

Guidebook to Build Better Community-Wide Transition Systems



Revised March 2008



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This guidebook is a revision of the original booklet developed and produced in March 2000 for Florida's Transition Project for Infants, Young Children and their Families.

The State Advisory Team of Florida's Transition Project concluded this revision in March 2008. A list of the State Advisory Team members who assisted in the revision of this booklet is provided in the Appendix.

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, provides funding to Florida's Transition Project through the Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) Project for this booklet.

Section One: Building a Community-Wide Transition System

This booklet was developed by Florida's Transition Project to assist collaborative, interagency community teams to make decisions regarding transition policies and procedures for infants, young children, and their families. The resulting policies and procedures are the basis for a comprehensive, community-wide transition system.



Families experience a smoother and more satisfactory transition when agencies and programs develop a comprehensive system of transition that provides clear information about services and the process involved in accessing those services.

This guidebook is designed to offer guidance about three important components of transition:

1. Understanding transition as it relates to young children, birth through five years
2. Providing benefits to the community as agencies and programs work together more effectively to develop a community-wide transition system to benefit young children and their families
3. Supporting the transition system through written policies and procedures in an interagency transition agreement

A. Understanding Transition

Young children with special needs are currently receiving services in many different types of settings—school district prekindergarten programs, in-home services, childcare centers, community preschools, etc. These children move from one program or educational setting to another, a process called **transition**, which is supported by collaboration among agencies to provide a continuum of services for children and their families. The most common transitions in children's lives occur at three years of age when they transition into a preschool or school system prekindergarten program and again at five years of age when they transition from a preschool or prekindergarten program to kindergarten.

Transitions may also occur when the child receives varying services in the natural environment, from public to private programs, or from classrooms for children with disabilities to inclusive classrooms. In addition, children frequently transition from one classroom to another or from one teacher to another within an educational setting, causing changes in the way the child and family interact with the program and staff.

It is important to help children, their families, and staff within agencies in developing effective skills that can be used throughout the various transitions, which promotes a smooth and effective transition system.

B. Benefits of an Ideal Transition System

Effective Practices

Effective transition practices are based on the understanding that transition is a process of change that takes time, preparation, teamwork, and planning. Children and their families can achieve positive outcomes when transition efforts focus on four critical areas:

- Child preparation
- On-going communication and coordination
- Parental involvement
- Continuity of learning, care, and services

Rewards for Children

When transitions are planned, children of all ages have fewer difficulties adjusting to the new educational setting. When parents and staff help children prepare for their new environment, the benefits for children may include:

- Continuity of language and culture
- Earlier learning, care, and service experiences
- Increased motivation and openness to new experiences
- Enhanced self-confidence
- A greater sense of trust among children, educators, and caregivers
- Improved relationships with peers and adults

Benefits for Families

When transitions are planned, families are supported before, during, and after the transition. When parents are involved with educators and caregivers in easing the transition of their children, parents can gain:

- Increased self-confidence in their children's ability to succeed in the new setting
- Improved self-confidence in their own ability to communicate with staff
- A sense of pride and commitment in their on-going involvement in the education of their children
- A greater knowledge of early childhood programs and services
- Enhanced ability to effectively influence education, care, and service delivery

Program Enhancements

When teachers and staff from sending and receiving programs collaborate with each other to facilitate the transitions of children and their families, they can expect:

- Increased information sharing and an enhanced ability to address individual child needs
- Increased parental and community support
- Access to a larger network of resources and professional support
- Enhanced understanding of other early childhood programs in the community
- Renewed sense of professional pride and commitment in improving outcomes for children and families

Community Successes

The benefits from coordinated transition planning include the following:

- Systems, which share information among agencies and programs that serve children and families during expected or sudden transitions, are in place.
- Accurate information about available services within the community increases the responsiveness of service delivery.
- Resources that can help families enhance their planning and advocacy skills in order to successfully manage future transition(s) are allocated to early childhood transition planning.
- Successful transition experiences during early childhood can have a lasting positive effect on the lives of families and the quality of life in the community.

C. Developing a Systematic Approach to Transition

Communities may find themselves at any point along the scale of system development, as shown in Figure 1 below. As it relates to transition, the community's ability to work together comprehensively and in a systematic way may make the difference in achieving smooth and satisfactory transitions for families and children. The goal is to create a community-wide system that results in positive transition experiences when children leave one agency or program and begin another.

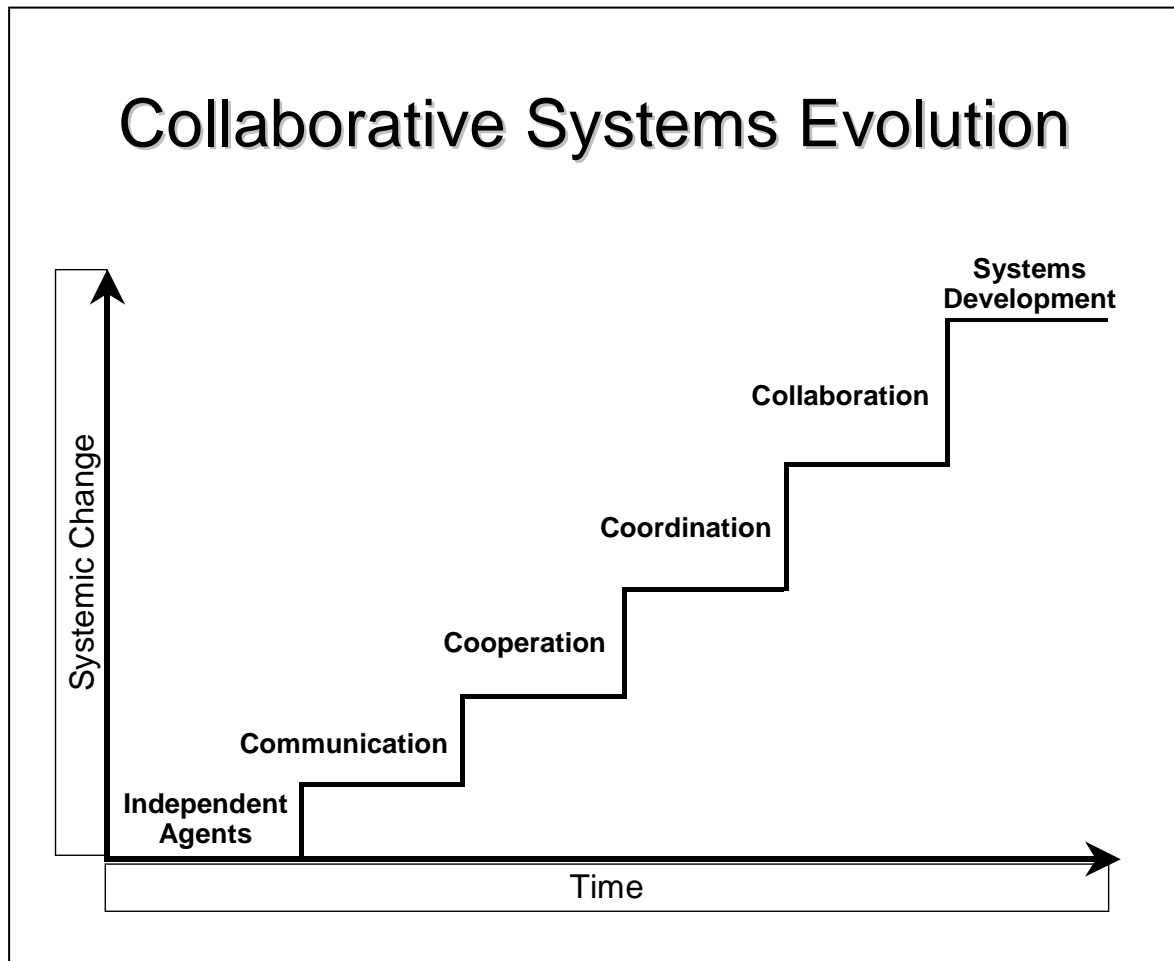


Figure 1: *Project STEPS – University of Kentucky, Lexington*

As revealed above in Figure 1, by employing each and every one of the four “C’s” over time, initial connections between independent agents from the array of transition points across a community can eventually come together to precipitate change and participate in systems development.

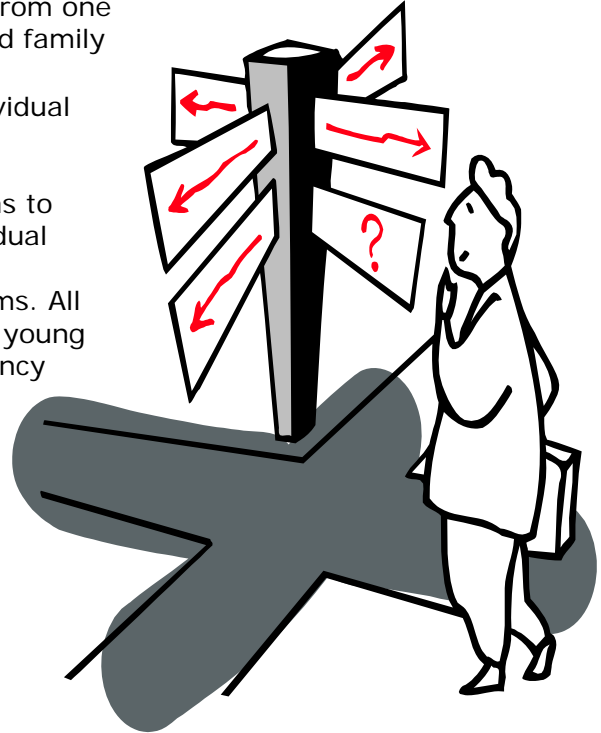
This guidebook, Florida’s Transition Project, and other resources can help community agencies move toward a comprehensive transition system to offer improved outcomes for families and children.

D. Supporting the Transition System through an Interagency Transition Agreement

The goal is for communities to create an interagency agreement that:

- Provides a clear and understandable process for communities to follow
- Facilitates smooth, comfortable transitions from one agency/program to another for any child and family
- Sustains the community's transition system regardless of personnel changes within individual agencies

The development of interagency agreements aims to achieve successful transition outcomes for individual children and families. The process is as much best practice as it is a mandate for some programs. All agencies that participate in transitioning infants, young children, and their families need written interagency agreements that are a result of their collaborative effort to resolve issues and improve the quality of the transition experience for all involved.



Section Two: Developing Effective Interagency Agreements

An effective Interagency Agreement often consists of, at least, the following elements:

- Statement of Purpose
- Description of Agencies/Programs Participating in the Interagency Agreement
- Requirements Impacting the Interagency Agreement
- Definition of Terms
- Working Procedures and Timelines
- Steps to Implement the Agreement
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Interagency Dispute Resolution Process
- Duration of the Interagency Agreement
- Authorizing Signatures
- Appendix

Community teams quickly discover that the ***process*** involved in creating the interagency agreement is equally as important as the ***outcome***. Through exploring all issues carefully and thoroughly, the team will ensure an outcome that serves the community effectively. Therefore, the team will want to take as long as they need to understand, agree upon, and develop each component. The goal is for team members to support each other and develop a comprehensive agreement that addresses the needs and concerns of all programs that comprise the system of transition in the community.

Before the Team Begins: Avoiding Pitfalls

Two all-important aspects of successful work on an interagency agreement happen even before the team begins working on the components:

- The team needs to determine whether they have all the key stakeholders, including families, participating on the team and invite the missing stakeholders.
- Each team member should identify who is the responsible party within the member's agency who will ultimately sign the agreement. If the participating team member is not the one signing the agreement, that team member needs to determine how to best keep the signer regularly apprised of the progress of the working group. Effective and timely communication facilitates the final review and signing of the agreement.
- The team may opt for an unsigned document. In this case, agency/program representatives who participate in the process of developing the agreement can be included on a list with contact information. This list can take the place of the Signature Page.

On the following pages is an explanation of each component of an interagency agreement. The descriptions will provide a better understanding of how the component comes to life in an actual interagency agreement.



A. Statement of Purpose

Define the Purpose of the Interagency Agreement:

- What **outcomes** do you wish to achieve as a result of the agreement?
- Who are the children and families being served?
- What is the age group you are targeting?
- What values and/or basic requirements drive your efforts under this agreement?

The Statement of Purpose can be worded in many different ways such as describing the goals, commitments, reasons for, and desired goals of the agreement. Parameters about those who will be affected such as populations, ages, basic limits of service, and eligibility requirements, can also be defined.

Adapted from Florida Healthy Start Standards & Guidelines.

B. Description of Agencies/Programs Participating in the Interagency Agreement

Ask the following questions:

- Who are the agencies?
- What services do they provide?
- What geographic region(s) do they cover?
- How do children qualify for services?
- Is there a contact position for transition within the agency?
- Are they interconnected with other agencies to provide services?
- Do they provide “wraparound” services to families?

Each participating agency should describe what services it provides so that it can identify overlapping services or gaps in services that may be needed by service recipients.

This phase of the team’s work allows team members to more fully understand each other’s work and how it relates to the work of other agencies. Team members may want to diagram coverage of populations and brainstorm test case scenarios to “flesh out” whether services are or are not really provided. Each agency should strive for honest, yet brief and clear, descriptions of agency services and served populations.

C. Requirements Impacting the Interagency Agreement

Consider the following sources of requirements:

- Federal/state legislation that applies to any agencies participating in the agreement
- State rules that apply to any procedures and timelines
- Program operations guidelines
- Other individual agency requirements

It is important to discuss and include in the interagency agreement the references to those requirements that will impact the interagency agreement. Requirements impacting the agreement do not necessarily need to be included in the agreement. However, the authors of the agreement must know the requirements guiding their own agencies and should cross-reference the agreement against those requirements to make sure that they are covered in the agreement. By citing the requirements, the team is providing the opportunity for anyone reading or using the agreement to understand the background from which the team was operating. These citations, along with the agency descriptions in Section Two, provide a full picture.

D. Definition of Terms

When writing an agreement, define terms appropriate for your community such as:

- Children's Registry Information System (CHRIS)
- Individual Educational Plan (IEP)
- Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP)
- Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)/Child Find
- Sending agency/program
- Service coordinator
- Receiving agency/program

In an effort to provide the reader with an understanding of the agreement, the "Definitions" section should precede the other sections of the agreement that include use of terminology that could potentially cause confusion. Include any definitions, in addition to those above, which help describe and clarify the system of services within your community. Defining terms is essential to ensuring that everyone has the same understanding of basic nomenclature. Acronyms can be confusing or even used among different agencies with different meanings. Be sure to define acronyms well. This section can be as brief or as long as the team decides since it is a community decision.

E. Working Procedures and Timelines

Develop Working Procedures and Timelines for at least the following:

1. Preparation of family, child, and staff for transition
2. Notification from Early Steps to the local education agency of children transitioning
3. Transition conference
4. Referral from the sending agency to the receiving agency
5. Child evaluation(s)
6. Eligibility determination
7. Transition follow-up
8. Other considerations

This section should include a *sequential narrative* that provides a clear written description of how a child and family move through the system. It should define which agency provides each component of the activity and how that agency connects with others. Once completed, this section of the interagency agreement should help the reader understand the step-by-step process as well as the role the differing agencies play.

Essential Areas of Concern About Working Procedures and Timelines

1. Preparation of Family, Child, and Staff for Transition

- Family: Explain how families will be informed of the process and whom they can contact to get questions answered, find out what community resources and options are available, and determine any timelines that are important.
- Child: Provide information on how the child will be prepared for transition, including completion of paperwork and strategies to ensure the child has needed skills.
- Staff: Provide agency/program staff with an overview of timelines, what participation in meetings/transition conferences is expected, and what training will be given on their role in the transition process.

2. Notification from Early Steps to the Local Education Agency of Children Transitioning

To aid in planning, this section should indicate how often and by what method the Local Early Steps will notify the Local Education Agency in advance of children turning three years old.

3. Transition Conference

While Early Steps has a primary role, other community agencies/programs play an important part. This section should define how all parties communicate and how the partners will ensure that all participants are invited, all information is prepared for the conference, and that the conference outcome is properly documented.

4. Referral from the Sending Agency to the Receiving Agency

Describe the process for the sending agency/program to obtain parent permission for referral and provide a packet of information to the agency to which the child is transitioning. The packet should include a copy of the IFSP, information about the child's progress, and any recent evaluation reports as well as other useful documents.

5. Child Evaluation(s)

Provide an explanation of the process for obtaining evaluations: when evaluations are needed, who pays for them and who secures the permission for and schedules the evaluations.

6. Eligibility Determination

Explain the process that includes how information will be forwarded from the sending program, how recent the information needs to be, what timelines exist, and any additional information that may be appropriate to determine eligibility. In addition, define who is responsible for calling the meeting and inviting the required participants and any others the family requests.

7. Transition Follow-up

In a systematic approach to transition, it is essential to address the use of follow-up methods to determine if the transitions children and families experience are satisfactory, timely, and successful. In addition, it is beneficial to use consistent tools to share information from the family, and from the sending to the receiving school/teacher (see Appendix examples: *Getting to Know Me*, *Getting to Know Your New Teacher and School*, and *Teacher-To-Teacher*).

8. Other Considerations

- Development of an Individual Educational Plan
- Community options for children who are ineligible for Part B services
- Late Entry: Children referred 135 days or less prior to their third birthday
- Summer birthdays: Children who turn three years old during the summer
- Process and responsibilities for transitioning assistive technology devices children may use

F. Steps to Implement the Agreement

Consider the following questions:

- How will the agreement be disseminated?
- When will families and agency staff be informed and trained?
- What action(s) will establish the agreement as a valid, functioning part of the transition system? Consider:
 - Including awareness of the information contained in the interagency agreement as part of job descriptions
 - Using the interagency agreement as part of new employee orientation and training
 - Making the agreement available on agency Web sites, in hard copy, as a PowerPoint presentation, etc.

G. Monitoring and Evaluation

Consider the following questions:

- Who will monitor the expectations and **outcomes** set forth in the agreement to ensure that the agreement is working effectively?
- How often will the **outcomes** of the agreement be evaluated?
- What specific state and local data will be used to measure adherence to timelines in the agreement?
- What will characterize an outcome as inappropriate?
- What process will be used to determine changes needed in the agreement?
- When will the identified changes be made?
- How often and when will the responsible parties meet to review and revise the agreement?
- Who is responsible for scheduling the meeting for participants to review and revise?
- How will the team use information gained from available community or statewide surveys of families and staff?

The transition team should establish steps to monitor the effectiveness of the interagency agreement that are consistent and attainable. The agreement should clearly state what procedures or process would be used to monitor the agreement; how often; and, specifically, when and what data will be used. So that the agreement does not go without review indefinitely, this section should state which agency is responsible for calling the meeting to review and revise the agreement.

In addition to steps determined by the team, Florida's Transition Project has developed the following tools/resources to assist communities in measuring their outcomes:

- Template for a family survey of satisfaction, which can be modified for local use to disseminate and measure family satisfaction after the child has transitioned
- Template for a staff survey of concerns/needs, which can be modified for local use to determine what areas are creating issues and where training can be targeted
- Checklist to help communities assess their interagency agreement's format and contents
- PowerPoint presentation, *Road Map to Interagency Transition Agreements*, to help community groups become informed about the process of developing an agreement

(These materials can be accessed on the project Web site at www.floridatransitionproject.com)

H. Interagency Dispute Resolution Process

Points to consider in the process are:

- The way in which disputes or conflicts that may arise during the course of implementing the agreement will be resolved
- The immediate and informal steps that can be taken
- A more formal process that can be used when needed

The transition team should establish standards for dispute resolution to ensure the integrity of a system for a continuum of services. For example:

- The team may want to outline a more informal method for minor disputes or differences.
- The team can identify how to access a more formal process in the event the team is unable to resolve a dispute, perhaps using one of the processes in place at one of the participating agencies.

By having dispute resolution procedures defined and in place, there will be no confusion if the occasion should arise when intervention is necessary.

I. Duration of the Interagency Agreement

Defining the duration of the agreement:

- Ensures that the agreement remains responsive and effective
- Facilitates monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the agreement
- Asserts and re-asserts the agreement so that it continues to remain a viable, living document for guiding transition
- Takes into account the changing environment of agency services within the community

The agreement should establish and define the beginning and ending month, day, and year of the agreement's effectiveness. This will help all participants in planning for needed updates.

J. Authorizing Signatures

Consider the following:

- Who or what position within each agency has the authority to sign?
- What process will the team use to obtain signatures from all the agencies and accomplish that in a timely manner?

As stated earlier, the person responsible for signing in each participating agency should be identified at the beginning of the interagency agreement process and be kept apprised throughout its development.

Once the team agrees to the language and intent of the agreement, the next step is getting it signed. This can be a formidable task. Programs often send individuals directly involved in providing or coordinating services to represent them on the transition team. These representatives may not have the authority to actually sign the agreement. The individuals with the authority to sign the agreement often include program directors, school district superintendents, special education directors, and organization presidents.

What if an agency is hesitant to sign?

There is always a possibility of a last-minute change, despite all of your best efforts.

Each member of your team has worked hard to represent the interests of your program. You have kept your superiors informed of the progress. Possibly you have taken them previous drafts for feedback. Nonetheless, you may find that despite your best efforts, someone refuses to sign the agreement unless certain language is changed.

If this happens, you will need to reconvene the team to discuss and approve the change and alert any previous signers of the change that is being requested. All parties must agree to the change before it can be implemented. This can be frustrating to those of you who have invested much time and effort into writing the initial agreement. Your agreement may circulate several times before all parties agree to sign.

—FACTS/LRE University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The team must discuss and agree upon the process members will use for obtaining the actual signatures as soon as the agreement is completed. A point person will need to coordinate the signing process and the final dissemination of the agreement.

Note: There may be exceptions to the typical signing process.

- Some agencies/programs may not be permitted to sign local agreements, and in this event, the agency contact can be a part of the participant list, but the agency name/signer will not appear as one of the signing entities on the signature page.
- Some local teams may prefer to include only a list of the participants and omit the signature page.

In either of these instances, the procedures are still effective as noted in the document and will serve as the team's intentions to work together in a systematic manner.

K. Incorporating Best Practices

Consider the answers to these questions:

Are there lengthy—yet relevant—good ideas for getting things done that would add value and understanding to the agreement? Are there sample documents you want to include to ensure understanding by anyone reading the agreement? Are there excellent ideas that some of the agencies may want to use as they move toward incorporating best practices?

As you draft your agreement, you will discuss many good ideas regarding transition. However, your team may not feel that all parties to the interagency agreement should be obligated to carry out each of these ideas or practices. Instead, you could include listing them in a "best practices" appendix.

—Facts/LRE University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



A best practices appendix includes activities or items such as:

- A standard form developed by the community for all early intervention agencies to report potential numbers of children to the local education agencies
- A process or format for regularly assessing parent satisfaction with the transition process
- A process or format for regularly assessing staff concerns about transition
- Sending a joint birthday card from the early intervention agency and the local education agency on the child's second birthday
- Recommending that each transition team develop a list of potential service options to distribute to parents prior to the transition
- Designing a transition workshop to teach parents how to prepare for the event (Workshops can be jointly developed and held by the early intervention agency and the local education agency.)
- Providing children with the opportunity to visit the new placement before the actual start date
- Offering toddler play groups through the early intervention agency to give children who are going to preschool an experience in a group situation

How Can Florida's Transition Project Assist Communities in the Process of Creating a Community-wide Transition System?

Florida's Transition Project can offer communities training and services in the following areas as well as others:

- Facilitating *Community Transition Self-Assessment* to determine the current status of the system
- Facilitating the development of comprehensive interagency agreements
- Providing guidance in effective meeting strategies and team building activities
- Assisting in the identification and resolution of interagency issues
- Facilitating conflict resolution
- Providing transition training
- Providing written and Web-based information and resources

Visit the Project Web site at www.floridatransitionproject.com or contact the Coordinator for information about the following items:

- Family Transition Booklet
- Family Survey
- Staff Survey
- Interagency Agreement Checklist
- Transition Tools
 - *Getting to Know Me*
 - *Getting to Know Your New Teacher and School*
 - *Teacher-To-Teacher*

Reference Guide

Appendix A:

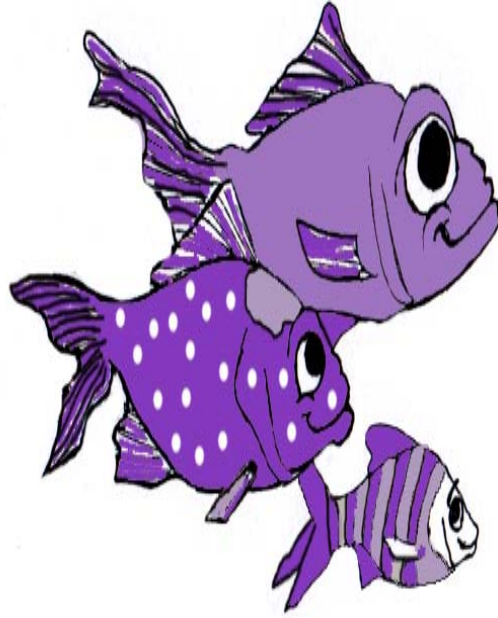
Tips to Remember When Developing an Interagency Agreement

Try to keep in mind the following good ideas:

- Use simple language. Ask yourself if a parent or staff member who is new to the system of services could easily understand the agreement. Break down the jargon.
- Send out a DRAFT to all participants. Continue to “massage” it to acceptability.
- Include families in the development and the feedback process.
- Make the Interagency Agreement as specific as possible.
- Make the roles and responsibilities of staff specific to the position, not specific to the person.
- Use the agreement to guide staff in their work with families and children.
- Think of the agreement as a procedural document that may be amended, as needed, based on the outcome of monitoring and evaluating how it is working.
- Bring in a third party if you get stuck in the process. The neutral perspective of a facilitator can move you through difficult places or discussions and help you keep on track.

Adapted from a presentation by Dr. Mike Wischnowski at the 15th Annual DEC International Early Childhood Conference on Children with Special Needs.

Appendix B:



Getting to Know Me

My Transition Book

My Name

My Birthday

Signature of My Parent(s) and Date

I like to be called by this name: _____

Here is a photo of me: Here is a photo of my family:



The people who make me happy are: _____

We speak this language in our home: _____

My pet is a: _____ My pet's name is: _____

My favorite toys to play with are: _____

A song I like to sing is: _____

The foods I like to eat the most are: _____

The things I'm a little bit afraid of are: _____

The thing I like the most about going to school is:

I like books about:

When I'm outside I like to play on: (For example: swing, trike, playground, with toys, other) _____

Here are some of the words I can say:

My parent(s) or teacher thinks this information would help you to better understand my needs:

I may need this kind of help in the bathroom:

I may need this kind of help in getting dressed:

I may need this kind of help at lunch and snack time:

I may need this kind of help with walking, sitting, standing, or moving around:

When I'm playing outside, I might need a little help with:

This is how I communicate with my parent(s) or teacher: (sign language, pictures, etc.)

This is how I play with other children:

When I get upset, this is what works best to help me:

My parent(s) or teacher thinks this is the most wonderful thing about me:

This is the thing my parent(s) or teacher hopes I'll be able to keep doing when I start my new program:

Important medical information that you need to know about me:

I have some allergies and they are: -----

I take this kind of medication: -----

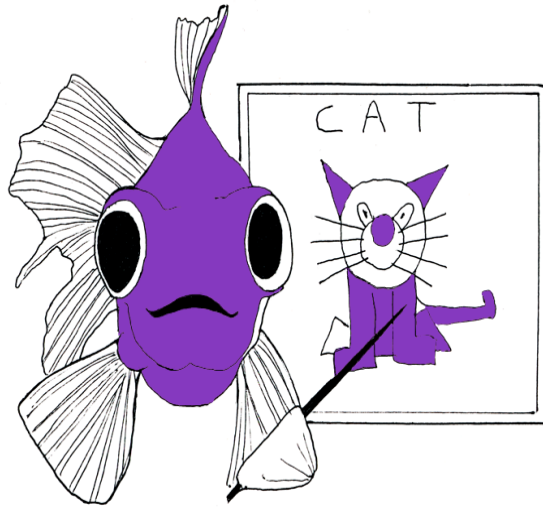
I have been in the hospital or treated for this medical condition:

Helpful information my parent(s) or teacher wants to share:

Look on the back for any other information or pictures, too!

For additional copies visit the Web site www.floridatransitionproject.com or contact the Project Coordinator, bettianne@floridatransitionproject.com

Appendix C:



***Getting to Know Your New Teacher and
School***

I will be your new teacher: _____

I speak these languages: _____

This is how your family can contact me: _____

The school's Web site address is: _____

My Web page and/or Web e-mail address is: _____

Other people who help in our classroom are: _____

Here is some information about my teaching experience and background:

Here is a photo of me:

Here is a photo of our
Classroom

Here is a photo of our
Playground

These are some of the activities we will do each day at school: _____

One of my favorite songs to sing with the boys and girls is: _____

One of my favorite books to read to the boys and girls is: _____

Some helpful things to know:

Breakfast costs: _____ Lunch costs: _____
We eat lunch at: _____ We take a nap at: _____
School starts at: _____ School ends at: _____
Bus riders leave at: _____

Here is a list of supplies to bring to school: _____
- _____

Special events I like to have families help me with are: _____

Here are some ways that your family can be involved in our classroom activities:
(And anything else families want to suggest)

- Volunteering in the classroom
 - Help in making educational games
 - Bringing in recyclable materials for our art activities
 - Reading stories
 - Going on field trips
 - Other activities: _____
- _____
- _____

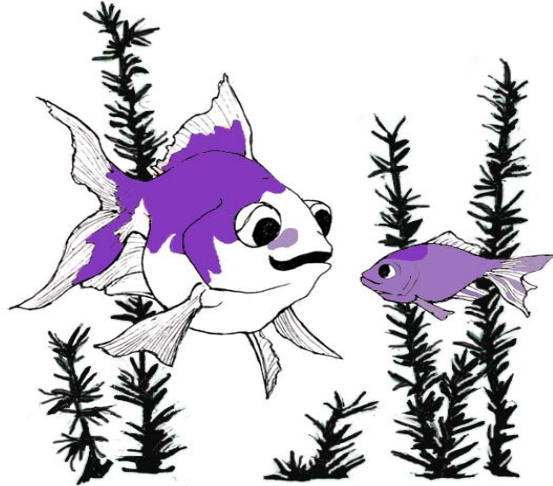
Something really special about our classroom is: _____

On our first day of school we will: _____

Welcome!

Visit the Web site www.floridatransitionproject.com to download additional copies.
For a version that can be completed on computer, contact the Project Coordinator at
(352) 372-2573, or by e-mail at bettianne@floridatransitionproject.com

Appendix D:



Teacher To Teacher: Sending and Receiving Child Transition Information

To share non-health-related information about a child's classroom experiences when a child is transitioning from one educational setting to another.

About:

Child's Name

Parent's Signature Required

Date

Sending Teacher's Name: _____
School/Program Name: _____ Fax: _____
E-mail Address at School/Program: _____

Receiving Teacher's Name: _____
School/Program Name: _____ Fax: _____
E-mail Address at School/Program: _____
Child's Name: _____

1. General comments about child's progress in our classroom:

2. Strategies we used to build social and behavioral skills: -----

3. Strategies we used successfully with-out-of bounds behaviors: -----

4. Strategies we used for communicating: -----

5. Strategies we used successfully in other domains: -----

6. Assessments completed:Comments:

Date completed: -----

Name of instrument: -----

7. Accommodations/adaptations used successfully to help the child participate fully in the classroom:

___ Schedule changes (picture schedules)___ Furniture arrangement

___ Hand over hand assistance___ Communication boards

___ Sign language___ Redirection

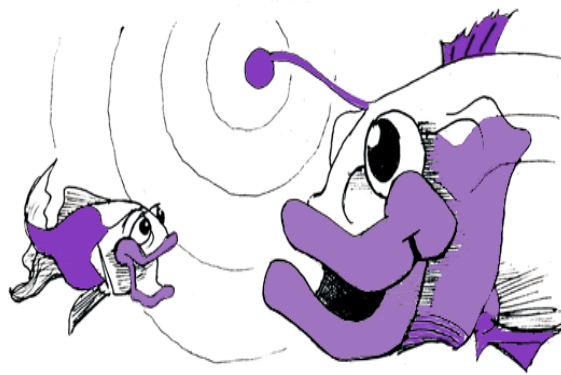
___ Social stories ___ Assistive Technology:

8. Suggested areas of development to build on in the next classroom:

9. The child's favorite school activities: -----

Please let me know how _____ is doing in your class after a six-week adjustment period by using the Teacher Follow up form on next page.

Thanks! -----



From the Receiving Teacher to the Sending Teacher

Comments about children who recently transitioned into a new educational setting

Child's Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Yes: ___ No: ___ 1. The information you provided to help the child's transition into our classroom was very useful.

2. More information about the child would be helpful in this area: _____

Yes: ___ No: ___ 3. Overall, the child has adjusted well to our classroom.
Comments: _____

4. I have one or two suggestions that might have made the transition into our classroom go more smoothly for the staff or the child: _____

Any other information/comments: _____

Appendix E:

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Interagency Agreement Checklist

Interagency Agreements provide a clear, easy-to-follow road map for communities to use that will facilitate smooth, comfortable transitions for the family and child from one service provider to another. Interagency agreements support them in their transitions from birth to entry into kindergarten. Some of the benefits of agreements involve the establishment of guidelines, including spelling out procedures, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and defining specifically how agencies/programs and school district programs will work together.

The following checklist outlines recommended components of interagency transition agreements.

1. Purpose

- The document states the purpose and outcomes to be achieved as a result of the agreement.
- The population addressed in the agreement is defined.
- The agencies/programs who can achieve the stated outcomes are identified.
- Are there other agencies/programs that should be involved in the development of the agreement? Yes: No: If yes, please list:

2. Description of Agencies/Programs Involved

- The services provided by the agencies/programs are listed in a clear and consistent manner.
- A description of how children qualify for the services of the agencies/ programs is provided (eligibility requirements).
- The geographic region the agencies/programs cover are identified.

3. Requirements Impacting the Agreement

- Federal/state statutes, state rules, program operations guidelines, and other individual agency/program requirements are included in the agreement.

4. Definition of Terms Used

All pertinent terms, which define the community's transition system, are included in the list of definitions. The following list of examples is not comprehensive or exclusive of other terms the community may wish to define, relative to its system:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural environments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exceptional Student Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Receiving agency/program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Screening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Educational Plan (IEP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sending agency/program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Service coordination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transition | <input type="checkbox"/> IDEA, Part C |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other terms to be added: | <input type="checkbox"/> IDEA, Part B |
| <hr/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten <hr/> |

5. Activities, Procedures, and Timelines

- ___ The referral process is clearly outlined to the receiving agency from sending agency/program.
- ___ The method and timeline for notification from Early Steps to the Local Education Agency (LEA) is outlined.
- ___ There are provisions for holding the Transition Conference and inviting participants.
- ___ Procedures for child evaluation and assessment are clearly outlined.
- ___ There are identified procedures for special circumstances, such as summer birthdays and children who enter Early Steps late.
- ___ There is a clear process for preparing staff, the child, and the family for transition.
- ___ There is a procedure in place to provide for follow-up assessment of the transition process. (Periodic feedback from administrators, families, and staff to evaluate the process.)

6. Implementation of the Agreement

- ___ There is a plan for dissemination of the agreement.
- ___ There are provisions for when and how families and agency/program staff will be informed and trained.
- ___ There is a plan for how often the partners will meet to discuss the effectiveness of the agreement and who will be responsible for scheduling the meeting.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Agreement

- ___ The agreement defines how the community will determine if the agreement is working. (What data will they use/who will provide it?)
- ___ There is a timeline for evaluation of the agreement. (How often will data be reviewed and who will participate?)
- ___ A procedure is in place for making needed changes to the agreement. (How often will the partners meet to make changes/updates, and who will be responsible for scheduling the meeting and inviting participants?)

8. Interagency Dispute Resolution Process

- ___ The method of resolving conflict is clearly defined.

9. Duration

- ___ The period of time the agreement covers is stated.

10. Authorizing Signatures

- ___ The agreement contains the necessary authorized signatures, representing agencies listed in Sections I and II of the agreement.

11. Information missing from the agreement being reviewed: _____

12. Other Comments: _____

For assistance in revising or developing an interagency agreement, contact:
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Appendix G:

Transition Interagency Agreement Development Tool

This Transition Interagency Agreement Development Tool is designed to provide local communities with some helpful components they may want to use in the process of developing their local interagency transition agreements.

1. Description of Agencies/Programs Participating in the Interagency Agreement

Recommended participants include, but are not limited to:

a. Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) – assists individuals from age three years and older who have developmental disabilities, their families, and/or their guardians.

Eligibility Criteria: Individuals who have one or more of the following diagnoses are eligible to receive services: mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida, and Prader-Willi syndrome. Individuals who meet the level of care for an Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled (ICF/DD) meet the eligibility criteria for the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waiver and the Family and Supported Living (FSL) Waiver. The Florida Legislature determines funding for HCBS and FSL waiver services annually. At the present time, there is a waiting list for individuals who request HCBS and FSL waiver funding. Individuals and their families/guardians may apply for services at their local APD area office.

b. Children's Medical Services (CMS) Primary Care – A program of the CMS network that provides CMS patients with a medical home where they can receive sick and well-child care, immunizations, testing, prescription drugs, and support.

Eligibility Criteria: Children under age 21 whose serious or chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions require extensive preventive and maintenance care beyond that required by typically healthy children.

c. Division of Blind Services (DBS) – provides direct and contracted services to facilitate the participation of children—birth through five years of age—who are blind and visually impaired, within family, community, and educational settings. In addition, DBS annually sponsors early intervention services delivered through community rehabilitation programs. Need-based services may include, but are not limited to, identification, vision-specific evaluations and interventions, and the provision of assistive devices and other support services.

Eligibility Criteria: Children under the age of six and their families are eligible for vision-specific early intervention services provided or sponsored by DBS if the following criteria are met (Section 413.092, F.S.):

- i. The presence of a bilateral visual impairment, which with best correction for that individual, constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to the child's ability to learn or function independently.
- ii. A reasonable expectation that services may benefit the child and family in terms of education, independence, and transition.

d. Early Head Start – promotes healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhancing development of very young children, and promoting family health and self-sufficiency. The program serves low-income pregnant women, infants, and toddlers from birth to three years. Once enrolled, children are eligible until three years of age when they must re-qualify for transition into another Head Start program or an appropriate preschool setting. Program services include:

- i. Quality early education, both in and out of the home

- ii. Parenting education
- iii. Comprehensive health and mental health services, including services to women before, during, and after pregnancy
- iv. Nutrition education
- v. Family support services

Eligibility Criteria: Families meeting household income and federal poverty guide-lines may be eligible. Federal performance standards require that at least 10 percent of enrollment opportunities be made available to children with disabilities.

e. Early Learning Coalitions – administers early learning programs co-ordinated through grant awards for services with Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs) through the Agency for Workforce Innovation, Office of Early Learning. Each coalition must implement a school readiness plan that includes a comprehensive program of services to enhance the cognitive, social, and physical development of children to achieve the performance standards and outcome measures specified by the Office of Early Learning. Each of the ELCs is required to implement a local Warm Line staffed by an individual who delivers inclusion training and technical assistance to early learning providers. In addition, this individual collaborates with teachers, parents, and other professionals to ensure successful participation in, and transition among, least restrictive early learning environments. ELCs require staff to be familiar with other entities referenced in this agreement.

f. Early Steps – A program of Children’s Medical Services that offers early intervention services and supports to infants and toddlers, birth to thirty-six months, and their families through contracted local offices across the state of Florida.

Eligibility Criteria: A child who has a diagnosis, or suspected diagnosis, that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay; or, the child is eligible for Early Steps with a developmental delay equal to or greater than 1.5 standard deviation on a standardized assessment tool or at least a 25 percent delay in terms of months of age.

g. Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) – provides state-wide diagnostic and instructional support services to district exceptional student education programs. Consistent with the *Florida Statutes*, functions of the FDLRS Associate Centers include enhancement of learner outcomes; partnership between families and professionals; student identification and evaluation; in-service training; assistive, instructional, and administrative technology; interagency services; and implementation of state educational goals and priorities. Functions of the FDLRS Specialized Centers include specialized instructional materials for students with visual and hearing disabilities; teacher preparation in the effective integration of technology into instructional programs; and information, awareness, and training for individuals needing assistive technology support and interventions. The FDLRS University Centers provide a variety of services that might include multi-disciplinary diagnostic and training services. Services are available to district, agency, community, and other personnel working with exceptional students as well as parents and families. There are 19 regional resource centers, 6 specialized centers, 5 regional technology labs, and 5 university centers in the network.

h. Florida’s Central Directory – provides information and referral on disabilities and special health care needs for families, service coordinators, and other professionals who work with children with special needs. The directory can provide information about a wide variety of services available in each local community, education on disability related services, and an advocacy role for families.

i. Head Start – promotes healthy child development, social competence, and enhanced readiness for school for low-income preschool children, ages three to five years, and their families. Federal standards require that Head Start and Early Head Start programs design services based upon the needs of families in their local communities.

Often, one program option does not meet the developmental needs of a child over a three-year period or support the family's changing needs; thus, each program must design program options based upon an assessment of local resources. The federal standards also require that services be planned and delivered in collaboration with other local programs, especially those serving children with disabilities. Preschool Head Start offers comprehensive child development services through center-based, home-based, and combination program options and provides health, mental health, nutrition, and parenting education as well as family support services.

Eligibility Criteria: Families meeting household income and federal poverty guidelines may be eligible. As with Early Head Start, at least 10 percent of enrollment options must be made available to children with disabilities.

j. Healthy Start – provides support services to pregnant women and infants in Florida to improve pregnancy, health and developmental outcomes, increase access to health care, reduce low birth weight and preterm birth, and reduce infant mortality and morbidity. As a voluntary program, Healthy Start services include care coordination, home visiting, and outreach to help ensure access to health care and support to families in reducing identified risk factors at no cost to program participants. Additional services may include breastfeeding education and support, childbirth education and support, parenting support, smoking cessation, nutritional counseling, psychosocial counseling, interconceptional counseling and education, and other risk-appropriate care. The program provides a professional assessment of their needs, identifies resources, and provides timely and important linkages, referrals, or services to reduce the risk of poor birth outcomes and poor infant development up to three years of age.

Eligibility Criteria: Healthy Start identifies women and infants at risk for poor outcomes through a confidential risk screening process. There is no cost to the individual for the Healthy Start Prenatal and Infant risk screens or to participants for receiving program services.

k. School District Prekindergarten Program for Children with Disabilities – provides specially designed instruction and related services to meet the unique needs of three-, four-, and five-year-old children with disabilities and their families. These services, available in all Florida school districts, are provided by school districts at no cost to the family. Prekindergarten special education is part of the exceptional student education program offered through the local district to all children with disabilities, ages three through twenty-one.

Eligibility Criteria: Based on criteria in the State Board of Education Rules, eligibility is determined through a multidisciplinary evaluation process. Children may be served in public schools, public or private community programs, at home, or in a hospital. Children served include those who meet the criteria for any of the following programs:

- i. Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ii. Deaf or hard-of-hearing
- iii. Dual-sensory impaired
- iv. Developmental delay
- v. Emotional/behavioral disabilities
- vi. Mentally handicapped
- vii. Physically impaired with orthopedic impairment
- viii. Physically impaired with other health impairment
- ix. Physically impaired with traumatic brain injury
- x. Specific learning disabilities
- xi. Speech/language impaired
- xii. Visually impaired

2. Requirements Impacting the Interagency Agreement

- a. Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 393.064, Florida Statutes (F.S.)
- b. Blind Babies Legislation, Section 413.092, F.S.
- c. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004, Public Law 108-446, Part C and Part B
- d. Head Start Federal Act, 45 CFR 1301-1310
- e. Healthy Families, 409.153 F.S.
- f. Healthy Start Care Coordination, 64F-3, Florida Administrative Code (FAC.), 383.011 F.S.
- g. School Health Services Act, 381.0056 F.S.
- h. School Readiness Act, Chapter 411.01, F.S.
- i. State Board of Education Rules, Chapter 6A-6, Special Programs for Exceptional Students, FAC.
- j. Transfer of Assistive Technology, 1003.575, F.S.
- k. Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Act, Part V of Section 1002, F.S.

3. Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are examples of those that help to define the system of services for children prenatal to five years:

Assessment – an ongoing collaborative process, including systematic observation and analysis designed to determine the child's unique strengths, competencies, resources, and needs along with the family's priorities and concerns. The assessment leads to identification of the appropriate caregiving and learning environments to benefit the child's development and assists in planning for appropriate educational services.

Assistive Technology – An assistive device is any item, piece of equipment, or product system—whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized—that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. Exception: the term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of such device.

Child Care – the provision of childcare in a licensed, licensed-exempt, faith-based, registered, or informal setting.

Cultural Competence – the demonstration of respect for the rights, opinions, and concerns of families from all backgrounds. Services must be sensitive and responsive to cultural differences. Caregivers are aware of the impact of culture and possess skills to help provide services that respond appropriately to a person's unique cultural differences, including race and ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, or physical disability. They also adapt their skills to fit a family's values and customs.

Children's Registry and Information System (CHRIS) – a confidential data information system used by FDLRS to assist school districts in the educational planning of service needs and support coordination of referrals.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) – specially designed instruction that is provided by school districts or others at no cost to parents to meet the unique needs of eligible students, ages three through twenty-one years, who have a disability.

Evaluation – the process and procedures used by appropriate qualified personnel to determine a child's initial eligibility for programs.

Family – parents or guardians, siblings, grandparents, caregivers and other persons designated as family members by parents or guardians.

Family Resource Specialist (FRS) – an individual employed by Early Steps (Part C) who is available to assist families with information, support, and connection to other families. This person must be a family member of a child with special needs who received services or would have been eligible for early intervention services.

FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act – legislation that protects the privacy and confidentiality of student education records.

Florida Administrative Code (FAC.) – used when referencing State Board of Education Rules or other state agency rules. For example: Rule 6A-6.03012, FAC.

Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)/Child Find – a resource, referral, and screening agency for children, birth through age twenty-one years, not enrolled in public school, who may be eligible for Exceptional Student Education Services.

Florida Central Directory – a component under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), Part C. Each state that receives funds must have a central directory that includes information on services, resources, and experts available in the state and research and demonstration projects being conducted in the state.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – refers to specially designed instruction and related services provided at public expense in conformity with the individual educational plan.

HIPAA – The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act – provides the structure for sharing Personal Health Information (PHI) and restricts sharing among providers without specific consent of the patient. Does not apply to student records.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004, Part B – a federal entitlement program that requires states to provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to children with disabilities from ages three through twenty-one years. Eligibility criteria are mandated through federal and state regulations, and services are supported with public funds.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004, Part C – a federal entitlement program that states participate in voluntarily, and requires states to provide a statewide, community-based, comprehensive, coordinated, family-focused, multidisciplinary, interagency program of early intervention services for eligible infants and toddlers from birth to age three years with a developmental delay or who have an established condition resulting in a developmental delay, and their families within their natural environment. Florida's early intervention program is called "Early Steps."

Inclusion – Inclusion is a term used to describe the concept that supports the right of all children, regardless of abilities, to participate actively in natural environments within their communities. Natural environments are those in which the child would spend time if he or she did not have a disability. These settings include—but are not limited to—home, preschool, nursery settings, Head Start programs, kindergarten, neighborhood school classrooms, child care, places of worship, recreational (such as community playgrounds and community events), and other settings that all children and families enjoy.

Individual Educational Plan (IEP) – a written statement that describes the specially designed instruction and related services that will be provided to students with disabilities ages three through twenty-one years. The IEP is the authorizing document for services provided through Part B of IDEA. The IEP is developed jointly by a team

composed of the child's family and professionals to meet the needs of a child eligible for IDEA, Part B services.

Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) – The IFSP form documents and guides the early intervention process for children with disabilities and their families in accordance with the IDEA, Part C. The IFSP is developed jointly by a team composed of the child's family and professionals to meet the needs of a child eligible for Early Steps and his or her family. The IFSP authorizes the types of services the child and family need, as well as the frequency, location, and provider of the services.

Late Entry – refers to children who are entering Early Steps 135 days or less prior to their third birthday.

Local Education Agency (LEA) – the local public school district in which the child resides that is responsible for the provision of IDEA, Part B, specially designed instruction and related services.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – An educational setting or program where a child with disabilities receives services designed to meet his or her needs while being educated with children without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate.

Medicaid – a program that provides medical coverage to low-income individuals and families. The state and federal government share the costs of the Medicaid program. Medicaid services in Florida are administered by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA). Medicaid eligibility in Florida is determined either by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Social Security Administration.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation – Multidisciplinary evaluation is the involvement of two or more disciplines or professionals working as a team in the provision of evaluation and assessment activities and in the development of the IFSP. With this approach, the team individually plans, conducts, and reports the results related to their discipline areas. Results are shared with the other team members who are working with the child, and the contributions of each team member are respected.

Natural Environments – using daily activities and routines as vehicles for addressing skill development in one or more particular domains of development at a variety of times throughout the child's daily schedule of activities in the home or in community settings in which children without disabilities participate.

Notification – an IDEA requirement for local Early Steps to provide notice to the local school district of children soon turning three years old.

Payor of Last Resort – IDEA, Part C/Early Steps funds can only be used for early intervention services that an eligible child needs when no other resources are available. These other resources include federal, state, local and private resources, including but not limited to: Title V of the Social Security Act (relating to maternal and child health); Title XIX of the Social Security Act (relating to Medicaid); and any medical program administered by the Department of Health. After it has been documented that no other funds are available, IDEA, Part C/Early Steps funds will be used for early intervention services.

Primary Service Provider – the individual on the IFSP team with Early Steps that has the responsibility to ensure that exchange of information and discussions between team members occur on a frequent basis. The primary service provider is the identified professional on the IFSP team that works with the family/primary caregivers on a regular basis and with other members of the team through consultation and/or joint visits.

Procedural Safeguards – requirements established to protect the rights and responsibilities of eligible children and their families and the rights of agencies as related to Part B and Part C services under IDEA.

Receiving Agency/Program – the agency/program to which a child will be transitioning.

Serving Hearing Impaired Newborns Effectively (SHINE) – the component of Florida Early Steps that provides early intervention services to families of children with hearing impairment. SHINE services provide parents with information and support shortly after the hearing loss of their infant or toddler has been confirmed. SHINE providers work as part of a team that provides assessment, ongoing intervention services, and evaluation of child progress to families and caregivers with the goal of meeting the unique communication and developmental needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Screening – a brief, standardized procedure designed to quickly survey a child's sensory, behavioral, and developmental skills to determine whether the child is progressing as expected or if further evaluation is needed.

Sending Agency/Program – the agency/program providing services to the child and family prior to transition.

Service Coordinator (or Family Service Coordinator) – the individual responsible for coordinating the implementation of the ISFP. This includes activities that promote and support the families' capacities and competencies to identify, obtain, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate resources and services to meet their needs.

Service Providers – individuals or agencies in the community that provide services to families.

Surrogate Parent – the individual assigned to protect the child's interests as it relates to early intervention or special education services whenever the parents of the child are not known; or the agency/program cannot, after reasonable efforts, locate the parents; or the child is a ward of the State. State workers are prohibited from being surrogate parents due to conflict of interest issues.

Transition – the process supported by collaboration among agencies to provide a continuum of services for children and families as the child moves from one program or educational setting to another.

Transition Conference – a conference held with the family and service coordinator not less than 90 days and not more than 9 months prior to the child's third birthday, along with a representative from the potential receiving agency(s)/program(s) and other individuals preferred present by the family. The purpose of the conference is to develop outcomes and strategies for the child and family to move from the Early Steps program at age 3 years to the most appropriate early care and educational setting (Head Start, school district prekindergarten disabilities, community preschool, or childcare).

4. Interagency Dispute Resolution Process

In the event that a conflict relevant to this transition interagency procedures agreement arises among the partners, the following procedures will be used in the order specified:

1. Staff from the agency/program with a dispute shall provide written communication that identifies the conflict, proposed action, and a summary of factual, legal, and policy grounds.
2. The staff from the receiving agency/program shall provide a written response, which includes proposed solutions to the dispute, no more than thirty (30) days after receipt of notice of the conflict.
3. Upon resolution of the conflict, a joint written statement so indicating will be developed and disseminated by a representative of each partner.
4. Should additional action be required, a report from both agencies will be submitted to the appropriate parties who signed the agreement for the agency/program.

Until final resolution of a dispute, each of the partners to this Interagency Agreement shall respect the policies and procedures of each other.

For assistance in developing or revising a community interagency transition agreement, contact the Coordinator of Florida's Transition Project:

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Notes:

Notes:



Florida Department of Education
Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner

ESE 312687