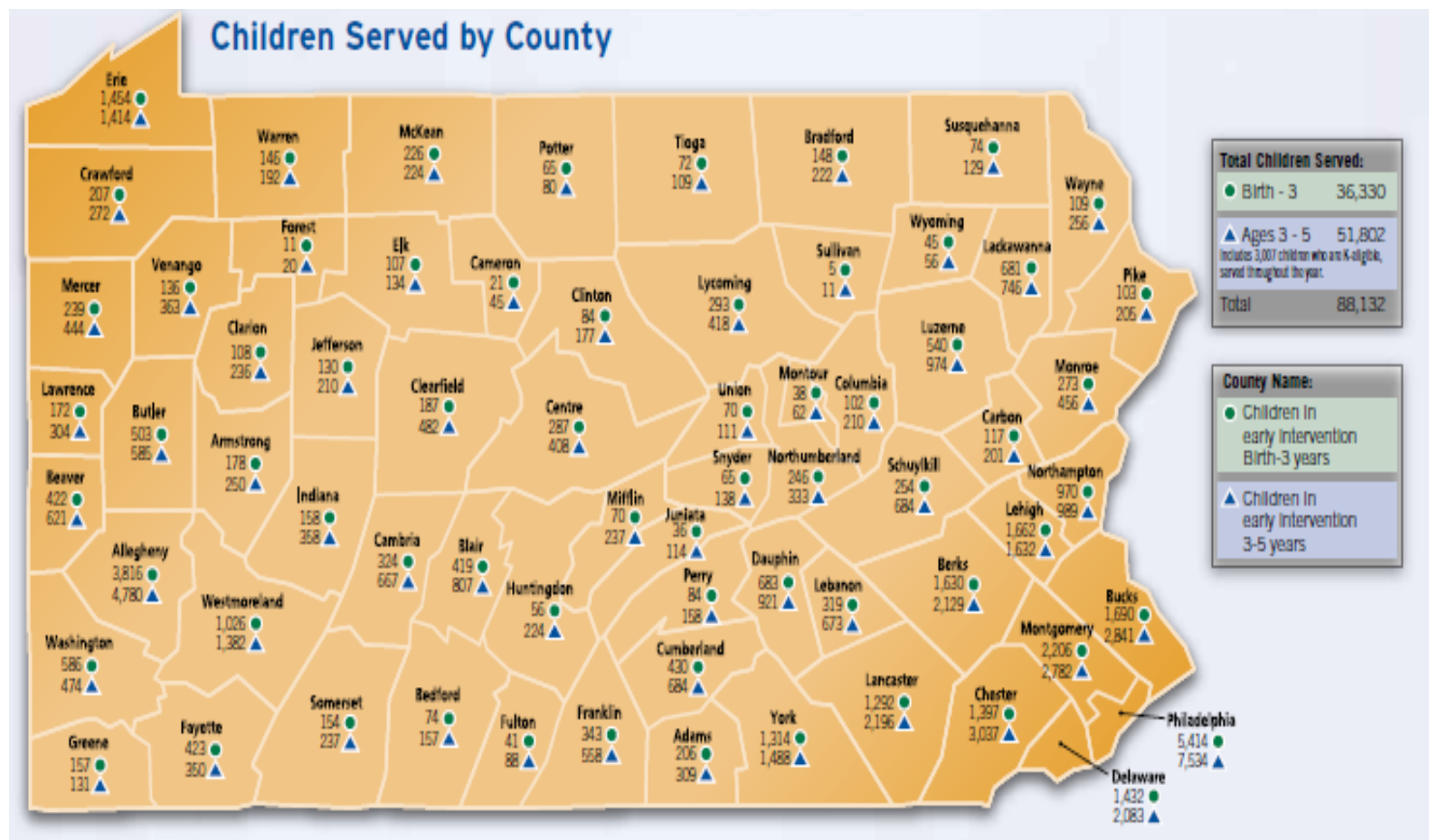


Figure 3. PA State Interagency Coordinating Council Early Intervention Map Dec. 2010

Table 11. School Districts, SES, and Early Intervention

County	School Districts	% Free-Reduced Lunch	EI Students
Allegheny	43	38.3	4780
Armstrong	4	43	250
Beaver	14	39	621
Butler	7	24	585
Fayette	6	57	350
Greene	5	44	131
Indiana	7	44	358
Lawrence	8	42	304
Washington	14	32	474
Westmoreland	17	32	1382

annual Governor’s report on early intervention (Pennsylvania State Interagency Coordinating Council Report on Early Intervention, 2012). Statistics about socioeconomic status of students by county and by individual school districts was extracted from the Division of Food and Nutrition Building Data Report (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Table 11 illustrates a breakdown of school districts by county, socioeconomic status of the school-age student population as defined by the percentage qualifying for free/reduced lunches, and the number of early intervention students ages three through five receiving special education in these counties.

To provide opportunities for additional analysis of survey data, the sample population of school district special education directors was divided by school district size and socioeconomic status. Table 12 illustrates the format for survey deployment in the sample population by school district size, number of school districts across counties meeting these size parameters, and the

Table 12. Format for Survey Deployment

Student Population	Free/Reduced Lunches (SES)	Districts Meeting Population and SES Description	Survey Link
Under 1500	40% and above	15	2a
Under 1500	Below 40%	7	1a
1500 - 3000	40% and above	7	2b
1500 - 3000	Below 40%	19	1b
Above 3000	40% and above	8	2c
Above 3000	Below 40%	21	1c

socioeconomic status of districts based on the percentage of the students qualifying for free/reduced lunches. The percentage of 40% free/reduced lunch population was selected as a delineator, as that is the criterion used to determine a district's eligibility for Title I compensatory education funding for remedial programs (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies, Title I, Part A). Identical forms of the survey were sent out on six different links, corresponding to district size and SES. All special education directors in districts with less than 40% or free/reduced lunch population received link 1a, 1b, or 1c (based on student numbers) while those in districts with the free/reduced population at 40% or above received link 2a, 2b, or 2c (based on student numbers). Analyzing survey data using these parameters allowed for the examination of transition practices as these related to school district size and socioeconomic status.

3.6.5 Survey Instrument

The survey included items adapted from the National Early Childhood Preschool Transition Practices Survey in addition to items based on research from the National Early Childhood Center, which identified practices and strategies supportive of early intervention transition. Prior to developing the survey, this researcher contacted Dr. Beth Rous from the University of Kentucky whose research on early intervention transitions to kindergarten for children with special needs is cited throughout this document. Dr. Rous shared a copy of an adapted survey from the National Early Childhood Transition Research and Training Center used in her research. Likewise, additional research of Rous, Hallam et al. (2007) provided the conceptual framework for transition practices within the context of ecological factors in the transition process. This type of ecological framework included interaction of children and families with sending and receiving programs, characteristics of individual children and their families, and the involvement of local services systems when applicable (as shown in Figure 4).

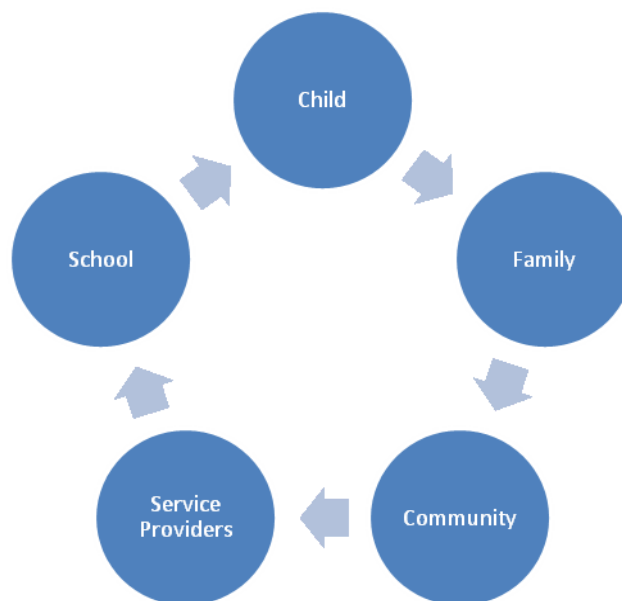


Figure 4. Ecological Transition Process

The theoretical constructs providing a research basis for the survey items included the relationship of family involvement, communication/collaboration between sending and receiving programs, professional development for involved staff members, and the ecological, dynamic nature of all systems in which a child is involved. In addition to these constructs, additional survey items were included to determine potential barriers to an effective transition process that may exist. The research basis for the theoretical constructs on which the survey was based can be found in Appendix C. A copy of the Early Intervention Practices Survey used in this study can be found in Appendix D.

3.6.6 Survey Deployment and Responses

The transition practices survey was deployed during the fall of 2013. Prior to being deployed, the survey was piloted on five current or former special education directors in the public school system in Pennsylvania. Using Survey Monkey, six links to the survey were created. Each link was sent to a special education director and copied to the superintendent within each school district in the sample population. The links corresponded to district size and socioeconomic status as determined by the number of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. Survey Monkey provided the vehicle for collecting responses. One week after the initial deployment, email reminders were sent out to special education asking for the survey to be completed or thanking them for participation. During the course of two weeks, responses were received from 77 of the 125 school districts to which the survey was sent; hence, 62% of the special education directors surveyed responded.

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The structure of this research project built on the theoretical constructs underlying the transition process. These constructs indicate that high intensity transition practices involving collaboration between and among programs, family involvement, professional development activities for staff, and a focus on the ecological nature of the transition process increase the likelihood of a seamless transfer of early intervention students to school-age programming. A strong transition to kindergarten from preschool special education programs decreases the amount of time needed for adjustment to public school while increasing the likelihood of better school achievement for these children in subsequent years as reported by Schulting, Malone, & Dodge (2005). The elements of the design included a non-experimental descriptive study with a structured survey on transition practices administered to public school district special education directors selected through convenience sampling.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the ordinal and nominal data on early intervention transition practices related to prevalence of usage and perceived effectiveness. Non-parametric statistical tests were used as data was nominal and ordinal, and the distribution of the sample population was not normally distributed. Nominal data items were analyzed in terms of frequency distributions. Measures of central tendency were used to describe and analyze ordinal data, specifically the median and mode of the distributions. The dispersion of data was examined as a frequency distribution including cross-tabulation of responses. Raw data was organized and

summarized to show frequency distributions, dispersion, and associations between variables and between variables and respondent groups. Data was described in terms of averages and percentages.

A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the survey variables, school district size, and socio-economic status of the student population (SES). Bivariate correlations were calculated. As the items of interest were ordinal in nature, and bivariate tables were rectangular, Kendall's Tau-c statistic was used to examine these correlations. A determination was made as to the level of significance of that correlation using Kendall's Tau-c. The correlational analysis determined both positive and negative correlations based on reported usage of types of transition practices and frequency of use related to school district size and SES.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Each year in Pennsylvania, young students with identified disabilities transition from preschool special education services to kindergarten. An effective transition process allows these students and their families to adapt more readily to the new school environment (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Quickly adapting to the kindergarten environment facilitates their adjustment to the academic challenges and the social-emotional readiness skills required for success at that level (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Transition practices which facilitate collaboration between sending and receiving programs, strengthen family involvement, provide information to involved staff on the relationship of transition to later school achievement, and address the process as one involving ecological, multiple systems from a child's environment formed the constructs underlying this examination. This study examines these practices and the transition process from the perspective of school district special education directors.

4.1 STUDY

4.1.1 Design

The study was a non-experimental descriptive study that included a structured survey on transition practices administered to 125 public school district special education coordinators selected through convenience sampling. Survey responses were received back from 77 (62%) of

Table 13. District Characteristics of Transitioning Students and Sites per Year as a Percentage of the Sample

District Characteristics	Special Education Directors (<i>n</i> =77)
Average Number of Transitioning Students	
0-5	20.0
6-10	24.3
>10	55.7
not sure	0.0
Average Number of Sending Early Intervention Programs	
1-3	41.4
4-6	42.9
>6	14.3
not sure	1.4

the school district special education directors. Demographic data showed the sample participants to be experienced in their field, with over half of the respondents indicating work experience of six or more years in their current position and 90% possessing degrees at the master or doctoral levels. In addition, more than half of the respondents indicated that their districts drew, on average, 10 or more transitioning students from four or more preschool settings. Table 13 illustrates the percentages of students transitioning to districts each year from early intervention services and the number of settings from which they transition as reported by 77 of the special education directors.

The sample population was divided into six response groups based on district size and SES for the purpose of examining correlations based on these variables. The same survey form was deployed to all groups, but sent on separate links based on the SES and district size qualifications as illustrated in Table 12. Responses were analyzed as a summary of all groups combined for practices related to frequency and effectiveness and in considering potential barriers to the

transition process. For correlations, school district size and SES were considered to determine if any relationships existed between these variables and high intensity transition practices.

4.1.2 Research Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the ordinal and nominal data on early intervention transition practices related to prevalence of usage and perceived effectiveness. Data was then analyzed in terms of potential barriers to effective transitions based on the responses provided. The dispersion of nominal data items was examined as a frequency distribution including cross-tabulation of responses. Measures of central tendency were analyzed for ordinal items by considering the median and mode of the distribution. In addition, a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between SES, school size, and the ordinal survey variables related to transition practices.

4.1.3 Research Questions

The intent of the study was to answer these research questions:

1. What is the frequency of use of high intensity transition practices as reported by special education directors?
2. What is the perceived effectiveness of these practices?
3. Do any significant correlations exist between district size, SES, and transition practices?
4. What potential barriers to quality transitions exist based on the implementation frequency of high intensity transition practices?

The data analysis reports the findings related to the frequency of usage of high intensity transition practices and their perceived effectiveness in response to the first two research questions. In response to the third question, a correlational analysis was done between ordinal survey variables on transition practices with school district size and SES to examine relationships between these. Potential barriers to effective transitions, as these relate to the practices considered in the study, were examined in response to the fourth research question.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: HIGH INTENSITY TRANSITION PRACTICES AND FREQUENCY OF USE

High intensity transition practices support children and families in bridging the gap between preschool special education services and school-age programs. Transition practices such as having a point person to coordinate transitions on the school district level can facilitate communication with families and preschool staff, as can individualized visits for children and parents to meet kindergarten staff and see classrooms prior to school starting. Other such practices supporting strong transitions include family involvement, professional development for staff, and the involvement of all agencies supporting entering students and their families. Responses of special education directors on survey items regarding the implementation frequency of these practices are examined here.

4.2.1 Communications: Primary Contact Person for Transition

Assigning a primary contact person within a public school district to coordinate the early intervention transition process provides a link between the sending and receiving programs. Survey respondents indicated the prevalence of this practice. Special education directors played this role in 69% of the school districts, while less than 10% assigned this responsibility to the school psychologist. Only 3.9% did not have a designated primary contact for the transition process, while the remainder divided the responsibilities among building administrators and guidance staff. Table 14 illustrates the dispersion of this responsibility as reported by 100% of the respondents.

Table 14. Primary District Contact for Transition

Position	Frequency Count (<i>n</i> =77)	Percentage
Special education director	53	68.8
School psychologist	7	9.1
Building administrator	2	2.6
None designated	3	3.9
Other	12	15.6

Having an individual to serve as a primary contact allows families, preschool personnel, and representatives of agencies providing services to entering children access to a point person who facilitates communication among all involved parties.

4.2.2 Communications: Collaboration Between Programs

Although not a legal requirement of the transition process, survey items on collaboration between programs examined transition activities that have been identified as being highly effective. Special education directors reported that public school staff conducted observations of transitioning children in preschool settings at a much higher rate than they reported early intervention (EI) providers to be observing in kindergarten programs. While 64% of the respondents indicated that public school staff observed transitioning children in the preschool settings often or almost always, only 16% of EI providers were reported to observe kindergarten classes with the same frequency. Although districts respondents did not frequently report the practice of EI staff observing in kindergarten programs, at least 50% of the special education directors reported sharing information on kindergarten readiness skills with EI staff. Table 15 illustrates these responses according to questions on the frequency percentages of practices related to school staff observing in EI settings, EI staff observing in school settings, and districts sharing information with EI staff on readiness skills for kindergarten.

Table 15. Summary Statistics for Program Collaboration

Item	<i>n</i>	Percent of responses by category					Median	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always			

School staff observing in EI settings	77	5.2	10.4	20.8	24.7	39.0	4.0	3.8	1.2
EI staff observing in school settings	77	20.8	33.8	29.9	10.4	5.2	2.0	2.5	1.1
Districts sharing information with EI staff on school readiness skills	76	3.9	13.2	32.9	19.7	30.3	3.5	3.6	1.2

Note. Responses coded on a 5-point Likert scale to calculate descriptive statistics with Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, and Almost Always = 5.

When examining on-going collaborative practices between school districts and EI providers, respondents indicated the prevalence of joint meetings on the transition process and the sharing of readiness information as happening more frequently than practices such as inviting EI providers to district events (e.g., open houses) and working on curriculum alignment between programs. Although 61% of special education directors reported that joint meetings between district personnel and EI providers are held to plan transitions prior to these occurring, remaining respondents indicated such meetings happened more sporadically. Low frequency percentages were also indicated for work on the alignment of curricula between programs with 15.6 of respondents indicating this to be a practice between their district and preschool providers. Table 16 reflects how special education directors report on-going collaborative practices with EI providers from a school district perspective.

Table 16. Collaborative Practices with EI Providers as Reported by Special Education Directors

Collaborative Transition Practices	Frequency Percentages (<i>n</i> =77)
Share curricular information with EI staff	49.4
Invite EI providers to district open house	18.2
Work on curricular alignment with EI staff	15.6

4.2.2.1 Analysis: Communication between Programs

Over 95% of the respondents reported having a primary contact person to facilitate communication between districts, EI programs, and parents. This contact is a key position in that all individuals involved in the process have a point person within a school district with whom they can address questions and concerns. Other data indicated somewhat of an imbalance regarding the role of districts and EI providers in respect to program observations. Although district staff observed in EI programs frequently, EI providers observed district programs with much less frequency. With less than 20% of EI providers being invited to district events or being asked to work on curricular alignment with the receiving programs, collaborative efforts were reported to be minimal regarding these practices. Collaboration and communication necessitate equal involvement of both school district staff and EI providers to facilitate an effective transition.

4.2.3 Family Involvement

Positive academic outcomes and strong school adjustments have correlated to the development of the family-school connection as shown (Kang, 2010; Schulting et al., 2005). Opportunities to involve families and children in the transition process can provide both support and address fears of the unknown when moving to a new setting. High intensity transition practices as documented in the research include reaching out to families prior to a child's transition and giving them an opportunity to see both the public school kindergarten and to connect with the receiving kindergarten teacher (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

In this study, special education directors indicated that the implementation of some high intensity practices occurred sometimes, rarely, or not at all in number of school districts. Sixty-five percent of respondents indicated this to be the case with parents having few opportunities to observe kindergarten programs prior to their child entering. However, more than half of respondents reported opportunities for parents/children to meet individually with kindergarten teachers prior to school starting as happening often or almost always. On the other hand, 17% indicated these meetings rarely or never happened. More than half of the reporting special education directors did indicate that providing parents with activities to support their children's preparation for kindergarten occurred frequently. Table 17 indicates this distribution of responses related to the provision of practice materials, parental opportunities to observe kindergarten programs prior to school start, and individual meetings with kindergarten staff and parent/child prior to the beginning of school.

Table 17. Family Involvement in Transition Processes as Reported by Special Education Directors

Item	<i>n</i>	Percent of responses by category					Median	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always			
Provision of practice materials	76	5.3	9.2	22.4	17.1	46.1	4.0	3.9	1.2
Opportunities for parents to observe kindergarten program	75	14.7	14.7	36.0	12.0	22.7	3.0	3.1	1.3
Individual meetings with kindergarten staff and parent/child	74	6.8	10.8	27.0	21.6	33.8	4.0	3.7	1.2

Note. Responses coded on a 5-point Likert scale to calculate descriptive statistics with Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, and Almost Always = 5.

While median responses for sharing materials and meeting individually with kindergarten staff suggested that these practices did occur, opportunities for families/children to observe schools and kindergarten classes had a median score indicated that this practice occurs less frequently. When summarizing the data on family involvement in transition, respondents indicated that practices involving customized opportunities for families and children to be engaged actively in the school district occur less frequently than the more generalized of providing summer activity packets.

As indicated by Rous, Schroeder, & Rosenkoetter (2009), communication with families prior to the start of school is an effective transition practice; hence, respondents were also asked about the mode and frequency of their communication with families during the transition process. Table 18 shows the modes of communication reported and the number of attempts made using any of the contact methods indicated.

Table 18. Characteristics of Family Communication as a Percentage of the Sample

Communication Characteristics	Special Education Directors (<i>n</i> =77)
Type of Communication	
Phone	76.6
Letter	75.3
E-mail	26.0
Home Visit	14.3
Number of Attempts	
0	3.9
1	14.3
2	14.3
3	35.1
4	23.4

Letters and phone contact were the most frequently used modes of communication with the majority of respondents reporting three attempts to make contact with families. One high intensity transition practice noted by Rous et al. (2007) was that of a home visit. Survey respondents reported this strategy as being used less frequently than calls, letters, or emails. Communication was, however, initiated using various modes and was attempted multiple times.

4.2.3.1 Analysis: Family Involvement

The practice of having families and students visit district programs prior to starting school and meeting with staff is a significant one in terms of effective transitions. This opportunity allows families and students to begin to develop a level of familiarity with the new setting. Respondents reported this practice as happening infrequently and, in some cases, rarely or not at all. Having an opportunity to develop a level of comfort with the new surroundings and staff allows transitioning students to begin kindergarten more ready to meet social-emotional and academic requirements (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Based on my experience as a special education director, these opportunities for personal contact provide families, transitioning students, and staff with an opportunity to begin relationship-building prior to school starting.

4.2.4 Professional Development

Providing school staff members with professional development on the transition of students from preschool to kindergarten is a high intensity transition practice noted by Early et al. (2001) and

Table 19. Characteristics of Professional Development for School Personnel as a Percentage of the Sample

Role	Participates in transition process	Learns about transition practices	Legal requirements of transition	Relationship of transition to school achievement	Strengths and needs of students
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Administrator	84	46	74	42	88
Professional	73	56	45	46	85
Paraprofessional	16	18	5	7	27
Support Staff	74	43	31	23	78

Schulting et al. (2005). Thus, the respondents were asked questions regarding the professional development opportunities available to various district staff. For the purposes of this study, professional development activities included those related to the legal requirements of transition, best practices for students transitioning to kindergarten, relationship of the transition process to school adjustment/school achievement, and the strengths/needs of specific transitioning students. Table 19 reflects the percentages of survey respondents who indicated that they provide various types of professional development opportunities to school administrators, professional staff (teachers), paraprofessionals, and other support personnel (e.g., speech therapists, counselors, etc.).

Respondents indicated that professional development on legal practices and on the strengths/needs of transitioning students were provided to administrators, professionals, and support staff more often than professional development on the relationship of transition to later school achievement. Although paraprofessionals are only somewhat involved in professional development activities, 27% of the special education directors reported that paraprofessionals were receiving information on the strengths/needs of students. When surveyed about the parameters for this professional development as it related to paid release time for participations, eight open-ended responses were received. Three district directors indicated there was no paid release time for participation, while four others indicated that paid release time was provided to involved staff. One respondent indicated uncertainty about the practice.

4.2.4.1 Analysis: Professional Development

With less than 50% of respondents reporting professional development activities for administrators, professionals, and support staff highlighting the relationship of effective transitions to later school achievement, an awareness of the significance of such practices may not exist. Professional development time in school districts is limited, with the number of topics needing to be addressed often exceeding the time allocated to do so. However, being aware of best practices in transition and understanding the relationship of transition for young children with disabilities to later school achievement increases the likelihood of staff to implement such practices. Including all levels of staff (i.e., support staff, teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals) in such professional development opportunities provides the information necessary for these individuals to work with all other school district personnel and families in ensuring a quality transition.

4.2.5 Ecological: Involvement of Multiple Systems

The transition of EI children involves not only the students and their families but also all of the systems in which they interact. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000) and Rous & Myers (2007) defined conceptual frameworks for transition that acknowledged the relationship between children and their surrounding contexts of family, peers, community, systems of care, and education. A high intensity transition practice growing out of this research is one that includes individuals from all such systems in which children and families interact in the transition process.

Table 20. Percentages of Respondents Indicating Ecological Transition Activities with Providers

Providers	Invited Provider to Meeting In District	Requested Information from Provider
Occupational Therapist	40.3	55
Physical Therapist	40.3	55.8

Speech Therapist	46.8	54.5
Behavioral Mental Health	53.2	51.9

Survey items based on this conceptual framework related to the involvement of agencies and individuals providing services to preschool children with special needs and their families prior to kindergarten transition. Special education directors responded to questions regarding the involvement of such individuals/agencies in transition activities within the school district and if school districts requested information on a child's strengths/needs to be shared with the school-based team. Table 20 indicates that the transition practice of involving ecological, multiple systems in the process was reported for some districts, although a significant number did not report it as a frequency used practice.

More than half of respondents reported that their districts invited behavioral mental health agency representatives to transition meetings and asked these and other providers to share information on the transitioning child. Although over 50% of all providers were asked to share information on transitioning children, less than 50% were invited to participate in those transition meetings.

4.2.5.1 Analysis: Ecological Systems

Transitioning students with identified disabilities enter kindergarten from preschool settings where they have received special support services. Many of these students and their families also receive support services from agencies/individuals outside of their school setting to address needs associated with their disabilities. Survey respondents indicated the practice of including such providers in the transition process does not occur consistently. However, these individuals have information on the strengths and needs of transitioning students. Families have

familiarity with these providers and value their input. Including these providers in a district's transition process validates the significance of the information such individuals/agencies have to share, recognizes the relationships parents have established with them, and enhances the likelihood of a better transition for the child (Rous & Myers, 2006).

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF HIGH INTENSITY PRACTICES

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate the perceived effectiveness of high intensity transition practices. The perceived effectiveness was then compared to usage frequency (often/almost always) for specific variables to determine if practices perceived as effective were used frequently. Table 21 illustrates responses by category on effectiveness and frequency percentages.

Respondent data indicated a number of practices reported to be perceived as effective but also reflected these as occurring less frequently. Although having EI providers observe kindergarten programs was reported as effective by 46% of respondents, 16% reported it as happening frequently. Another effectiveness/frequency disconnect was apparent with the practice of family visits with 70% of directors reporting this as effective while 35% reported it as happening frequently.

Table 21. Effectiveness and Frequency of Use Percentages of High Intensity Transition Practices

Practice	Effectiveness Percentage	Frequency Percentage
Primary school contact	69	95
Family visit	70	35
School staff observe EI	47	65
Practice activities	66	63
Multiple contacts	58	87
PD on transition and school achievement	40	30
PD on best transition practices	42	40
Readiness information to EI	17	50
EI providers observe kdg. classes	46	16
Health/ human services providers at transition meetings	55	45

n=77

To investigate if there were statistically significant associations between the special education directors' reported frequency of using high intensity transition practices and the perceived effectiveness of these practices, a correlation was computed using Kendall's Tau-c. Kendall's Tau-c was selected to determine if a correlation existed between two rank variables: frequency of use and perceived effectiveness (Lovric, 2011). The Kendall's Tau-c correlation coefficient was significantly different from zero when frequency of practices related to program observations (Q12a, Q12b), school visits (Q12c), professional development (Q12e) and agency involvement (Q12f) were correlated with perceived effectiveness for the same variables in Q13. The direction of the correlation was positive meaning that participants who endorsed these practices as effective also reported a higher frequency of use. There were significant positive correlations between perceived effectiveness of these practices and the frequency with which

special education directors reported their implementation. Table 22 illustrates these relationships.

Table 22. Correlation between Transition Strategy Frequency and Perceived Effectiveness

Variables	<i>n</i>	Tau-c	Sig.
Q12a x Q13_b	68	.569	.000
Q12b x Q13_a	70	.499	.000
Q12c x Q13_e	70	.516	.000
Q12d (n/a)	—	—	—
Q12e x Q13_i	68	.541	.000
Q12f x Q13_m	69	.627	.000

All correlations $p < .001$

4.3.1.1 Analysis: Perceived Effectiveness

When examining the percentages of effectiveness/frequency, congruence between perceived effectiveness and frequency was apparent in the practice of providing parents with summer practice activities. This congruence was also apparent, although lower, in effectiveness and frequency related to professional development on best transition practices. However, practices perceived as effective (i.e., family visits, observations by EI providers) showed larger gaps between effectiveness perceptions and implementation frequency. These are areas where districts might consider implementing high intensity practices, which were reportedly perceived as being effective, more frequently in order to improve the EI transition process. When examining correlations between effectiveness/frequency, the positive correlation suggested a relationship

between variables related to frequency and those on effectiveness. Respondents who rate practices as effective may work in districts where these specific practices are implemented with greater frequency.

4.4 RESEARCH QUESTION THREE: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SES, SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE, AND HIGH INTENSITY TRANSITION PRACTICES

In addition to the descriptive statistical analysis, bivariate correlations were calculated to examine relationships among SES, school size, and ordinal transition variables. Both positive and inverse correlations were found when correlating SES, school size, and transition practices. Variables related to districts providing readiness information to EI providers, parents/students meeting kindergarten staff individually prior to school start, and families/students visting kindergarten programs prior to school start were also correlated to SES as shown in Table 23.

Table 23. Correlations of Variables with Socioeconomic Status

Variable	<i>n</i>	Tau-c	Sig.
School Size	77	-.331	.005
Providing readiness information to EI providers	76	.268	.032
Parents/students meeting kindergarten staff individually prior to school start	74	-.280	.023
Families/students visting kindergarten programs prior to school	70	-.275	.021

SES had a significant negative correlation with school size. Districts with higher student enrollment tended to have relatively lower SES (more students on free/reduced lunch). Larger districts are frequently in urban areas where it is not unusual to find a lower SES. Districts with

lower enrollment tended to have a relatively higher SES (fewer students on free/reduced lunch). SES also had a significant negative correlation with the special education directors' reports of the frequency of students and parents visiting kindergarten programs prior to enrollment and meeting individually with the kindergarten teacher prior to enrollment. As SES rates increased (more students on free/reduced), the special education directors reported less likelihood of meeting individually with the kindergarten teacher prior to school starting. This trend was similar when examining the correlation between families observing kindergarten programs prior to school starting and SES. As SES rates increased (more students on free/reduced), there was a negative correlation with families observing programs prior to school starting. Larger districts with a significant number of lower SES students may have difficulty implementing high intensity practices due to volume of entering students. Such correlations indicate degree of relationship between these variables, however, and not causality.

Correlations were also done between ordinal variables on transition practices related to school size. Table 24 depicts these correlations. With the exception of the inverse correlation between SES and school size, the remaining correlations with transition variables and school size were both significant and positive. As school size increased so did the relative frequency of practice related to school staff observing in EI settings, considering the nature of a child's

Table 24. Correlations of Variables with School Size

Variable	<i>n</i>	Tau-c	Sig.
SES	77	-.331	.005
School staff observing in EI settings	77	.249	.007
Considering the nature of a child's disability during transition	75	.196	.043
Parents/students visiting the kindergarten program prior to school starting	70	.315	.001

School staff observing in EI settings	70	.278	.017
Designating a primary school contact person	70	.237	.013

disability during transition, parents/students visiting the kindergarten program prior to school starting, school staff observing in EI settings, and designating a primary school contact person. One item, the special education directors' report of the frequency of parents/students visiting the kindergarten program prior to school starting, had a negative correlation with SES and a positive correlation with school size. The significance criterion of $p < .05$ was not met for other bivariate correlations between district size, SES, and ordinal survey variables.

When reviewing the correlations, there was an inverse correlation between socioeconomic status and school district size. Districts with a higher student enrollment tended to have a student population with a lower socioeconomic status and districts with a lower student enrollment tended to have a higher SES population. SES correlated inversely with meetings of parents and students individually with kindergarten staff and parental opportunities to visit kindergarten programs prior to school starting. With a higher proportion of the population of students qualifying for free/reduced lunches, special education directors reported less frequency in personalized parent/child interactions with school personnel. However, positive correlations existed between school district size and the high intensity transition practices of observations between programs and personalized parent/child engagement in the school district.

4.5 RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR: BARRIERS TO EARLY INTERVENTION TRANSITION

Barriers to a strong early intervention transition process can exist when practices supporting these moves are not an integral part of the process. According to the responses of special education directors to survey items on frequency of implementation, high intensity transition practices are reported in many instances as happening infrequently or are non-existent. Potential barriers to transition, based on inconsistent implementation of these practices, and the issues these can create are discussed here.

4.5.1 Primary Contact

In school districts without a primary contact person to coordinate transition, the process has the potential to lack structure and organization. Coordinating the school-based team, assigning transition responsibilities to school staff, serving as a liaison to EI staff and other providers, and working with families define only some of the areas of responsibility for this contact person. Without a person in this position, the transition process can be compromised. A primary contact person can readily coordinate the observation process between program providers. The need for public school staff to observe a transitioning student in a setting where they are most comfortable assists in assessing an entering student's strengths and needs. Conversely, inviting EI providers to observe in kindergarten classes allows those providers an opportunity to acquire information on curricular, social, behavioral, and functional skills required in public school programs. Knowledge of these requirements allows EI staff to tailor and adjust preschool programming in addition to

matching instructional formatting to better align with the kindergarten environment. A primary contact person within a school district can facilitate all communication. Having this role filled in a school district alleviates potential barriers to transition in relation to the organizational process.

4.5.2 Program Communications

A collaborative process between programs requires equity in the amount and types of opportunities available to school district personnel and EI providers. One potential barrier to successful collaborations between EI providers and public school districts is evidenced in the imbalance of opportunities for EI providers to conduct observations in public school kindergartens. Collaboration on a joint goal to effective seamless transitions requires that all providers have similar opportunities to observe children in their current settings and in the settings to which they will transition. Likewise, a strategy noted in the research as enhancing transition, curricular alignment between programs, occurred infrequently. The type of collaboration between public schools and EI providers as reported by study respondents places EI providers in more passive roles, with school district personnel more involved in providing information on readiness skills required for kindergarten than actually collaborating on curriculum. A true collaborative process among all providers servicing students and families has the potential to remove another barrier to successful EI transitions.

4.5.3 Family Involvement

Researchers have shown that family involvement in the transition process is a practice that enhances the development of children with and without special needs upon entrance to

kindergarten (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). As indicated by survey participants, these practices are often or always implemented for approximately half of the transitioning student/family population, but correlational analysis revealed that these practices do not occur with the same frequency across all districts. This finding is consistent with the research of Wildenger & McIntyre (2010) where families reported involvement in transition, but not consistently with high intensity practices. Family involvement facilitates the transition process by providing parents with pertinent information about the kindergarten program, creating opportunities for them to observe the new setting, and allowing families/children to become familiar with school staff prior to the start of school. Relationship building between families/children and school district staff evolves over time and ideally begins in a student's preschool year, well in advance of kindergarten starting. Involving families early in the transition process allows this relationship to develop gradually. Lack of opportunities for families/children to develop a comfort level with school staff and the kindergarten setting is a potential barrier to a successful transition in that a child's adjustment period may be extended, affecting their readiness to engage in learning upon entrance.

4.5.4 Professional Development

Providing district staff with professional development activities related to best practices in transition maximizes the probability for implementation. Lack of awareness of what high intensity transition practices encompass, such as family involvement and communication between programs, decreases the likelihood of their implementation, creating a potential barrier to an effective transition process. Knowing about these practices and recognizing the impact of an effective transition on later school adjustment and achievement enhances opportunities for these practices to be implemented as students with special needs move to kindergarten. Customizing

professional development activities for school staff related to EI transition removes another potential barrier to the process.

4.5.5 Ecological Systems

An effective transition process relies on the cooperation of school district staff, families, EI providers, and any agency or individuals who may provide support services to transitioning children and their parents. A potential barrier to this process exists when providers are not included in transition activities. Including such agencies/individuals in the transition process allows district personnel to gain additional information about strengths and needs of students and families. Having all available information on entering students from providers related to services they have rendered helps enhance a child's adjustment to the new setting. These providers give a perspective on entering students which is based on their experiences with these families/children over time. Including these providers in the transition process acknowledges their services and respects the bonds already established between them, their students, and children's families. Rather than creating a barrier to transition by overlooking the significance of their contributions, including EI providers and agencies at the request of families supports the family/school district connection and provides additional input on transitioning children.

4.6 SUMMARY

High intensity transition practices as reported by special education directors vary significantly in both frequency and intensity among school districts in the reporting sample. Significant findings

illustrate a disparity between districts observing EI programs and EI providers observing district classrooms. Limited collaboration exists between districts and EI providers regarding opportunities to discuss/observe district programs or to align curriculum. Family involvement prior to school starting is likewise limited with more than half of all respondents indicating this to happen in some instances or less often. Professional development opportunities varied according to staff roles. Professional development on the relationship of effective transitions to later school achievement was only reported by approximately 50% of the respondents, as was the involvement of outside service providers with the exception of those in the behavioral mental health field. District respondents reported finding some practices as effective while indicating lower frequencies for implementation. Early intervention transition practices occurred in different districts with varying levels of intensity as reported by special education directors in this structured survey. Significant correlations between SES/district size and transition variables along with disparities between frequency and perceived effectiveness and low implementation frequency rates provide starting points when considering implications for the findings.

5.0 INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A quality transition from early intervention special education services to kindergarten for children with identified disabilities provides them with an opportunity of a strong start at the beginning of their K-12 education. Results from this survey research study on transition practices as reported by special education coordinators in Southwestern Pennsylvania school districts provides a basis for recommendations at the policy and practice levels. In addition, implications for future research are also discussed.

5.1 STUDY SUMMARY

This study of transition practices for preschool students with identified disabilities as they move to kindergarten was based on the theoretical framework that some practices are more likely than others to enhance the quality of the transition process. To operationalize this theory, the study explored high intensity transition practices based on frequency of use, perceived effectiveness, correlations between practices and settings, and barriers to implementation. The constructs investigated included those related to collaboration between preschool providers and school district personnel, family involvement, professional development, and ecological systems as these relate to transition. A structured survey based on items related to these constructs was deployed to 125 special education directors in school districts situated in ten counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania using an online survey tool. There was a 62% response rate. Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were used to examine and interpret the data.

5.2 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Results showed that the frequency of use for high intensity transition practices varied widely across the study sample. Collaboration between programs was reported as being somewhat imbalanced between EI programs and school districts. While district staff observed in EI settings frequently, the inverse was not indicated. Providing readiness information on kindergarten expectations was reported as a more common transition practice than collaboration and alignment of curricula between both programs.

Transition practices around family involvement showed that less intensive strategies, such as providing summer practice materials to parents, occurred much more frequently than individualized and more high intensity practices. Individual meetings with kindergarten staff and opportunities for families to visit kindergarten programs prior to the start of school happened much less frequently, and according to approximately 50% of the respondents, these opportunities were not available in some districts at all. While these visits were not widely occurring, most respondents reported multiple attempts to contact families using a variety of communication modes. Professional development on transition practices for school staff was reported by the majority of respondents to happen infrequently. Including services providers working with families and children as part of the transition process also had a low rate of frequency reporting.

Differences between frequency of practices and perceived effectiveness were also indicated in the findings. Practices around family involvement with districts prior to school starting and EI providers observing in kindergartens were perceived as effective but were not

implement frequently. Correlations did exist, however, for district respondents reporting higher frequency of identified practices and perceived effectiveness. Additional correlations were found between SES and school size and for both SES and school size with variables related to program collaboration and family involvement. Higher rates of students on free/reduced lunch negatively correlated with family involvement. Positive correlations were related to school size, family involvement, and program collaboration. Significant correlations for SES and school size did exist for some transition variables, although not for the majority for which correlations were run.

Transition practices related to kindergarten entrance tend to be generalized rather than individualized (La Paro et al., 2000). Based on early intervention transition research, these findings aligned with what other studies have indicated. Lower levels of family involvement in personalized and intensive practices were reported by special education directors in response to survey items on visits to programs and meetings with staff, similar to the findings of McIntyre et al. (2007). Likewise, research related to the involvement of all ecological systems of care and education reported by Rous & Myers (2007) was similar to findings in this study. It was a practice reported by more than half of respondents as occurring infrequently. Barriers to effective transitions exist when high intensity practices involving collaboration, family involvement, professional development, and the existence of teams including all providers are implemented infrequently or not at all when students with special needs move to kindergarten.

Although study findings were congruent with other research in the field, some results were different than expected. More than half of the respondents indicated that they transition over 10 students each year. However, this data may be reflective of the fact that more children in Pennsylvania are being identified for early intervention services yearly (Pennsylvania State Interagency Coordinating Council, 2012). An increase in the transitioning EI population suggests

the need for increased professional development for school personnel to support quality transitions. EI providers observed in school districts infrequently or not at all. The data on this variable suggests the need for additional exploration, especially from the EI perspective, on how the collaborative process can be improved for all providers involved in servicing a child. Additionally, some respondents indicated that certain transition practices were perceived as effective; yet, these same practices were not being implemented frequently. Such discrepancies invite policy and practices initiatives designed to align effectiveness with frequency of practices. The fact that approximately one-third of respondents reported rarely or never initiating family involvement prior to school starting was unanticipated and of a concern when considering requirements for quality practices. Strategies for engaging families and professional development activities for school staff around the significance of doing so are a potential outgrowth resulting from this data.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Results suggest the need for increasing early intervention to kindergarten transition practices for preschool students with identified special needs as they move to kindergarten, based on reported usage from the study. These findings support other research in the field in terms of the study's theoretical framework: high intensity transition practices improve the quality of transitions. Improved collaboration between programs and providers, increased family involvement, and additional opportunities for professional development have the potential to enhance the quality of transition for preschool students moving to school-age programs. Awareness of SES and school size correlations and the implications these correlations have for transition practices should be a consideration in all policy and practice suggestions.

The legal requirements for early intervention transition are established under IDEA (2004) and Pennsylvania's Special Education Services and Programs (2001 & Supp. 2008). By February first of each year, preschool program providers of students eligible to transition to kindergarten inform parents about the transition process. A school-age transition meeting or IEP is held between EI providers, district staff, and parents. Parents then indicate their intentions to have their child enrolled in kindergarten. Records of entering students are shared with the district. A determination is then made as to whether or not any reevaluation is required or if the child's current EI IEP can be implemented as written or with revisions, upon their entrance to kindergarten. At this point, the legal requirements of the process have been met. Aside from adhering to special education timelines, school district personnel now assume responsibilities for continuing the transition process. Policies and practices to implement them are now under the auspices of receiving school districts. Although the legal requirements prescribe what must be done, high intensity practices are things that can be done to improve transition for preschoolers entering kindergarten.

5.3.1 Implications at the Policy Level

At the policy level, professional development that includes early intervention and school district providers across the state is called for at all levels of staff. Collaborative professional development activities including representatives from both groups can develop an increased awareness of the program structure and of the expectations at each level to help support an understanding of the roles played by all in supporting students. A policy recommendation may be to develop training programs at the state level in Pennsylvania through groups such as the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, State Interagency Coordinating Council and the PA Department

of Education. Trainings may be conducted by local intermediate units at the county level and through the PA Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN) at the regional level. Voluntary joint trainings would include early intervention program staff, district administrators, teachers and support staff, and parents. Topics related to best practices in transition and the relationship of transition to later school achievement should be considered.

Another policy level change could include the requirement of fall notifications by EI providers to school districts so that personnel are made aware of potential incoming early intervention students to their district programs. Although the legal requirement under 22 Pa. Code Chapter 14.15 determines the notification of school districts by February 1 of the year prior to a child entering kindergarten, earlier notices may enhance the transition process on various levels. Early notification, even though transitioning rosters are not finalized, allows district staff ample time to begin making plans for the process. Based on the number of potential incoming students, staffing requirements may need to be adjusted. Because the budget process begins in late fall for most districts, early notification allows for budgetary considerations for staffing adjustments. The transition of a significant number of students also requires scheduling observations, participating in consultations with various providers, initiating communications with families, and possibly conducting reevaluations of entering students. Early notification regarding the potential number of students who may transition allows for preliminary schedules to be developed so transition activities for each child and family are allotted ample time. School staff might then be available to participate in the process and not miss participation opportunities due to inadequate planning.

Finally, policymakers might consider adding the transition plan to part of the required PDE Comprehensive Plan, which is currently required to be submitted by districts every three years. Using this vehicle to articulate a transition plan, districts may define how collaboration is done

with preschool providers, describe family involvement activities, and articulate what types of professional development activities are made available to staff. Having this transition plan as a requirement at the state policy level, as suggested in the research of Patton & Wang (2012), would ensure its articulation and enhance implementation probabilities.

5.3.2 Implications at the Practice Level

At the practice level and under the direction of school district special education directors and early intervention program administrators, another suggested strategy is to initiate collaborative planning sessions focusing on early learning standards, assessment, and curriculum. A focal point for such collaborations could be the PA Early Learning Standards for Early Childhood which exist both for kindergarten and pre-K programs (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2009). Providing both district and EI staff with a common ground for discussing early learning standards and reviewing how the curriculum content of both programs addresses these would provide a starting point for aligning curriculum and standards between preschool settings and kindergarten programs. Using the Early Learning Standards as a reference point, EI providers and school district staff may examine curricula from both programs as a basis to support curriculum alignment and to address possible gaps in instruction. Such practices would also provide opportunities for preschool staff and kindergarten personnel to develop a common language for teaching practices, curriculum, and assessment.

Use of technology can likewise be integrated easily into a district's transition process. In an outreach effort to families and students prior to school starting, narrated videos of a school day in the life of a kindergarten student might be disseminated to parents. Classroom clips of a

kindergarten teacher greeting students, conducting reading and math lessons, or structuring play opportunities can be made by school personnel and provided to parents of incoming students. Personalized audio tapes may also be created, welcoming students by name to kindergarten classrooms that might not have had prior opportunities to visit the program.

In addition, such collaborative focus groups may investigate transition practices considering both the kinds of strategies implemented and the frequency of implementation. Joint discussions would allow participants an opportunity to view transition practices from the perspective of one another. Understanding the relationship of transition to school adjustment and the relationship of adjustment to engagement in learning may be an outcome of such discussions. This recommendation is supported by the research of LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008), which indicates that a pre-kindergarten teacher's use of transition practices are associated with student adjustment in early kindergarten. Understanding the benefits to an effective transition process, in turn, provides more learning opportunities and enhances the quality of the process. The increased use of transition practices by both preschool and school staff has the potential to contribute to quicker adjustments to the new program, and perhaps prevent adjustment problems, which interfere with learning.

Another implication at the practice level would be increasing family involvement via increased communication. Originating from policies defining the role of parents in the transition process, family involvement can be increased by initiating contact with them early in the transition process through collaboration with early intervention providers and school district staff. Contacting families early in a child's final year of preschool services allows a bond to develop over the course of the year rather than initiating such contacts at a much later point. Reaching out to families, reaching back to non-respondents, and reaching with intensity is a strategy based in

the research of Bohan-Baker & Little (2002). Developing family relationships on the part of school district staff can enhance not only the transition of early intervention students but also improve their potential for higher academic achievement.

Partnerships between health and human service agencies are one vehicle to be considered when looking towards increasing family involvement. In Allegheny County, once such partnership between the United Way and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit supports such transition efforts. Grants are available to public school districts to support connecting with parents of transitioning students while children with identified disabilities are still early in their final year of preschool services. Increasing the capacity of initiatives such as this one in addition to publicizing information on the significance of transition is another way to develop awareness in families of their role in the process. Rather than considering transition as a single event occurring between the early intervention settings and kindergarten, the transition should be thought of as an on-going process that has the potential to improve opportunities to develop and continue family relationships while supporting preschool students with identified needs as part of the effort. Improving family involvement is a practice that can be implemented readily at the local school district level.

Another practice recommendation with potential for swift implementation at the school district level would be to survey parents of early intervention students as to their perceptions on the process. Feedback would allow for improvements in meeting the needs of district families and their children.

In addition to parent input, school districts may consider the identification of a parent advocate who has had personal experience with the early intervention transition process. On a voluntary basis, parents of incoming early intervention students may be given a parent advocate's

contact information, enabling them provide information and advice on navigating the transition process. From a personal perspective, a parent advocate can provide information about what happens and when it happens as children move to school-age programs. This individual may also provide support for families during meetings with both preschool providers and school district staff. The intent of instituting such a practice would be to help families develop familiarity with the new system they will be navigating from the perspective of another individual who has experienced it. Such familiarity may lead to more confidence with the process and thus incur a higher level of family involvement.

5.3.3 Summary of Policy and Practice Level Recommendations

From a systems level, transition policy recommendations require support at the governance level. Information about the status of early intervention to kindergarten transition practices in PA school districts demonstrated by research studies and reported by constituents, needs to be made accessible to state level agencies overseeing these areas. Providing information on the status of the early intervention process to these agencies facilitates opportunities for increased involvement at governance level, especially as it relates to state funding. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Department of Public Welfare, and the agencies operating under each department would require both funding/finance and personnel supports to focus on transition improvement initiatives. Such supports are essential for policy level decisions to be enacted with fidelity. Based on the results of the current study, the need to emphasize such policy enactments with special attention to districts with a larger SES population is unmistakable. Policy development requires not only determining the ramifications of what needs to be done but also necessitates considering how it will happen in practice. Developing policies, disseminating information on policy

requirements, providing training on implementation, and assessing progress are all procedures requiring funding and staff. Early intervention transition policies are no exception.

Agencies supporting and supervising early intervention transition already exist. State intermediate units are the designated agencies overseeing early intervention programs within Pennsylvania counties and serve as the bridge between these programs and school districts. The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network services regions within the state and offers training course, resources, and technical assistance to both intermediate unit and school district personnel. Information regarding the SES population in all school districts is readily accessible on the PDE website. Coordinating recommendations for improving the quality of early intervention transition practices may be done through these groups, as both have contact with and responsibilities for the constituencies involved in improving practices. While school districts and providers serving early intervention students and families make up these constituent groups, governance support for all involved state, regional, and local agencies is critical for these kinds of recommendation to come to fruition. In addition, partnerships between universities, school districts, preschool program providers, child advocacy groups, and community groups may provide other avenues for advancing quality transitions.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Study limitations included the small sample size in the population. Surveying a larger sample group may have provided some differences in the reported frequency of practices, perceived effectiveness, school district size, and SES. Generalizability of the study would be best applied to school districts receiving transitioning students from various preschool service providers.

In addition, the survey instrument was broad in scope, consisting of only a few items for each of the numerous transition practices queried. Each section on communication between programs, family involvement, professional development, and ecological systems could have been explored in depth. Further analysis on correlations between district size, SES, and transition practices could have likewise been examined more extensively but was limited by the number of respondents in the reporting sample. The research design of the study using a survey instrument provided a general overview of transition practices as opposed to a more in-depth investigation. A more thorough investigation might be gleaned through individual interviews with special education directors. Although descriptive statistics were used extensively in reporting the results, only a few significant, bivariate correlations emerged in reference to SES, school size and transition variables.

5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature included few research studies focusing on the early intervention student population with identified disabilities moving to school-age programs. None of the studies reviewed investigated this process from school district special education director's perspective, which supports the rationale for selecting this research topic. Avenues for future research exploration may include examining the early intervention transition process from the perspective of early intervention preschool service providers or from agencies/individuals providing services to students and families outside of school settings. Each would bring an untapped perspective to the topic, as it was not identified extensively in this or other research studies.

5.6 CONCLUSION

An effective early intervention transition process for students with identified disabilities as they move from preschool services to school-age programs is significant in that transition provides a bridge between early childhood supports and the K-12 educational process. Implications for an effective process are many. Quality transitions create optimal learning opportunities, positioning this population of students as ready to learn upon entrance to school. Reducing the time needed for transitioning students to adjust allows them to engage with learning early in the kindergarten year. Collaborating with their preschool staff allows school district personnel the opportunity to become aware not only of academic and adaptive levels, but also to become knowledgeable about the social-emotional readiness of these entering students. Championing practices that encourage family involvement allows parents to develop trusting and enduring relationships with school staff, empowering them to support their children during the transition process and as they move through school. Providing professional development opportunities for school staff and collaborating with preschool providers on these activities allows information on best practices in transition and the relationship of quality transitions to later school achievement to be known to those who directly serve these students.

Implementation of the policy and practice recommendations based on this research study requires support at the governance level if state, regional, and local agencies are to acquire both the tools and resources to see these recommendations through to completion. Capacity building at all of these levels is likewise required to sustain strong early intervention transitions. These recommendations promote the implementation of high intensity transition practices for all children in every school district, both in Pennsylvania and beyond. Although policy level determinations may require more investigation and additional resources, implementation of high intensity

transition practices at the local school district level are more readily accomplished. Benefits resulting from high quality transitions for this population of students with identified disabilities outweigh the costs associated with implementing these practices, both now as these children begin their K-12 education and in future years.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear _____ (Special Education Director),

My name is Kathleen Foster, and I am the Assistant Superintendent of Keystone Oaks School District in Pittsburgh. For my doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh, I am conducting survey research on the topic of early intervention transition as children move from preschool special education services to kindergarten. This study has the support of my dissertation committee including Dr. Charlene Trovato, Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr, Dr. Diane Kirk, and Dr. Rita Bean. A letter of support from Dr. Susan Sam's, Director of the DART program at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit is also included and can be accessed at <https://pitt.box.com/s/3ltpyognwg9pkylly76w>

As a former special education director, I am aware of the role of special education directors in the early intervention transition process. My survey examines transition practices, their perceived effectiveness, and barriers to implementation. The survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete. All responses will be collected anonymously. No personally identifiable demographic information will be associated with your responses. Survey results will be shared with my dissertation committee and with survey respondents upon request. I can be contacted by email at kmf44@pitt.edu to request a copy of the research results.

I appreciate your time in reading this introductory letter and your willingness to share your responses to the survey questions. To begin the survey, click the link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2013KMF1c>

Sincerely,
Kathleen M. Foster

c: _____ (Superintendent's Name)

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF SUPPORT



Allegheny Intermediate Unit

Educational Opportunities • Innovative Solutions • Leadership Excellence

10/8/13

Dear Special Education Director:

One of our Allegheny County school district administrators, Kathy Foster, is conducting a research study on early intervention transition practices for her dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh. The research study will focus on children moving from preschool early intervention services to kindergarten.

Your input on transition practices is valuable as it provides information from a school district perspective. Quality transitions allow children identified with developmental delays or disabilities to have the best possible start in school-age programs.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to make a contribution by completing this short survey. Should you have any questions about the survey please direct them to Kathleen Foster at kmf44@pitt.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Sams", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Susan Sams, Ph.D.
DART Program Director
Allegheny Intermediate Unit

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH CORRELATIONS TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

Construct: Family Involvement in Transition and Research Correlations

Survey Question: How does the school district communicate with parents of students moving from early intervention special education programs to kindergarten?

- Parents of students entering kindergarten from early intervention programs have an opportunity to visit public school kindergarten programs prior to their child transitioning (Dogaru, Rosenkoetter, & Rous, 2009).
- Early intervention students and their families have an opportunity to meet their kindergarten teacher prior to the child transitioning (Dogaru et al., 2009; Kang, 2010).
- Parents of early intervention students receive activities to help their child prepare for kindergarten prior to the beginning of the school year (Dogaru et al., 2009; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007).
- A primary contact person for transition activities exists in the school district (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- A visit to the home of the student/family transitioning from early intervention to school is made prior to the beginning of the school year (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- Multiple modes of communication such as letters, phone calls, and emails are used to reach out to families of early intervention students (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- More than one attempt at contact is made for families not responding to the initial outreach (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- School district staff reach out to families and children while they are in early intervention programs. reach back prior to the start of kindergarten and reach with intensity (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

- School district staff reach back prior to the start of kindergarten (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).
- School district staff reach with intensity in an attempt to engage families (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002)
- Families are aware of the importance of transition planning and have the information they need to actively participate in transition planning with their child (NECTC Transition Toolkit).
- Families of incoming children are provided with information about academic expectations in kindergarten and are provided with activities to assist the child at home (McIntyre et al., 2007).
- Families of incoming kindergarten children are provided with readiness activities to assist their children in preparing for kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2007).

Construct: Professional Development for School Staff and Research Correlations

Survey Question: What type of preparation do school district staff members receive related to the transition of early intervention special education students to kindergarten?

- School staff members participate in professional development activities related to the significance of the transition process to adjustment and school achievement (Burford, 2005; Kang, 2010; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).
- School staff are provided with professional development on the regulations regarding the transition of early intervention special education students to kindergarten (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- Training is offered to school staff on effective transition practices (in-person contact with parents, classroom visitation opportunities for students/families prior to start of school) (Dogaru et al., 2009; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001).
- Principals and district administrators have received professional development on transition practices and requirements (Early et. al., 2001).

- Support staff (counselors, speech therapists, special area subject teachers) are provided with information on the strengths and needs of the transitioning child and their role in transition process (Dogaru et al., 2009).
- Released time is provided for receiving school staff to participate in transition planning and transition activities (Dogaru et al., 2009)
- Special education staff provides receiving regular education teachers with individualized professional development on strategies to address the needs of special education students transitioning to kindergarten. (Dogaru et al., 2009)

Construct: Ecological Framework for Transition and Research Correlations

Survey Question: How does the relationship between the child, their family, providers (speech, OT, PT, Behavioral Mental Health), and all systems of care and education in which they are involved influence the transition process?

- The child, family, community agencies, private providers, and individual programs that serve them are all considered as contributors during the transition process (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007).
- The nature of a child's disability influences the transition process in terms of amount and kind of transition activities (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007).
- Transition planning initiated by the public school involves representatives of the individual care and education program in which transitioning children are involved (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007; Rous & Myers, 2007).
- Collaboration among all services providers from sending and receiving programs and other providers servicing a child and their family is evident during the transition process (Boyer, 2001; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007).
- Private providers servicing children out of the school setting (e.g., speech therapists, behavioral mental health therapists, occupational/physical therapists, etc.) are included in on transition planning activities and transition meetings in the public school district (DeVore & Russell, 2007) .

- Transition involves the child, and their surrounding contexts of family, peers, community, and systems of care and education (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).
- Collaborative efforts between the sending preschool providers and the receiving public school personnel are evident to parents of transitioning students. (Pianta et al., 2001)

Potential Barriers to Transition If Non-Existent and Research Correlation

- District administrative support is evident for students, families and staff involved with early intervention to kindergarten transition (Boyer, 2001).
- Kindergarten class lists are generated in ample time for staff to implement transition practices prior to the start of school and at the beginning of the kindergarten year (Pianta et al., 1999; Rous, Early, & Hallam, 2006).
- Funding to support additional transition work (summer, evenings, etc.) for teachers and staff is available (Pianta et al., 1999; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010).
- A transition practices plan delineating roles and responsibilities of involved staff exists in the school district (Pianta et al., 1999; Rous, Early, & Hallam, 2006).
- Early intervention providers appear to play a role in the transition process (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.)
- Professional development activities are provided for school district on staff on the significance of transition practices for students moving from special education early intervention programs to kindergarten (Rous, 2009).
- Transition practices involve a significant amount of time for school district staff (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.)
- Direct service providers are included in transition meetings (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.).
- There is a curriculum alignment between early intervention programs and district kindergarten programs (Rous, 2009).
- Early intervention records are available for kindergarten teachers to review prior to the beginning of school (Rous, Early & Hallam, 2006).

- Opportunities for district staff to visit early intervention programs are provided (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.).
- Early intervention staff visits district kindergarten programs (National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practices Survey, n.d.).
- Home visits to are made to families of students transitioning from early intervention to school age programs (Rous, 2009).
- Personal meetings between the family of early intervention students, the child, and the kindergarten teacher occur prior to the opening of school (Ahtola et al., 2011).
- Families have fears and anxieties about the transition process and their child's move to the next environment (Rous, 2009).
- Staff between sending early intervention programs and the receiving school district are unfamiliar with each other's roles (Rous, 2009).

APPENDIX D

EARLY INTERVENTION TRANSITION PRACTICES SURVEY

WELCOME!

Thank you so very much for sharing your ideas about your district's early intervention transition practices. By sharing no more than 10 minutes of your time, you will help us understand this important time in children's lives. Your participation is completely voluntary; no one will be able to identify you or your district.

1. Has your district designated one primary contact person for transition?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes: Special education director
- ☐ Yes: School psychologist
- ☐ Yes: Building level administrator
- ☐ Yes: Other (please specify)

2. We'd like to know about the ways your district initially collaborates with early intervention providers before a child comes to your district. Let's begin with visits and information.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Although not required by law, your school staff members observe students in early intervention settings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Although not required by law, early intervention providers observe your kindergarten program to become familiar with kindergarten expectations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Early intervention providers receive information about kindergarten readiness skills from school staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Early Intervention Transition Practices

3. Initial Meetings: Do your district staff and early intervention providers meet prior to a child transitioning to kindergarten?

- ☐ No
☐ Yes: Meet only regarding students with significant disabilities
☐ Yes: Meet about some students
☐ Yes: Meet about most students
☐ Yes: Meet about all students

4. Ongoing Collaboration: Do your district staff and early intervention providers communicate about programs, curriculum, and processes? Check all that apply.

- ☐ District shares information on district kindergarten curriculum with early intervention (E.I.) providers.
☐ District invites E.I. providers to school district programs such as Open House.
☐ District and E.I. providers communicate about aligning curriculum between E.I. programs and kindergarten.
☐ District and E.I. providers participate in joint meetings to discuss transition process between programs.
☐ Other (please specify)

5. Now let's turn to the written communication your district has with parents/guardians of transitioning students.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Our district sends parents/guardians some activities they can do with their children to prepare for kindergarten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Next, tell us about observations. Before school starts, our district invites parents/guardians of early intervention students to observe the kindergarten.

- ☐ Never
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Almost always

Early Intervention Transition Practices

7. Before school starts, our district invites parents/guardians of early intervention students to meet individually with the kindergarten teacher.

- ☐ Never
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Almost always

8. Perhaps your district staff makes follow-up contacts with parents/guardians if they do not respond to your initial communication. If so, please tell us how you do that followup.

	not applicable	phone call	letter	e-mail	home visit
Yes: One attempt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Two attempts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Three attempts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: More than three attempts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Thank you again for your time. Now we'd like to ask about ways your school district helps employees understand the transition process.

	administrators	professional staff	paraprofessional staff	support staff (such as counselors, speech therapists)	not applicable	unsure
participate in transition activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
receive information on the strengths and needs of transitioning students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
receive professional development on best practices for transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
receive professional development on legal requirements for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
receives information on the relationship of transition to later school achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does your staff pay released time for these activities? If so, please tell us which ones.

Early Intervention Transition Practices

10. Your perspectives are important to us. Will you please tell us whether

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
The nature of a child's disability influences the intensity of transition activities our district plans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Even though not required by law, does your school district involve providers serving early intervention children outside of school to transition meetings? Check all that apply.

	District invites provider to transition planning meetings	District asks provider to share information on child	District reviews provider reports submitted by parents/guardians
No, we do not include providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Occupational Therapists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Physical Therapists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Speech Therapists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Behavioral Mental Health Agencies (TSS, BST)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes: Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

Early Intervention Transition Practices

12. Your background of experiences with early intervention transition will provide us with information on how frequently specific transition practices are implemented in your school district.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
E.I. providers observe public school kindergarten programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
School staff observe transitioning students in E.I. settings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents and E.I. students visit the kindergarten program prior to the start of school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School staff makes home visits to families of E.I. students prior to the start of school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school district provides professional development for staff on early intervention transition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school district includes health and human services providers for early intervention children in transition meetings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Early Intervention Transition Practices

13. You are almost finished! Thank you again for sharing your views. Now we'd like to know how effective following transition practices are in your district?

	Not applicable	Not effective	Somewhat effective	Neither effective or ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
School staff observing transitioning children in E.I. settings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E.I. staff observing kindergarten classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing kindergarten readiness skill information to E.I. staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Designating a primary school district contact to coordinate transition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing opportunities for the child and family to visit the kindergarten prior to school starting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making multiple attempts to contact unresponsive families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using multiple modes of communication such as letters, phone calls, email, home visits, etc., when communicating with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing families of early Intervention students with information on activities to help their child prepare for kindergarten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing professional development on best practices in transition related to early Intervention students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing school staff with information on the relationship of a strong transition to later school achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing school administrators with professional development on transition practices related to early Intervention students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Considering the nature of a	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Early Intervention Transition Practices

child's disability when planning transition activities

Inviting health and human services providers working with E.I. students and their families to district transition meetings.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

14. What is the highest level of a degree that you have completed?

☐

Bachelor's Degree

☐

Master's Degree

☐

Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD)

15. How many years have you been in your current position?

☐

Less than one year

☐

1-5 years

☐

6-10 years

☐

More than 10 years

16. Approximately how many students are in your district?

☐

Under 1000 students

☐

Between 1000 and 2000 students

☐

Over 2000 students

☐

Over 3000 students

17. On average, how many students enter your school district each year from early intervention special education programs?

☐

– 5 students

☐

6-10 students

☐

More than 10 students

☐

Don't know

Early Intervention Transition Practices

18. On average, from how many settings or programs does your district draw early intervention students?

- ☐ 1 -3 settings or programs
- ☐ 4 – 6 settings or programs
- ☐ More than 6 settings or programs
- ☐ Don't know

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