A PARENT RESOURCE HANDBOOK TO SUPPORT A FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACH TO THE TRANSITION FROM EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES TO PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
Education
(Special Education)

by
Chris Hedges Hess

SUMMER
2014
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Chris Hedges Hess

Approved by:

______________________________, Committee Chair
Jean Gonsier-Gerdin, Ph.D.

______________________________
Date
Student: Chris Hedges Hess

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____________________, Department Chair ___________________________
Susan Heredia, Ph.D. Date

Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

A PARENT RESOURCE HANDBOOK TO SUPPORT A FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACH TO THE TRANSITION FROM EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES TO PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

By

Chris Hedges Hess

It was the intention of Congress for a child with special needs and his/her parents to transition from early intervention, family-centered services to child-focused, center-based preschool special education programs smoothly. However, the research literature reveals that this transition is not always smooth and parents often feel that they are not equal partners in the transition process and subsequent individual education planning (Lovett & Haring, 2003). Factors that contribute to parents’ anxiety during their child’s IEP include unfamiliar special education terminology and procedural safeguards written at reading levels that may be too high for some adult readers. In fact, the current author was not able to locate a parents’ rights document in her district that was written at a reading level below the tenth grade, which is a concern since forty-nine percent of adults read at an eighth grade reading level or below (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). Clearly, there is a need to provide parents and guardians with information that is written at accessible reading levels and has parent input in mind.
The purpose of this project was to create a parent resource handbook, written at approximately a seventh to eighth grade reading level, to explain parental rights information and unfamiliar special education terminology in non-legalese wording. To provide further rationale and gather information for the handbook, three parents of children with special needs and three special education preschool teachers in the current author’s school district were interviewed to explore the difficulties and barriers that parents face in the transition of their child from early intervention services to preschool special education programs. The content of the handbook includes information about a child’s starting preschool, procedural safeguards, eligibility categories, and related services. Family-centered best practices suggest that ongoing collaborative partnerships with parent begin with special educators creating an ongoing dialogue with the parents. The hope is that this parent resource handbook will serve as one tool to assist in facilitating this dialogue.

__________________________, Committee Chair
Jean Gonsier-Gerdin, Ph.D.

__________________________
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Gonsier-Gerdin who was with me every step of the way on this journey. Accomplishment of this goal has been a lifelong dream. Thank you is not enough to adequately express my gratitude for her support; she dedicated many hours to help me realize this dream. I took the liberty to edit a little quote that expresses just some of the feelings I have after working with Dr. Gonsier-Gerdin: “A teacher affects eternity, she will never know where her influence will lead.” Her influence in many students’ lives means so much to each of us.

Writing about families reminds me of how very lucky I am to be a part of my wonderful family. They may not know it, but they all provided support through words of encouragement, hugs and phone calls to find out how this process was going. I would like to especially thank my mom who encouraged me to reach for my dreams. She taught us all the meaning and importance of the love of family and how to value and keep those bonds strong. Her strength has always been an inspiration to me!

I would like to thank my incredible husband, John. His unwavering support and encouragement has helped me follow the dream and reach the goal. He is a source of strength and unending love and has stood beside me every moment up to the completion of this project. I would also like to thank my children, Julianna, Dan and Elizabeth; they have also been a source of ongoing support, patience, and understanding when I didn’t make it to every family event. I love each of them very much.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As parents await the incredibly joyful moment of the birth of their child, they wait in nervous anticipation in hopes “that everything will be all right” with their newborn. In preparation of their child’s arrival, the parents have begun to envision the life that their baby will have. Now imagine yourself in that moment, walking in the shoes of a parent who has just received the news that their child has a disability.

Whether parents learn the diagnosis of their child during the neonatal period or when the child is a bit older, these parents experience a heart wrenching range of emotions which may include fear, a sense of loss, disbelief, anger, distress and feelings of being overwhelmed (Leff & Walizer, 1992). As the arrival of a newborn is anticipated, parents often attach their own dreams for the future onto their child (Moses, 1987). Now, the newborn that a parent lovingly holds in his or her arms will have a very different future than the life about which the parent may have spent a long time dreaming. While facing challenging emotions, parents may face letting go of the image of the child about which they dreamt and begin the process of learning to accept the child with his/her strengths and developmental needs. Moving through this grieving process is a very personal journey for each parent of a child with special needs. This is also a critical period for the parents because it is when they begin to sort out and learn more about their child’s challenges and their role in the educational process (Moses, 1987).
Once a child has been diagnosed, children with unique and individual learning needs may require educational and related supports to maximize their own educational potential. Children with special needs who receive early intervention and preschool special education services exhibit long term beneficial outcomes (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). While a substantial amount of research has documented that parents and the child’s family play a powerful role in shaping a child’s development, parents are likely unprepared to manage the difficult task of supporting a child with special needs without support (Bailey, Raspa, & Fox, 2012).

The desire to support parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers played a key role in the development of educational legislation which include the Individual with Disabilities Act (Public Law 101-476) of 1990 and its reauthorizations in 1997 and 2004 (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). Congress sought to strengthen the parental role in their child’s educational planning and, thereby, mandated that parents have active and meaningful participation in their child’s educational planning. Turnbull et al. (2010) pointed out that, “the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) has been revolutionary in terms of its affirmation of the importance of parents participating equally with educators in making decisions about their child thereby holding educators accountable for benefiting the child” (p. 43).

Early intervention services were first established when Congress authorized Public Law 99-457 in 1986 and were designed to provide special education services for infants or toddlers with special needs or those who were at risk of developing a
developmental disability from newborn to two years old (Harbin, Danaher, & Derrick, 1994). Since early intervention services occur in natural learning environments for the child, it is important that services and supports focus on families as well as the child (Bruder, 2010). In fact, at the center of early intervention services is the philosophy of family-centered developmentally relevant practices. Family-centered practices encourage active involvement of the child’s family members in the child’s acquisition of developmental skills (Raver, 2005). Throughout the provision of early intervention services, parents are included in the assessment, planning, decision making and development of the family’s priorities for the child and the family (Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998). Early intervention, family-centered practices encourage families to participate in choices for their child in terms of resources, supports, and learning opportunities and to work towards building collaborative relationships with their child’s early intervention team (Bruder, 2010; Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Consequently, the family should feel empowered with the knowledge and skill that they have gained and feel capable of making informed decisions regarding their child (Dunst, 2002).

Parents of children with special needs who have received early intervention services have reported positive early intervention experiences. In the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS) over a 36 month period, 2,586 parents from twenty different states were interviewed to examine their feelings and perceptions about the early intervention services that they received (Bailey et al., 2006). The results of this study suggested that eighty-two percent of participants, at the completion of early
intervention services, felt well informed about early intervention services, felt they were capable of taking care of their child, and felt they were able to advocate for services and access supports for their child as a result of their early intervention services. Results of this study suggested that there are a significant number of parents who appear to have had a positive early intervention experience and felt empowered as a result of early intervention services (Harbin, Danaher, & Derrick, 1994).

**Background of the Problem**

Once a child reaches three years of age, as has been mandated by legislation, he/she is eligible for preschool special education services and is no longer eligible for early intervention services. Preschool special education services are available for children with special needs from three to five years of age, who have been identified as having a disability based on a pre-determined set of qualifying conditions. Services for students with special needs who are within the preschool age range typically receive services which are based on the concept of child-focused, center-based services as opposed to family-focused services (Harbin, Danaher, & Derrick, 1994).

Children turning three years of age and their families, who move from early intervention services to preschool special education services, are considered to be in a transition period (Harbin, Danaher & Derrick, 1994). Brandes, Ormsbee, and Haring (2007) estimated that approximately 1.5 million toddlers transition from early childhood special education services to preschool special education services per year. The transition between early intervention special education services and preschool special education
services include a change in location of services and services providers. What parents do not often understand and what is often not well explained to them is that early intervention services are delivered via family-centered, developmentally relevant practices and that preschool special education services are delivered via child-focused, centered-based educationally relevant practices (Myers, 2007; Podvey, Hinojasa, & Koenig, 2010). So, not only is there a change in the location of services and service providers, but there is also a difference in the philosophical orientations and eligibility requirements between early intervention services and preschool special education services. These differences in philosophical orientation have led to discontinuity between the two intervention styles which has left parents confused (Danahar, Shackelford, & Harbin, 2004). As a result transitions for children and families have not always been smooth.

Congress became aware of transitions that have not been effective for students and families and has attempted to write legislation to address these concerns (Connelly, 2007). This law required parental consent for a change of placement and required early intervention teams to hold a meeting with the child’s future school district and the family of the child at least 90 days before the child’s third birthday to plan for the transition to preschool (Whaley & Hains, 2001).

The intent of Congress was to further strengthen the role of parents to participate and help make crucial decisions that influence their child’s educational development. It was also the hope of Congress that families would transition seamlessly from early
childhood special education services to preschool special education services without interruption of services (Hebbeler, Spiker, & Kahn, 2012). IDEA 2004 requires a smooth transition for toddlers to preschool, and seeks to ensure smooth transitions for preschoolers and their families (Connelly, 2007). Although there is a legal mandate for seamless and smooth transitions, Congress did not define the meaning of “seamless transition,” and this lack of definition unfortunately may contribute to difficulties experienced by parents when moving their child from early intervention services to preschool special education services (Hebbeler, Spiker, & Kahn, 2012). Parents, service providers, administrators, and other districts may all have their own definition of a seamless and smooth transition.

Congress, as previously stated, intended that the parents of children with special needs would become more involved in their child’s individualized education plan (IEP) process. Fish (2008) stated that IDEA was constructed to ensure that parents and schools share in the responsibility of ensuring children with special needs have equal access to educational opportunities. This legislation requires that parents participate in meaningful ways in their child’s individualized education plan (IEP) meetings and that parents understand their rights. However, there is quite a bit of research to suggest that parents of children with special needs who are moving from early intervention services to preschool special education services have not felt well informed, empowered, and involved in their child’s educational process (Fish, 2008).
Research conducted by Pruitt, Wandry and Hollums (1998) suggested that the shift in philosophical focus between early intervention services to preschool special education services may be just one of the contributing factors that influence parents’ feelings of disenfranchisement and disenchantment. Seventy-eight parents agreed to be interviewed by these researchers. Themes emerged from the interviews which included the following recommendations for educators: 1) develop and improve strategies of communication between parents and educators and other service providers; 2) continue to be lifelong learners and increase their knowledge of disabilities; 3) increase sensitivity to the parents or try to view the parents’ challenges by thinking what it might be like to be in the parents’ shoes; 4) demonstrate respect for the child and meeting the child’s needs by letting the parents be a part of the IEP process and improve the IEP process. In this study, parents also stated that they wanted educators to listen to them and value their contributions about their child (Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998).

In another study, Lovett and Haring (2003) interviewed thirty parents of children with special needs who had moved from early intervention services to preschool special education services regarding their perceptions of the transition process. Forty-six percent of the parents interviewed described they felt uncomfortable with the transition process to preschool special education services. These parents also communicated that they did not understand the process, did not feel like they were full participants of the process, and they had a difficult time communicating with service providers. Although parents
appreciated that their children had access to preschool services, they had not felt included in the transition process (Lovett & Haring, 2003).

More recently, Podvey, Hinojasa, and Koenig (2013) investigated the transition experiences of six families over a three month period. Families in this study described feeling as if they moved from being “insiders” during their role in early intervention to “outsiders” in their role with their preschool special education program. Based on their research, Podvey, Hinojasa, and Koenig (2013) concluded:

For the past two decades, most research in this area provides suggestions on how to better include parents in the transition process. Despite these suggestions and legal mandates for family participation, we did not find that these suggestions have translated to families’ experiences. Rather our findings suggest that families cannot maintain the level of involvement once their child has entered preschool (p. 215).

Contrary to the educational laws that have been written that require parent involvement at the preschool special education level, there appears to be a gap between legislative policy and educational practice. One of the most stressful and challenging periods for families that the current author has observed since she began work as a preschool special education teacher four years ago is the transition period between early intervention special education services to preschool special education services. Each family with whom the current author has worked has expressed anxiety, concern, and nervousness during their child’s transition to preschool special education services. All of
the families have left impressions of their child’s and family’s transition to preschool special education. However, there is one family in particular that left a lasting impression when one family member expressed, “It is not just our daughter who is transitioning to preschool but rather it is our whole family.” The significance and importance of the words has stayed with the current author ever since. It has been her experience that although all educators attempt to explain parental rights and other relevant educational material to the parents of children with special needs, it is often the case that the parents appear overwhelmed and confused as they begin to learn about the new and ominous preschool special education world that they and their child have entered.

**Statement of the Problem**

Parents of preschoolers with special needs who have just transitioned to school have not only had a change in placement and service providers, but are also learning new special education terminology and policies. Parents may be sending their precious preshooler who has cognitive difficulties and who may be non-verbal off to school on a bus to work with educators who don’t really know them. A considerable problem in the transition process is that a significant number of parents of infant and toddlers report feeling informed and empowered while a significant number of parents of children who are entering preschool special education services report feeling uninformed, lost, and confused as their child heads off on their first school experience (Lillie & Vakil, 2002; Lovett & Haring, 2003).
As previously mentioned, a parent of a preschooler with special needs enters a new world of special education policies, laws, and specialized terminology. Much of this information is unfamiliar to parents and often parents are left to find information on their own (Odom & Wolery, 2003). One source of information for parents is through searching for information on the internet. There are many problems with parents using the internet as a primary resource. First and foremost, information parents find on the internet may not be valid or evidence-based information, which could lead to further confusion for parents. Another issue is they often have to sift through an endless number of websites to find needed information. Once a parent has located a website which they would like to research, it may be difficult for parents to negotiate or understand the material (Turnbull et al., 2010). Furthermore, there are parents that may not have access to the internet because they can’t afford internet access or cannot find access to free use of the internet (Turnbull et al., 2010).

A significant problem for parents of children who are transitioning to preschool special education services is that special education documents, such as the parent’s rights document, are often written well above their reading level. Based on their research, Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) stated that the Department of Education reported that 49% of American adults hold a high school degree or less. It was also noted that reading abilities of parents can vary from three to four grade levels within the last grade that he/she completed (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). Not surprisingly, Fitzgerald and Watkins
(2006) found that most parent rights documents are written well above the reading level of most Americans.

The question arises if parent rights’ documents are written above the reading level of parents of children with special needs, then how can parents participate in a meaningful way in their child’s educational planning? If parents do not understand the educational document that has been provided to them, can they participate as equal partners on the IEP team to help decide their child’s educational future? For parents of a child whose primary language is not English, it can make the task of trying to decipher their parent’s rights and other educational written material even more difficult.

To the current author’s knowledge, there is not a written resource, within the school district where she works, other than procedural safeguards for parents. Clearly, to help parents negotiate the preschool special education world, there is a need for a parent resource handbook, which would encompass policies, terminology, and important timelines to inform parents about the transition to preschool that is crucial for them to know.

**Purpose of the Project**

Clearly, there is a lack of available, accessible resources to support parents in the transition to preschool process. Information from parents, early intervention teachers, and preschool special education teachers who voluntary participate in the project was key to the development of the parent resource handbook. The purpose of this project was to create a jargon-free, English language parent resource handbook with input from both
parents and educators. The handbook will primarily be written for parents. Parents who have recently completed (i.e., within the last year) the transition process were asked open-ended questions to elicit information that would be useful for parents of children with special needs to know during the transition process. Following the parent interviews, early intervention special education teachers and preschool special education teachers, who have been involved in transition IEPs, were interviewed to add their knowledge and experience. Once the handbook is compiled and developed, it will be shared with the parents and educators who participated in the project to gain their feedback.

When the current author has been asked what the purpose of her proposed project is, other stakeholders in the IEP transition process have expressed their interest in obtaining the completed version of the resource handbook. These requests led the current author to see the importance of such a resource to help parents transition from early intervention to preschool special education services in her school district as well as the greater Sacramento region and could possibly be relevant to parents, teachers and school districts throughout California.

**Significance of the Problem**

Parents who are in the process of transitioning their child to preschool special education services have the legal right to be involved in the decisions that will affect their child’s future. Parents should understand the meaning of special education terms and all other relevant IEP information that is being shared with them. A major contribution which preschool special education educators can provide to parents is the information
that they need to make informed decisions (Lillie & Vakil, 2002). It is the responsibility of preschool special education teachers and other service providers to bridge the information gap to provide parents of preschoolers the information they need to make informed decisions.

It is also important for preschool special educators to establish rapport and build trusting relationships with parents of preschoolers. Dunst and Dempsy (2007) acknowledged that building positive professional relationships formed on trust are likely to have empowering benefits for parents. Dunst (2002) wrote that educators need to work together with parents to form a common goal and form relationships that are based on shared decision making, responsibility, mutual trust, and respect.

With this in mind, the goal of the project is twofold. First, it is to provide parents with a resource that can be used as a guide to help them understand special education information. Second, the resource handbook would be used by educators to begin to dialogue with parents and to nurture relationships in which parents feel informed and feel as if they can trust their child’s individualized educational team. This handbook that will be put together with input from parents and teachers may help families develop questions about the transition and IEP processes, which they may have not known how to ask previously, and in turn, assist in creating dialogue between families and educators.

**Limitations of the Project**

One of the limitations of this project is that the number of parents and educators who will be interviewed to inform the development of the resource handbook is a small
group of participants. While these participants, who voluntarily participated in the project, will provide information about what they feel would be useful for parents who will transition to preschool special education services in the future, this information may not be applicable to other parents within the school district or greater Sacramento area. The information provided by parents and educators within one school district may be specific to the participants who were involved in the project and may not generalize to other parents or educators throughout California. Finally, the information provided by parents and educators for this project may be time sensitive, so the handbook will need to be updated on a regular basis.

**Definition of Terms**

*Center-Based Preschool Special Education Services*

Preschool center-based programs are very different than the family-centered model from the early intervention services. Generally speaking, service providers using the center-based model do not have the frequent, ongoing contact with a child’s parents as those who use the family-centered model. Typically, parent and service provider contacts may be less direct and are usually less intense (i.e. contact by phone or email). In the child-focused, center-based model there is not the emphasis on family strengths and resources as in the family-centered family-focused intervention model (Kaczmarek, Goldstein, Florey, Carter, & Cannon, 2004).
Early Intervention Services

Early intervention services are special education services that are provided to infants, toddlers and their families ranging in age from newborn through the age of two years. Children become eligible for early intervention services if they have a disability or are at risk of a developmental disability. Parent involvement is an integral part of early intervention services. Services such as educational services, physical therapy, speech and language services and occupational therapy are provided depending on the needs of the child (Kaczmarek et al. 2004).

Family-Centered Special Education Services

The family-centered service approach is centered on the philosophy that young children should not be viewed apart from their families. When professionals collaborate with families using the family centered-approach, the professionals focus on the family’s strengths, encouragement of family empowerment, and respect for family values and cultural diversity (Bailey, Raspa, & Fox 2012).

IDEA 2004

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a landmark law that ensures the rights of all children with special needs. All students with special needs who are eligible by law to receive special education services should receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that is especially designed to fit the individual and unique needs of each child in the least restrictive environment (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Shriner, 2006).
**IDEA, Part B**

Part B of IDEA is that portion of the federal law written by Congress to provide services and protect the educational rights of children who have special needs between the ages of 3 through 22 years of age, and the rights of their parents (Lillie & Vakil, 2002).

**IDEA, Part C**

Part C of IDEA is that portion of the federal law written by Congress to provide services and protect the educational rights of children who have special needs between the ages of newborn through two years, and the rights of their parents (Lillie & Vakil, 2002).

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**

The individualized family service plan (IFSP) written with the family’s strengths and needs of the child and family taken into consideration, keeping in mind family resources (i.e. support of extended family, etc.). The IFSP is reviewed every six months. Early intervention teams can include parents and extended family members along with service providers, such as early childhood education specialists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, nurses, bilingual assistance, interpreters and those individuals who are needed to support the student and his/her family (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Dogaru, 2007).
Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)

The individualized educational plan (IEP) developed by a child’s educational team, which includes the parents, teacher, administrator, and service providers. All members are considered equal partners in the process and meet at a mutually convenient time to develop a child’s educational plan. IEPs are conducted at least annually to determine a child’s individualized education plan (Altshuler & Kopels, 2003).

Preschool Special Education Services

Preschool special education services are services that are typically provided in preschool classrooms in local school districts. A child’s eligibility is determined based on whether the child falls into one or more of the special education eligibility categories. Preschool special education services are center-based which is in contrast to early intervention services which are family-focused. Children with special needs become eligible for preschool special education services on their 3rd birthday (Rosenkoetter et al. 2007).

Procedural Safeguards Document

This is a document that explains a parent’s legal rights as they relate to their child’s education and gives explanations of the procedural safeguards. This document must be offered at every IFSP and IEP annually meeting that parents attend. Procedural safeguards give parents the right to examine all educational records, have an individualized educational evaluation (IEE) and participate in all meetings. Parents must
also be given the right to written prior notice when the school suggests a possible change
to the individualized education plan (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006).

**Organization of the Remainder of the Project**

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the project and explains the purpose of the project. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature specifically related to parental chronic sorrow, the transition from early intervention special education services for children and families to preschool special education services. This chapter also includes information about preschool special education policies and eligibility requirements to receive preschool special education services, barriers to successful transitions from early intervention services, the role that preschool special education teachers can provide in the transition process and best practice recommendations for successful transitions for preschoolers and their families. Chapter 3 describes the methods that were used to gather the information for the project and how the parent resource handbook was developed. Chapter 4 contains a detailed description of the project, including a discussion of the project and implications for educational practices and recommendations for further research related to transitions from early intervention special education services to preschool special education services.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is organized into three sections. The first section discusses parental chronic sorrow which occurs upon a child’s diagnosis of a disability and often reemerges at important developmental milestones such as the transition from early intervention services to preschool. The second section examines the barriers that parents experience during their child’s transition to preschool special education services. Finally, the third section presents best educational practices which can promote a successful, positive transition from early intervention services to preschool services for children and their families and facilitate preschool parents to be valued team members in their child’s educational process.

Parental Chronic Sorrow

Prior to a child’s birth, parents begin bonding with their child as they imagine their child’s future. Indeed, parents dream, fantasize and project thoughts into the future of the unborn child. Dr. Ken Moses (1987), a psychologist who has worked with families of children with a disability, stated, “Children are our second chance, our ultimate life products the reflection and extension of our very being. Parents, all parents, attach to their children through dreams, fantasies, illusions and projections into the future.”

When a child is born, he or she becomes a member of a family. Parents have the ominous responsibility of caring for the child, along with encouraging and supporting the child’s development and enriching the child’s life (Bruder, 2010). Parents hope that their
child will be born without a disability and will develop following typical developmental milestonest. However, upon the diagnosis of their child’s disability, his or her parents come to the realization the future they had hoped for may not come to pass (Richardson, Cobham, McDermot, & Murray, 2013). In article by Klemm and Schimanski (1999), one parent commented:

Parents have to adjust emotionally to the fact that our experiences with our child are different than we thought they would be, and we have been thrust into a whole new world. The world contains professionals we never knew existed, words and acronyms that are unfamiliar, reactions from friends and family that we never anticipated. We must learn about the disability itself and what this will mean for our child and our family. We often feel scared, alone and lost” (as cited in Klemm & Schimanski, 1999, p. 109).

A parent’s ability to grieve the loss of their original dream and to create a new dream for the child’s future actually impacts the parent’s ability to adapt to the news that their child has a disability (Moses, 1987). Grieving is a natural reaction to the loss of a parent’s concept of their ideal child. Moses (1987) pointed out that grieving is not a step-by-step process that evolves from moving from one stage to the other. Rather, he suggested that parents may be in varying “states of grief” at different times in the child’s life. He concluded that we may fall short of supporting parents through the grieving of the loss of their ideal child if we expect parents to move from one state to another with expectations of them accepting their child’s disability. In fact, he remarked that he has
never observed a parent who completely accepted their child’s disability, but rather parents had learned to acknowledge the disability (Moses, 1987).

Olshansky (as cited in Burke, Eakes, & Wainsworth, 1999) proposed a similar theory. He noticed that parents of children with special needs experience sorrow as a reaction to the loss of their expectation of the “perfect child.” Olshansky described this sorrow as a “universally experienced phenomenon defined as pervasive sadness that follows loss throughout a child’s lifetime” (as cited in Burke, Eakes, & Wainsworth, 1999, p. 109). This theory is called “chronic sorrow.” At different developmental milestones during the child’s upbringing, parental awareness of the differences between their child and typically developing children may be heightened at these times (Dempsey, Keen, Pennell, Reilly, & Neilands, 2009). This awareness of the differences may serve to remind them of their child’s challenges and can lead to the experience of grieving the idealized perfect child. In short, when a parent experiences this chronic sorrow, which can be brought on by internal and external triggers, they are reminded of the loss of their idealized child and their fears for the future for their child (Landgridge, 2002).

Chronic sorrow is further defined as a natural, understandable response to life changing news, such as the news that one’s child has developmental challenges (Scornaienchi, 2003). Key developmental periods, such as when a child is expected to learn to walk, begin school, commence puberty, and approach the expected graduation date from high school, are all important transition points in a child’s life. Concerns for the child’s developmental outcomes and the child’s future, both individually and within
the context of the family, surface at these transition times and contribute to the ongoing sorrow that parents may experience due to having a child with special needs (Ahmann & Dokken, 2009). In other words, each one of these events can serve to act as potential triggering events for parents’ experience of chronic sorrow and grieving. For example, when a child who has special needs reaches the age when a developmental milestone typically occurs, the parents are reminded that their child may not meet the anticipated developmental milestone. When such an event triggers the parent to feel sad and experience grief and the parent does not have effective coping skills, the parent may painfully feel the discomfort of their sorrow (Gordon, 2009).

Parents with a child who has special needs may go through a range of different emotional reactions during the child’s first years of life (Ray, Pewett-Kinder, & George, 2009). Although changes and transitions occur within all our lifetimes, for parents whose child has challenges, this early period may bring reactions which include denial of a disability, periods of depression, anger at the diagnosis, bargaining with professionals involved in the diagnosis and various levels of acceptance of their child’s disability (Ray, Pewitt-Kinder & George, 2009). Knowledge of the range of emotions which include chronic sorrow and the grieving process which parents undergo, as well as of the possible triggers of chronic sorrow and grieving, will help early childhood educators to better support families during these early childhood transitions (Rous, Hallum, McCormick, & Cox, 2010).
**Barriers for Parents When Transitioning Their Child to Preschool**

Beginning school for the first time, such as starting preschool, is an important early developmental milestone for all children and their parents (Lovett & Haring, 2003; Rous, 2010). The transition to preschool is a critical step for children with disabilities and their parents (Pang, 2010). While legal mandates and best practices call for parent involvement during a child’s educational years, a gap exists between what is considered best practices for parental involvement and what actually occurs in the real world (Odom & Wolery, 2003). There are discrepancies between the level of involvement and participation levels that occur during early intervention services from that which occur during preschool special education (Rock, 2000; Lytle & Bordin, 2001). The high level of parent involvement and participation that parents experience during early intervention services reduces dramatically when their child moves to preschool (Bailey et al, 2000). In an effort to more fully understand why the level of parent involvement decreases following a child’s transition to preschool, it is important to understand some of the difficulties with this transition (Rous & Hallam, 2012).

Areas of concern or issues which could present stumbling blocks for families upon entering preschool include, but are not limited to: 1) fears and apprehensions about moving from the home environment to the classroom; 2) the impact of the philosophical differences in intervention styles between early intervention and preschool; 3) the differences in eligibility requirements between infants/toddlers programs and preschools; 4) the perceived power difference between educators and parents; and 5) the high reading
levels of special education documents which make it hard for some parents to understand information that is given to them at this time (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). Zhang & Bennett (2004) suggested that with an understanding of the barriers that cause fears and apprehensions for parents, it may be possible to develop strategies to encourage more parental involvement when a child reaches school age.

**Fears and Apprehensions for Parents Transitioning their Child to Preschool**

One of the hurdles that parents may first confront is a wide range of emotions that they feel. Nervousness, anxiety, stress and sorrow may be heightened during the transition to school. Issues that parents often worry about include being frightened because: 1) their child does not speak yet and doesn’t have a way to communicate his/her needs; 2) their child may have behavioral problems; 3) their child may not be potty trained; 4) they may have concerns about school bus safety; and 5) they may have concerns whether the child’s teacher will see their child’s strengths (Burke, 2013).

Parents may also worry about their child’s ability to get along with his/her peers. It is during this time that parents’ feelings may be intensified, especially if they are not provided information (Anderegg, Vergason, & Smith, 1992). Parents, not knowing what to expect when their child enters preschool may be one contributing factor to the parents’ range of emotions (Trussell, Hammond, & Ingalls, 2008).

**Impact of the Different Philosophies of Intervention Services**

Yet, another area that may influence the transition is that the regulatory policies that govern early intervention and preschool special education services are shaped by the
laws and policies, as well as the philosophies behind them, and affect how each service interacts with children and their parents. Central to the development of IDEA, Part C is the philosophical concept that early intervention providers base their intervention on assisting parents in their abilities to meet their child’s needs by actively seeking their involvement in the child’s intervention (Pang, 2010; Hebbeler, Spiker, & Kahn, 2012). Early intervention services are designed with parental involvement in mind and with the dispersal of services woven into the delivery of services (Haring & Lovett, 2001; Hebbeler, Spiker, & Kahn, 2012). One of the benefits for parents during early intervention is that the parent or family goals are written into the Individualized Family Support Plan (ISFP) (Rupiper & Marvin, 2004). Furthermore, regular contact with early intervention service providers gives the opportunity for ongoing communication with their child’s early intervention specialists (Pang, 2010).

In contrast, while Part B of IDEA also requires parent involvement and participation when a child reaches school age, the design of the special education services do not focus on family outcomes, but rather on child only outcomes (Kzar, Turnbull, Summers, & Gomez, 2012). The services that a child receives are solely relative to a child’s educational needs (Lillie & Vakil, 2002). This shift in a parent’s role in the intervention of their child brings with it changes in the expectations of the child and parents, levels of staff involvement and participation, and styles of intervention (Podvey, Hinojasa & Koening, 2010). The transition also brings new choices, new terminology and requirements for services (Lee & Gardner, 2010; Rous et al., 2010).
Differences in Eligibility Requirements

Another source of confusion for some parents is that the eligibility requirements for early intervention and preschool special education services differ (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, & Poston, 2007). Parents whose children were previously eligible for early intervention services may find out that they are no longer eligible for preschool special education services, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy (Burke, 2013). These differences in eligibility requirements is often not well explained during the transition process so parents may be unaware that their child will or will not qualify under the preschool eligibility requirements for services (Podvey & Hinojasa, 2011). If a child’s level of service decreases when a child moves from early intervention to preschool services, parents may feel that his/her child’s services should not have changed; this can not only be a significant point of confusion for parents, but also a potential point of disagreement between parents and school districts (Zhang & Bennett, 2003

Perceived Power Differential between Teachers and Parents

Under IDEA, Part B, the procedural safeguards specifically states that parents are to be equal partners in making decisions for their child, which includes decisions for all formal assessments and placements, as well as any discussions during IEP team meetings (Brandes, Ormsbee, & Haring, 2007). Yet, another concern is that parents may not feel they are considered as equal partners in the IEP process and that educators and administrators have a distinct advantage over parents because educators have information
and knowledge they do not possess (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Raver, 2005; Sheehey, 2006). Parents may feel marginalized because although they try to contribute information about their child during the IEP meeting, their contribution may not be listened to or valued (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Many parents have confirmed that they often end up taking a more passive role in their child’s educational planning than they did while their child received early intervention services (Pang, 2010). Parents also complain that educators have the upper hand when it comes to their role as compared to parents in meetings (Kalyanpur, et al., 2000; Sheehey, 2006; Pang, 2010). Frustration over not being able to understand special education information, jargon and policies and procedures shared at the IEP meeting is another common complaint voiced by parents (Burke, 2013).

When parents feel that they are not viewed as equal partners in the IEP process, there may be a power differential between the professionals and the parents with team members being perceived as having more power (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000; Sheehey, 2006; Pang, 2010; Burke, 2013). A power differential can lead to parents’ feelings of incompetence and consequently having difficulties communicating their questions and/or discontent with other team members (Burke, 2013). Fish (2006) interviewed 10 parents of children who receive special education services in a support group in southwest Texas and found that the participants in this study did not feel like they were viewed as meaningful contributors to the process. One participant stated, “I
never really got the feeling that they [education professionals] wanted me to understand it all, and they have it [IEP] all figured out before you get there” (Fish, 2006, page 13).

**High Reading Levels of Special Education Documents**

IDEA 2004 mandates that in order for children to receive a free and appropriate education, parents must receive information about their rights (i.e., procedural safeguards) (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). In order for families to meaningfully participate in their child’s IEP process, parents need to be able to understand educational terminology and jargon, including procedural safeguard documents which outline the parents’ rights. In a memorandum by President Clinton in 1998, it was ordered that all documents be written in “plain language which uses common everyday words” (cited in Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006, p 499). The Health and Human Services Department defined plain English as an eighth to ninth grade reading level and it was further suggested that documents for the general public be written in that range (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006).

A study conducted by Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) examined the reading levels of parental rights documents from all 50 states. These researchers were concerned that reading levels of current documents might be above the reading ability of many parents. Ninety-two to ninety-six percent of the procedural safeguards documents were found to be written at a ninth or tenth grade reading level. Additionally, it was reported that 50% of Americans read at a level at or below the eighth grade. They further stated that if more than 90% of the documents were found to be written at higher than a seventh or eighth grade reading level (i.e. the recommended reading level for most adults), then there are
definitely many parents who would have difficulty reading these documents (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). These authors further noted that when parents receive information such as procedural safeguard documents, it is assumed by IEP teams that they understand the definitions and terminology. All too often parents may not be comfortable asking questions if they do not understand the information.

Reading levels were again explored in a study conducted by Mandic, Rudd, Hehir & Acevedo-Garcia (2012). These researchers noticed that the work of Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006), a number of the procedural safeguard documents had been studied in their draft form. Mandic et al. (2010) took the Fitzgerald and Watkins study a step further by examining the finalized procedural safeguard documents from state departments of education and by using a more stringent reading level assessment scale. They found that over half of the state procedural safeguards documents were written at what was considered to be a college reading level and nearly 40% of the documents were considered to be written at a graduate or professional reading levels.

There are numerous authors in the literature such as Rupiper and Marvin (2004), Dunst and Dempsey (2007), Turnbull et al. (2011), and Rous and Hallum (2012) who suggest that the perceptions that parents sometimes form during the transition to preschool could be improved through the use of family centered practices. Open communication, empowering parents by providing useful and relevant information and valuing parents input may go a long way to reduce the barriers discussed in this chapter, that parents often encounter.
Best Practices to Facilitate the Transition to Preschool

When a child starts preschool, special education services become child-focused and more center-based; however, research reveals that using a family-centered intervention approach may facilitate collaborative partnerships between parents and educators and be responsible for positive developmental outcomes for the child (Rupiper & Marvin, 2004; Bailey, et al. 2006; Angell et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2013). Additionally, it has been shown that developing positive relationships between parents and their child’s teachers has led to positive perceptions of their child’s education (Knopf & Swick, 2007). McWilliam, Tocci and Harbin (1998) suggested that positiveness, responsiveness, friendliness, sensitivity and understanding of families are attributes of a family-centered teacher, which can lead to increased parental involvement. Moreover, a parent’s ability to cope with challenges that may occur while raising a child with special needs can be positively influenced by teacher’s availability, accessibility and commitment to their work with families (Turnbull et al., 2011).

Clearly, family-centered practices recognize the importance of a child’s family in his/her life, view parents as partners in the decision making process, and provide support to parents in the caring for and educating of their child with special needs (Rupiper & Marvin, 2004). Dempsey and Keen (2008) further described family centered practices as services in which a child is not viewed separately from his or her family and also in which family considerations are taken into account. Furthermore, Blue-Banning, Turnbull and Turbiville (1999) stated that family-centered practices focused on family strengths,
family choice, and parental control of decision making. One of the most comprehensive descriptions of family-centered practices was written by Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren (2011). These authors described seven principles that are essential to the building of parent-teacher collaborative partnerships and to truly family-centered services: communication, professional competence, equality, respect, commitment, advocacy, and trust. Fostering family-centered principles such as these will have a positive impact on families and may lead to a decrease in barriers to meaningful involvement that are experienced by parents.

Educators who are not using or are not familiar with the use of family-centered practices might feel challenged by suggestions put forth by noted researchers such as Dunst and Dempsey (2007), Turnbull et. al (2011), and Rous and Hallum (2012), because these practices may require them to look at their own current teaching practices and their relationships with parents. However, providing information to families in transition using family-centered practices can empower the parents’ levels of self-confidence in their ability to care for their child and participate more confidently in the transition and IEP process (Rupiper & Marvin, 2004).

Although there are many recommended best practice strategies to enhance the development of collaborative partnerships between parents and educators, communication is the key to successful partnerships. Communication is central to the building of trusting relationships with parents (Angell et al., 2008). In order for meaningful communication to begin, professionals must believe that family involvement
in the education process is important and they choose to learn more about families with whom they work (Knopf & Swick, 2008).

Strategies which begin the important communication process during the transition from early intervention to preschool include: 1) providing families with information about the transition process; 2) ensuring that families receive information about their child’s move to preschool and about placement options; 3) educating parents about timelines and referral processes in understandable terminology; 4) fostering ongoing communication with the family using a variety of different modes of communication that is culturally reflective and sensitive to different types of families; and 5) contacting the parents the child’s transition to preschool and following up on the child’s adjustment to preschool.

Recognizing collaborative, parent-educator partnerships are based on family-centered practices and are central to the development of ongoing positive relationships with families, the current author sought to assist parents by helping to reduce confusion as their child moves to preschool. The provision of information to parents about what to expect as their child begins school has many family-centered outcomes for the child, parents and families. It was with the intention of furthering her own professional development and the desire to foster collaborative partnerships with the families with whom the current author works that she recognized the importance of the development of a parent resource handbook. When parents of preschool children with special needs bring their child to preschool for the first time, they are entrusting their child into the guiding
hands of the preschool teacher and staff. The provision of information to parents about their child’s transition to preschool is the first step in developing a positive, family-centered, collaborative environment.
Chapter 3

METHODS

This chapter will provide information on the methods used to develop a resource handbook for parents who have children with special needs and who are in the process of transitioning their child from early intervention special education services to preschool special education services. Specifically, the chapter will include the manner by which information was gathered for the resource handbook, the criteria for selecting information that is used in the handbook, and the process used for writing, editing, and developing the handbook.

Prior to the implementation of the project, the current author had written a paper for a graduate level class that explored the transition processes for infants/toddlers from early intervention services to preschool special education services. Through this research, she had the privilege of informally speaking with a small group of parents who had preschoolers with special needs, preschool special education teachers, and two early childhood special education administrators regarding the transition of children and families from early intervention services to preschool special education services. Within this group, there was a general consensus that this transition for children and families could be improved. Parents indicated that they did not feel a part of their own child’s individualized education plan team meeting, and they did not understand information presented to them and felt confused and frustrated. Moreover, parents shared that they needed more information about their child’s disability, service options, and available
resources and supports. One parent even suggested that a parent resource handbook or parent training workshop would be helpful to parents for the purpose of explaining preschool special education terminology and concepts. In more recent discussions about the current author’s proposal to put together a parent resource handbook, other teachers and parents have indicated they would like to see the handbook when it is finished. In order to ensure open communication and ongoing dialogue for parents of children with special needs in the current author’s class, the idea to create a parent friendly resource handbook began to emerge.

Although the current author is not a parent of a child with special needs, she is a mother of children who have had serious medical diagnoses and have had other family members who have had serious illnesses. During these personal circumstances, it was remembered that when information was provided and explained clearly, feelings of confidence emerged. These difficult personal moments further motivated the current author to want to develop a parent resource handbook. As a parent of a child with medical concerns, she was able to empathize with parents of preschool children with special needs. The provision of information, through the development of a parent resource handbook may help parents and families feel a little less lost. In fact, it has been well documented that when parents are provided information and support that fit their child’s needs as well as their own needs, they feel more confident and empowered (Turnbull, et al., 2010).
Process Used for Gathering Information for the Thesis Project

One of the first sources of information gathered for the project was information provided through interviews with parents of preschool children with special needs and teachers of preschool children with special needs. Parents of children with special needs, from the current author’s preschool classes, and preschool special education teachers who worked in the current author’s school district, were invited to participate in interviews about the transition to preschool for children and families. In the original proposal, the current author wanted to include interviews of early intervention teachers who work with children and their families from birth to three years of age. Numerous attempts to interview early intervention teachers were made, but the attempts to secure interviews were unsuccessful.

Three parents of preschoolers and three special education teachers agreed to participate. Prior to the interviews, both the parents and the preschool special education teachers were informed of how their confidentiality would be maintained. Each participant signed a consent form provided by the current author, indicating their willingness to participate in the interview.

Parents were asked to talk about their child, their perspectives about their child’s recent transition to preschool, their special education knowledge and any recommendations that they would make to improve the transition process to preschool special education services. The preschool special education teachers were asked about their roles in the IEP process and their perception of parents’ levels of special education
knowledge during the transition to preschool. Additional questions such as whether teachers believed that parents were viewed as equal partners in IEPs and whether they believed there was special education information that could be better explained to parents were also asked. Finally, the special education teachers were asked to talk about situations that might be potential barriers to successful transitions and best practice strategies when working with families of students with special needs.

Parents stated they felt confused, overwhelmed, lost at times and frustrated with their child’s transition to preschool. Parents reported they had minimal special education knowledge before and after the initial IEP. Recommendations from parents included suggestions that the IEP teams should listen to information that parents had to add to the conversation, IEP teams should take more time to explain who they are and their roles at the IEP meeting, IEP meetings should not be rushed, and team members should make an effort to not use special education terminology that is unfamiliar to most parents.

The teachers also provided useful information about how they provide an explanation to parents about how early intervention services fall under the responsibility of the county and regional agencies and preschool special education services fall under the umbrella of the school district. This is an important insight because parents are often confused by the fact that there are sometimes differences, in service levels for their child when their child moves to preschool. The teachers shared that parents are often unaware that due to the philosophical differences between early intervention services and preschool differences there are different eligibility criteria between the two similar, yet
very different intervention styles. They further related it is sometimes assumed by parents that the high level of service interventions that their child received through early intervention will continue into preschool. Many students do not receive the same level of service provision during preschool. One preschool special education teacher who participated in the interviews suggested that parents should also receive an explanation about how special education services are determined based on the student’s education needs and not on medical needs which is another concept difficult for parents to understand.

A common theme expressed by between all of the teachers was the belief that parents should be integrally involved in the educational planning of their child’s education and that parents should be assured they are a very important part of their child’s educational team. Also, all three teachers indicated the parent rights documents should be written in clear and concise language to assist parents in their understanding of their rights. Each teacher suggested the IEP team members make a concerted effort not to use educational jargon and acronyms during meetings. It is interesting to note that parents felt they had not received enough information from special education professionals through the transition to preschool, and teachers felt parents need more information especially in the area of parent rights and defining special education terms.

The information that was provided via the parent and teacher interviews was valuable because it upheld the current author’s belief that parents need more special education information. Another noteworthy finding from the interviews was that all three
teachers believed parent rights documents should be easier for parents to understand. Also, the teachers all thought it was important for parents to be knowledgeable about special education terms, especially terms pertinent to their being able to understand their own parent rights.

Another avenue to gather information for the project gathering was to research existing literature. Articles for the literature review were found via the current author’s university library in the EBSCO database. These were peer reviewed journal articles in the areas of special education, medical issues and psychology. These articles provided additional sources of information in their reference section. The sources provided information about chronic sorrow, barriers to smooth transitions from early intervention to preschool special education information, and information that relates to collaborative processes between parents and special educators.

The first topic area reviewed from the literature was related to the chronic sorrow which parents of children with special needs may experience as their child reaches developmental milestones and they become more aware of their child’s developmental difficulties. Finding resources that specifically address the chronic sorrow that parents feel upon learning that their child has a disability and subsequently may feel again when their child reaches developmental milestones was more challenging than other subject areas within the review. The information about chronic sorrow was very enlightening because it gave the current author a glimpse of how chronic sorrow affects parents at important developmental milestones, such as the transition to preschool. Researching the
literature in this area provided the current author with a greater understanding of parent experiences and with further impetus to find ways to meaningfully involve the parents of children with special needs in their child’s special education process.

Another area of focus for the literature review was on the barriers that parents encounter during their child’s transition to preschool special education services. One area of difficulty for parents is the high reading levels of procedural safeguard documents and the difficulty that some parents have understanding or comprehending the documents.

When parents are not provided their parents’ rights in the way it was intended in IDEA, then the question arises whether parent’s rights have been protected. Reviewing literature that discussed barriers that make it difficult for parents to transition their child to preschool was very helpful. It gave the current author a more in depth understanding of roadblocks parents come upon during this transition. At a time when parents may be experiencing sadness or sorrow due to their increased awareness of their child’s challenges, they shouldn’t have to encounter barriers which prevent a smooth transition to preschool. Through the awareness that this literature provided about the difficulties parents experience when transitioning their child to preschool, the current author became increasingly more motivated to find a way to bridge the information gap that some parents experience.

**Review of Relevant and Available School District Documents**

A brief review of parent information including parent rights documents from five different school districts in the greater Sacramento area, where the current author works
was conducted to assess the reading level of educational documents. All the documents from these surrounding districts were found to have reading levels of 12th grade or higher using the Flesh-Kinkaid reading level scale. Fitzgerald and Watkins further (2006) recommended that reading levels of parent information be written at a 7th to 8th grade reading level. Based on this recommendation, the resource handbook for parents being developed needs to be written at a 7th to 8th grade reading level or lower. Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) further emphasized that educational terminology or jargon be minimized, that acronyms not be used without an explanation, and that lengthy texts be broken down into smaller texts to allow the reader to take breaks. These authors (2006) also suggested that the font size of the procedural safeguards be no larger than 12, that a table of contents be included and the different sections use headings to help parents navigate the information. Other recommendations by Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) included the use of a glossary of terms and the use of pictures and/or illustrations to make the document more pleasant to look at and to draw in the reader.

Review of well-known education websites from such as the U.S. Department of Education, California Department of Education, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, the Beach Center on Disability, Warmline and ten California County Office of Educations was done to provide resources as well as guides to what to include and not include in the resource handbook. These sites were chosen on the basis of their being county, state and/or national level websites where parents might first look for information or of their being popular informational websites about children with
disabilities. The current author, keeping in mind the recommendations made by Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006), previously discussed wanted to review characteristics of commonly accessed internet sites to see whether attempts were made to make it easier for the reader to understand the information. Notes were taken during all reviews of websites to obtain information.

Based on the articles reviewed, it was also suggested that family-friendly language be used for written documents for families. For example in the literature it was suggested that instead of using “mom and dad” that maybe “families and friends” be used for written materials for parents. Another point emphasized was that family compositions are changing to include foster parents, grandparents, and unmarried couples who may be the primary caregivers for children instead of the natural parents. In addition to the reading level consideration of procedural safeguard documents, the use of family friendly language should also be kept in mind for parent special education documents and communication.

**The Process of Writing and Editing the Parent Resource Handbook**

Based on the information gathered through interviews with important stakeholders in the transition from early intervention services to preschool special education services and the review of literature and relevant websites the current author began the process of compiling a concise parent resource handbook. Parent and teacher concerns helped guide the development for the resource handbook along with work by Fitzgerald & Watkins (2006) which recommended that the reading level of parent
educational documents be at lower reading levels than most educational documents found in the community and/or on the Internet.

Based also on the recommendations by Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006), specific considerations for sections of the parent resource handbook were used as a guide to develop the handbook. The first section in the handbook includes a letter written to parents and teachers who might be prospective readers of the resource. Then, as was recommended by the authors, the handbook was divided into specific sections based on parent or teacher needs. Sections most helpful for parents include information on what happens in the educational process when their child turns 3 years old, procedural safeguards, eligibility for services, explanations of services, skill domains, behavioral terms, legal terminology, and the IEP process. The resource handbook is designed to answer questions reported by parents in the interviews and in the literature review. Teachers’ concerns, especially the desire to have information for parents that is easier to read and understand, are also met by the handbook. Revisions and editing of the handbook continued bearing in mind all the information revealed to the current author through the entire thesis project process.
Chapter 4

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five years ago, the current author began her career working as an intern teacher, and, taking part in individualized education plan (IEP) meetings for students who would be transitioning to preschool was eye opening. As a new member of initial IEP meetings, she became concerned when the look of confusion and bewilderment appeared repeatedly on the faces of parents of children with special needs during their initial meetings with school personnel. Parents are given a lot of information at one time at the initial IEP meetings before their child enters preschool. Typically, the special education information that is discussed with a parent at these meetings includes the educational rights, a variety of assessment results from different service providers, the educational needs of their child, a categorical label associated with the child’s deficits, and educational placement options. During observations of parents in these meetings, they appeared to be more recipients of information than true participants in the information sharing and educational planning process. As a new participant to the IEP process at that time, the current author was left with the desire to find a way to help parents that she works with understand information and terminology that is unfamiliar to them when their child starts preschool special education services.

When a child transitions to preschool special education, it is not only the child who needs to adjust, but the family as well. Families leave the comfort of the family-focused home-based intervention style to move to the preschool school, child-focused,
center-based intervention style. Parents have complained that they experience confusion, isolation and frustration. This may be due in part to the use of the child-focused, center-based style of intervention versus the family-centered home-based intervention style. Educators have been known to control child-focused IEP meetings in an effort to expedite the IEP process (Lovett & Haring, 2003). Parents stress that when their child moves to preschool to receive special education services, they may not receive special education information and that their input about their child may not be listened to and valued. Parents also emphasize that at IEP meetings about their child that they have not felt a part of their own child’s IEP meetings (Podvey, Hinojasa, & Koenig, 2010).

Another source of confusion is that parents’ rights documents are often written at reading levels between a tenth grade reading level through a graduate reading level. Since forty-nine percent of adults in America read between a seventh to eighth grade reading level, it is apparent that some parents may not be able to read and fully understand their rights as the parent of the preschool child.

In addition, these parents are learning to adjust to their child’s new staff, new environment and new style of intervention. The current author hoped to find a way to decrease the feelings of confusion and the chronic sorrow that parents may feel at this important developmental milestone. As was previously mentioned, chronic sorrow is the feelings of sadness or sorrow that parent’s experience at key developmental periods. Developmental milestones such as transition to preschool remind parents of their child’s challenges and the awareness that their child’s learning process may be different than
other children. Teachers of preschool children with special needs also felt that parents of children in their classes often did not understand their parent rights, and that their rights should be provided in an easier more accessible version than current documents.

As a result of the literature review and the current author’s interviews of key stakeholders in the transition process, it was determined that a resource handbook would be of benefit to the parents of children with special needs moving to preschool as parents want more information to be able to support their children. Teachers of preschool children with special needs also felt that parents of children in their classes often did not understand their parent rights, and that their rights should be provided in an easier more accessible version than current documents.

**Project Description**

The parent resource handbook was divided into seven sections: 1) a letter to parents with recommendations on how to use the resource; 2) a letter to special education teachers with recommendations on how to use the handbook; 3) information about when a child turns 3 years of age and enters preschool; 4) procedural safeguards document information; 5) eligibility information; 6) related services 7) skill domains areas; 8) definitions of special education terms; and 9) definitions of behavioral and legal terms behavioral definitions and legal definitions.

The handbook begins with letters to parents and teachers, accentuating the importance of parents and educators working together as a team, and reminding parents that they are their child’s most important teacher. Within the parent letter, it is also noted
that the role of the handbook is to supplement existing information parents already have, not to act as a replacement of other special education documents. It is hoped that this letter will make clear that the handbook could be a starting point for parents and teachers to begin to dialogue about their children/students. Similarly, the second section is a letter to special education teachers of preschoolers. In this section, a key point is the information to the teacher about how the handbook should be used. Rather than just handing the handbook to the parents to view on their own, the purpose of the handbook was for teachers and parents to go over the handbook together and use different questions that parents have as future talking points.

The third section pertained to information parents need prior to their child turning three years of age which was meant to help parents understand the transition process by providing them with specific information about how a child qualifies for special education services, the need for an assessment, and an explanation of what happens at a transition meeting. The fourth section of the handbook is the procedural rights section which is a very important part of the handbook. The procedural safeguards document or the parents’ rights documents is a document which parents, often have difficulty reading and understanding. Due to the fact that procedural safeguards are written at reading levels that are above the reading levels of many parents, which the current author to provides easily accessible information about the procedural safeguards in the handbook.

Following the section on procedural safeguards, the next session includes short explanations of the thirteen eligibility categories under which students qualify for special
education services. These eligibility categories include autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disabilities, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic disabilities, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech and language impairment, trauma brain injury and visual impairment. The identification of the child’s disability may be new to some parents because during early intervention, a child may not be identified with a disability per se, but may be eligible for early intervention services under the early intervention description of developmentally delayed.

Another source of confusion for parents during the transition period is that it is often assumed that if a child received early intervention-related services, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy or speech and language therapy, that the child will also be eligible for similar preschool-related services. What is often overlooked in discussion with parents is an explanation that the child’s needs for related services are determined differently for early intervention services as compared to preschool special education services. Preschool services are determined solely on the child’s need and the educational relevancy to the need. Early intervention services are determined collaboratively based on the parents’ concerns for their child’s needs which is very different than how preschool eligibility is decided. Included in handbook is information about the steps prior to the transition to preschool, the assessment process and a description of each of the thirteen special education categories.

After the section on eligibility categories, the current author included a section on skill areas such as pre-academic skills, speech and language skills, fine and gross motor
skills, social/emotional skills, and adaptive skills. This is another important section because these skill areas are referred in the IEP under the heading of “present levels.” The use of a child’s different skill sets such as pre-academic skills, language and speech skills, fine motor skills etc. which are included in IEPs. The handbook includes information about the multidisciplinary team assessment process.

During initial IEP meetings, the current author has noticed many parents appearing overwhelmed and confused about terminology used. There is an overabundance of special education terms that may be new to parents who are moving into the special education world as their child enters preschool. That was why it was especially important to the current author to include a section with definitions of special education terms such as free and appropriate public education and least restrictive environment that are often confusing to parents. Moreover, when the current author was reviewing other special education glossaries of terms, definition lists were very long. Recommendations from the literature included suggestions to break long text up to shorter sections in order to make reading material easier to read. Therefore, legal terms and behavioral terms were put into their own sections.

Limitations

The resource manual has not yet been piloted. It is unknown at this point whether those who will use the parent resource handbook will benefit from the information. While the handbook has not been field tested, the current author intends to have colleagues and other professionals, including coworkers and parents of children with whom the current
author works, evaluate its usefulness. Another limitation is that the current author spoke to a very small number of parents and special educators. The current author also did not take in consideration the needs of parents who have a child with special needs who come from culturally diverse backgrounds and which English is their second language.

**Recommendations**

It is the current author’s belief that the provision of information to parents such as that provided in the parent resource handbook, may set the stage for the formation of an ongoing dialogue with parents. It is her hope that opening the door so to speak, will make parents feel more comfortable to interact and ask questions during IEPs meetings with educators and other professionals. Parent’s meaningful participation in their child’s IEP is the overall goal for the parent resource handbook.

An important piece to the transition period is that it is a particularly vulnerable time for parents and their awareness that their child may have a different learning journey than their same age typical peers may lead to or accentuate feelings of sorrow. Chronic sorrow is not yet a familiar concept that education professionals fully understand, but it is an area in which educators should become more knowledgeable. It is a further hope of the current author that this parent resource handbook may lead to discussions with other teachers about the use of family-centered practices which can serve to ease or at least not trigger feelings of sorrow. Perhaps parent’s use of this document might help alleviate some of the feelings of stress and confusion in the parent’s lives.
Additionally, it is recommended that this project fulfill the following needs: 1) parents would have a supplemental resource to refer to in order to more fully understand information that is presented at IEP meetings; 2) parents would have a local guide that will help them understand current special education information; and 3) that parents will be able to meaningfully participate in their child’s educational planning process. By providing this resource, parents and professionals working with special needs children with have a resource to resource to reference when questions arise. Assisting parents to understand factors about special education is just one of the family-centered strategies that should be used to build trust and develop open communication with parents of our students.

Since this book has not been piloted, it is recommended at a later date that the handbook be provided to parents and teachers to obtain their feedback and suggestions. As input from parents of preschoolers grow, it is important that the necessary changes continue to occur and updates of the handbook be made. Following the reviews of the handbook by parents in the current author’s preschool classes, it is her hope to share the handbook with other preschool special education teachers in her school district for use in their classes. Ongoing review and editing of the handbook will continue over time.

After the handbook has been reviewed and approved by district colleagues, it will be given to preschool special education teachers to use as a resource for improved interaction with parents and to help facilitate smoother transitions. Possible further dissemination of the resource handbook may include other agencies in the greater
Sacramento area such as Alta Regional and early intervention specialists who will have students transitioning to preschool.

Further research definitely needed in a couple of key areas. Specifically, researchers might want to reframe the procedural safeguards to include easier language. Comparing the reading and comprehension levels of a simpler parent rights document to one of the more difficult parent rights documents might be worth while exploring. Further research is needed to explore whether procedural safeguard documents can be written in simpler terminology and language to see if truly helps to build rapport and to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with parents.
Appendices
Appendix A: Consent to Participate Letter

Consent to Participate in Parent or Educator Interview
Regarding Transitions from
Early Intervention Services to Preschool Special Education Services

Dear Parent/Educator,

You are being asked to participate in an interview which will be conducted by Chris Hedges Hess, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Education, Special Education Concentration program at California State University, Sacramento. I will be conducting a Master’s project which is a requirement for completion of the program. The faculty sponsor for this thesis project is Dr. Jean Gonsier-Gerdin.

The purpose of this project will be to develop parent resource handbook for parents who are new to the preschool special education world. Interviews will be conducted to gain knowledge from parents and educators about special education topics that parents may need more information about during the transition from early intervention to preschool special education services. Based on information provided by you as a participant, I will be utilizing your feedback and recommendations to develop a parent resource handbook.

As a volunteer participant, you will be asked interview questions conducted by me and the interview session will last no longer than one hour. At any time, you as a participant may decide to not participate in the interview or may choose not to answer a question. If you decide not to participate in the interview or would prefer not to answer a specific question, you simply can request to stop the interview or ask to skip a question. Your responses to interview will remain anonymous and confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns about this interview, you may contact Chris Hedges Hess xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at xxxxxx@yahoo.com and/or Dr. Jean Gonsier-Gerdin at (916) 278-4619 or via email at jgonsier@csus.edu.

By signing below, you indicate your consent to participate in the interview described above. You may decline to participate in this interview without any consequences.

_________________________________
Signature of Participant, Date
Appendix B: Interview Questions for Parents of Preschoolers

Interview Questions for Parents of a Preschooler

1. During the past year, your child transitioned from early intervention to preschool special education services. Please tell me a little about this experience?

2. What information did you learn during the transition process from early intervention to preschool special education services that you feel would be helpful to share with parents whose child is just transitioning to preschool?

3. Now that your child is in a preschool environment, what other important information have you learned that you feel would be useful information for families to know who are transitioning to preschool?

4. Are there special education terms you have heard that you feel you would like more information about? Please share those terms.

5. At this point in time, would you like more information about special education policies such as FAPE, LRE, preschool special education eligibility, differences between early intervention services and preschool special education services, assessment and IEP timelines and so on?

6. How can IEP teams support and work with families through the transition process from early intervention special education services to preschool special education services? Was there information that you feel would have been helpful to you prior to the transition to preschool? Were there things that you feel the professionals could have done to assist with your child’s and your transition to the preschool world?

7. Was there information shared or with you that helped you feel an equal partner in your child’s individualized educational plan meeting? Was there anything specifically done by the professionals that made you feel as an equal partner?

8. Are there specific recommendations you would make to service providers regarding what they could provide to support parents of children who are just moving from early intervention to preschool services?
Appendix C: Interview Questions for Preschool Special Education Teachers

Interview questions for Preschool Special Education Teachers

1. As an early intervention special education teacher or preschool special education teacher who has worked with children and families who are transitioning their child from early intervention services to preschool special education services, please tell me what information you feel is important to share with parents during the transition time period.

2. What special education information do you feel transition teams might want to spend more time on so families feel informed about the transition process?

3. As educators, what can we do to help families feel more comfortable with the move from early intervention services to preschool special education services?

4. What other ideas might you have that transition IEP teams could do to help parents feel empowered and a part of their child’s educational process?

5. Please provide any additional information that you feel would be useful in the formation of a parent resource handbook.
Appendix D: Special Education Information Handbook

Special Education Information
Parent Resource Handbook
Dear Parents and Families,

I am a preschool special education teacher. My philosophy on teaching is that I want to come together with you as a partner to work with your child. You are your child’s first and most important teacher. You know your child better than anyone. I need your help to be able to learn how your child learns. Please share with me your strategies that you use to work and play with your child with me.

I recently heard the phrase “everyone is differently abled to do things.” We all have our own strengths and needs. Let’s work together to find out what your child’s strengths are so that we can find a way to help your child with his/her school challenges.

Starting School

Starting school for the first time can be an exciting new adventure for a child and their parents. Truthfully, all parents are a little nervous when their child begins school. Parents who have a child with special needs may have many questions.

Special education information words can be difficult to understand! Parents of children from former classes have said it would be nice to have special education information that is easier to understand. Parent rights documents can be difficult for many to understand.

This parent resource handbook was created to help parents and families understand some of the difficult special education information. This parent
resource was created with you in mind. Parents of children with special needs and teachers of children with special needs gave input on the parent handbook.
The Parent Handbook

It is my hope that you will take time to go over the handbook with your child’s teacher and ask any questions you have. It was written so that at a later date if you have a question you can go back to the handbook to find the information you need or help you decide if you have questions you need to ask.

The handbook is divided into different sections. Information about the individual education plan (IEP) and the transition to preschool are presented in a question-answer format. Other topic areas are defined.

Please use this parent handbook along with other information that you have received from your student’s teachers. This resource handbook is to be used as a supplement to other special education documents and should be considered in that light. The information within the handbook should not be taken as legal, medical or any other type of professional advice.

Sincerely,

Chris Hess
To Special Education Teachers,

This parent resource handbook has been created to use as a supplement to information such as the Procedural Safeguard documents. It is the hope that you will use this resource handbook as a starting point to begin conversations with the parents of the children with whom you work with.

Empowering parents by helping them to understand their special education information has many positive benefits for their child and his/her family. It has been documented that when parents and educators work together, there are long term beneficial outcomes for both the child and parents.

Our journey with our students and his/her parents and families is just for a short time. Parents need ongoing information throughout the child’s school journey to make informed decisions.

Sincerely,

Chris Hedges Hess
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My Child is turning 3 years of age, what comes next…

Before your child turns 3 years old, the agency or the group of people who have been providing your child’s early intervention services, will begin to talk to you about your child going to preschool.

When your child turns 3 years old, your child may be eligible to receive his/her special education through the school district.

With your approval, someone from early intervention services will be in contact with school district professionals to let them know your child will be turning 3 years old.

When your child turns 3 years old, his/her special education services (if he/she is eligible) will be provided by the school district.

My child received early intervention services. Does that mean that he/she will eligible for preschool special education services?

In order for a child to qualify for special education services, he/she will need to have an assessment or tests to decide whether your child will be able to receive special education services in preschool.

The rules for deciding whether your child can receive preschool special education services are guided by state and federal government laws and rules.

How does my child become qualified for special education services?

Prior to my child’s becoming 3 years of age your early intervention specialists will talk to you about your child’s need to continue or not continue to receive special education services.

If your child is still in need of special education services than there are a few steps that will need to take place first. You and your early intervention team will schedule a meeting to meet with the school district. This is called a transition meeting. This
is not the meeting when it is decided whether your child can receive special education services.

**What is a transition meeting?**

A transition meeting should occur before your child’s third birthday. This is a meeting when you and the early intervention specialists meet with someone from the preschool.

They will want to know about your child. They may want information such as:

- when your child was born,
- were there any difficulties during his/her birth,
- his/her development,
- your child’s early intervention services,
- how you feel that he/she is doing now,
- what information can be provided from the early intervention team and,
- share with the team members information that you feel is important about your child’s growth and development.

**What is a multidisciplinary team assessment?**

In order to qualify for special education services, your child will need to be assessed. In order for the assessment to take place you will need to give your permission for the assessment to occur. You will be asked to sign a Request for Assessment form.

With input from you and your early intervention team about what skill areas are a concern for your child, recommendations for assessments in your child’s area of need will be made. This will help determine the child’s need for service and at what level those services should be recommended.

This is a group process in which you should be involved. Your knowledge and expertise about your child will be invaluable information for the educators and service providers who will be assessing your child. You are your child’s first teacher and the information you give to the team will be very important.

**How will I know whether my child will qualify for special education services?**

During the multi-disciplinary team assessment meeting the team members will want to know more about your child. They will want to know about when your child was born, his/her early development, about your child’s early intervention services and
how you and the early intervention specialists feel that child is doing now. This is not the meeting in which your child’s eligibility will be discussed.

It is a meeting so that the new special education specialists can get to know your child. A plan for what should occur after that meeting should be discussed with you. For example, you and the teams from early intervention and preschool may decide that your child no longer needs physical therapy but does need to be evaluated to determine eligibility for speech and language concerns.

Procedural Safeguards

What is the Notice of Procedural Safeguards?

Procedural safeguards document is another name for parent rights. You should receive the parent rights document at least once a year.

The parent rights document should be given:
- at the child’s annual individual educational plan (IEP) once a year
- when an assessment for your child has been proposed;
- when you are meeting to discuss a possible change in placement
- if you are meeting for a due process complaint.

What is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

IDEA is a federal education law. This law requires school districts to provide your child with a free and appropriate education.

What does free and appropriate public education mean?

This means that a child with special needs must be given a free education or at no cost to the parents. Students with special needs have the right to have specialized instruction when the need has been identified. Students with special needs have the right to receive other services as well as needed.

What is an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?
An IEP is a written education plan for a child with special needs. The plan for the child is decided by a team. Parents are an important part of the team. The team may include teachers, physical therapists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists and so on.

**May I participate in the decisions about my child?**

Yes, parents are a very important part of the IEP team meeting or the IEP meeting. It is your right to be part of the meeting to help plan your child’s education.

You also have the right to be part of the child’s identification (eligibility), assessment and/or other meetings that have to do with your child.

The local educational agency (school district service providers) has the right to participate in your child’s IEP decisions also.

If you would like to audio tape the IEP meeting you must notify IEP team members at least 24 hours before the meeting.

**What do I need to do if I need more help?**

When you have questions, the first person to ask is your child’s teacher. If he/she cannot answer your question(s) then it is recommended that you consult a special education programs specialist or administrator.

Informal conversations with educators and/or service providers can help to address questions and or concerns you may have.

**What is needed for a special education assessment?**

You have the right to refer your child for special education services for an assessment. If it is agreed that your child needs an assessment you will be asked to sign a request for assessment form.
What else do I need to know about an assessment of my child?

If a person from the school district has recommended an assessment, you have 15 days from the time that you receive the proposed assessment plan to decide if you would like your child to have the assessment and return with a signature.

The assessment may begin as soon as you have given your permission by signing the request for assessment form and returning it to your child’s teacher.

If you refuse the assessment, there are steps in place for the school district to use to be able to proceed with the assessment any way if is felt that it is necessary.

After the Request for Assessment form has been signed, when will the IEP be held?

The assessment and the IEP must be completed within 60 days from the date of your approval of the Request of Assessment.

**The 60 days doesn’t include weekends or school breaks. For example if you sign a Request for Assessment on the last day of school, the first day of school will be day 2.

What else is needed for my child to receive special education services?

In order for your child to receive special education services you will meet with the IEP team. Services providers who are part of the IEP team will present reports to you about the areas of need that you were concerned about. The IEP team (which includes you) will talk about your child’s strengths and needs. Together the IEP team, of which you are a part of, will all make recommendations for your child’s individualized educational plan.

You have to consent or give your permission for your child to receive special education services.

If you do not give your permission for the recommended services, then the school district will not be able to provide the special education and related services.
How do I obtain my child’s school records?

If you would like to have a copy of your child’s school records, you can do so in writing or orally (such as requesting over the phone or in person). The school district must give you copies of your child’s records within 5 days.

What is a Prior Written Notice?

When the district wants to initiate or refuses to make a change in the identification, assessment or placement of a child, a prior written notice form needs to be filled out and given to the parent.

This information should be included in a prior written notice:
- a description of the wanted action
- the reason why the action needs to occur
- a description of each assessment, record, or report
- a description of the parent’s rights

Eligibility Categories

Your child needs to be assessed before he/she qualifies for special education services. There are 13 different special education categories. In order to receive services your child must be identified to have one of the following disabilities. Disabilities can affect the child’s ability to learn.

Eligibility is guided by the results of the assessments and should be explained to you at the meeting before your child starts preschool.
**Autism (AU)**–a child with autism may have difficulties with social interactions and verbal or nonverbal communication. Your child may also have difficulty making eye contact, imitating facial expressions, smiling at familiar people, playing with other children, responding to affection (cuddling), and may have repetitive behaviors (such as moving their hand in front of their face).

**Deaf (D)** a child with has a hearing loss that is so severe that he/she can not hear. The child will have difficulty understanding words and with also with learning skills.

**Deaf and Blind (DB)**–a child who is deaf and blind has both vision and a hearing loss. The child could have varying degrees of vision and hearing loss. The combination of the two difficulties can be very difficult for children.

**Emotionally Disturbed (ED)**-a child with an emotional disturbance may have emotional difficulties over a long period of time that adversely affect their educational performance.

**Hearing Impairment (HI)**-a child with a hearing loss may not respond to his/her name or sounds consistently, speech is delayed, can not hear loud noises.

**Intellectual Disability (ID)**-a child with an intellectual disability has limitations in a child’s ability to learn think and solve problems.

**Multiple Disabilities (MD)**-a child with multiple disabilities has more than one disability at the same time. The combination of different disabilities makes learning very challenging for students.

**Orthopedically Impaired (OI)**-a child with an orthopedic impairment has had a change in their skeletal system through an event that may have occurred before birth or after that also involves muscles and ligaments. This disability can be caused by a variety of reasons such as being born with the difficulties, amputations, disease and other causes.

**Other Health Impairment (OHI)**-limited strength and energy due to a chronic or health condition. Examples of those conditions include asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, leukemia and many more health conditions.

**Speech and Language Disability (SL)** a child with a speech and language disorder have difficulties with communication and/or has difficulty with eating and/or feeding.
Specific Learning Disability (SLD) - a child with a specific learning has difficulty in a specific learning area such as the ability to think, read or write.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) - a child who has a traumatic brain injury has had an injury that occurred by an external force. Traumatic brain injury can have an effect on all skill level areas such as academic skills, speech and language skills and gross motor skills.

Visual Impairment (VI) - a child with vision difficulties means that a part of their vision or that their eyes may not work right. It could be for many different reasons such as interruption between the eye and the communication to the brain.

Related Services

Assistive Technology/Augmentative Communication - devices or use of a product whether it is purchased or custom made that is used to improve the functional capabilities of a child.

Occupational Therapy - services that may include the improvement of self--through school), positioning (sitting appropriately), sensory-motor (using the senses and muscles) fine motor (writing, cutting) and gross motor (walking and other athletic skills), life skills and psychosocial adaptation.

Physical Therapy - services that have to do with muscle strength, mobility and posture. Qualified physical therapists must provide physical therapy.

Speech and Language Therapy - services that are provided to a student who has communication difficulties and/or swallowing disorders.
Special Education Definitions

**Annual Goals** - a goal that which is decided by a child’s IEP team for the next year. Student’s educational goals are decided based on a child’s needs. Goals can be written for academic, social/emotional, speech and language, fine motor, gross motor, adaptive skills and behavior needs.

**Assessment**: a collecting and bringing together of information about a child's learning needs; a process using formal and informal methods to determine an individual's strengths and weaknesses to plan, for example, his or her educational services.

**Assistive Technology**: an item, piece of equipment, or product system purchased commercially, modified or customized and used to increase, maintain or improve functional skills of students with disabilities.

**Benchmark Goals** - the benchmark goals are the goals or steps to the annual goals.

**Case Manager** - the person whom the student’s family contacts.

**Child find**: the responsibility of the school district to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities.

**Consultant**: a person who gives expert or professional advice.

**Criterion Referenced Tests**: assessment that compares a person's performance to some specific established level (the criterion) or a specific degree of mastery; his or her performance is not compared with that of other people.

**Curriculum-based Measurement**: an informal assessment approach emphasizing repeated direct measurement of student performance.
Differentiation: a way of thinking about and planning in order to meet the diverse needs of students based on their characteristics; teachers differentiate content, process, and product according to students' readiness, interest, and learning profiles through a range of instructional and management strategies.

Disability: a documented conditions that results in restricted capability to perform a function of daily life; a disability is not a handicapping condition unless the individual with a disability must function in a particular activity that is impeded by his or her limitation.

Eligibility: the process of qualifying for a service under one of thirteen federally defined disability categories.

Evaluation: to examine, judge, and analyze the data collected through the assessment process.

FAPE (free appropriate public education): the guaranteed right of children with disabilities to receive an education that meets their unique needs at no cost to parents.

General Education: a standard curriculum adopted by the state or local school district for all children from preschool to high school; the setting where this instruction routinely takes place.

Highly Qualified: related to the teacher certifications requirements mandated by federal and state laws beginning in 2005.

Identification: the process of locating and identifying children needing special services and/or the identification of a child’s special needs.

Inclusion: the idea or philosophy related to students with disabilities participating and being educated in the general education classroom/program to the extent possible.

Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE): Federal law defines an IEE broadly as an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the public agency responsible for the education of the child in question.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): a legal document designed by a team of individuals for a child with special needs. The team includes the child’s parents and service providers. The entire team works together to identify a child’s needs and strengths and develops a plan for the upcoming year.
**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA):** first enacted in 1975 as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, and subsequently periodically reauthorized, it is a comprehensive federally funded law that governs the education of students with disabilities.

**Informed Consent:** signed parental agreement to an action proposed by the district after the parent is provided full information in a way he or she can understand.

**Intervention:** action taken to correct, remediate, or prevent identified or potential educational, medical, or developmental problems.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** refers to the concept that children with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent possible with children who are not disabled while meeting all their learning needs and physical requirements. The type of setting is stipulated in a child's IEP. LRE is an individual determination.

**Local Education Agency (LEA):** a school district, board of education, or other public authority under the supervision of a state educational agency having administrative control and direction of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or political subdivision in a state.

**Mainstream:** the placement or a student with a disability into a general education classroom or any nonacademic setting (such as physical education, lunch, etc.) for any part of the school day.

**Mastery Criteria/Mastery Level:** the cutoff score on a criterion-referenced test; the condition for mastery of an IEP goal.

**Meaningful Progress:** improvement in student performance individually determined to be sufficient to indicate that FAPE is being provided.

**Modification:** changes to curriculum demand or assessment criteria such that the curriculum demand or assessment criteria are altered.

**Multidisciplinary Team (MDT):** a group including parents and professionals with different areas of expertise who come together for the purpose of looking at an individual child's educational program.

**Multiple Intelligences:** educational theory put forth by psychologist, Howard Gardner, which suggests that an array of different kinds of "intelligence" exists in human beings including: Verbal-Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Visual-Spatial, Musical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic.
**No Child Left Behind**: a United States federal law that aims to increase the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools, as well as provide parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend.

**Parent**: a natural, adoptive, or foster parent; a guardian or individual acting in place of a natural or adoptive parent with whom the child lives or who is legally responsible for the child's welfare; a required member of the MDT team.

**Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance**: a statement in the IEP of the child's current baseline of strengths and needs as measured by formal and informal evaluations.

**Prior Written Notice**: required written notice to parents when the school proposes to initiate or change, or refuses to initiate or change, the identifications, evaluation, or educational placement of the child.

**Referral**: a written request for evaluation or eligibility for special education and related services.

**Related Services**: services that are developmental, corrective, and other services required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.

**Screening**: the process of administering global methods to determine if the child has a suspected disability and whether the child should have evaluations to determine if he qualifies for special education services and/or related services.

**Special Education**: specialized instruction specifically designed to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability, including classroom instructions, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions.

**Standardized Tests**: tests where the administration, scoring, and interpretations are set or prescribed and must be strictly followed; scores resulting from these tests are based on a normed population and compare students to their same-age peers.

**Supplementary Aides and Services**: supports that are provided in the classroom, extracurricular, and nonacademic settings to allow a student with a disability to be educated with his nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

**Transition**: a child who will soon be turning 3 years of age will transition from early intervention special education services to preschool special education services.
Behavioral Terms

**Antecedent**- An event that occurs just before a child’s unexpected behavior.

**Discrete Trial**- A method that is used to teach in a simplified and systematic way. A skill or a task broken down into simple steps.

**Functional Behavioral Assessment**- A set of strategies used to figure out what the function or purpose of a behavior is.

**Interfering Behavior**- A child's behavior that gets in the way of his or her ability to be able to focus on learning.

**Positive Behavioral Support Plan**- A range of activities that are planned to prevent a problem behavior.
Legal Terms

**Due Process Hearing**: formal legal proceeding presided over by an impartial public official

**Dispute Process**: procedure to resolve disputes between parents and schools.

**Mediation**: mediation is a voluntary process in which the parent and school district come together to discuss differences with an impartial mediator who is trained in mediation techniques. Mediators try to help people work things out.

**Stay Put**: Student stays in current placement (or class) when there is a disagreement between the parents and the school district. Until due process complaint is resolved, the child stays put in the class he/she is in.

A final note to parents and teachers:

- Thank you to the parents and teachers who have participated in the parent and teacher interviews. I am very grateful for your participation in the project.

- To the parents of my students. Thank you for taking the time to look over the parent handbook with me. My hope is this after we have gone over the handbook together that you will have some more questions for future conversations

- This handbook is in an ongoing process of editing. Please feel free to make comments or suggestions for future revisions of this information.
References

The following websites are information websites that have helpful information for new to preschool special education services. These are helpful websites that are well worth looking into if you are knew to the special education world. They are well written and provide information about local resources.

http://www.warmlinefrc.org/calendarscommunity-activities.html

Warmline is a family resource center. The website has great information about early Intervention, preschool special education, support groups and community activities. A family friendly website. This website is definitely a website with a lot of valuable information!

http://www.altaregional.org/resources/

Alta Regional is a local agency that provides information for all individuals with developmental disabilities.

http://www.scoe.net/services/multimedia/selpa_handbook.pdf

Local Sacramento County Office of Education- good site for definitions of special education information.
References


