

**Parallels in Time: Exploring Present and Future Transitional Strategies for Kindergarten
Students with Disabilities**

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Successful transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities is a complex process that can have long term effects on school success. Although attempts are made for a seamless transition, far too often the process lacks the communication, training, and high intensity transition supports needed for all the involved stakeholders. This study examines the complexity of kindergarten transition for children with disabilities. Specifically, it examines studies that implement supports that are of higher intensity to improve transition for children with disabilities while considering the ecological context. Ecological factors such as the home, school, and community context interplay and can become either beneficial or barriers that may determine the kindergarten transition experience for a child with disabilities. Coordination of services and collaboration across the involved transition agencies is becoming more relevant to the transition process and as a topic in research. A transition procedure that allows a continuation from the preschool program and discourages disconnect is critical. Additionally, parent, teacher, child, school, and community engagement in transition has also been studied to create an effective transition with positive educational outcomes. Transition to kindergarten is a child's entry into formal schooling and is paramount for the long-term school achievement of a child with disabilities.

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Preface

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1.0 Introduction

Transition to kindergarten is the first step in an equitable inclusive school program for children with disabilities (CWD) (Ekins, 2015). Disabilities can be defined as a collection of conditions associated to impairment in one or more of the following areas: learning, physical, behavioral/social, or language (Daire, Munyon, Carlson, Kimemia, & Mitcham, 2011). The prevalence of children identified with disabilities has doubled over the last three decades and currently CWD represent 13% of public school enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Although transition has been an area of focus in early childhood special education for some time as shown in theory and literature (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Dogaru, 2007), the current emphasis on transition is due to shifts in demographics, reduced funding in school systems, inclusive practices, and literature that supports the long term educational benefits to early childhood initiatives (Rous et al., 2007). Likewise, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), 1975, mandated that all CWD between the ages of 3-21 receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE). In 1986, Parts B & C of IDEA mandated states to offer free early intervention and preschool services from trained personnel to all children who qualify. Additionally, IDEA, required public schools who identify school-age children as having a disability to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and provide FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Fortner & Jenkins, 2018). IDEA, 2004, LRE policy has changed the landscape of the public school setting to a more inclusive environment. A majority of students with disabilities now receive their instruction in the general education classroom (E., R., 2014). Transition to kindergarten is the first time CWD are experiencing the demands of a public school general education classroom.

CWD enter public school with a distinctive set of disadvantages and challenges (Fortner & Jenkins, 2018). The kindergarten transition has been found to be challenging for CWD given deficits in critical socio-behavioral and adaptive skills (McIntyre et al., 2006). A well-planned transition to kindergarten for this expanding population of CWD is important because their experience tends to be more diverse and intense relative to their typically-developing peers (Rous & Hallam, 2012). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013) the achievement gap between CWD and their peers is increasing with the largest gaps prevailing at early elementary school among CWD from lower income families (Morgan, Farkas, & WU, 2011). Moreover, lower income families comprise the highest rates of disability nationwide (Houtrow, Larson, Olson, Newacheck, & Halfon, 2014). Population changes combined with the academic trajectories of these susceptible students constitute a significant concern for policymakers, administrators, parents, and teachers.

Moreover, Kindergarten transition may be more complex and require more attention for CWD from lower-income backgrounds due to their more complicated needs (Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2011). There are fewer services available for lower income families experiencing multiple problems simultaneously (Dockett et al., 2011). The literature has revealed that families from lower income backgrounds are concerned about whether schools are prepared for their children, their cultural backgrounds, and their individual needs (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005). Furthermore, CWD from lower income families experience an even greater risk for educational challenges during transition (Miller, 2015). As a result, the kindergarten transitional process and practices require specialized services and supports that align with the context of the transition as well as the needs of the individual child (Gooden & Rous, 2018).

Transition to kindergarten can be viewed as successful if the following outcomes are achieved: academic, social, and emotional adjustment of the student and a positive outlook toward school is developed (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre 2003). This adjustment to Kindergarten requires information and support from a variety of contexts including family, school, and community (Rous & Hallam, 2006). Implementing collaborative practices that encourage different stakeholders to work together are essential to an improved practice (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005). A transitional process that prohibits students from experiencing social and behavioral problems early in their school programs perpetuates the likelihood that they will encounter success as they progress through their school career (Margetts, 2002).

Transition practices that promote success can be both child-centered (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011), and context-based (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007). A child-centered approach can be effective when high intensity supports, and practices are implemented (Rous, Meyer, & Stricklin, 2007). High Intensity supports are those practices that are conducted in a small group or individualized manner to elicit an effective transition to kindergarten (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). An ecological approach to transition extends beyond the capabilities of one child to transition successfully and examines the inter-relationship of multiple contexts. These contexts include the family, school, and community ((Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Moreover if a school relies solely on the expectation that a child will change rather than improving the contexts, the transition may not be successful (Kennedy, Cameraon, & Greene, 2012).

Transition can be comprised of a single event prepared by schools or consist of multiple efforts to establish a home connection to the school context (Dockett et al., 2011). Additionally, transition often seeks continuity between preschool and kindergarten curriculums and pedagogical settings (Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2012). Communities may vary in defining and managing

transition. Barriers within the community may exist to prevent a seamless transition for CWD to kindergarten. Such barriers may be a direct result of the limited resources in a lower economic setting (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Due to the complex nature of transition, implementing an approach that encompasses a multitude of factors, influences, and contexts is currently viewed as optimal in the literature (Miller, 2015).

1.1 Statement and Significance of the Problem

The problem of practice is to investigate ways to improve the transition of children with disabilities to kindergarten within a lower economic status at Sunset Elementary. Addressing the needs of students at this critical moment of entry into formal schooling is documented to have long-term results that follow a student throughout their educational experience. Transitional practices that are child-centered and high intensity will be examined for frequency and effectiveness. High intensity supports will be those implemented at an individual or child level. Transitional contexts will be explored for barriers within the lower economic setting that inhibit supports.

A well-planned transition to kindergarten is important to the academic, social, and emotional development of a child because it fosters long term positive educational outcomes and later successes coping with other life transitions (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). Children who experience social and behavioral tribulations early in their educational programs are likely to encounter similar issues as they proceed through their school careers (Margetts, 2002). The problem of practice seeks to identify opportunities to maximize the school district's capacity to

foster a successful transition for children with disabilities as they embark upon their initial opportunity for an equitable and inclusive education.

2.0 Literature Review

Transition from preschool to kindergarten requires positive formations of new relationships, new skills, and new expectations and has a lasting impact on a child's later development (Clark & Zygmont-Fillwalk, 2008). A well-planned transition to kindergarten is important to the academic, social, and emotional development of a child because it fosters later school success and later success with managing other transitions in life (Clark & Zygmont-Fillwalk, 2008). Children with disabilities may be especially vulnerable during transition and may lack academic and behavioral readiness skills essential for kindergarten (McIntyre 2010). This becomes more profound when considering the transition of a child with special needs from their early intervention (EI) or preschool program to a school-age kindergarten program due to developmental deficits, limited coping skills, and the nature of their disability (Clark & Zygmont-Fillwalk, 2008). Additional stressors can occur when there is disparity among the educational setting, the curriculum, or physical location. Prior research investigations suggest transitional difficulties need to be identified within the current practices of the system (Malone & Gallagher, 2009).

The significance of transition has been a focus in early childhood education for some time. However, coordination and collaboration across multiple contexts has become more prevalent in research (Rous & Hallam, 2012). The potential for discontinuity between preschool and kindergarten has been an area of need (Kemp, 2003). New evidence about the value and success of early transition indicates a need to shift the focus from solely a child-centered approach to a more ecological approach (Rosenkoetter et al., 2007). An ecological framework considers the context of the transition and dictates the types of supports that will be provided as well as the

barriers that may be experienced by children with disabilities (Rous et al., 2007). Contextual factors of transition to kindergarten include characteristics of the classroom, children, teachers, family, and community (Early et al., 2001). Moreover, the communication among these varying contexts must be comprehensive due to the time-sensitive nature of transition (McCormick et al., 2011).

Nearly 6,500,000 children of kindergarten transition age are eligible for special education services in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This continued prevalence has resulted in four decades of research on best practices in transitions in the field of early childhood special education. Beginning in the year 1970 until 2000, the U.S. Department of Education funded outreach programs concentrated on the transition of children with disabilities (Scarborough, Hebbeler, Spiker & Simeonsson, 2011). The programs originated out of the Office of Special Education (OSEP) and focused on the three primary transitions experienced by children from birth to primary school: hospital to home, early intervention to preschool, and the focus of this review: preschool to kindergarten. These programs produced a literature base that defined issues and models to support the transition of children with disabilities and their families across early childhood (Scarborough et al., 2011). More recently, in 2008, a Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), supported by the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) in the U.S. Department of Education studied a large sample of children age three to five that is illustrative of the populace who were receiving special education services in the 2003–2004 school year (Carlson et al., 2009). Findings encompassed information about ecological contexts involved in early special education experiences: children, families, schools/teachers, and community/agencies. A portion of the data was collected using child assessments and multiple questionnaires.

Kindergarten transition of children with disabilities was studied extensively. PEELS focused on specific transition practices used on each child with disabilities in the study rather than whole classrooms to allow for a more accurate description of the variables that may impact individual transition (Daley, Munk, & Carlson 2010). Results of the PEELS longitudinal study have resulted in a national data bank used for numerous studies (Carlson et al., 2009). Thus, Rous, Hallom, McCormick and Cox, 2010, used PEELS data to identify transition practices as either high or low intensity. High intensity supports were those that were considered individualized to a specific student or family at the child level rather than a practice that is low intensity or not directed toward an individual or at the class level (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). The overarching ideas derived from the study were that often children with disabilities require more effort to foster the transition to kindergarten and this may be predominantly the case for children with a more severe impairment. The children who have severe disabilities experience the most disruption due to the need to adapt not only to new staff, but often a new physical location as well. Data concluded that they were more likely to have only one kind of transition support (Clark & Zygmund-Fillwalk, 2008).

According to Daley, Munk, and Carlson (2011) high intensity supports are practices that are individualized to a specific child and family while low intensity supports focus on whole classrooms or large groups. Supports that were individualized to the child, or high intensity, had the most impact (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). High intensity supports include interventions such as a visit to the child's home, a visit to the prior setting, a phone call to parents, a meeting or phone call with sending staff, an individual or small group visit to the kindergarten setting, and prep strategies developed prior to the start of school (Rous and Hallam, 2012).

Despite the extensive research in the area of transition to kindergarten of children with disabilities, less than twenty percent of schools in the United States have kindergarten transition practices in place to support children and families (Clark & Zygmund-Fillwalk, 2008). Identifying exact transition practices that can be adapted to the diverse needs of specific children and families is an area of need (Rous & Hallam, 2012). Many practices can be considered a transition support based solely on the timing of the intervention. Additionally, classroom strategies can be repurposed and applied toward improving the transition of an individual student (Rous & Hallam, 2012). Specifically a home visit is a high intensity practice that can be utilized throughout the school year, but can be a time-sensitive practice if it occurs as a support during transition. The temporal and timely nature of transition along with environmental factors makes it difficult to relate specific practices to a successful transition (Marcon, 2002). The timing of transition practices in relation to the needs of the child is important to positive adjustment outcomes (Daley et al., 2011).

An equitable education for children with disabilities begins with a successful transition to kindergarten. Integrating an ecological approach along with child-centered transition practices may expedite positive educational outcomes. This literature review will examine transition practices and perspectives through an ecological lens to capture the intricacy involved in transition. Both a child-centered and ecological approach will be examined while investigating optimal transitional procedures in this review of literature.

Research Questions:

1. What current transition practices within an ecological context promote successful kindergarten transition experiences for children with disabilities along with their families and teachers?

2. What are some of the barriers to successful transition experienced by children with disabilities, families, and teachers?

2.1 Methods of Literature Review

2.1.1 Search Procedures

An online search was conducted that included the search engines PsychINFO and ERIC. The following keywords, including truncations were employed in multiple combinations: kindergarten readiness, transition to kindergarten, early intervention, school-age special education, transition of children with disabilities to kindergarten, transition of children with autism to kindergarten, experiences of teachers and families of children with disabilities during kindergarten transition. The search resulted in 59 studies, the abstracts and titles of which were reviewed for the topic of interest. Initial search procedures using the term “Transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities” generated thirteen studies from the data base ERIC and forty-six studies from PsychINFO.

The references to articles related to the transition to kindergarten of children with disabilities were reviewed and a previous literature review on transition (Rous & Hallam, 2012) was also examined for potential additional studies also. Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria: (a) published in peer reviewed journals (b) included qualitative data (c) participants included children with disabilities or families and teachers of children with disabilities (d) examined perception of transition by teachers and families with disabilities including practices that enabled transition and/or examined barriers to transition. Studies were excluded if they (a) did

not identify an ecological context of the transition to kindergarten experience for children with disabilities or their families and teachers (b) were not peer reviewed (c) did not contain qualitative data (d) participants were typically developing children. (e) did not discuss transition practices and experiences of stakeholders on enablers and/or barriers. All studies were conducted in the U.S. with the exception of two studies: New Zealand (Schischka,, Rawlinson, & Hamilton, 2012) and Canada (Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes, 2007). These two studies were not excluded due to the limited research on the transition to kindergarten of children with disabilities.

After expanding and then narrowing the search according to the methodology previously described, ten studies were identified from eight different peer reviewed journals. The final selection of ten studies was designated for this review: Daley, Munk, and Carlson (2011); Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, and Todd (2004); Janus, Kopechanski, Cameronand Hughes (2007); McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro Reed, and Wildenger (2010); Quintero and McIntyre (2010); Rous, Myers, and Stricklin (2007);Schischka, Rawlinson, and Hamilton (2012);Starr, Martini, & Kuo (2014); Wildenger,Welchons, and McIntyre (2015a) *Predicting Socio-Behavioral Outcomes*; Wildenger, Welchons and McIntyre (2015b) *An Investigation of Parent and Teacher Concerns & Involvement*.

2.1.2 Coding Procedures

Across the reviewed studies, the first feature that was coded for was the participant's characteristics. Participants were coded for being a child, parent, or teacher. Additionally, studies had to include participants who were children with disabilities of transition age. Perspectives from teachers and families of children with disabilities during transition were identified. Transition practices were coded as either high or low intensity supports. High intensity supports were

individualized or small group oriented activities designed to aid in a seamless transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities. High intensity supports were examined and specifically named. High intensity supports included: Visit Child's Home (VCH), Visit Prior Setting (VPS), Called Parents (CP), Met with Sending Staff/called (MET/C), Developed Prep Strategies (DPS), Individual or small group visit to K prior to start of school (IV). Family or teacher perspectives were uncovered in each study. The method of qualitative data instrumentation was explored. Barriers to successful transition and the four factors as determined by the ecological framework outlined in Rous et. al, 2007, were examined in each study and included: child, family, community, and individual program factors.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Participants

Across the reviewed studies, there were nearly two thousand participants. An exact number of participants are not known due to some studies referring to families without a specific indication of the number of family members. Students with varied disabilities were included in the studies and they ranged from preschool-age to current Kindergarten students which were age four to six years old. Variations in disabilities included children with autism, developmental delays, intellectual disability, and multiple diagnoses. The participants were also teachers and parents who were involved with a child transitioning to kindergarten from Early Intervention or preschool. Janus et al., 2007 had forty percent with no clear diagnosis and sixty percent had multiple diagnosis. Two studies had only children with an ASD diagnosis (Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer,

& Todd, 2004) and (Starr, Martini, & Kuo, 2014). Two studies included preschool (pre-transition) groups and kindergarten (post-transition) groups Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron and Hughes (2007) and (Wildenger, Welchons, and McIntyre, 2015). Two studies included participants with and without disabilities.

2.2.2 Settings

Across studies, the settings were preschools, and elementary or primary school. Public and private schools located in urban and rural locations were included. Higher and lower socio-economic contexts within large and small school districts were examined. Additionally, the classrooms were primarily inclusive.

2.2.3 Research Designs

The research designs of included studies had a qualitative component. In ten studies the research was conducted by a team of researchers rather than an individual. Interviews were used by five studies: Daley, Munk, and Carlson (2011), Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron and Hughes (2007), Rous, Myers, and Stricklin (2007), Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer and Todd (2004), and Schischka, Rawlinson, and Hamilton (2012). Five studies included a questionnaire as part of their qualitative data. One study by McIntyre et al., (2010) used a survey. These studies had multiple research designs. Yet, the ten studies in this literature review can be categorized as qualitative research. An interview, questionnaire, survey, focus group, or scale was used to gather data in each study. Qualitative data in the form of open-ended responses were coded for overarching themes and the relationship between codes.

2.2.4 Study Findings

Evidence-based practices for successful transition from EI to kindergarten were measured and used in all studies. High intensity supports were those that were individualized to the child. Low intensity supports were those that were applied to the whole-group. All the practices were aimed at improving the transition experience of one or all of the stakeholders during transition of children with disabilities from preschool to Kindergarten. As noted in the results table, the frequency and duration of the practices varied and were short or long-term as well as high or low intensity. Additionally, all studies found that individual transition practices, high intensity practices, improved transition for students with disabilities. Daley, Munk, and Carlson, (2011) found that high intensity supports decreased when ecological barriers such as larger sized school districts, poverty, and a different physical location from preschool to kindergarten. In Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, and Hughes (2007), there were twenty children with disabilities in a preschool group (Pre-transition) and twenty children with disabilities already in kindergarten (Post-transition). Parents of the post-transition group were less satisfied with school staff than pre-transition parents. Once in school, parents were dissatisfied with the care that their child received and the long wait for services to begin. Transition is an in-between process that is not owned by any one agency and results in low parent satisfaction Janus and colleagues (2007) and Starr, Martini, & Kuo, (2014). Transition is a process not a discontinuous event that begins the year prior to kindergarten (Starr, Martini, & Kuo, 2014). Teachers and parents of children expressed more concern for the transition of their students with disabilities than typically developing peers. A team leader to coordinate transition was also recommended (see Appendix A).

2.3 Discussion

Early transitions have been studied in the field of early childhood special education for over three decades between 1970 and 2000 funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. These studies have produced a body of literature that outlined specific issues, challenges, strategies, and models to support the transition of children with disabilities and their families across the early years (Scarborough et al., 2011). The transition from preschool to Kindergarten is a critical time for children with disabilities. Furthermore, children with developmental adversity who are growing up in poverty are subject to the additional distress of beginning kindergarten on an average of two years behind their classmates (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). The deficit of these young children as they begin formal school persists and expands over time (Mashburn, LoCasale-Crouch, & Pears, 2018). An additional factor impacting the transition of children with disabilities is the recent decline for funding of pre-k programs while enrollment demands increase (Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010). Therefore, addressing the needs of children with disabilities as they transition to formal school is a growing concern. Programs will lack the resources to provide comprehensive transition practices to the growing numbers of children with disabilities in need of this service (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). Consequently, collaboration among providers, schools, and families is imperative (Roeser & Eccles, 2015).

2.3.1 What are the practices that support transition for children with disabilities from preschool to kindergarten?

Children with disabilities need an individualized plan for successful transition that incorporates high intensity practices for effective transitions (Rous & Hallam 2012). High intensity practices should be used to prepare the child and family prior to the start of school as well as during the adjustment period (Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007).

Included in the studies was an emphasis on collaboration within an ecological framework which considers the impact of the contexts of home, school, and community for successful transition practices. Moving beyond a transition model that solely examines a child's skill level to assess readiness and toward a framework that examines the relationship between multiple contextual factors is optimal (Rous & Hallam, 2012). One overarching theme of the review was that important sources of support to foster early school success include the child, the family, schools and teachers, peers, preschools and preschool teachers, and the wider community. Interactions among the stakeholders over time can provide a foundation to ensure smooth and successful transitions to school. RTI (Response to Intervention) models along with time allocated to have faculty and staff from both the preschool and primary school meet and discuss specific transition plans for students provides a way to improve transition and learning outcomes for all students (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Supporting the connection between the student's home and the community also helps improve the transition from preschool to primary school. Developing and nurturing family and school partnerships will provide an opportunity for sharing information about options that are available to families within the community (Villeneuve et. al 2013).

2.3.2 What are some of the barriers to successful transition experienced by children with disabilities, families, and teachers?

According to a review of the literature, barriers to transition for children with disabilities are prevalent. An ecological framework was utilized to identify barriers in different contexts found during transition such as home, school, and community. Namely, systematic variances during transition in socioeconomic status and other identity markers have been researched to play a role in the stratification of the long term positive educational outcomes of children (Daley, Munk, & Carlson 2011). Variation in school readiness based on socioeconomic status has been well documented in the literature. District size, urbanicity, and poverty were found to be among the barriers to effective transition (Daley, Munk, & Carlson 2011). Students from higher poverty or larger districts are less likely to receive transition support. Moreover, less wealthy districts must cope with numerous pressures on their resources (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Furthermore, McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro Reed, and Wildenger (2010) revealed that caregivers of special needs students had less education and income than those of general education students.

Another factor that impedes adjustment to kindergarten is whether the transition takes place in the same setting or new building (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Specifically, children who have autism as their disability experience difficulty generalizing skills that they learned in a different setting to kindergarten (Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd 2004). Starr, Martini, & Kuo (2014) examined the cultural differences in understanding autism and the reluctance to discuss disabilities outside of the family as a potential barrier to kindergarten adaptation. Janus, Kopechanski, Cameronand and Hughes (2007) determined that lack of communication between school and home for both Pre and Post transition was an issue. Most commonly reported barrier

in the preschool setting was lack of time and transition training according to Quintero and McIntyre (2010)

There are numerous barriers to a seamless transition in a school setting. Rous, Myers, and Stricklin (2007) reported that the lack of administrative provision to implement high intensity supports adversely impacted kindergarten classroom settings. Likewise, Schischka, Rawlinson, and Hamilton (2012) noted that delayed access to special education services at the start of Kindergarten is another obstruction to smooth transition. Additionally, parents may be confused by the unfamiliar legal special education language first introduced at formal school.

Research that seeks to investigate solutions for transition difficulties has indicated the need to examine the current transition policies and practices of the system (Malone & Gallagher, 2009). Wildenger, Welchons and McIntyre (2015a) discovered that low income families were less likely to participate fully in transition activities. Additionally, involvement from preschool teachers who had negative attitudes about their students with disabilities resulted in less positive outcomes for children w/disabilities during transition. Wildenger, Welchons, and McIntyre (2015b) showed that kindergarten teachers were less likely to complete a home visit or coordinate curriculum with preschool teachers. However, a majority of the studies indicated that transition practices that were most effective for children with disabilities included collaboration and communication between families, schools, and preschools/early childhood providers.

The overarching ideas derived from the studies in this literature review was that often children with disabilities require more effort to foster the transition to kindergarten and this may be predominantly the case for children with a more severe impairment (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). The children who have severe disabilities experience the most disruption due to the need to adapt not only to new staff, but often a new physical location as well. Data concluded that they

were more likely to have only one kind of transition support. Supports that were individualized to the child, or high intensity, had the most impact (Carlson et al., 2009).

2.4 Limitations

There were several limitations to this literature review. Only two data bases were searched for the topic of interest. Search terms were limited so relevant studies may not have been located. Two included studies had the same author. Additionally, a second coder was not utilized for checking reliability. Synthesizing qualitative studies incorporating varying designs and qualitative tools presented some challenges during the systematic review process and may be considered a limitation.

2.5 Implications for Research

From 2010 until 2014 Funding for Pre-K counts increased by \$4.5 million and Head Start Supplemental increased by \$2 million (PAEYC, 2014). Increases in funding for early childhood will enable future research to be conducted on the topic of transition to kindergarten as well as funding for transition activities. IDEA (2004) reinforces the provision of education to all children regardless of the presence of major disabilities or serious health concerns. All children need to have opportunities for healthy development and positive outcomes (Rous et al., 2007). Although parent and teacher perspectives are well represented in the literature, administrators and the students with disabilities voices are not well represented. Further research that examines the

perspectives of administrators and children with disabilities would be a welcomed addition to the literature.

Additional research opportunities can measure children with disabilities outcomes in relation to transition. Adaptive, cognitive, and social skills are central to positive school adjustment in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year (McIntyre, Blancher, & Baker, 2006). Research that examines the amount of preparation teachers and parents provide for children with disabilities in support of transition to kindergarten is an area of need (McIntyre and Wildenger 2011). Moreover, it is not well documented in the literature if engagement in transition varies according to the characteristics of a child.

2.6 Implications for Practice

These findings should impact school-based practices in transition by offering more high intensity supports to children with disabilities and considering the ecological factors or barriers that prohibit optimal transition. Teachers should implement high-intensity supports such as individual meetings with previous preschool teachers, as well as individual child and family meetings. The experience of parents as their children with developmental disabilities transition from preschool to kindergarten is improved by individualized practices considered to be high intensity transition activities. See Table 1 for a list of recommended high intensity supports. Transition practices need to include high intensity supports to effectively address the transition needs of children with disabilities. Parents and teachers need to develop communication and workable positive relationships. Training and adequate time to allow the high intensity supports to occur needs to be a priority of school administration. These kindergarten transition practices

foster secure attachments and relationships between teachers and students at the beginning of the school year which has long-term benefits (Mashburn & LoCasale-Crouch, 2018).

Additionally, transition to kindergarten requires a dynamic back and forth interplay between all involved participants from the child to the larger community. A successful transition for children with disabilities to kindergarten is best when viewed through the lens of a shared responsibility. This ecological approach considers the economic, family, community, agency and school context of the child's transition to promote quality and continuity during entry to kindergarten. Transitional practices are effective when they support the long-term development and positive educational outcomes of children.

3.0 Methods

The Methods chapter starts with a statement of the purpose of the study and the research questions the study attempts to report about. (Section 3.1). Next, will be a brief description of the local context of the study (i.e., the selected district) (Section 3.2). In succeeding sections, a summary of the study design (Section 3.3), including a summary of data collection and procedures (Section 3.4) as well as data analysis procedures (Section 3.5) will be discussed.

3.1 Research Questions

3.1.1 Research Questions and Topics

The purpose of this study is to examine the transitional process that occurs for children with disabilities as they enter kindergarten (K) within a public-school setting. Transition to K for young children with disabilities is a complex process (Rous & Hallam, 2012). Equal access to transition services for children with disabilities and economically disadvantaged families is a major problem (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Although this population is vulnerable and benefits the most from more services, they are the least likely to obtain transitional services (Schulting, Malone, Dodge, 2005). Transitional services have been widely recognized as important when young children are moving from community or home-based environments to a more formal school context. This is due to the introduction of more demanding expectations which include acceptable

behavior, appropriate communication, academic competence, and functional self-care skills (Rous & Hallam, 2006).

Furthermore, the problem can be compounded by the lack of initiating the policies already in place, namely, P.L. 99-457 (IDEA), Act 212 of 1990, the Early Interventions Systems Act, and the one-year early window for an IEP intervention. Moreover, according to 22 Pa. Code Chapter 14.154(e), children with disabilities are required to have transition goals included in their early intervention (EI) Individualized Education Plan (IEP) one year prior to the start of kindergarten to enable a smooth transition without an interruption in special education services. However, it can be complicated by the failure for school districts to comply with compensatory services (Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2009). See Figure 3.1 for policy procedural steps for transition of children with disabilities in Pennsylvania.

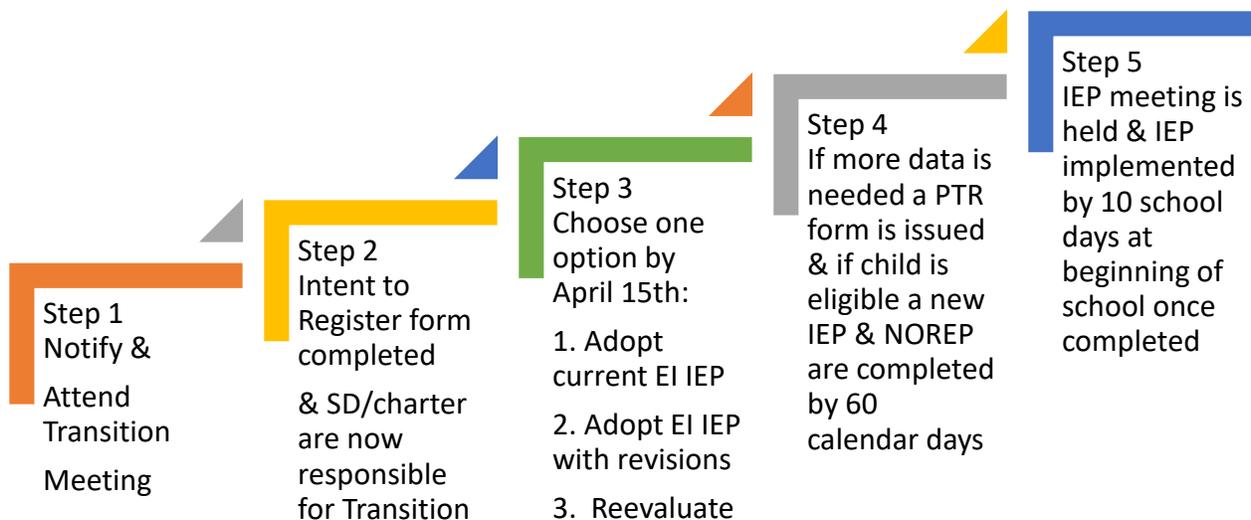


Figure 3.1. Policy Procedural Steps for Transition of Children with Disabilities in Pennsylvania

The current study draws from transitional research provided by multiple studies including the 2009 Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS). PEELS identified transitional

practices as either high or low intensity. High intensity practices were those that were considered individualized to a specific student or family at the child level. Low intensity practices are practices that were not directed or implemented for the benefit of the transitioning child (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Often children with disabilities require more effort to foster the transition to K and this may be predominantly the case for children with a more severe impairment (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007). An awareness of the critical factors connected to the transition process assists in framing a more contextualized approach to transition rather than solely a child-centered approach (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). As part of the current study, an interview process with classroom teachers will commence prior to the child's entrance into kindergarten. Research is most conclusive and demonstrates that children were more likely to have success when they were exposed to the high intensity transitional practices (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011).

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Effective transition practices

1.1 What is the capacity of a lower economic school (BSD) to effectively implement supportive transition practices for children with disabilities?

To foster a successful experience, additional planning may involve a complex cluster of transitional practices. For example, the PEELS study focused on specific transitional practices used for individual children with disabilities (Daley, Munk, & Carlson 2011). High intensity supports that were recommended consisted of individualized activities for one family and child (Rous & Hallam, 2012). Determining which high-intensity supports are currently functional and integrated into the Sunset Elementary transitional process and which are lacking will be examined

in this study as well as the District's capacity to implement effective practices during this critical time (see Figure 3.2, below).

2. Barriers to successful transition

2.1 What barriers prevent successful transition to kindergarten by children with disabilities?

Investigating the barriers within the current transitional process at Sunset Elementary will provide clarity for improvement opportunities. At present, some of these barriers may include but are not limited to district size, urbanicity, poverty, new setting or same building impact. Further hindrances are limited communication, deficient prerequisite skills, median income below poverty level, and caregiver's lack of education. In addition, it appears that the following obstructions could impede the progress of the transitioning student with disabilities: lack of time for high intensity practices, and lack of training. Lack of administrative support, delayed access to services at start of K, and cultural differences further exacerbates the problem. Similarly, K teachers are less likely to coordinate a home visit and incorporate preschool curriculum. Addressing transitional needs is best accomplished through implementing individualized practices. The use of high intensity supports, and practices indicates a successful transitional strategy (Rous, Meyer, & Stricklin 2007). In addition to the implementation of high intensity supports, research indicates that framing transitional needs as a dynamic process that extends beyond one child's needs is also operative (Miller, 2015). Transition to K should be conceptualized as not only one child's competencies but assessed through the ecology of the different contexts of a child's life which include resources in a lower economic community, early childhood education, and family (Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2012). This ecological framework can be understood as the intercommunication between community, agencies, families, and child during the transition (see Figure 3.2, below).

Transition plans are developed that include individual activities for each child and family.

- Arrange for children and families to visit programs.
- Family visits to different programs and schools before a final decision on programs is made.
- Visit child's home before program/school starts.
- Visit child's home after program/school starts.
- Providers/Teachers arrange for children to visit their future teachers and classrooms.
- Talk with parents to help prepare them for the child's transition.
- Provide opportunities for a child's family to talk with preschool and kindergarten staff about the special needs of their child and/or details like meals, transportation, and special services available.
- Invite children in early intervention to a play group/time/visitation for observation.
- Offer visits to the new school prior to transition for personal introduction of child and family to new environment (e.g., 1:1 visit, small group visit, NOT open house).
- Implement gradual transition into preschool and kindergarten with specific goals and objectives.
- Visits by family to programs prior to transition as part of transition plan.

Figure 3.2. Examples of Transition Practices That are High Intensity (Rous & Hallam, 2012)

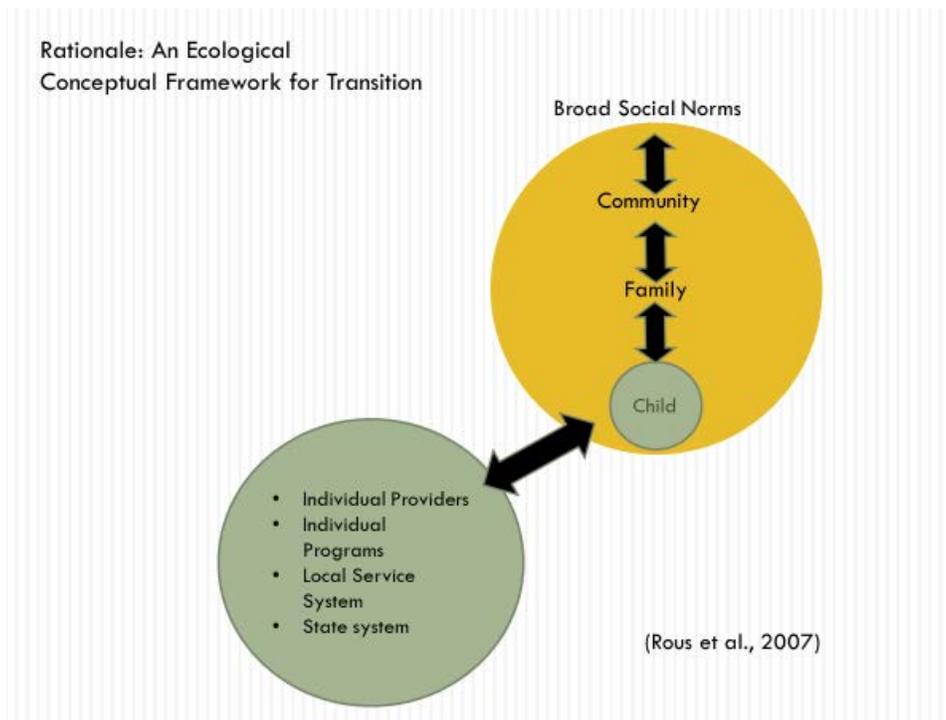


Figure 3.3. A Visualization of the Framework Guiding Research Question 2

3.2 Context

3.2.1 School District

The study was conducted at Sunset Elementary, which is situated within a small suburban community consisting of four boroughs in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. According to the most recent ACS 1-year survey in 2016, the average family median income is \$39,770, which is below the average state income of \$54,895 (Census Reporter, 2016). Total enrollment within the school district is 1,683 students. Nineteen percent of the population at Sunset Elementary is identified as special education students, as compared to the state average of fifteen percent of students per enrollment (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2015). District demographics are predictive of the educational resources students receive in those districts during transition (Daley et al., 2011). At Sunset Elementary, early transition comes to nearly a halt over the summer as financial constraints do not allow for a summer staff. Improving the complex transition process at Sunset Elementary can occur through a synthesis of the literature, implementation of multiple assessments, and the addition of partnerships and supports to assist children with disabilities, parents, and teachers as they engage in this mandatory transition within a lower socioeconomic stratum.

3.2.2 Schools

Sunset Elementary is a Title I K-6 public school within the East School District. Students who attend Sunset Elementary School come from varied ethnic, social and economic backgrounds. The District is unique in that both rural and urban cultures coexist within its communities. This is the only elementary building in the district that houses Kindergarten.

Teachers were recruited for this study based upon the grade level. The kindergarten teachers have acknowledged an ongoing desire to strengthen the overall transitional experience for their students. Over the last year, three transition nights entitled Parents are Welcome in School (PAWS) have been held for all students and their families. On the first meeting of PAWS in February, the mandatory structural process is introduced (refer to Figure 3.1 for mandatory transition procedures). The special education director/school psychologist addresses the group of parents. Two preschool teachers, a speech pathologist, and kindergarten special education teacher are also present. During each of the PAWS Nights future Kindergarten families visit the classrooms and meet the Kindergarten teachers & staff. Parents receive free educational materials to help prepare their child for Kindergarten. PAWS Nights are themed and future Kindergarten students participate in a large group of fun learning activities that focus on Reading, Math, and Writing skills. However, individual or small group sessions are held where children with disabilities can meet their assigned teacher or classroom. This is an area of concern and should be ameliorated for the future.

3.3 Study Design

This study focused on the critical time of transition from preschool to kindergarten for children with disabilities. This important period in early childhood has been documented in the literature to determine later success in school. Children with disabilities may be especially vulnerable during this transition and may lack academic and behavioral readiness skills essential for kindergarten (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). A needs assessment was implemented with a focus on assessing the gaps or barriers that exist in the transition of children with disabilities in a

public school with varying demographics. The aim was to improve the transition process of children with disabilities to kindergarten at Sunset Elementary through three phases of a needs assessment. The previous transition strategy at Sunset Elementary was not well defined and led to miscommunication and difficulties in a successful transition for students. Identifying performance improvement opportunities on an individual and organizational level can have long-term benefits (Gupta, Sleezer, & Russ-Eft 2014). The approach of the needs assessment was strategic and included the following three research activities: a fishbone exercise, face-to-face interviews, and a review of artifacts.

Phase 1 consisted of a brainstorming session where a cause and effect, fish-bone diagram was developed by stakeholders within the school. Fish-bone sessions allow team members to collaborate and identify the origin of problems in a cause/effect model (Shinde, Ahirrao, & Prasad, 2018). Moreover, the fishbone diagram can be used to develop plausible solutions to improving the transitional process. Developing a fishbone diagram could also clarify roles and establish a clear vision of what transition should look like which is researched to improve the overall transition process (Rous & Hallam, 2006). A successful transition to kindergarten includes critical outcomes that allow for the academic, social, and emotional adjustment of the student and a positive attitude toward school (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre 2003).

In phase two, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of both teachers and administrators. The purpose of these interviews was to identify and assess current practices and barriers that are representative of the Sunset Elementary transitional process (refer to Appendix A for Interview protocol).

In phase 3, the researcher used archival records to obtain any additional data regarding existing transition practices including current communication with preschool teachers and parents

regarding transition. Determining if the dissemination of information about a student with disabilities is adequate should prove helpful. If transitional procedures were expected, whether a formal written policy existed and if it was clearly communicated to school staff annually for effective implementation was also surveyed in phase 3.

3.4 Participants and Sampling Procedure

Participants in this study included the six female Kindergarten teachers who are impacted by transition of children with disabilities at Sunset Elementary School. Additional participants consisted of one second year male special education teacher who services only the children from Kindergarten who have an autism diagnosis. The special educator contributed to the fishbone session and the artifact review at Sunset Elementary. The inclusion of only the six kindergarten educators from Sunset Elementary was due to school-age transition occurring exclusively at that grade level. Teachers ranged from two to twenty-four years of teaching experience.

Table 3.1. Teacher Type and Experience

Type of Teacher	Gender	Years Teaching
General Educator	F	24
General Educator	F	23
General Educator	F	24
General Educator	F	12
General Educator	F	13
General Educator	F	12
Special Educator	M	2
Speech Pathologist	F	12

One administrator was invited to participate in the fishbone session but was unable to partake due to an emergency the day that the session was held. Selection of participants for the Interview portion of the study was determined by the new co-teaching team put in place to support children who participated in early intervention. This team consisted of the two general education kindergarten teachers and related service provider. Lastly, parental involvement was limited to archival review with no direct contact as per the recommendation of the school administration.

3.4.1 Instrument

The instrument utilized to conduct the school staff interviews was an adapted form of the Elements of Transition (ETK). This tool examines early transition through the lens of successful transition activities implemented up to twelve months prior to the start of kindergarten.

3.4.2 Purpose and Adaptation of the Elements of Transition (ETK)

The original goal of the ETK was to provide a practical tool from which schools could assess their transition process for children with autism from preschool to kindergarten. A gap in the literature suggested that a need existed for the identification of transition elements that create a successful transition plan for children (Jewett et al., 1998). The ETK was created through a literature review of transition of children with disabilities from preschool to kindergarten with a focus on children with high functioning autism. The elements uncovered in research were then categorized in four phases by time orientation. Table 3.2 gives an overview of the ETK Transition Phases and how each phase will correspond to the present study.

Table 3.2. Summary of ETK Original Transition Phases and Adaptations to ETK in This Study

	ETK Phase A	ETK Phase B	ETK Phase C	ETK Phase D
Time Assessed	One year prior to Kindergarten	12 months to 6 months prior to kindergarten placement	6 months prior to kindergarten placement and actual placement	3 month and 12 month review of the whole transition process
Number of Transition Elements	Contains 6 transition elements	Contains 7 transition elements	Contains 10 transition elements	Overall transition experience reviewed and two evaluative elements were added
Adaptations from original ETK to the three Phases 1,2, & 3 of the current study	Phase A Adapted ETK in present study	Phase B Adapted ETK in present study	Phase C Adapted ETK in present study	Phase D Adapted ETK in present study
Transition Elements	Phase 3 will utilize ETK PHASE A elements to guide the archival records examination of the current study	Phase 3 will utilize ETK PHASE B elements to guide the archival records examination of the current study	Phase 1 and 2 will utilize ETK Phase C elements to guide the fishbone activity and Interview of teachers	Phase 2 will utilize Phase D of the ETK to guide the interview. Final data analysis/interpretation influenced by framework provided in Phase D of the ETK

The final adaptations of the ETK are presented in Appendix B and Appendix C.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

In this needs assessment, the data collection process was compared to the desired transition process across five elements to gather information about the organization (school/school district). Internal elements of transition that include inputs (transition practices, transition process, and transition product) combined with external elements that include outputs (students/families) and outcomes (community context) guided the needs assessment (Gupta, Sleezer, & Russ-Eft 2014). All data collection procedures were informed by early transition research and draw on the design features of the Elements for Transition, ETK (Forest, Horner, Palmer & Todd 2004). In the ETK, elements for a successful transition plan have been well defined and an adapted version of the protocol will be used during Phase 2 of this study which is the face-to-face teacher interview. Other portions of the ETK protocol located in section *Phase A: One year prior to kindergarten* and *Phase B: Twelve months to six months prior to kindergarten placement* served as a guide for framing the fishbone session and archival record review.

Phase 1 began with a brainstorming session that included six kindergarten teachers, one special education teacher and a speech pathologist to help establish the first step to the needs assessment. This first step of an accurate needs assessment is a situational analysis (Boone 1985). To establish a situational analysis a fishbone diagram was developed through the collaboration of these critical stakeholders. The root causes of the problems were submitted on individual fishbone diagrams and later synthesized to one visual representation.

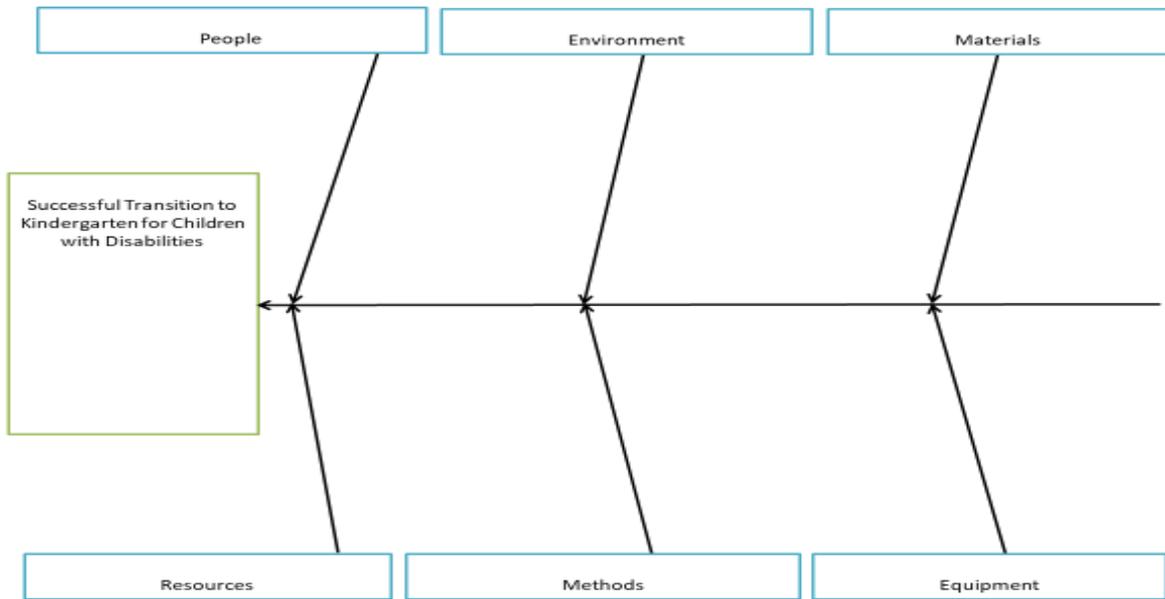


Figure 3.4. Provides a Visualization of the Framework Guiding the Fishbone Session

Phase two was semi-structured face-to-face interviews. All interviews of teachers were held in the classroom of the kindergarten teacher at the end of the school day. The related service provider was interviewed in her office at a time convenient for her. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed using Rev audio transcription service. The semi-structured interview posed open-ended questions along with some on a 1-6 Likert -type scale. Phase 3 of the study concluded with a review of archival records to determine what transition elements occur outside of the classroom at the school district and larger community level.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Phase 1 of the Needs Assessment provided a forum to create a fishbone diagram of the transition process. Current and future transition practices were added to the diagram based upon

frequency of use and prioritized need. Additionally, perceived barriers to effective transition were recorded. This fishbone diagram was then compared to the data uncovered in Phase Two and Phase Three of this study. This served as a fluid document to guide ongoing improvement in the transition of children with disabilities at Sunset Elementary School. The final analysis of the needs assessment allowed for a review and revision of the fishbone diagram to work toward transition success among all stakeholders based upon the findings of the present study. The fishbone diagram remains posted in a shared faculty space as a visual representation of the improvement process and synthesis of the conclusions drawn from the present study.

In Phase two, interview transcripts were analyzed to determine emergent themes. Once themes were established, descriptors and codes were developed. Dedoose, a research website, was used to ensure the security of the data sets and aid in the coding of the transcripts. A laptop with a security code was utilized as well. Visual representations of the data were created to aid in the dissemination of the data collected. The semi-structured interview posed open-ended questions along with a 1-6 Likert -type scaled response section to allow for teacher perspectives on the importance of certain elements of transition. Interview data were analyzed by examining the transcriptions and identifying similar themes. After themes were known and grouped, they were coded. Additionally, the scaled responses produced quantitative data analyzed through a comparison of frequency of importance according to teacher perspectives. An index of perceived importance was then established. The transition elements scored as the highest in importance and those viewed as least important were uncovered and compared to determine the focus of strengthening transition at Sunset Elementary.

3.6.1 Coding Methods

Interviews were coded for evidence of both high intensity and low intensity supports. High intensity supports were individualized or small group-oriented activities designed to aid in a seamless transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities. High intensity supports were examined and specifically named. High intensity supports included: Visit Child's Home (VCH), Called Parents (CP), Met with Sending Staff/called (MET/C), Developed Prep. Strategies (DPS), Individual or small group visit to K prior to start of school (IV). Low intensity supports included large group activities (LGA) such as PAWS open house nights, visits to the preschools to read (VPS), and Kindergarten Orientation held the week before school begins. Two independent coders were used to ensure agreement on the application of the coding scheme.

The final phase of the present study synthesized and evaluated the data uncovered in archival records relating to the transition process at Sunset Elementary. Published and unpublished artifacts were examined to determine if the elements important to transition twelve to six months in advance to the actual transition of a student with disabilities were addressed. Artifacts can be an important tool to uncovering and understanding ongoing problems and issues (Mertens 2015). The percentage of high intensity supports in current use was analyzed along with existing barriers. A comparison of the transitional process to the transitional policy was also reviewed to determine if the two align or need amended to improve transition. Please refer to Appendix C for a representation of the elements to transition important one year to six months prior to transition in Phase A and B of the ETK.

4.0 Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the current transition process of CWD to Kindergarten at Sunset Elementary. The existing transition practices of children with disabilities were compared to the desired transition process. Low intensity supports occurred most frequently within the larger community and classroom context. In order to answer this research question, a synthesis of all three phases needed to occur. Each phase of the study's results will be discussed in relation to the research questions previously mentioned in Chapter 3.

4.1 Phase I: Fishbone Session

The role of the fishbone session was to enable school stakeholders an opportunity to act as a team to identify the issues that prevent a successful transition to K for CWD. Input was given by six general education teachers, one speech pathologist and one special education teacher.

Each stakeholder recorded their ideas on an individual fishbone diagram. Results were synthesized to one fishbone diagram as visualization for what successful transition should look like at Sunset Elementary.

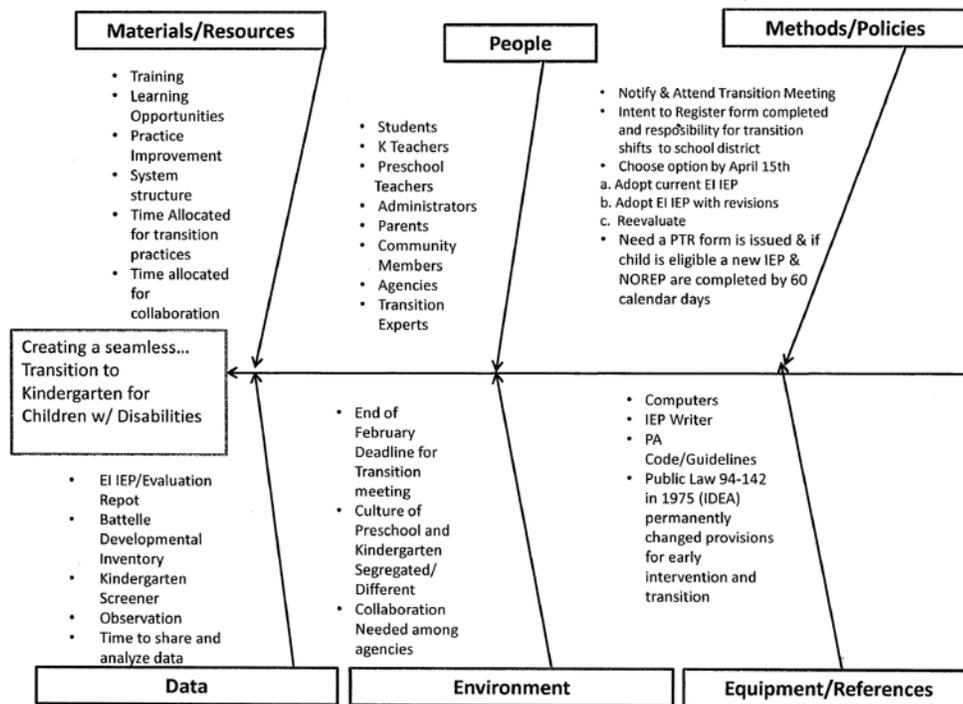


Figure 4.1. Fishbone Session Diagram Team Results

Similar to the results obtained in this study, Pianta and Steinberg (1992) determined that more experienced kindergarten teachers were less likely to indicate that there was transition issues associated with the incoming kindergarten students. Educators with at least twenty years of experience in the current study had fewer concerns listed on their fishbone diagram regarding the transition process. The Fishbone session indicated that the lower economics of the school left teachers with limited resources that negatively impacted transition. The resource of *Time allocated for collaboration* was identified under Materials/Resources by all seven educators as the area of greatest need. Additionally, *Time allocated for transition practices* and *System structure* were viewed by six educators as lacking. This is important because transition within an ecological framework requires collaboration among all participants. The only other category where all seven

educators reached a consensus was in the category of People. Specifically, *Students, K Teachers, Pre-K Teachers, administrators, and parents* were identified as the essential people to a seamless transition. Time allocated for individualized high intensity supports was a barrier to successful transition.

Addressing the problem of how to create a seamless transition for children with disabilities is an ongoing issue at Sunset Elementary. Prioritizing the transition of the Sunset Elementary's youngest students is foremost to solving this problem. This fishbone attempts to analyze the problem and begin to develop solutions for improvement of the current transition procedures through professional collaboration. The overarching themes that emerged from the analysis were lack of resources, training, time for data review, and prioritizing the transition process. Sunset Elementary should make early transition a priority because the literature is clear that children with disabilities may be especially vulnerable during transition and may lack academic and behavioral readiness skills essential for kindergarten. Additionally, transition to Kindergarten has been studied to have lasting long-term effects on a student's educational career. This all becomes critical when considering the transition of a child with special needs from their EI program to a school-age program due to factors such as a lower socioeconomic status (SES), developmental deficits, inability to cope, and the nature of the disability that they are experiencing. At Sunset Elementary, our school strives for a seamless transition from EI to school age special education within "...district fiscal constraints" as per our mission statement. Developing professional learning opportunities to better understand transition begins with building on the strengths of Sunset Elementary. These strengths include teamwork within the kindergarten grade-level and student data collected. Additional training for teachers on transition policy/procedures, behavior management, intervention strategies, and universal design/differentiated instruction would benefit

the learning process. Ongoing professional development and better use of the available resources, such as time, seemed important in the analysis. The need for collaboration among all the stakeholders presented as a critical component as well as expanding the organization's capacity for addressing this professional learning problem. Sunset Elementary has a clear ongoing professional learning problem in the area of early transition that includes all of the causal factors listed under each category of the fishbone. This process results in coming to terms with the idea that multiple factors impact one learning problem within an organization.

4.2 Phase II: Teacher Interview

The Interview process involved a series of questions aimed at uncovering the effective practices in use as well as the barriers to transition. The data were analyzed for the Likert scale items by looking at percentages, mean and standard deviation. The open-ended questions were analyzed using coding; specifically, identifying themes according to the content of the responses. The three female staff members interviewed included two teachers who co-teach with a special education teacher in a general education classroom and one related service provider who was a speech pathologist.

Below is a summary of the interview responses. The interview questions were adapted from recent research on transition and include important elements to transition of children with disabilities. Teacher's' perceived level of the importance of each transition element, with 1 being not important and 6 being most important, can be seen in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Rating Scale Results with a Score of 1 (Low Level of Importance to Transition) Through 6 (High Importance to Transition)

Questions from the Interview	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Average Total score for participants	Standard Deviation
1b Pre-K teachers visit K?	6	3	5	4.7	1.25
2b K teachers visit Pre-K?	6	5	5	5.3	0.47
3b Pre-K share student info w/K?	6	2	4	4.0	1.63
4b Individual child visit K?	6	1	5	4.0	2.16
5b Specific materials for a child?	6	2	5	4.3	1.70
6b Individual child schedule?	6	2	6	4.7	1.89
7b Professional staff work w/child identified?	6	4	6	5.3	0.94
8b Environment ready?	6	4	5	5.0	0.82
9b Related services coordinated	6	5	6	5.7	0.47
10b Individual/small group activities?	6	4	5	5.0	0.82
11b Barriers to transition?	Open-ended	Open-ended	Open-ended		
12b Barriers impact?	6	4	6	5.3	0.94
13b Overall transition process at Sunset School	4	4	3	3.7	0.47
Average total Score per Participant	5.8	3.3	4.75		

As shown in Table 4.1, Question 9b received the highest combined average ($M=5.7$) among the three school staff members interviewed. This question referred to the importance of coordinating related services and “touching base” with the related service provider. The related service provider (Interview B) responded:

Okay, well occupational and physical therapy will not be contacted until the beginning of the year, and then they will begin those services. As far as speech, like myself being a related service provider, yes, I have been... Services have been coordinated with me at this point. I know what students I will work with or at least the students who already have the IFSP plan, who will be transitioning. As far as touching base with service provider, the learning support teacher and I are always in contact regularly about our shared students.

Three questions, Question 2b, 7b, and 12b, received the same next highest average ($M=5.3$) which indicates that school staff believes that these items are important to transition. Question 2b asks if staff has visited a preschool classroom to observe a child. Participant A: “We have gone and read to the classrooms of the preschools in the area that neighbor our district. Some teachers at the preschools have pointed out certain students that might be part of our co-teaching inclusion classroom, but other times we were just there to get to know the kids and read, so they're comfortable coming into kindergarten.” No school staff indicated that a preschool classroom visit was specific to an individual child. Question 7b indicated that school staff found identification of the professional staff who will work with the child important. Lastly, Question 12b specified that barriers to transition are significant.

Participants A, B, and C of the interview phase were specifically asked during question 11 of the interview “What are some of the barriers or obstacles that you have encountered while children with disabilities transition to kindergarten at our school district?”

Participant A: “Sometimes, unfortunately, students are not registered prior to school, so a lot of times we don't know of certain disabilities, or maybe barriers, or the obstacles that we need to help them overcome, we don't know right away; and they register late so we don't have lot of background information sometimes for our students.

Participant A: “Sometimes it's the parents don't give us the correct information, or lacking some information, or like I said, sometimes they're even just registered late, and we don't really get everything that we need.”

Participant B: “The fact that we do not meet our students until the actual school year begins, I feel that is a barrier. It would be helpful to have the time in the spring of the year before the student starts school in the fall, and get a better picture of the student in order to determine which goals maybe are continue to be appropriate, and possibly gather some baseline data so that we can be better prepared to begin therapy right away at the beginning of the school year.”

Participant C: “I think one is, sometimes we just don't know the children when they come in. We might get a child that we didn't know their various needs, so we are dealing with that right on the spot. And sometimes just the lack of physical resources that we might have. There's so much we can do with this child, we just don't have the exact resources to meet their needs at that moment, and we try to do the best we can with what we have.”

Interviewer: “Okay, so as far as the lack of resources go, how would you rate that as a barrier to transition, as low or high?”

Participant C: “I think it's a definite barrier. It's a high barrier. Six. Sometimes we do get a child that we don't know their background, and we're left kind of looking for something we can

do. So the resources that we do have might not be enough at that moment for that child. The fact that we do not meet our students until the actual school year begins, I feel that is a barrier. It would be helpful to have the time in the spring of the year before the student starts school in the fall, and get a better picture of the student in order to determine which goals maybe are continue to be appropriate, and possibly gather some baseline data so that we can be better prepared to begin therapy right away at the beginning of the school year.”

Late registration, lack of background information, lack of resources, and not meeting students prior to the start school were all named barriers.

4.2.1 Coding Results

4.2.1.1 Interview 1: Participant A

Participant A described using the high intensity support of DPS for individual students. DPS: “Depending on the student, yes, we've had some individual activities for students. We may be able to put them in a group, it all just depends on the students’ needs, and the school that I work for and the teachers that I work with, are very accommodating for helping the students with anything that they need.”

VPS was the low intensity support implemented by Participant A once prior to the start of school. VPS: “We have gone and read to the classrooms of the preschools in the area that neighbor our district. Some teachers at the preschools have pointed out certain students that might be part of our co-teaching inclusion classroom, but other times we were just there to get to know the kids and read, so they're comfortable coming into kindergarten.”

4.2.1.2 Interview 2: Participant B

During the second interview, Participant B rated the level of importance of an individual visit (IV) as a 4 on the rating scale from 1-5. IV: “Well, at the beginning of the year, the student will be pulled out for an initial one-on-one meeting, and then in small group with other students who are transitioning to go through the details and let them know what to expect. Just to ease their transition into that environment.” Additionally, participant B implements a DPS for her small group of students with specific speech needs.

DPS: “I have not had a need to adjust the actual physical environment as far as student physical needs, other than having wheelchair accessibility, which is already there. I do already have visual aids in my classroom to help with children receptive language needs, and all students who come into my room. So that's something that is just already prepared.”

4.2.1.3 Interview 3: Participant C

In the third interview, Participant C revealed that once again DPS was the high intensity support implemented frequently. DPS: “Yes, we do have children with various needs, and we do try to get as many of the materials. For instance, we do have some weighted blankets and weighted animals in our room for the children who need that. I would like to get some more of that in the future in our classroom, but we do have some.” DPS: “Yes, for some of them we do create a schedule. It really varies from child to child, and we look at that at the beginning of the year, and as we get to know the children, we're very flexible with that. As the children learn and adapt better, we can change it, but we do do that for various children.”

As noted above, the high intensity support in frequent use for all participants was DPS and the low intensity support commonly employed was LGA. Overall, more low intensity supports

are implemented during the transition process. The two high intensity supports included: Developed Prep. Strategies (DPS) and individual visit (IV).

4.2.1.4 Overarching Theme of Transition Improvement

The overarching theme was that transition at Sunset School needs improved. The three participants rated transition as a 3 or 4 out of 6.

Participant A: “I would maybe give it a four, we're kind of new to this, and I see lots of improvement coming into the upcoming school year from the previous school year, and I just see a lot of good things coming.”

Participant B: “I would say it's a four. Just pretty average.”

Participant C: “I would say it is a three. I think we're really trying hard to, very hard to do the best we can with what we have and getting information about different children.”

The staff members with the highest overall satisfaction rate for transition were general education kindergarten teachers. The lowest average satisfaction rating was derived from a related service provider who cites an unsurmountable caseload and lack of time to focus on transition as explanations for the dissatisfaction.

4.3 Phase III: Artifacts

Phase 3 of the study reviewed artifacts to determine what high intensity and low intensity transition elements occur outside of the classroom at the school district and larger community

level. Artifacts examined were section X. Transition Plan on a template of an early learning Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)/ Individualized Education Program (IEP), kindergarten team meeting minutes, school calendar of events, and school flyers.

Through this artifact review, one of the transitional activities that emerged was that all kindergarten teachers visit nine different preschools or daycares located within the community and read a story to the children. Students have a brief opportunity to familiarize themselves with one of the kindergarten teachers. However, a student may be assigned to a different kindergarten classroom than the teacher who visited them. This is a low intensity support due to the teacher addressing the whole group and not individual students. Furthermore, there is no formal time set aside for the kindergarten and preschool teacher to meet and discuss individual needs of students.

In addition, Sunset Elementary hosts three different LGA open house nights called Parents Are Welcome at School (PAWS). During each PAWS session, families bring their transitioning child to visit the school, kindergarten classrooms, and school staff in a large group. Children have the opportunity to attend a tour of the school and kindergarten rooms. Once again this would be considered a low intensity support since all kindergarten students attend in one large group.

Additionally, CWD and their families are invited prior to February 28 to attend a transition meeting to get familiarized with their new school setting. Children and their families who receive early intervention services are invited to Sunset School for a transition meeting. Although this is a smaller group of students, it is not individualized. The group of early intervention students and their families meet as one group to begin the process of transitioning from preschool to kindergarten. A liaison from preschool is present along with the preschool teachers. One kindergarten special education teacher, a speech pathologist, and special education director host this meeting. General education kindergarten teachers are not present for this meeting. The

meeting is held at Sunset school, but typically not located in the kindergarten wing. Information dispersed at the meeting is general and the kindergarten registration paperwork is presented and discussed.

Kindergarten team meeting notes were examined. General education, special education, and Title I teachers are a part of this team. There were suggestions made during these team meetings to improve transition to kindergarten. One idea was to hire additional paraprofessional support staff to ease the transition during the first few months of school. The team made this recommendation to offer students more individualized attention during what can be a challenging time. Children who are on the Early Intervention (EI) list would initially be given the support by the extra staff. However, there are students each year who do not receive Early Intervention Services that they would qualify to receive. Recent evidence of low rates of participation in early intervention by children afflicted by poverty and children who are black hinders preparation for transition. An estimated six times the number of children eligible for early intervention do not receive it (Rosenberg, Zhang, & Robinson 2008). Therefore, the school is not aware of their transition needs and this can present some difficulties.

The K team stated that each school year brings students who do not transition well to kindergarten and need extra individualized support. This is exasperated by a significant number of parents waiting until August 1st or later to register their children for our kindergarten program. In the 2015-16 school year, thirty-seven children registered late, or 31% of our population.

Another recommendation from the K team was to implement a staggered start to ease transition. A staggered start allows students with the last names A-M to come to school all day. Each teacher would be assigned approximately 10 students. The students would rotate around to all 6 teachers. The school counselor, the special education, and the Title I teachers will be available

to screen students who have not been screened. Students with the last names N-Z come to school the following day and same procedure is followed. On the third day, no Kindergarten students would attend school. The teachers will work on creating class lists based on screeners and classroom observations. On the fourth day, parents will come to school with their children to meet their teacher and attend Kindergarten Orientation. Students with the last names A-M will come in the morning. Students with the last names N-Z will come in the afternoon.

This staggered start was believed to alleviate some of the transition problems by helping students acclimate to the school environment, especially those who have not been enrolled in a preschool program. An additional benefit of a staggered start was to more constructively use Kindergarten Screener data and CWD are evenly distributed among the classes. The Kindergarten Screener may need a revision to streamline the data collected. K teachers suggested discarding portions of the assessment which make it too lengthy and including only questions that will benefit transition. Questions that elicit the types of high intensity supports recommended for an individual student should be added to the screener.

The final artifact that was reviewed was section X. Transition Plan IFSP/IEP document that every student who qualifies for early intervention is required to have. This is intended to be an individualized transition plan for a specific student. However, the information contained within the document is general. A transition goal/outcome, date of the Intent to Register, information that the family finds relevant to share, activities/services designed to ensure a smooth transition in Early Intervention, a kindergarten transition handbook created by the preschool program, child progress/assessments, and completed child specific checklists/forms from school district are a part of this document. However, although the information could be useful, questions in each section are intended to elicit brief answers that lack specifics to an individual child. Few

kindergarten teachers review this transition portion of the document thoroughly. Consultation with the special educator to review this document with upcoming kindergarten teachers is limited. No formal time is set aside for the specific purpose of discussing a transition plan for an individual CWD. Collaboration in the form of a formal meeting between preschool teachers and kindergarten general and special education teachers may be beneficial to not only improve the quality of information contained in the transition portion of the IFSP/IE but expedite the distribution of that information.

5.0 Discussion

Fostering a seamless transition to kindergarten enables an equitable school program for children with disabilities (CWD) (Ekins, 2015). IDEA (1986, 2004) mandates that CWD be educated in the LRE. CWD are entering Kindergarten in larger numbers warranting a need to make their first experience in the general education setting successful (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Additionally, families from a lower income background have the largest rates of disability nationwide (Houtrow, Larson, Olson, Newacheck, & Halfon, 2014). Therefore, kindergarten transitional process and practices require specialized supports that consider the context of the transition as well as the needs of the individual student (Gooden & Rous, 2018). Transitions that are well-planned for this expanding population have positive long-term effects (Rous & Hallam, 2012). One distinct educational outcome of a seamless early transition is helping to minimize the achievement gap that exist between CWD and their typically developing peers. Educators are given the responsibility to successfully transition our youngest CWD to meet the demands of their new school environment. Successful transition of CWD requires a collaboration among all participants beginning with the individual and ending with the larger community. If a school relies on a child to change rather than improving the contexts, the transition may not be successful (Kennedy, Cameraon, & Greene, 2012).

The current study's purpose was to determine ways to improve the transition of children with disabilities to kindergarten within a lower economic status at Sunset Elementary. The suggested improvements could be implemented in schools with similar backgrounds. Transition practices that encourage success are both child-centered and context-based.

5.1 Research Question 1

What is the capacity of the lower economic school Sunset Elementary to effectively implement supportive transition practices for children with disabilities?

All three phases of this study supported the idea that a transition framework that focuses on both the individual student and the context of the child can promote success (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007). The capacity of a lower economic school such as Sunset Elementary to execute supportive transition practices can be improved by conceptualizing transition to kindergarten simultaneously as both one child's abilities and a shared responsibility among the lower economic community, early childhood education, and family (Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2012). Transition has been addressed at Sunset Elementary with the implementation of lower intensity supports. Supports that are LGA make it easier for the school to provide a transition activity for a larger population at a minimum expense of resources. At Sunset Elementary, the successful lower intensity supports are PAWS nights, Kindergarten Orientation, and K teacher's visits to preschool. Lower intensity supports are a good foundation for transition to kindergarten but can be enhanced by introducing higher intensity supports into the process. High intensity supports for CWD are effective (Rous, Meyer, & Stricklin, 2007). The effective high intensity supports in place are an individual visit to the speech classroom (IV) and Developed Preparatory Strategies (DPS). Specific DPS implemented are individual schedules, individual speech room visits, and small groups to address transition difficulties and complete social stories. The capacity for teachers to implement high intensity supports is hindered by the lack of time allocated for transition activities. The low intensity LGA PAWS nights and Kindergarten Orientation are on the school calendar. High Intensity Supports such as Individual visits to the classroom or home visits are not a part of the current event calendar of the school. This is also a result of no existing

funding to pay teachers to do transition activities in the summer before school begins. The resource of *Time allocated for collaboration* identified during the fishbone exercise was viewed by teachers as the area of greatest need to improve the transition process. Educators also acknowledged, *Time allocated for transition practices* and *System structures* as deficient. Cooperation among all participants is an important high intensity support within an ecological framework. Sunset Elementary lacks the time to collaborate with families, school, and community so that a more effective transition to kindergarten can occur. The lack of individualized high intensity supports was an obstruction to successful transition supports.

5.2 Research Question 2

What barriers prevent successful transition to kindergarten by children with disabilities?

Barriers unveiled in all three phases of this study impacted successful transition to kindergarten for CWD. Sunset Elementary is a small school district with the median income below poverty level and prevalence of children from a black minority. Since there are no preschool programs housed in the school district, all students must transition to a new physical location which impedes a smooth transition. Further hindrances are limited communication, deficient prerequisite skills, lack of time and resources for high intensity practices and training. In addition, lack of administrative support, delayed access to services at the start of K, and cultural differences obstruct transition. Participants A, B, and C of the interview phase indicated that the logistics such as late registration or reporting of relevant student background information can serve as barriers. Late registration prevents preparation for individual needs of a child. There is a need for school staff

to have time to familiarize themselves with CWD who register for kindergarten late. School staff identified gaps in the background information received from families as a barrier. Students with or without a diagnosis may register late and require transition supports that are unknown. Lack of timely registration inhibits communication between school and home and does not allow for adequate preparation for a student's transition needs.

The theme that frequently emerged from answering the question of barriers to transition was the lack of time allocated for high intensity transition activities. School staff identifies the need to have the time scheduled to attend to the individual needs of CWD. The recommended high intensity supports of meeting with the special education teacher to review records and create DPS and tour the classroom individually are prioritized. This would give the teachers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the incoming CWD and provide the optimal transition experience. This first step into kindergarten is critical to long-term success in school.

Addressing transitional needs is best accomplished through implementing individualized practices that are supported by multiple contexts from child to community.

5.3 Recommendations

Overall, the transition to Kindergarten has been improved at Sunset Elementary. However, suggestions for improvement were obtained through the Fishbone exercise, interview process, and artifact review. Recommendations are laid out in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1. Suggestions to Improve Transition to Kindergarten

Suggestions to Improve Transition to Kindergarten for CWD
1. General education teachers should also be invited to participate in EI February meeting
2. Staggered Start/ Revised Kindergarten Screener
3. High Intensity and low Intensity supports need implemented
4. More time allocated for Transition/Collaboration among staff from Sunset and outside agencies/preschools
5. Time to review Early Intervention Records together as a team
6. Time to share/analyze data
7. Additional paraprofessional staffing
8. Preschool Cohort of friends

Transition to kindergarten requires an ongoing complex array of activities to ensure the best possibility for success. Recommendations for practice that may be valuable to CWD, special and general education teachers, school staff, agencies, preschools, and community members listed in Table 5.1 are described below.

1. The very first event is the transition meeting held in February where the first contact between preschool and kindergarten is made for families of CWD. Currently, this meeting is held outside of the Kindergarten wing and only school staff members from the Special Education Department attend. General education teachers should also be invited to participate in EI February meeting.

2. A Staggered Start would be beneficial to transition by providing time for teachers to collaborate and time for students to receive high intensity supports namely small group or

individualized visits to the physical setting. The K screener that assesses the student's readiness level should include a section that states which high intensity supports that a specific CWD would benefit from.

3. As revealed in Research question 1, high and low intensity supports need implemented. This will improve transition by providing research-based interventions to CWD. Kindergarten Transition can be a time of high anxiety for parents of children with disabilities and CWD. Parents and children are adjusting to leaving previous early childhood settings and providers and forming a new relationship with the subsequent kindergarten teacher. A recent study indicated that parents of children with special needs are significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with transition services than parents of typically developing peers (Daley, Munk, & Carlson 2010). Offering parents and CWD the assistance needed to allow for a seamless adjustment requires facilitation of a well-organized transition plan that includes the right supports for that family (Daley, Munk, & Carlson). High intensity and low intensity support engage families and CWD in activities that familiarize them with Kindergarten and promote a seamless transition.

4. More time allocated for Transition/Collaboration among staff from Sunset Elementary and outside agencies/preschools would foster communication and connections between preschool education and the elementary school. Even with increased funding and emphasis on transition, only 10% of the preschool teachers speak to the Kindergarten teachers (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). In my place of practice, general education teachers do not have the opportunity to meet and discuss individual student's needs of children with disabilities with previous preschool teachers.

5. Time to review Early Intervention Records together as a team would enable a smoother transition for CWD. Students with EI services prior to school have already accumulated a lengthy

file from which much information about the nature and severity of their disability can be used to inform their next teacher (s). Time allotted for teacher collaboration and review of student records would increase the likelihood that high intensity supports are planned for a particular child. Teachers would have time to prepare for the upcoming school year with the specific needs of their student with disabilities in mind.

6. Additional data collected via the screener, registration forms, parent and child contact, or agency and preschool contact could be streamlined and discussed by staff during time set aside to address the individual transition needs of CWD. Collection of more relevant data applicable to transition will improve the process. Teachers need a transition meeting to analyze all of the information and make informed decisions about classroom placement and individual transition plans.

7. Additional paraprofessional staffing was highly regarded during multiple K team meetings as a way to create a successful transition. Although there are budget concerns, the K team believes that this resource would be invaluable. Transition does not end once school begins. Children with disabilities who enter kindergarten from other school settings who would benefit from extra supports, often receive less (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007). Additional school staff can help put into practice the High Intensity supports needed well beyond the start of school.

8. A Preschool Cohort of friends may allow CWD to have the peer support needed to successfully transition to kindergarten. Peers have a clearly identifiable role to the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Weyns et al. 2019). Familiarity with peers may increase instructional time and have academic benefits by decreasing the average one-month time period for transition (Nitecki, 2017).

Transition of CWD to kindergarten will continue to be a priority in my place of practice. Improvement of the complex transition process will occur through a synthesis of the literature and putting it into practice. Equally, the addition of partnerships and supports to assist children with disabilities, parents, and teachers as they engage in kindergarten transition within a lower socioeconomic context.

5.4 Future Research

The context of a transition is a key component that has often been overlooked in the literature. The current study explored the capacity of an economically challenged school to implement individualized transition practices that are considered effective in transition research. The context of a transition may create unforeseen barriers that hinder the process. An approach to transition that enables individual schools to assess their resources and abilities to align policy with best practices is being sought in the literature (Miller, 2015). Understanding the local context of a transition can shift the focus from adjustment to preparation in future transitional practices (Rous, 2012). Frequently, transition preparation can include typical classroom strategies and interventions that are implemented at a critical time to be repurposed for transitional support (Rous, 2008). There have been limited incidences in past transition research to address which types of transition practices are available to lower income or non-dominant cultures (Schulting et al., 2005). Moreover, further transitional research seeking to improve this critical process from an individualized and ecological perspective blends two well-known strategies to promote early academic success that can expand well beyond one child and one context.

At this point, it's important to address, how can we, as educators determine the landscape of a child with disabilities during the critical period of kindergarten transition? Among educationalists, the answers continue to cause reservation and concern. Future research on transition for CWD should address the transition knowledge and understanding that can be applied, analyzed and evaluated for each individual child. Assimilating into the academic and social culture of school is equally important and may prove beneficial if it becomes part of a well-balanced transition plan to kindergarten. Future research may want to explore the benefits of a preschool to kindergarten cohort that builds on the established social relationships and alleviates the social component of transition in the area of peer interaction. Moreover, optimal transition of CWD may be explored by beginning the school year in an online format where students can virtually tour the school, classroom, bus, and meet the school staff prior to the start of school. Implementing technology may resolve some of the original barriers of transition. Due to COVID-19, many schools have become one-to-one districts where each student receives a technological device. The use of technology during transition planning should be considered for future research as it could resolve some of the original barriers as well as provide new avenues for transition to kindergarten for CWD.

5.5 Conclusion

Outreach, perception, activism, organization and technology are crucial to the present and future transitional strategies for kindergarten students with disabilities. Advocating for our youngest most vulnerable school-age students can lead to change and success for students with disabilities. IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, 2008 (ADAAA) are examples

of successful activism precluded by decades of discrimination and inequity that an individual, or in this scenario, a child with disabilities can face in this upward battle to simply thrive. Transition to kindergarten warrants the resources of time within the context of the home, school, and larger community to provide the first steps to a successful inclusive education.

Appendix A Summary of Literature Review Studies

Authors (Year)	Participants	Method of Qualitative Data Collection	High Intensity Transition Practice(s) Used	Ecological Factors/Barriers	Results
Daley, Munk, and Carlson (2011)	1,989 children with varying disabilities as they entered their K year in both lower and higher SES, larger/smaller districts, and urban/rural settings	Parent Interview using (CATI) and Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire	VCH, KVPS, CP, MET/C, DPS, IV	District size, District urbanicity, District poverty, and transition to same setting or new building (school)	High Intensity Supports decreased according to ecological barriers of larger size, poverty, and different school setting
Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, and Todd (2004)	Teachers and parents of three children with autism transitioning from preschool to kindergarten	Interview using Elements for Transition to Kindergarten (ETK) parents, preschool and K teachers	IV, DPS, VPS, Met/C	Skills acquired in one setting are less likely to generalize for children w/ASD	25 transition elements were identified and formulated into a tool(ETK) to assess transition at multiple points in time for children w/ASD. High intensity supports were consistently rated high in importance
Janus, Kopechanski,	Forty families of children with disabilities who	Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (VABS) and	IV	Lack of communication between school	One third of families of K students not satisfied with transition

Authors (Year)	Participants	Method of Qualitative Data Collection	High Intensity Transition Practice(s) Used	Ecological Factors/Barriers	Results
Cameron and Hughes (2007)	were transitioning to kindergarten or one year from transitioning	interview of parents to assess aspects of transition process		and home for both Pre and Post transition	
McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro Reed, and Wildenger (2010)	One hundred thirty- two parents or caregivers of children transitioning to kindergarten (22% received special education).	Participants completed a 57 question survey to assess family perspective regarding their child's transition preparation.	IV, VCH Teacher relationships were important to both gen. ed. and special ed. so transition practices that support that relationship are viewed as important.	Caregivers of special needs students had less education and income than those of gen. ed. Students.	Parents of special education students had more concerns about their child's overall readiness for K than did Gen ed. parents due to greater risk factors. A team leader to coordinate transition is recommended.
Quintero and McIntyre (2010)	Teachers and parents of Ninety-five children w/disabilities	Teachers completed a questionnaire concerning the use of common transition activities. Parents completed a separate questionnaire concerning family experience and involvement in the transition.	IV and MET/C wanted *Written communication to parent from school cited as most frequently used practice as reported by parents.	Most commonly reported barrier by preschool teacher was lack of time and transition training	Preschool teachers and parents want meetings with K teachers but often do not meet- indicates need for collaboration Transition practices are rarely individualized Preschool teachers expressed more concerns about the transition of students w/ASD than DD

Authors (Year)	Participants	Method of Qualitative Data Collection	High Intensity Transition Practice(s) Used	Ecological Factors/Barriers	Results
Rous, Myers, and Stricklin (2007)	Thirty-three Practitioners, administrators, trainers, faculty/researchers and ten family members of children w/ disabilities.	Participants attended one of nine focus group sessions where questions related to strategies and practices for transition were posed and discussed. An interview with only one participant was also held and same questions were posed. Field notes, transcripts and recordings of the sessions and interview comprised the data collected.	DPS, IV, VCH, MET/C	Lack of administrative support to provide time for high intensity supports.	Transition strategies found effective were of high intensity and aligned with Division for Early Childhood Standards such as a family-centered approach.
Schischka, Rawlinson, and Hamilton (2012)	Seventeen children w/ disabilities 5.6 mean age transitioning to K	Open-ended, semi-structured interviews for the study's parents and teachers	VPS, CP, MET/C, DPS, IV	Delayed access to special ed. services at the start of K	Transition practices that were most effective for children w/ disabilities: Ongoing communication, /collaboration btw families and schools as well as early childhood staff

Authors (Year)	Participants	Method of Qualitative Data Collection	High Intensity Transition Practice(s) Used	Ecological Factors/Barriers	Results
Starr, Martini, & Kuo (2014)	Six teachers, Eleven families of children with autism and Eighteen providers transitioning to K	Multiple focus groups were selected and sessions conducted which posed 12 question to the group participants. Transcriptions from the session recordings represents the data collected.	IV, VCH viewed as important for students with ASD	Cultural differences in understanding autism and discussing it outside of family. Legal special ed. language first introduced at formal school ASD Training for K teacher	Establishing a relationship amongst parents and K teachers prior to the start of school helps transition Transition is a process not a discontinuous event that begins a year prior and well into K
Wildenger Welchons and McIntyre (2015) <i>Predicting Socio-Behavioral Outcomes for Children w/without Disabilities</i>	One hundred four children and their families and teachers w/ fifty-two children w/ disabilities	Parents completed questionnaires at two different periods of the child's transition to assess family involvement. Teachers completed questionnaires at three different periods of the child's transition.	Individual child and family Supports were used	Barriers included low income families and study completion Increased Preschool teacher involvement resulted in less positive outcomes for children w/disabilities	Adaptive behavior is a predictor of early school outcomes for children w/ or w/out disabilities

Authors (Year)	Participants	Method of Qualitative Data Collection	High Intensity Transition Practice(s) Used	Ecological Factors/Barriers	Results
Wildenger Welchons and McIntyre (2015) <i>An Investigation of Parent and Teacher Concerns & Involvement</i>	Thirty-two families of children w/ DD and twenty-five families of TD Forty preschool teachers and forty-nine K teachers	Parents completed questionnaires at two different periods of the child's transition to assess family involvement. Teachers completed questionnaires at three different periods of the child's transition.	VCH, VPS, CP, MET/C, DPS, IV *preschool teachers primarily provided These supports	Kindergarten teachers were less likely to complete a home visit or coordinate curriculum w/ preschool teachers	Parents most frequently reported transition practice was attending the K registration meeting Families of children w/ DD were more involved Preschool teachers provided more high intensity supports

Notes. Transition Practices: VCH: Visit Child's Home, VPS: Visit Prior Setting, CP: Called parents, MET/C: Met or called Sending Staff, DPS: Developed Prep Strategies, DD: Developmental Delay, ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder, K: Kindergarten, IV: Individual or small group visit to K prior to start of school.

Appendix B ETK Protocol Introduction

Transition to Kindergarten INTRODUCTION The purpose of this interview is to:

1. Identify the critical features of successful transitions of children with disabilities from preschool to kindergarten.
2. Determine the extent to which these features are present in current transitions practices
3. Identify the features that are most likely to improve these transitions

Confidentiality will be maintained by:

1. using a code list and keeping all documents in a locked file
2. destroying these documents within 12 months of the completion of the survey Anticipated completion date:

Conclusions drawn from these data will be used:

1. in a dissertation
2. to affect the current transition protocols for transitioning children with disabilities from preschool to the EA School District.

EVALUATION OF TRANSITION ELEMENTS

You will be asked to rate transition activities on a scale of 1 to 6 based on

- Your experience—To what extent were these features in place during the transition of your child/the child you work with?
- Importance—Based on your experience, how important do you think that this feature is to a successful transition? You will also be asked for comments regarding each feature. These may include but are not limited to the following:

- When did this feature occur during the transition of your child/the child you work with?
 - Was there anything unique about this feature in the transition of your child/the child you work with?
 - When did the transition process begin?
 - What program did the child transition from?
 - What school did the child transition to?
 - Provide a brief explanation of the child's level/type of disability:
2. Please rate each activity for the level of your experience and the level of importance

Adapted Interview Protocol: Today we will discuss the transition process of children with disabilities here at our school. The goal of this interview is to gain insight into the transition process and examine how the transition experience might be improved for all stakeholders.

Two main research questions that are the focus of the current study are as follows:

Inquiry Question 1: What transition practices can be implemented at Sunset Elementary to promote successful kindergarten transition experiences for children with disabilities along with their families and teachers?

Inquiry Question 2: What are some of the barriers to successful transition experienced by Sunset Elementary children with disabilities, families, and teachers?

Interview Questions: Adapted from Elements for Transition, ETK (Forest, Horner, Palmer & Todd 2004)

The following questions have been adapted from recent research on transition and include important elements to transition of children with disabilities.

Adapted from Phase C and D of the ETK:

Six months prior to kindergarten placement and actual placement

1. a. Have any of the preschool teachers visited your kindergarten classroom?
1. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
2. a. Have you as the receiving teacher visited any of the preschool classrooms to observe child?
2. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
3. a. Did you meet with any of the preschool teachers to share information?
- b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
4. a. Did any of the children with disabilities visit the kindergarten classroom?
- b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
5. a. Have materials specific to the child's needs been identified and created?
- a.1 What does this entail?
5. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
6. a. Has a daily schedule been identified and created for the individual student?
- 6 a.1 If so, what does it look like?
6. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
7. a. Have the professional staff for the child been identified?
7. a.1 If so, who else will work with the child besides you?
7. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
8. a. What have you done to get the physical environment is ready?
8. b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High
9. a. Have the related services been coordinated?
- a.1. Have you touched base with the service provider?
- b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High

10. a. Have you provided transition activities individualized to the student one-on-one or in a small group?

a.1. If so, what have you done?

b. Level of Importance to transition: Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High

11. What are some of the barriers or obstacles that you have encountered while children with disabilities transition to kindergarten at East Allegheny?

12. You mentioned from question 11 that the following barriers have impacted transition:

a. Can you rate their level of importance as a barrier to the transition process:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 High

13. Overall, how would you rate the transition process at our school?

Successful 1 2 3 4 5 6 Not successful

Appendix C Section Examples

ETK Phase A and B

Used for Phase 3 (artifacts of present study)

- **Kindergarten placement**
- **Related services**
- **Readiness Skills**
- **Initial transition timeline**
- **Roles and responsibilities of team members with timeline**
- **Contact person to parent established**
- **Phase B**
- **Classroom visit arranged for individual student to multiple placement options**
- **Parent and preschool teacher meet**
- **Kindergarten placement selected**

Appendix D Phase IV: Scholarly Demonstration

- Improvements and Changes to K Transition at Sunset Elementary
- Staggered Start considered by Administration and School Board
- Special Education Teachers observed individual students at preschool
- Dissertation was utilized as research project for teacher Evaluation

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