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Reflection SPED 856 Transition Education and Services

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## **Personal Context: A Parent and an Educator**

As a mother of a neurodiverse son and a disabled daughter, I have firsthand experience of how crucial well-planned transitions can be for children who need additional support. When my son attended this school, I quickly learned how inconsistent or minimal transition services could be—sometimes little more than “lip service.” This realization was enlightening and frustrating: I saw the potential for genuinely collaborative, supportive planning, yet through this interview and others, I recognized how often those possibilities were unrealized.

Professionally, I am an early childhood educator—far removed from the high school-to-college transition. However, I have learned that the skills, strategies, and collaboration required to help a child move successfully from preschool to kindergarten mirror those needed for older students moving from high school into college or the workforce. At every level, students benefit from a comprehensive approach that involves all stakeholders, encourages self-determination, and centers the child’s strengths.

## **Turning to PACER’s Guidelines**

PACER emphasizes the importance of early and thoughtful planning for any significant educational transition. The same principles apply whether a child is heading to kindergarten or college. Below are some key areas highlighted in PACER’s guidelines that align with my experiences and observations:

### **1. Student Involvement and Self-Determination**

Even at the preschool level, it is vital to include children in developmentally appropriate discussions about their interests, preferences, and goals. PACER recommends helping

children begin to advocate for themselves, however simple that might be at an early age (e.g., choosing activities or communicating needs). Fostering self-determination lays a strong foundation for lifelong advocacy.

## **2. Building Social and Academic Skills**

PACER underscores the value of supporting children's growth in social and academic domains. In preschool and kindergarten, children need opportunities to practice social interaction, self-regulation, and communication. Tailoring instruction and interventions to each child's strengths while supporting areas of need helps ensure a smoother transition and sets them up for continued success.

## **3. Family Engagement and Collaboration**

The diversity of family backgrounds, structures, cultures, and languages means that one-size-fits-all approaches rarely work. According to PACER, a child's transition plan should be developed in close partnership with families. This partnership ensures that families feel heard, respected, and fully informed about available services, accommodations, and resources. In my experience, when families understand and contribute to the plan, children experience more consistent support and fewer gaps between home and school.

## **4. Coordinating with Educators and Outside Resources**

PACER encourages teams to bring all relevant professionals to the table, including early childhood educators, special education teachers, and outside experts who can support a child's needs (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, or behavior specialists). A multi-disciplinary team ensures that each aspect of a child's development is considered and strategies are aligned across environments. My personal frustration has

often been that these experts are available but not always included in transition planning, or they do not include us. When we work together, the difference in outcomes can be remarkable.

## 5. Ensuring Families Know What Supports Are Available

One of the most straightforward yet significant recommendations from PACER is to communicate clearly and early about the services, accommodations and supports children may be eligible for. As a parent, I remember feeling overwhelmed by the jargon and procedures. A clear roadmap—explaining everything from extended-day kindergarten options to specific therapy services—would have eased the transition. Schools and districts should proactively contact families with easy-to-understand guides, checklists, and timelines.

### Implications for Early Childhood Education

In my role as an early childhood educator, these principles from PACER, our learning and my own experiences have direct implications for how I approach transitions:

- **Start Planning Early:** Collaborate with families well before the final weeks of preschool to discuss their hopes, concerns, and questions regarding kindergarten. Early planning provides ample time to gather necessary documents, schedule evaluations, and meet with relevant professionals.
- **Foster Self-Advocacy:** Even young children can practice expressing their choices and preferences. Encouraging them to communicate their needs in small ways—such as selecting which center to play in or deciding when they need a break—helps them develop a sense of control and agency.

- **Emphasize Strengths:** Rather than focusing on deficits, develop an educational plan that highlights a child's natural abilities. For instance, a child who loves music might benefit from musical cues for transitions or learning songs that reinforce social skills.
- **Utilize Community Resources:** If a child's family requires connections to external services (e.g., mental health support, translation services, or specialized therapy), I can assist in bridging that gap by providing referrals or introducing them to the relevant professionals.
- **Continuous Communication:** Effective communication is essential. Regularly checking in with families—before and after a child starts kindergarten—helps everyone adapt more smoothly and address issues swiftly.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on my experiences as both a parent of neurodiverse children and an early childhood educator reinforces my conviction that successful transitions depend on early, thoughtful, and collaborative planning. By integrating the principles recommended by PACER—student involvement, family engagement, interdisciplinary teamwork, and clear communication—educators can facilitate the transition from preschool to kindergarten for children receiving special education services. Ultimately, these strategies empower families, promote children's self-determination, and help establish a foundation for future academic and personal growth.

Through this process, I have learned that meaningful transition planning is more than just a policy or a checklist; it is an ongoing partnership rooted in mutual respect and a shared commitment to each child's success. While the challenges may feel daunting at times, witnessing

a child thrive in a new environment serves as a powerful reminder of why these efforts are so important.

## References

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