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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model designed to ease the movement of handicapped children (aged 3-8) from one agency to another. The approach was developed based on interviews with agency personnel and parents. A successful transition is characterized by common understanding of the details of the moves, efficient transfer of records, minimal program disruptions, and adjustment of the child to the new program. The model is organized into six issue areas (transfer of records, timing, awareness of programs, parent involvement, decisionmaking processes, and post placement communication). Each issue area is described in terms of possible strategies, required actions, personnel involved, statement of purpose, expected outcomes, time required, and additional costs. Field testing of the model has occurred in three sites. (CL)

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Movement from Program to Program at an Early Age:

The Early Childhood Transition Process

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Moving from a program in one agency to a program in another agency is a time of stress and uncertainty for the families of young handicapped children. That children will move (or transition) from one agency to another is a certainty. These periods of transition, times of change, times of stress, times of conflict, need to be handled with care and pre-planning in order to insure appropriate programming for the child as well as stability for the family.

There are numerous issues and problems in the transition of children between agencies. These include; who will be involved in the planning, how the planning will occur, when activities will take place, as well as what needs to be planned. The Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model was developed to address these issues.

How the model was developed

The Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model is a product of the Single Portal Intake, Project, a Handicapped Children's Model Project funded through Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Additional support comes through the Regional Interagency Center which is funded by the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, under the State Implementation Grant. The Early Childhood Transition Model was developed in cooperation with parents, administrators, assessment personnel, and direct service staff.

The first step in developing the model was to interview personnel that participate in interagency transitions. Existing procedures,

problems, and suggested strategies for improving the process were identified. Interviews were conducted with administrative, assessment and direct service personnel from school districts, Head Start programs, Early Childhood Developmental Centers, Neuromuscular Centers, and other contractual agencies in Washington and Idaho.

Parents of children who had been through a transition were interviewed about their role in the transition process and their satisfaction. Parents of children who were going through a transition were interviewed over a 6-month period at regular 6- to 8- week intervals in order to ascertain their concerns regarding the transition process and their recommendations for improvements.

The Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model was field tested in urban, suburban, and rural communities in eastern and western Washington. Parents and administrators, assessment personnel and direct service staff from public schools, Early Childhood Developmental Centers, Head Start programs and a contractual agency participated in the field testing of the model. Children served by the transition field tests were from 3 to 8 years old. The model was revised based on the field test evaluation results.

Purpose of the Model

The focus of this model is the transition of handicapped children ages three to eight from Early Childhood Developmental Centers, Neuromuscular Centers, Head Start programs, and other contractual agencies into public school programs. The model may also be used for children moving out of school district programs and into a contractual

agency. The model will improve the transition process for the children and their parents, and for administrative, assessment and direct service personnel of both agencies.

The model was designed to ensure a successful transition for young handicapped children which includes the active participation of the primary individuals involved. Who is involved with such a transition? Major participants include: the child, his or her family, and administrative, assessment, and direct services personnel from both agencies.

Indicators of a successful transition include:

- understanding by everyone of the what, who, how, when and where of the move
- the timely transfer of records which are useful to the receiving agency
- minimal disruption in programs or services
- the adjustment of the child to the new program.

The model procedures provide direction to administrators, assessment, and direct service personnel as well as to parents in planning and carrying out the transition. The strategies do not focus on activities which directly involve the child, but rather, on the activities of the adults working on behalf of the child.

The model has been organized into six issue areas. Each issue area includes: 1) a set of strategies, 2) required actions, 3) who is involved, 4) statement of purpose, 5) expected outcomes, 6) time required and 7) additional costs. All of the materials required for implementation, as well as methods for evaluating the model procedures are provided in the model. Strategies are presented for:

- A) Transfer of Records
- B) Timing
- C) Awareness of Programs
- D) Parent Involvement
- E) Decision Making Process
- F) Post Placement Communication

Explanations, guidelines and forms are included with each strategy.

Each may be modified to fit individual needs.

Each strategy can be used in isolation or in conjunction with other strategies, depending on the needs of the transition partners. The following list identifies the 6 issue areas by capital letters (e.g., A, B, C). The strategies that accompany each issue are listed underneath the issue and are labeled with the issue letter and a number (e.g., A1, B1, C1).

Issue Areas and Strategies

A. TRANSFER OF RECORDS

- A1: Receivers specify type of information and desired format they need, then negotiate information exchange with senders.
- A2: Senders develop a list of current assessment data which is available and negotiate information exchange with receivers.
- A3: Feedback from receivers to senders as to the use of information for determining eligibility, deciding on placements and for planning.

B. TIMING

- B1: Receivers specify desired timelines for transition. Based on proposed timeline, due dates are mutually agreed on. These due dates should include ones for: notification of who is leaving, transition conferences, exchange of records and other pertinent transition events.

C. AWARENESS OF PROGRAMS

- C1: Joint Awareness of Programs-in-service staff training for senders and receivers.
- C2: Reciprocal visits to programs by sending and receiving staffs.
- C3: Receivers develop a criterion-referenced entry level generic skills checklist based on the ability levels of children currently enrolled in the program to assist with pre-planning for the transition.

D. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- D1: Written guidelines are provided to parents to assist parents with the transition.
- D2: Written guidelines are provided to staff to assist parents and children with the transition.

E. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

- E1: Parent transition group meeting is held, co-sponsored by both agencies.
- E2: Senders and parents complete a Child Summary Form. The Child Summary Forms are reviewed by receivers as they prepare for placement decision meetings.
- E3: Formal Transition conferences are held with receivers, senders and parents in attendance.

F. POST PLACEMENT COMMUNICATION

- F1: Senders call receivers 2 weeks following placement to talk about specific children and to check that records were transferred.

These procedures have been field tested in three separate sites and final revisions to the model are almost complete. The overall findings of the field testing indicate positive outcomes. Staffs of the agencies have come to respect and better understand each other when there is systematic planning and discussion around transition issues. Awareness of each other's program leads to understanding and cooperation. Parents feel more in control and as a result more positive about the new program. The "match" between individual child programs across agencies is higher after the use of the model. This includes earlier implementation of programs in the receiving site as well as continuity of goals, objectives and instructional procedures.

We believe simple, straightforward procedures such as those found in the Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model will have a major impact on the lives of young handicapped children and their families. Because the activities required to execute a successful transition are simple, and logical, they are often overlooked or initiated too late to be effective. Successful transitions require careful planning which begins early and involves parents, sending and receiving staffs. This model provides a format for that planning.