



Free Special Education Resources, Consultation, Trainings Your Arizona Parent School Connection

Transition: Preschool to Kindergarten

Transition: The Next Step

Transition is movement or change without interruption. It should be a smooth flow from one place or condition to another. While the transition plan for a student receiving special education services is designed to prepare him or her for life after high school, transition can start when a child enters preschool. The second of six distinct stages of transition is preschool to kindergarten.

Factors of Change

A major change from preschool to kindergarten is found in the different categories of disabilities for which a child may qualify. In grades kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12), there are thirteen categories of disability in the public school system.

One of the activities the school staff will need to complete is an evaluation before an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be developed for a child entering kindergarten. An evaluation is done to help the school staff determine if a child may be eligible for special education services. This is based on the definition of specific categories as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). This is the federal law that governs the education of children with disabilities in public schools ages 3–21. The child's need for special education and/or related services will be determined by the multidisciplinary evaluation team (MET). An IEP will be written following a determination of a need for continued special education services.

The parent is an integral part of this team that determines the child's eligibility for special education services. When parents bring information from medical specialists on the child's medical history, this may also assist the MET complete a more thorough evaluation. Generally, staff from the school or charter in which the family resides will attend the IEP meeting. This meeting is held at the regular IEP date for the child on the year when he will be five years old on or before September 1st. At this time, the IEP will be developed to include the child's kindergarten experience. This is done so there will be no lack of services for the child as he begins kindergarten. The evaluation and planning for the transition to kindergarten may take more than one meeting.

Ages and Stages

It sometimes helps to look at how the majority of children age five are developing. This information assists the parent and the school staff in determining the educational needs of the child, and where those needs may be most appropriately met.

Below are samples of tasks that average developing five year olds can typically do: copy squares, string beads, fasten buttons that are visible to the eye, zip and unzip a zipper, and sometimes tie a shoelace. Children with physical and/or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing these activities.

The typical five-year-old likes playground challenges; dresses self without the help of others; can say number words one through ten; has a vocabulary larger than 1,000 words; and a well established language, with correct grammar being used most of the time. Pretend play with other children is developing. Five year olds are able to tell the difference between physical characteristics of family members and others who are not family members. They know the location of things, such as the location of food, shelter, or danger. The five year old should be able to focus on a task for more than 20 minutes at a time. He or she can remember things, where things belong and where things are placed. Children with disabilities may find some of the activities a little difficult, or in some cases, may not be able to accomplish age appropriate tasks yet. The parents need to focus on what the child is able to do.

At age five, children generally are able to tolerate separation from parents more easily for school attendance, especially if the teacher is sensitive and involved with the child. For a child with a disability, separation may or may not be a challenge for everyone involved—the child, the parent(s), and the school staff.

Making the Transition Smoother

There are several possible activities that the parent may wish to do in order for the child to move smoothly from the comfort of the preschool setting to the newness of the kindergarten setting. The parent may request that preschool staff invite the elementary school staff to a transition meeting in the spring if one has not been scheduled. This

will allow time for evaluation activities and IEP review. The parent may go to the school and meet the teacher, principal and/or the director of special education. A visit to the new classroom with the child might lower anxiety for both parent and child. By visiting the classroom and meeting the teacher, this will give both the parent and teacher a chance to discuss the child's needs, and assist the child in a successful transition to kindergarten.

References

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Draft-Sayre, M. E., & Pianta, PhD, R. C. (2000). *Kindergarten transition studies: Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families and schools.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, National Center for Early Development and Learning.

Books

Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, Transition Services. (2004) *Navigating the transition highway: From tots to teens with ease.* Phoenix, AZ: Author. Available from the Parent Information Network, 928-679-8102 or 800-352-4558.

Draft-Sayre, Marcia E., & Pianta, PhD, Robert C. (2003). *Transition to kindergarten: Your guide to connecting children families and schools.* Baltimore, MD: Brooks Publishing.

Pianta, Robert C., PhD & Cox, Martha J. (2001). *Transition to kindergarten.* Baltimore, MD: Brooks Publishing.

Organizations

Arizona Head Start Association, 3910 S. Rural Road, Suite M, Tempe, AZ 85282, 480-829-8868, www.azheadstart.org

Bridges 4 Kids: Building Partnerships Between Families, Schools and Communities, 2465 Woodlake Circle, Suite 140, Okemos, MI 48864, 517-381-0528, 877-553-KIDS, www.bridges4kids.org/SSI.html

Center for Health and Health Care in Schools (CHHCS), 202-466-3396, www.healthinschools.org

Council for Exceptional Children, 1110 N. Glebe Road, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22201, 888-232-7733, www.cec.sped.org

Enhancing Arizona's Parent Networks (EAPN), www.azed.gov/ess/eapn

National Center for Early Development and Learning, CB #8185 UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-8185, 919-966-7180, www.ncedl.org/

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHY), P.O. Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013-1492, Tel/TTY 800-695-0285, www.nichcy.org

Parent Information Network, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, 2384 N. Steves Blvd., Flagstaff, AZ, 86004, 928-679-8102, 800-352-4558, www.azed.gov/ess/pinspals

Pilot Parents of Southern Arizona, 2600 N. Wyatt Drive, Tucson, AZ 85712, 520-324-3150, 877-365-7220, www.pilotparents.org

Raising Special Kids, 2400 N. Central Avenue, Suite 200, Phoenix, AZ 85004, 602-242-4366, 800-237-3007, www.raisingpecialkids.org

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