

Special Education Program Review Advisory Group Preschool Subgroup Recommendations

- Some existing preschool concerns:
 - Visibility of administration
 - Staff meetings are too infrequent
 - Case loads above trigger since day
 - Beginning the school year with fewer classrooms instead of planning ahead for incoming families
 - Lack of clear kindergarten transition plan
 - Lack of clear birth-3 into pre-k transition plan
 - Lack of clear plan for students transitioning from sped to gen-ed classrooms
 - Appropriate staffing and funding
 - Family outreach and education
 - Lack of transparency from district leadership

Recommendations

1. Establish and distribute a handbook for incoming families.
 - Serves as an introduction to the district and key administrators
 - Explains rights of all students
 - Explains what an IEP is and procedures for evaluation, implementation and updates
 - Suggests ways to connect with other families (list of PTA/PSOs, event list, etc.)
 - Goal is to ensure families know what the district can and should provide for their students so parents and guardians feel more knowledgeable about their student's education from day one.
2. Improve the transition to Kindergarten
 - IEP meetings for outgoing pre-k students should include Kindergarten prep and planning with their case manager and all other staff members on the student's IEP team
 - District should proactively ensure that each preschooler entering Kindergarten has an IEP with updates specific to kindergarten transition
 - With the cut of Jump Start, the district should implement a program similar to jump start for students with IEPs
 - Students need an opportunity to familiarize themselves with their new environment, new teachers, the longer school day, and bathroom access.
 - In order to keep costs as manageable as possible, this jump start program for students with IEPs headed into Kindergarten could be a program that's one or two days (instead of a full week)
3. Implement a transition strategy for children receiving early intervention services entering the district into pre-k
 - Prior to beginning pre-k, students and their families should receive the handbook described in recommendation one
 - The district should continue to partner with local providers of early intervention services to ensure that families within the boundary learn about the district so that they are better prepared to have their child evaluated and begin services as soon as their child qualifies.
 - The student's case manager and IEP team should ensure the family fully understands what their IEP covers, the student's rights, ask if there are questions based on information in the handbook and set expectations for timelines with future IEP meetings

- The student's teacher and/or case manager should ensure the family is notified of upcoming connection opportunities, and groups that they can participate in, such as SEAC and their school's PTA/PSO
- This subcommittee recognizes that it is difficult to identify every child that qualifies for early intervention services between birth and three years of age. The district should take on outreach projects aimed at helping to identify children that qualify for services between three and five years of age and help them transition into the district even if they aren't transitioning from other providers.
- The district should consider creating a role to operate as a "Family Liaison" or "Family Engagement/Outreach Coordinator" to accomplish these objectives.
 - In lieu of creating a new job position, the district should consider including these objectives in the job description of relevant positions within the district.

4. Improve the experience for students transitioning from sped classrooms to gen-ed classrooms

- For students that will transition from sped classrooms to gen-ed classrooms, the student's current case manager and IEP team should plan and hold a meeting with the student's family to prepare for the transition.
- If the student's future teacher or case manager is known they should be included in this meeting to ease the transition and create a "warm handoff"
- Educate the family on the differences between the environment their child is leaving and will transition to and how the family can help their student process any difficulties they have with the transition.
- Educate the family on services that continue to be available and key contacts, staff members, etc. that will be good resources for the family as their student transitions to a new classroom.

5. Visibility of Administration

- Teachers report that staff meetings are infrequently held. Administration should implement guidelines for expectations on frequency of staff meetings and ensure schools and staff are following those guidelines
- Administration should ensure all guidelines for participating in IEP meetings, classroom visits and observations, etc. are being adhered to. This includes guidelines that call for directors to participate in IEP meetings and be on site at school locations.

6. Advocate for appropriate staffing and funding sources

- It is well known that funding provided by the state is insufficient for covering the expenses associated with sped programs in the district.
- Transparency from the district regarding staffing, funding, planned cuts, leadership updates and more needs to be greatly improved. The preschool model has seen drastic changes over the past two years and staff should not be faced with so much uncertainty. Leadership in the pre-k department should allocate time in their weekly schedule to proactively communicate with staff and families with the goal of increasing transparency.
- Advocate for appropriate staffing by encouraging the district and board to plan ahead.
 - Start the year with as many classrooms as you'll need for the *entire* year. Utilize information regarding numbers of children who will be aging out of birth to three programs to determine more accurately how many total classrooms will be needed. The classrooms will start off a little smaller in September, and kids get added throughout the year as they enter pre-k. Currently the year starts with the least number of classrooms possible, and classrooms are added as the number of students increases, which creates extra mid-year work to locate additional teachers, prep and open additional classrooms, etc.

- Advocate for funding sources
 - The district needs to encourage families and educate on how to contact state and federal representatives that can bring these issues to legislative sessions in an effort to improve funding from the state and federal level.
 - The district should be transparent about the work done to advocate for improved funding from the state and federal level and communicate updates on that work to families in the district in an effort to be transparent and encourage families to be more involved.

7. Explore other opportunities for outreach and education with families in the district

- Families aging out of pre-k with students going into Kindergarten can volunteer to be a “mentor” to an incoming family
 - Goal is to ensure incoming families feel a sense of community
 - Have a thorough understanding of what their child is entitled to with their education
 - Be another source of information about the district and community groups (PTA, PSO, parent nights, etc)
 - Ensure that there are mentors fluent in more than one language and that represent other cultures to improve accessibility for incoming families.
 - Natural Leaders is an existing program but it is relatively unknown by families in the district. The district should make efforts to educate families on this program and what it offers via social media, newsletters, website content, and more.
- At the district level, who “carries the torch” when someone is outgoing and someone else is incoming?
 - It should be part of the job description for the different staff positions in the district who important information needs to be handed off to. This will ensure that valuable work that’s already been done doesn’t get forgotten, lost or unnecessarily redone by someone else
 - “Family Engagement Specialist”

8. Look at what other districts are doing.

- What is working elsewhere?
- What is staffing like elsewhere?
- Use this information as a way to generate further ideas and update these recommendations