University of New England

DUNE: DigitalUNE

5-2019

Improving Kindergarten Transition Practices For Students With Special Needs

Julia "Sandy" Flacke
University of New England

Follow this and additional works at: https://dune.une.edu/theses

Part of the Disability and Equity in Education Commons, Early Childhood Education Commons, Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

Preferred Citation

IMPROVING KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES

FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

By

Julia "Sandy" Flacke

BA University of Maine 1992
MS University of Maine 2003
CAS University of Maine 2007

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

May, 2019

Julia "Sandy" Flacke
May 13, 2019
Educational Leadership

IMPROVING KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES

FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

ABSTRACT

The transition to kindergarten is a magical milestone for children and families. For students identified with special needs, there are additional worries and celebrations to share with the transition team. The research site included in this study comprises pre-K programs that operated through a cooperative agreement between a Maine school district and Head Start. In the State of Maine, preschool students who are identified with a disability are provided services and programming through a Maine Department of Education (MDOE) agency: Child Development Services (CDS). For public pre-K programs in Maine, this created a unique situation. While the pre-K programs are located in and funded by the local school district, CDS is responsible for providing special education services. The purpose of this study is to provide qualitative information that will inform local, state, and national educational systems regarding improving practices around the transition of students with disabilities from pre-K to kindergarten. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting? (2) How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, Head Start administrators, and district administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 stakeholders from public school and Head Start/

pre-K. Data analysis followed Atkinson's four-step process. Three themes emerged: pre-K improvement practices, public school improvement practices, and mutual improvement practices. Nine sub-themes emerged from the qualitative interviews: assessments, pre-K teachers, services in pre-K, observations, services in kindergarten, collaboration, communication, parents, and transition meetings. This study revealed stakeholder's perceptions regarding both strengths and weaknesses with the practice of transition into kindergarten for students with special needs. Districts can develop strategies to improve the transition practice. This could include: The development of an organizational framework to support collaborative pre-K programming and the establishment of a service delivery model for identified pre-K students.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Julia "Sandy" Flacke

It was presented on
12 April, 2019
and approved by:

Dr. Heather Wilmot, Ed.D.
Lead Advisor
University of New England

Dr. Peter Harrison, Ed.D.
Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Dr. Hannah Batley, Ph.D.
Affiliate Committee Member
RSU #3, Unity, ME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family,

I would like to acknowledge my daughters who have grown up watching me balance life as a mom, educator, and student. I can only hope that I have been a role model for you ~ you can do anything you set your mind to!

To my parents and my brother, thank you for always supporting me.

To Steve, who has patiently let late night, or all weekend schoolwork or Skype calls be a part of our life.

To my advisors,

Dr. Wilmot, thank you for being an amazing scholarly advisor. You have lifted my research and writing skills to the next level. I appreciate you being our cheerleader and providing us with inspirational soundtracks!

Dr. Harrison, thank you for your supportive alignment and dependable feedback of my research.

Dr. Batley, thank you for being part of my team at work and also through this process.

To my research group,

Thank you for your support over the past three years.

To my Skype Group,

Thank you all for being a part of my scholarly journey! I could not have done it without our Tuesday night Skype meetings and endless text messages.

To my friends,

Thank you all for being flexible and supportive over the past three years. Letting me leave dinner early or rearrange plans so that I can carve out time to get my homework done.

To my editor,

Thank you Dr. Jennifer Broderick for your stellar editing.

Finally,

To the research participants, without your voice, this research would not be possible. Thank you for all the work that you do to support our students with special needs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, one of big milestones in a child's life was when they started kindergarten. In the past, kindergarten was considered the introduction to school with many programs being a half-day or a few days a week. The definition of kindergarten is literally the "garden of children" or where children are nurtured to grow. This time in a child's life was considered a gentle transition from being home with mom to a more formal learning environment. Kindergarten was traditionally play-based with the focus on learning routines and building relationships.

Current Status of Kindergarten Transition

As the country's family dynamics changed and women were increasingly prevalent in the work force, the need for early care and education grew. In 2011, 32.7 million children in the United States under the age of five were in some form of early care and education arrangement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2013). According to Phillips and Lowenstein (2011), in 1962, through the framework of a welfare law, the federal government reserved funds for child care. This was soon followed by the enactment of the Head Start program in 1965. To support the increase in children entering early care and education at a younger age, states have increased their funding for safe and quality programming. However, the funding for early care and education is mainly focused on supporting families living near the poverty level (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011). One facet of early care and education is the establishment of pre-K programs through the auspices of public education system.

In the State of Maine, both communities and state programs have increased the support for public pre-K programs. According to Educate Maine, in 2015, 45% of the state's eligible preschool students were enrolled in a public or private preschool. In comparison, 58% of

students eligible in New England attended (Educate Maine, 2016). In the State of Maine, all preschool programs must comply with Chapter 124 by July 1, 2017. Chapter 124: Basic Approval Standards: Public Preschool Programs is the state's rule governing the standards for school districts to implement and/or expand their programming for four-year-olds (MDOE, 2018a).

This study explores the current practice and challenges facing teachers, and administrators during the transition from pre-K to kindergarten. This study is located in a rural school district in central Maine. The district is located in a rural farming community with an overall percentage of 83% of students qualifying for free and reduced meals. According to the MDOE website, the October 1, 2017 child count enrollment for the district was 1330 students. The number of pre-K students included in this count is 75 district-wide (MDOE, 2018b).

The district has offered public pre-K programs to qualifying four-year-olds for over 10 years. Initially, the district participated in a collaborative pre-K model that included BroadReach (local early childhood preschool and early intervention program) and with Waldo County Head Start providing the programming. This collaborative model was developed to provide high-quality literacy and preschool programming to children who qualify for Head Start, as well as students who are identified with a disability. Presently, the district has moved to collaborate only with Head Start. While this programming provides high-quality programming for pre-K students and their families, it has left a gap for pre-K students with disabilities.

Statement of the problem, significance, and purpose of the study

Preschool students who are identified with a disability are served through a MDOE agency: CDS. The CDS organization provides identification, case management, and funding for services for children 0-5 with disabilities. For public pre-K programs, this creates a unique

situation. While they are housed and funded by the local school district, the responsibility for providing special education services; referral, child-find, case management, and Individual Education Plan (IEP) monitoring is the responsibility of CDS. In a recent case study of Maine's public preschool programs, Logue, Tu, Fisher, and Mason (2015) found that "principals and teachers in both urban and rural districts expressed concern about delays between referral for screening and receipt of special education services from CDS" (p. v). Indeed, for the schools that were already staffed and ready to serve those children, it was a discouraging situation (Logue et al., 2015).

In the district, the Head Start pre-K programs do not provide specially designed instruction, nor do they hire teachers who are certified special education teachers. Previously pre-K students with disabilities would attend the BroadReach early childhood inclusive program that was staffed with special education teachers with additional staffing to support student needs. The BroadReach program that was located in the same building as the district pre-K programs closed at the end of the 2018 academic school year. For pre-K students with disabilities to receive specially designed instruction as determined by their IEP, they would need to attend an early intervention program in another town. The problem is a lack of a continuum of programs that support the least restrictive environments for preschool students. Currently, if a child is attending a district Head Start program and they have an IEP that identifies goals and services that cannot be provided through Head Start programming, the student is required to leave that program and attend an early intervention program in another town, which is funded through CDS or parent tuition. Additionally, CDS is responsible for coordinating and funding related services for pre-K students with an IEP. Related services are defined in Maine Unified Special Education Regulations (MUSER):

Special education transportation, and such developmental, corrective, and other related

services pursuant to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 United

States Code, Section 1401 (26) and, *as defined by the Commissioner,* as required to assist

children with disabilities to benefit from special education. (MDOE, 2018c, p. 126)

Related services could be speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral interventions. Due to a lack of local resources, the district pre-K students with related services on their IEPs have experienced gaps in their services. This has led to students transitioning into kindergarten with unmet needs and little to no progress on their individual IEP goals. The purpose of this study is to review how current practices are impacting the transition of students with disabilities from pre-K to kindergarten.

Research Questions

The motivation for this research is to provide qualitative information that will inform local, state, and national educational systems regarding improving practices around the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for children with special needs. Research has shown the importance of organizational planning for transition activities (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007; Rous, Harbin, & McCormick, 2006) and collaboration (Hicks, 2011; Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes, 2008; Quintero & McIntyre, 2010) between preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents. An unexamined topic in the current research is the impact of unmet needs such as specially designed instruction (SDI) and related services on preschool students with special needs as they transition to kindergarten. The main purpose of this study is to shed light on how to improve transition practices for students with disabilities. Through a case study approach the following questions are presented:

1. How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

   a. How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, Head Start administrators, and district administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

Conceptual Framework

This research is driven by the organizational development framework. Organizational development is described by Cummings and Worley (2009) as a planned, long-term process, based on commonly held values. French, Bell, and Zawacki (1989) support this with describing organizational development as "a particular type of change process designed to bring about a particular kind of end result" (p. 7). Church, Waclawski, and Seigel (as cited in Gallos, 2006) define organizational development as the process of promoting positive, humanistically-oriented, large-system change. By humanistic, they mean that the change is "about improving the conditions of people's lives in the organizations" (Gallos, 2006, p. 92). One of the frameworks for organizational development focused on how organizational structures can change or should change, based on the information or data collected (Cummings & Worley, 2009).

Incorporating this definition into the framework supports the study regarding how the organization is functioning, including information and voice from families, teachers, and administrators. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) report that change can occur when people inside the organization are visible, accessible, and willing to share their opinions. According to Gallos (2006), effective organizational performance depends on devising and implementing a strategy that fits the new logic.

The findings from the study support planning that is strategic and involves members of the organization. Fullan (2001) and Kotter (2012) provide specific frameworks for organizational leaders to approach and tackle the process of change. Fullan (2001) states that leadership then, is not mobilizing others to solve problems individuals already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed. Kotter (2012) supports this by stating that only leadership can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in any significant way. Leadership teams can get change to stick by anchoring it in the very culture of an organization. This framework supports organizational development theory, incorporating the information from the stakeholders in order to develop a system of change, guided by leadership.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

In order to gain the perspective of stakeholders in the district, this research study used the case study method. The limitations that may exist within this study are the restricted sample size, as this study occurred in one school district in the State of Maine. The information was collected through interviews with a small sample size. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared that having enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case study limits the value of some case studies. This research did not review or validate the effectiveness of interventions or services for children with disabilities. An additional limitation is that the research did not assess student achievement or outcomes. While the intent of the researchers was not for this information to be generalized to other school districts in Maine, the information will provide other school district leaders insight into kindergarten transition practices for pre-K students with disabilities.

Significance

The significance of this research includes the review current transition practices for Pre-K students with disabilities. As district leadership has changed over the past 10 years, so has the

collaboration with community partners to provide pre-K programs. According to Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2010), the average tenure of school superintendents is five to six years with an annual turnover of 14% to 16%. This statistic directly implies part of the shortcomings of the institution described in the problem of practice. As district leadership changes there are implications for the district programming, philosophy, and budgetary decisions. A review of information collected from the district teachers, pre-K teachers, and administrators provided insight into programming and services for students with disabilities. As the district is the institution that is receiving these students and families, it was important to hear from the kindergarten teachers and administrators regarding students with disabilities transitioning into kindergarten.

Definition of Terms

A number of terms have been used to clarify and describe the essential participants, agencies, and artifacts regarding the transition to kindergarten for children with special needs. The terms have been defined below for a beneficial understanding of the proposed research related to the transition to kindergarten and children with special needs.

Child Development Services (CDS): A state intermediate educational unit under section 7209, subsection 3, and any regional sites it chooses to establish and maintain to ensure the provision of child find activities, early intervention services and free, appropriate public education services to eligible children (MDOE, 2018d).

Certification: The State of Maine endorses certification for special education teachers according to the following:

282B	Teacher of Students with Disabilities (0 to age 5)
282E	Teacher of Students with Disabilities (K-8)
282S	Teacher of Students with Disabilities (7-12)

Chapter 124: State of Maine rule governing the standards for school districts to implement and/ or expand their programming for four-year-olds (MDOE, 2018a).

Early intervention services: "Early intervention services" means developmental services that are provided under public supervision; are provided at no cost except where federal or state law provides for a system of payments by families, including a schedule of sliding fees; are designed to meet the developmental needs of a child with a disability, as identified by the individualized family service plan team, in one or more areas including physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, and adaptive development; meet the standards of the State; are provided by qualified personnel; to the maximum extent appropriate, are provided in natural environments, including the home, and community settings in which children without disabilities participate; and are provided in conformity with an individualized family service plan (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Free, appropriate public education (FAPE): "Free, appropriate public education" means special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction and without charge; meet the standards of the department; include an appropriate preschool, elementary school or secondary school education in the State; and are provided in conformity with the individualized family service plan or individualized education program. The CDS system shall provide free, appropriate public education to a preschool child with disabilities who reaches five years of age between July 1st and October 15th if that child is already receiving free, appropriate public education through the CDS and the child's individualized education program team determines, in accordance with rules adopted by the commissioner, that it is in the best interest of the child not to enroll that child in kindergarten until the start of the following school year (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Head Start Administrator: The Head Start administrator is responsible for administration and management of all aspects of the Head Start and Early Head Start Programs in accordance with state and federal regulations. Management of up to six content coordinators for a program of 184 children served in up to five centers, multiple classrooms, three school districts, and coordinated pre-K classrooms as well as community collaborations. Align all actions to support agency mission by ensuring all policies and procedures demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior (Waldo County Action Partners, 2018a).

Head Start Education Coordinator: Responsible for oversight of the implementation the Head Start and Early Head Start program performance standards on education and early childhood development. Align all actions to support agency mission by ensuring all policies and procedures demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior (Waldo County Action Partners, 2018b).

Individualized education plan (IEP): The term "individualized education program" or "IEP" means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with this section and that includes:

- A statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.
- A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals.
- A description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals A statement of the special education, related services and supplementary aids and services.
- An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children in the regular class and in school activities.

- A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on state and district-wide assessments.

- The IEP Team shall adopt a transition plan during the child's 9th grade school year, or the year in which the child turns 16 years of age (whichever comes first) (MDOE, 2018c).

Inclusion: Inclusion, as a value, supports the right of all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, to participate actively in natural settings in their communities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

Kindergarten: A one-year or two-year childhood education program, for children at least five years of age, immediately prior to Grade 1 (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): A student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate.

Public preschool program: A program offered by a public school that provides instruction to children who are 4 years of age. The term preschool is used interchangeably with pre-Kindergarten or pre-K (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Principal: The person who supervises the operation and management of a school and school property as determined necessary by the superintendent under policies established by the school board. The term *Principal* is used interchangeably with building administrator and building-level leader (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Related services: Refers to special education transportation and such developmental, corrective and other related services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical

therapy) as defined by the commissioner, as are required to assist children with disabilities to benefit from their special education programs (MDOE, 2018c).

Service delivery provider: A service delivery provider is certified to provide related services. Service providers are licensed through their respective Board of Examiners. Service providers support the goals on the IEP through direct and consultation services. According to Chapter 101, a list of approved service providers includes: speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school psychologist, rehabilitation counselor, school nurse, and social worker (MDOE, 2018b).

Specially designed instruction (SDI): Specially designed instruction is instruction provided to children ages 3-20 by an appropriately qualified special education professional, or an appropriately authorized and supervised educational technician consistent with a child's IEP. The design and delivery of services is uniquely designed to assist children to meet the goals of the child's IEP (MDOE, 2018c).

Superintendent: The person in a school administrative unit or school union appointed and having the authority and responsibility under this title and other applicable statutes (Maine Legislature, 2018).

Conclusion

As public schools move forward with mandates to provide public pre-K programs, it is imperative that school district leaders make decisions that include programming and options for students with IEPs. In comparison to other schools, the district is ahead of other school districts in Maine in regard to providing pre-K programming. Educate Maine reported in 2016 that 28% of Maine schools had no pre-K programs. The recent changes to available programs have left CDS and the district without a continuum of special education programming. As reported by

Fullan (2001), schools need to become learning organizations and use recent and innovative ideas to drive decision-making. Use of information gathered through this research will support the district when developing a plan that supports programming and transition practices for students with disabilities.

The following chapters will include a literature review on key themes regarding the transition to kindergarten for children with special needs. This review of the literature will define and provide a scholarly research review on the following topics: parents, children with disabilities, providers, teacher preparation, early intervention in Maine, and a prominent author. The literature review informs and supports the methodology for this research through myriad connections. Literature supports early intervention for children with disabilities. Organizational structures influence the capacity of successful change and development. The case study method allowed the researcher to capture the current circumstances and provide information to improve practices.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine current research regarding the transition of students with disabilities from preschool programs to kindergarten. This review of the literature begins with an overview of kindergarten transition. The literature examined for this review focuses on parents, children with disabilities, providers, teacher preparation, early intervention in Maine, and Dr. Laura Lee McIntyre, a prominent author.

Importance of Kindergarten Transition

Kindergarten transition refers to the process and practices that provide continuity between a home or preschool and a kindergarten program (Nelson, 1999). Additionally, Nelson (1999) posited that the process of transition involves the sharing of student information, classroom activities, and curricular objectives. McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro-Reed, and Wildenger (2010) discussed that kindergarten transition is an important milestone, as well as an exciting and challenging period of change for children as they take on the formal role of a student. In a national survey of kindergarten teachers conducted by Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000), findings comprised that 52% of kindergarten students experienced a successful transition, 32% experienced a moderately difficult transition, and 16% experienced a difficult transition. Difficulty following directions was the highest-rated problem that students enter kindergarten struggle with. Other barriers include lack of academic skills, disorganized home environments, and social skills. These problems are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentage of Teachers (Means and Standard Errors) Who Said that About Half of the Class or More Enter Kindergarten with Specific Problems (N =3,595)

Type of Problem	Percentage of Teachers (SE)
Difficulty following directions	46.16 (1.07)
Lack of academic skills	36.26 (0.98)
Disorganized home environment	34.54 (1.00)
Difficulty working independently	34.39 (1.02)
Lack of any formal preschool experience	30.79 (0.99)
Difficulty working as part of a group	30.45 (0.99)
Problems with social skills	20.39 (0.88)
Immaturity	19.87 (0.87)
Difficulty communicating/ language problems	13.50 (0.72)

Note: Reproduced from *Teacher's Judgment of Kindergarten Transition* by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000).

When students have disabilities, this transition means that staff has additional responsibilities as well as challenges. The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides families and children with disabilities transition experiences when moving from early intervention or Part C (birth to age two) to preschool Part B (ages three to five) and then from preschool services to kindergarten. The focus of early childhood programs is on developing the child through supporting and educating the family. Most families develop relationships with their preschool or early childhood caregiver. Families also have options and more control of programming during the transition from Part C to Part B. The transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities involves changes in services (programs and providers) and requires both the child and the family to make adjustments (Rous et al., 2007). McIntyre, Eckert, Arbolino, DiGennaro-Reed, and Fiese (2014) discussed that students with high-risk factors (poverty status, family type, and home language) may be more perceptible to the differences in routines, impacting their ability to adjust. The review of the literature regarding the improvement

of transition to kindergarten practices for students with disabilities will be categorized into parents, children with disabilities, providers, teacher preparation, state of Maine, and a prominent author.

Parents

In the United States, parents of children with special needs officially go through a transition process when moving from early intervention to special education services. However, there are many more transitions that they will have to encounter during their public school experience. When a child with a disability transitions to public school it can be challenging for parents to maneuver through the process. Parental involvement is an important part of preschool programming and is a key indicator of later educational success (Barnard, 2004). Collaborative planning with parents regarding the available programs and resources available at the kindergarten level is a crucial part of the transition plan. Research completed by Janus, Lefort, Cameron, and Kopechanski (2007) shows three main areas of concern by parents: contact with the school, the exchange of information, and school-based services.

Communication and contact with the receiving school are imperative to shaping parents' perception of the transition process. During the pre-transition process, participants report that contact with the public school prior to kindergarten transition varied. According to Janus et al. (2007), a majority of participants report there was contact with the public school prior. However, in 11 of those cases, the contact was initiated by the parent. The post-transition group (parents of students who are already in kindergarten) reported that nine parents initiated contact with the public school. Welchons and McIntyre (2015) found that caregivers of students with disabilities had a higher involvement in the transition process compared to parents of typically developing

student. Hicks (2011) posited that information needs to be shared with families in a format that meets the needs of the families. This could include visits to the programs and information presented in different formats. Nelson (1999) found that it is important for parents and teachers to discuss their expectations for transition and develop common goals. Nelson (1999) also supports transition practices that involve practices that involve:

1. Sharing information regarding school expectations through information sessions or mailing.

2. Home-visits that give parents an opportunity to share information.

3. Screenings or opportunities for teachers to gather information on the incoming kindergartener's development.

Parents of English Language Learners (ELL) need the opportunity to participate throughout the process. This is achievable with access to interpreters and information in their home language (Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009). The additional language barrier should not impact the ability of a parent to communicate and participate in the early intervention process. For parents that are transitioning from early intervention to preschool programming, having the preschool teacher participate in the IEP meetings was perceived as a supportive practice (Mawdsley & Hauser-Cram, 2013).

During the transition process, parental concerns centered on having a small classroom size as the perception is that a small class size is associated with better individual student experiences in preschool classrooms (Mawdley & Hauser-Cram, 2013). Parental concerns comprise the proportion of typically developing students in the preschool classroom and social opportunities with typically developing peers (Mawdsley & Hauser-Cram, 2013). The transition

to kindergarten may cause an additional level of stress and grieving for parents. Typically, families are moving from early intervention preschool services, which have had a family-centered approach to a school-based system, which is a student-centered approach (Hicks, 2011). There can also be a change in the service delivery system, with school-based services occurring at school and without parental observation or participation. Developing a clear transition plan that articulates what the child will receive for services as well as where the child will receive the services is essential to alleviate parents' confusion and uncertainty. However, parents reported frustration post-transition with the delay of services as well as an unclear plan on the proposed services (Janus et al., 2007). Providing parents with a practical plan of what they can expect upon their child entering kindergarten may alleviate confusion and frustration.

Research by Janus et al. (2007) out of Canada has shown that there were very few barriers to transition. When parents were surveyed about their perceptions of the transition practices a majority of the parents (identified children and non-identified children) were at least somewhat satisfied. Parents that participated in the transition activities found them helpful. A common theme that emerged between the literature review and interviews with professionals supported increasing the role of parents as advocates.

Children with Disabilities

Providing timely screening, evaluation and early intervention for children with special needs is paramount. A review of the literature promotes and supports the need for opportunities for early intervention and preschool programming in relation to the transition to kindergarten. There are conflicting results in one research paper that will be discussed.

Early identification of a child with special needs is essential to the process of providing appropriate programming and services. Through the process of child-find, students are screened, assessed and if appropriate, identified with a disability. Mann, McCartney, and Park (2007) suggested that early identification can provide placement or alternative remediations such as home visiting programs, child care, preschool, and pre-kindergarten programs. According to Bagnato (2007), authentic assessment of children in early childhood should include the following:

1. Professionals and families collaborate in planning and implementing assessment.

2. An assessment provides useful information for intervention.

3. Professionals share information in respectful and useful ways.

4. Professionals meet legal and procedural requirements and meet recommended practice guidelines.

Students must meet specific criteria to qualify for special education services in one or more of the 15 areas of disability. The current areas of disability are: Autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay (0-5 only), emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, speech and language impairment, specific learning disability, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment (including blindness), and multiple disabilities. Crane (2009) reviewed when children were identified (pre-kindergarten or kindergarten) and which disability they were identified with (see Table 2).

This study gives a snapshot of when students are being identified through participating in preschool programming. This research also reviews students who exit out of special education as

well as change disability identification. High quality early educational intervention programs may not only decrease the rate of referral into special education but may also reduce the length of time that special education services are needed (Mann et al., 2007).

Table 2

Table of Time of Entry into Special Education Services

Primary disability category	Time of Entry into Special Education Services			
	Pre-kindergarten	% of PD group	Elementary school	% of PD group
DD	85	86%	14	14%
SI	19	7%	265	93%
LA	15	27%	40	73%
ED	59	50%	60	50%
LD	238	51%	230	49%
A	86	95%	5	5%
OHI	12	29%	29	71%

Note: Reproduced from "*Preschool Children with Special Educational Needs: Achievement, Retention, and Classification Through Second Grade*" *by* J. Crane, 2009, Doctoral dissertation (ProQuest No. 305242510), George Mason University, p. 113.

Prior to kindergarten, programs that provide interventions to low-income children had greater gains in literacy skills than their peers who did not participate (Pears et al., 2014). The early intervention programs or early childhood education programs that are available to parents and children vary depending on location and availability. The EARLY program in Grand Rapids, MI, implemented a play-based framework: Classroom Literacy Enrichment Model (CLEM). CLEM is a scientifically based reading research program. The framework included: teacher training, workshops, on-site coaching and student assessment. All children in the program were determined at-risk for failure. The pre- and post-test comparisons are depicted (see Figure 1):

Figure 1
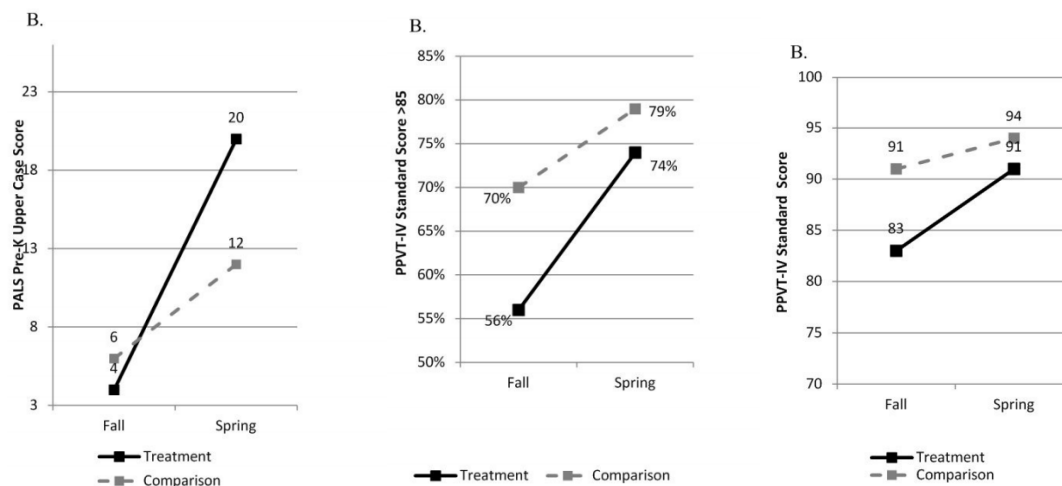
Figure 1. Pre and posttest comparisons. Reproduced from "Early Literacy Skill Development Provides the Key to Success for Preschoolers at Risk for School Failure," by R. J. Russell-Brinks, *The Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table, 2012*, p. 1.

While the treatment group started lower than the comparison group on pre-tests, the growth line shows that they made significant progress. This research was done with a small sample size of 101 children in Oregon but shows a format for replicating scientifically-based reading research programs. Review of research of school readiness in children with developmental delays and disabilities showed that early intervention services that focused on early literacy skills, early academic skills, and school adjustment behaviors showed a decrease in the risk of poor school outcomes (Brown, 2015).

Students with disruptive behavior problems (DBP) are confronted with the task of adapting their social and academic behavior to a new school environment during the transition to kindergarten. Eisenhower, Taylor, and Baker (2016) reviewed a school-based program called Starting Strong. Starting Strong is a school-based prevention program that targets problem behaviors, student-teacher relationships and parent-school connections for students transitioning

to kindergarten. The program used a block-randomized, controlled trial with 33 kindergarten classrooms in an urban population and 97 children and families participating. The results support programming for targeting behavior adjustments during the transition to kindergarten. Key factors to the success of having parents and teachers attend were: location, provision of food, childcare, and offering the program in English and Spanish.

McWayne, Cheung, Wright, and Hahs-Vaughn (2012) discuss school readiness factors and how they meaningfully predict a child's transition to kindergarten. This study used data available through the 200 Head Start national cohort surveys with 2,790 first-year Head Start students in the final sample. The study also used student assessments, parent reports and teacher reports. The study identified five profiles of school readiness and the different patterns the emerged. One area of importance is the finding that an intervention that builds upon the strengths of a student in one domain may support skills across other domains of learning. This finding reflects thinking in early childhood education nationally about the importance of making use of the overlapping nature of the learning domains of children. Other factors that were present suggest that improving parent-child interactions and parent education is worthwhile.

There was one research study that contradicts what has become common knowledge about the benefits for students with disabilities to participate in early intervention services. The research completed by Sullivan and Field (2013) uses data from a large national sample through the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort. The results from this comparison of students who attended special education preschool programming and students who did not receive those services. In this comparison, researchers looked at reading and math outcomes in kindergarten. Results indicated of receiving those services had a statistically significant moderate

negative effect on skills. While this study reports this result, consideration should be made for the fact that a student's disability will continue to impact them in kindergarten. Early intervention can provide support and instruction to build a student's skills, but the skill level may continue to be impacted, thus causing reading and math outcomes to be negatively impacted. The authors support the need for more research into the long-term effects of early intervention and special education services.

Providers

The sharing of information regarding the child's special education services and the IEP plan is essential for all team members to be informed of current programming and progress. Prior to the team's meeting to make decisions and determine placement, all participants need to have information about the child and family (Hicks, 2011). In the research by Janus et al. (2007), both pre-transition and post-transition groups of parents showed that there was an inconsistency regarding the sharing of information. There was no specified system or process for the sharing of information. There are school systems that have protocols for sharing information as well as scheduling transition meetings. Best practice would indicate that school district leaders share this information with the appropriate parties in order to plan for student needs. For ELL students, ensuring that screening, referral, evaluation, and placement process, as well as parental rights, are all translated for families and available in their home language. The use of cultural navigator programs to assist families is recommended (Hardin et al., 2009).

There are multiple stakeholders that support the process of transition. Social workers are one of the stakeholders that support children and families. Rosenkoetter, Hains, and Dogaru (2007) report how social workers can support the social, emotional and academic adjustment for

both children and parents. The differences in expectations can have an effect on the adjustment of any child, especially those with disabilities. A social worker can support the process of planning for transition and overseeing transition activities. Social workers can also promote school success when they clarify with school personnel the needs of the student in regard to their cultural practices and communication needs of the family. Figure 2 demonstrates the responsibilities of a social worker during the transition process.

Figure 2

1. Make certain that families have the information that they need to participate effectively in transition decision making regarding their children.
2. Help participants consider a range of options for services in order to address the child's and family's needs and values.
3. Ensure that appropriate services, necessary equipment, and prepared staff are available in the new setting.
4. Assure that health, developmental, social and family support services continue without interruption.
5. Prepare the reviving staff with information necessary to support the child and family and acquaint them with former staff to promote ongoing consultation regarding programming decisions.
6. Orient the child to aid a positive transition to the new setting and to advance the child's success.
7. Assure that family members are welcomed into the new program and encouraged to share information with its personnel.
8. Meet legal requirements and make decisions in a timely manner.
9. Enhance positive attitudes about the new services among all partners and minimized stress for all involved.

Figure 2. The nine important roles for social workers involved in childhood transition. Reproduced from "Successful Transitions for Young Children with Disabilities and their Families: Roles of School Social Workers*,"* by S. Rosenkoetter, A. Hains, & C. Dogaru, 2007, *Children & Schools, 29*(1), p. 31.

Being aware of the perceptions of stakeholders is a key element during the process of transition. Graziano (2015) was unable to support any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of enhanced transition processes due to the limited sample size. The intention of this study was to review the relationship between parent and teacher perceptions of the transition process and child outcomes. Participants in this study included: resource room teachers, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents.

Teacher Preparation

What is a kindergarten classroom supposed to look like? The answer to this question will vary within each district and school. As stated by Graue (2009) "for 150 years, we've argued about what kindergarten should look like" (p. 28). As the world has changed, so have the expectation for the school district's curriculum and programming for students. Graue (2009) further advocates that kindergarten goals should reflect children's individual developmental milestones. Marxen, Ofstedal, and Danbom (2008) state that kindergarten children are in the early childhood range and require a developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy.

What do kindergarten teachers need to prepare for the varied needs of students entering their classroom? Early et al. (2006) report that early childhood advocates are calling for all teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree, ideally with a focus or state certification in early childhood education. Furthermore, Bogard, Traylor, and Takanishi (2008) state that the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) recommends that every child between four and eight years of age deserves a bachelor's degree-level teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and certification in the early childhood field.

Understanding developmentally appropriate pedagogy is critical for teachers to promote student learning. Bauml (2011) found that novice teachers demonstrated their knowledge learned in teacher preparation programs through four strategies. These strategies are adopting, modifying, imitating, and avoiding. Bauml (2011) further advocates that kindergarten teachers need a deep knowledge of content domains.

Bogard et al. (2008) raise the question regarding the current status of having two systems of teacher preparation for the education for young children. One system for pre-K and one system for kindergarten-3rd grade (K-3). The discrepancy in teacher education and certification between pre-K and K-3 teachers may impact the quality of learning experiences in the pre-K programs. Early et al. (2006) find few associations between any of the measures of education (years of education, degree), major, or credentials (state certification or child development associate), and classroom quality or children's outcomes. Most importantly, Graue (2009) describes the essential virtues of a kindergarten teacher to include patience, good humor, and a love of children.

Early Intervention in Maine

Nelson (1999) reviewed the Community Options Project. The Community Options Project was a five-year effort to increase the capacity of eight communities in Maine and New Hampshire to include students with disabilities and their families in early childhood programs. This final report shares that the efficacy of the project was evaluated by the following methods: surveys, interviews, state placement data, and a community needs assessment. The outcomes exceeded the original expectations. The evaluation found an increased number of children and families participating in early childhood programs, increased number of programs available to

children and families in New Hampshire and Maine, enhanced the quality of the programs,

system changes that enhanced the promotion of inclusive programs in Maine and New

Hampshire, and enhanced public awareness of inclusive programs. The groundwork for early

childhood inclusive programs in Maine and New England was established in the early 2000s.

The LEARNS program (collaborative initiative between Maine Department of Education,

University of Maine, and collaborative school districts) supported early care and public school

educators inclusive educational practices through planning and technical assistance, consultation,

resources, research, and policy review. The program created Foundations of Inclusive Education,

which was a four-part guide, designed to be used for staff development by educational teams.

Kendrick and Labas (2000) report that "getting the right people to the table and leveling the

playing field, which these seminars have reliably done, provides an exceptional opportunity for

personal growth and the development of collaborative leadership" (p. 6).

How are we ensuring that these programs are providing high-quality educational

opportunities for all students? Kendrick and Poulin (2002) developed an instrument to assess

inclusive early childhood programs. The goal of developing this assessment was to increase the

capacity and quality of early childhood programs. The development of this tool supports

identifying inclusive placements as well as providing a clear definition and understanding of

what constitutes a high quality inclusive early childhood educational program. More recently

Maine has developed Maine Roads to Quality, which is a voluntary rating program for early

education programs. Unfortunately, only half of the providers in Maine participate. Providers are

rated on a one to four-step system with step one being basic compliance with state licensing

regulations and step four which provides a structured programming plan for staff, parental

involvement, and policies.

Figure 3

**MAINE'S QUALITY RATING LEVELS
FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS** ⁹

SEPTEMBER 2016	FAMILY		CENTER BASED		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
LICENSED PROVIDERS	1,044		741		
ENROLLED IN QRS	458	44%	472	64%	52%
STEP 1	341	74%	210	44%	59%
STEP 2	58	13%	77	16%	15%
STEP 3	44	10%	46	10%	10%
STEP 4	15	3%	139	29%	17%

Figure 3. Maine's quality rating levels. Reproduced from "*Early Childhood Education a Strong
Foundation for Maine,*" by Educate Maine, 2016.

Conceptual Framework

The support for public pre-K programs in the state of Maine from both communities and

state programs has increased over the past decade. In 2015, 45% of eligible preschool students

were enrolled in a public or private preschool. In comparison, 58% of students eligible in New

England attended (Educate Maine, 2016). This figure demonstrates that the State of Maine is

lagging in either students participating in public or private preschool and/or there is a lack of

providers for public or private preschool. The State of Maine is requiring that public schools

offer public Pre-K programming to students starting this 2018-2019 school year. Educate Maine

reported in 2016 that 28% of Maine schools did not offer pre-K programs. In the State of Maine,

all school districts must comply with Chapter 124 by July 1, 2017. Chapter 124: Basic Approval

Standards: Public Preschool Programs is the State of Maine rule governing the standards for

school districts to implement and/or expand their programming for four-year-olds (MDOE,

2018a).

In the State of Maine, preschool students who are identified with a disability are served

through a the CDS agency. CDS provides identification, case management, and funding for

services for children 0-5 years of age with disabilities (MDOE, 2018c). For public Pre-K

programs, this created a unique situation. While the programs are housed and funded by the local

school district, the responsibility for providing special education services including referral,

child-find, case management, and IEP monitoring, is the responsibility of CDS. In a recent case

study of public preschool programs in Maine, Logue et al. (2015) found that:

> Principals and teachers in both urban and rural districts expressed concern about delays
>
> between referral for screening and receipt of special education services from CDS. It was
>
> reportedly particularly frustrating for those schools that had service personnel in the
>
> school and availability in the schedule but were still unable to have those children served.
>
> (p. v)

The school district is located in central Maine. The district is one of the largest school districts in

terms of land size and serves students from 10 rural towns. The district is located in a rural

farming community with a low socioeconomic status (81% free and reduced rate). Indeed, as

providers of pre-K programming, the district is ahead of other school districts in Maine.

Historically, district leaders have attempted to provide a variety of pre-K models.

Presently, the district has moved to collaborating only with Head Start, which is operated by

Waldo County Community Action Program (WCAP). The decision to move to collaboration

with Head Start was made administratively and based on the proposed financial benefit. This benefit is based on Head Start's federal funding for programming. The recent changes in the collaborative partnership for pre-K has left CDS and the district without a continuum of special education programming and services for students. In the district, the Head Start programs do not provide specially designed instruction, nor do they hire teachers who are certified special education teachers. For students with disabilities to receive specially designed instruction they either need to transfer to a program that provides it or have a developmental therapist provide services within the Head Start program.

CDS has experienced a shortage in the number of related service providers statewide. pre-K students who would typically receive related services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy or social-emotional/ behavioral supports have gone without services. This change in pre-K programming, in addition to the lack of essential services, has impacted the transition of pre-K students to kindergarten. Pre-K students are entering kindergarten without the mandated early intervention services that are essential to their growth and development, as well as to their future academic success. A review of the current barriers to services and programming and the impact on preschool students transitioning to kindergarten is the basis for this study. This research will be designed to review:

1. How pre-K teachers, administrators, and service delivery providers describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting.

Purpose

With the growth of public preschool programs, it is time to look at transition practices for students with disabilities transitioning into kindergarten. According to Rimm-Kaufman et al.

(2000), they argue that with the influx of students entering kindergarten, there is a greater urgency for public education to provide a more comprehensive support for the development of young children. Siddiqua and Janus (2017) discussed that the facilitation of a successful transition to school is crucial for establishing the foundation of children's future development. Prior to kindergarten, programs that provide interventions to low-income children had greater gains in literacy skills than their peers who did not participate (Pears et al., 2014). Mann et al. argue that "high quality early educational intervention programs may not only decrease the rate of referral into special education but may also reduce the length of time that special education services are needed" (2007, p. 283).

The purpose of this study is to review current practices between the district's pre-K programs and elementary schools that impact students with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten. The case study reviews how the district pre-K programs can improve transition practices through the lens of teachers, administrators, and program directors. The significance of this research is providing information to public schools that are now mandated to provide pre-K programming for all students, including students with an IEP.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be applied to the study is organizational development. According to Esmaeili and Baramond (2014), organizational development is a strategy that is utilized to improve the organization. Organizational development looks at organizations and how the people within that organization operate. The goal is to provide insight into how individuals, groups and organizations can perform better through planned change strategies. According to Gallos (2006), organizational development is an effort that is planned organization-wide, managed from the top, and designed to increase organizations' effectiveness.

According to Glanz, Rimer, and Viswanath (2017), the process of organizational development comprises myriad factors related to problem-solving and change management, from the planning stages through evaluations, to improve the on-going transfer of information. Esmaeili and Baranound (2014) concur in stating, "Organizational Development addresses planned changes that encourage individuals, groups and organizations to perform better" (para. 2). Gallos (2006) further promotes a new model of organizational development that addresses contemporary change dynamics within the field. This change addresses the requirements of 21st century organizations and engages a more cyclical flow for change than the traditional linear model. The goal is to provide recommendations for public school systems on how to support the transition of students with disabilities in elementary school programming. The organizational development theory will support the review and evaluation of current practices and well as plans for improvement and strategies to evaluate progress and growth.

District Policies

The average tenure of school superintendents is five to six years, with an annual turnover of 14% to 16% (Kowalski et al., 2010). As district leadership changes frequently, and each superintendent has had a different perspective and philosophy on programming for pre-K. School districts are charged with the general supervision, support, and oversight of programming for children with disabilities. Local school districts can develop practices and policies that would enhance the relationships between parents, pre-K programs, and the public school district.

Rimm- Kaufman et al. (2000) recommend that future policy and practice be based on the following principles:

1. Acknowledge that there are multiple influences on a child's competence, such as family, peers, community, and school.

2. Acknowledge how these influences impact a child's experience during transition.

3. Acknowledge the relationships between the influences change over time and support the social infrastructure.

4. Acknowledge that the transition to school provides an opportunity to develop new patterns of relationships.

Rous et al. (2007) state that the transition to school is an interagency process. The quality of the transition process is supported by the following interagency features.

1. Communication and relationships between the child, family providers and community agencies.

2. Interagency administrative support through policies, agreements and memorandums of understanding.

3. Alignment of systems in regard to programs, practices and expectations.

Rous et al. (2006) provide a framework for child outcomes during the transition process. This framework, as depicted in Figure 4, outlines key interagency variables and practices that support the transition of children with disabilities.

Figure 4
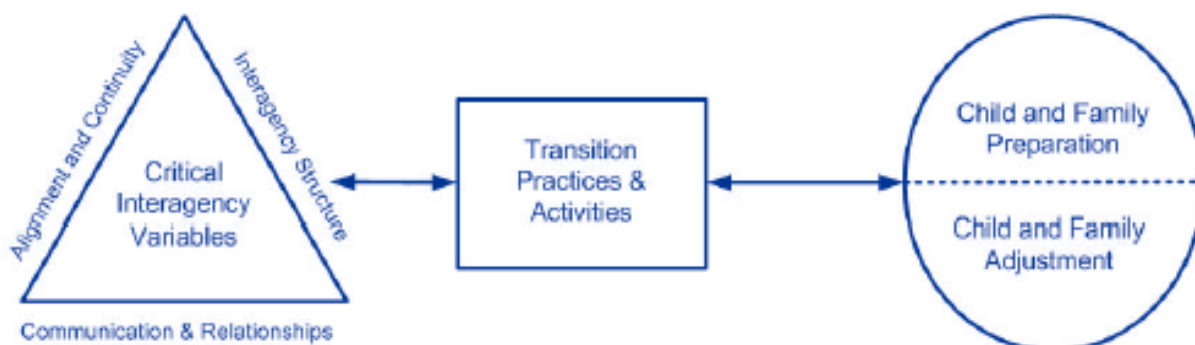
Figure 4. Key Elements in the Transition Process for Both Sending and Receiving Agencies. Reproduced from "A Child Outcome Framework for the Early Childhood Transition Process," by B. Rous, G. Harbin, & K. McCormick, 2006, Opening Doors to Success Research Brief: National Early Childhood Transition Center, 1-5.

Rous et al. (2006) further support the use of a child outcome framework to support policy makers with a measure for success. This measure of success can be used by schools and districts to increase their knowledge of transition outcomes. For families it can support their understanding of how experiences can provide positive outcomes during the transition process.

Prominent Authors

Laura Lee McIntyre is Department Head of Special Education and Clinical Sciences and Professor of School Psychology at the University of Oregon. Dr. McIntyre is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), board-licensed psychologist, and certified school psychologist. Her research focuses on the following topics: transition to kindergarten, young children with or at-risk for developmental and behavior disorders, and parent partnerships.

Dr. McIntyre co-authored a study that compared kindergarten transition practices for developmentally delayed and disabled students and typically developing students (Welchons &

McIntyre, 2015). This study found that the involvement of parents and preschool teachers was higher for developmentally-delayed and disabled students than the kindergarten teachers. Additionally, this study found that preschool teachers were more involved than parents or kindergarten teachers for children from low socio-economic backgrounds. In another study that Dr. McIntyre co-authored, the goal was to explore predictors of socio-behavioral kindergarten outcomes in children with and without developmental disabilities using a longitudinal design (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). The findings support that child adaptive and problem behavior are important predictors of kindergarten outcomes for children with and without disabilities. Specific interventions that address social skills, such as sharing and turn taking for both children and families, would support transition practices. This was supported by another study that shared several child measures predicted positive school outcomes (Blacher & McIntyre, 2006). Self-regulatory skills were one of them. Self-regulatory skills include the ability for children to manage and cope with emotions as well as the ability to express emotions in appropriate ways.

McIntyre et al. (2007) reviewed parent experiences and involvement. This study looked at parental involvement in kindergarten transition. This study supported the families' interest in participating in kindergarten transition practices and planning including what kindergarten classrooms expected students to know for academics and behavioral expectations. This study revealed that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less involved in transition activities. This supports that preschool and kindergarten teachers increase collaboration to families who potentially struggle with parental involvement. Quintero and McIntyre (2010) investigated teacher and family experiences in transition practices and teacher concerns in relation to students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or developmental disabilities (DD).

The study found that there were no significant differences in parent involvement in transition activities between the parents of children with ASD or parents of children with DD. The study did show differences between the parents of children with DD group reported participating in a transition-planning meeting significantly more than parents of children with ASD.

Dr. McIntyre has dedicated her academic career to understanding the barriers and successes for children with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten. The studies include information and voices from stakeholders including parents and teachers. Her work has supported the importance of consistent transition practices between preschool and kindergarten teachers as well as the inclusion of parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds to participate in transition activities and programming.

As the district continues to improve pre-K programming and collaboration with parents and stakeholders, it is imperative that students with disabilities are able to access their necessary services. Early intervention services are paramount to students with IEP's to increase their skill development so that they may be with their typically developing peers. McWayne, Cheung, Wright, and Hahs-Vaughn (2012) identified that communication, as well as how educators viewed their role, suffered on both sides of Head Start students' transition to kindergarten. By reviewing the current transition strategies of the collaborative organizations, the goal of this study is to provide input into improving transition practices for the district pre-K students with disabilities.

Summary of Literature Review

High quality inclusive early childhood programs are an essential component to the transition from preschool to kindergarten for students with special needs. Children who are

identified early and who are provided scientifically-based instruction will show growth trends

similar to typically developing students (Brown, 2015). While not all studies confirm that early

intervention services support student growth in kindergarten, the reality is that students with

disabilities will continue to need support and interventions throughout their school career. The

practice of early childhood inclusive programs in Maine gained support in the early 2000's. The

growth of public preschools will demand that public schools support a seamless transition for all

students entering kindergarten, with mandated practices for students with disabilities. As

stakeholders prepare for children to transition to public school, they will need to develop

practices and protocol that support communication and collaborative planning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is a phenomenological case study. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), a phenomenological study focuses on people's experience from their perspective. Roberts and Hyatt (2019) further explain that qualitative research may also focus on organizational processes. Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that a case study is a good approach when there is a clearly identifiable case with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the situation. The study is a single-site case study that involves several individuals within the district and Head Start program. Creswell and Guetterman (2015) posit that purposeful sampling is when researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the phenomenon. The participants were intentionally chosen for their experiences with students in the pre-K programs as well as when students transition to kindergarten. Creswell and Guetterman (2015) state that purposeful sampling is preferable, selecting cases that show different perspectives on the problem, process or event. This leads to information that will allow others to learn about the problem and to hear the voice of individuals who may not otherwise be heard.

The following research questions allowed all stakeholders to have a voice in improving transition practices for students with special needs entering kindergarten. The statement of the problem indicates that there is a lack of services and programming for special education services pre-K students. The case study methodology sheds light on the following:

1. Current transition practices

2. Stakeholder and parent perception of current transition practices

3. Recommendations to improve transition practices

Research Site and Scope of Setting

The district pre-K programs are in operation through a collaborative agreement between the school district and Head Start. Preschool students who are identified with a disability are provided services and programming through the CDS agency. CDS provides identification, case management and funding for services for children 0-5 years-of-age with disabilities. For public pre-K programs, this service created a unique situation. While they are housed and funded by the local school district, the responsibility for providing special education services; referral, child-find, case management, and IEP monitoring is the responsibility of CDS. In the district, the Head Start programs do not provide specially designed instruction (SDI), nor do they hire teachers who are certified special education teachers. For students with disabilities to receive specially designed instruction as determined by their disability and individual education plan (IEP), they would need to attend a special purpose private preschool. Due to the recent closure of a special purpose private preschool, there are no special purpose private preschools located within the district's catchment area.

The purpose of this study is to review current early intervention practices within the district's pre-K programs and how those practices impact student with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten. The case study reviewed how the district's pre-K programs can improve transition practices through the lens of district pre-K and kindergarten teachers, administration and program directors. The significance of this research is documenting information useful for public schools that are now mandated to provide pre-K programming for all students, including students with a disability.

The relationship between the researcher and the research subjects is varied. The researcher has had a long-standing relationship with the early childhood and early intervention community. As the district's Director of Pupil Services, the researcher has a relationship with the pre-K and CDS staff as pre-K students with disabilities transition into kindergarten and require public school programming and services. In addition, the district's Director of Pupil Services is a point of contact for the pre-K programs and CDS when addressing concerns or needs of the programs within the district and has access to the pre-K programs, kindergarten teachers, service providers, and elementary school principals.

Participants

The participants were chosen based on their position within the pre-K programs and the school district. Moustakas (1994) states that the essential criteria for participants is that they have experienced the phenomenon, are intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, are willing to participate in an interview, and provide the researcher with permission to record the interview and publish the data in a dissertation or other publications. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) report that purposeful selection is a strategy for accessing appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, available resources, and the challenges being faced. Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that the researcher should focus on learning the meaning that the multiple participants hold about the problem or issue. The researcher invited the following stakeholders to participate:

1. Three district elementary principals.

2. Two Head Start administrators.

3. Six district elementary kindergarten teachers.

4. Five Head Start teachers.

The participants were invited to participate in the research through a Letter to Potential Participants (Appendix A). This invitation was sent through email to district staff and Head Start staff. The researcher followed up with participants through email to confirm willingness to participate in the interview process. The researcher then scheduled the interview at the interviewee's location of preference. Interviews were scheduled at a convenient time for the participants. The locations of the interviews included: teacher's classroom, researcher's office, or school conference room. One interview was completed via phone due to a school snow day. Interview questions were made available to participants prior to the interviews through email (Appendices D-H). The interviews were scheduled in January and February 2019.

Data and Analysis

This study was conducted through individual interviews of participants. The data was collected through interviews with pre-K/Head Start teachers and administrators, kindergarten teachers, and school administrators. As discussed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), it is common practice to produce detailed descriptions of the setting and participants in a case study. In addition, a case study provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives of transition practices for students with special needs.

The interviews were all recorded with participants' consent. Yin (2009) reports that using a recording device is a matter of personal preference. An audio recording will provide a more accurate version than taking notes. Creswell and Guetterman (2015) suggest that the researcher check the functioning of the equipment prior to the interview and keep the interviews on track to ensure that all interview questions are answered. All interviews were recorded on the digital application (app) Rev© that provides transcription services. The Rev© app is located on the researcher's password-protected phone. The recordings will be saved for one year after

presentation of results. The digital coded interviews are stored on a password-protected laptop. Paper copies of interviews are stored in a locked file drawer.

Once all interviews were transcribed, the in vivo coding method was used. According to Saldana (2015), in vivo coding is appropriate for virtually all-qualitative studies. Saldana (2015) further explains that in vivo coding is useful for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data as well as for studies that honor and prioritize the participant's voice. The researcher used NVivo© coding software and hand coding methods. NVivo© is a qualitative data analysis computer software package. It is designed for qualitative researchers where analysis of data is required. Yin (2009) shares that software has become more diverse and functional over the past decade. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) acknowledge that coding by the researcher can be tedious but allows the researcher to become intimate with the data. Merriam (2009) offers an option of a mix of manual and computer management for managing the data. According to Charmaz (as cited in Saldana, 2015) In vivo helps preserve participants' meaning of their views and actions in the coding itself. Saldana (2015) reports that with in vivo coding there is no fixed rule or formula for the average number of codes per page. It is suggested that if something in the data stands out, apply a code. As a phenomenological study, the information was reviewed for significant statements in order to develop a description of the phenomenon. Yin (2009) supports the organization of material into a case study database so that the researcher can located specific data during intensive analysis. Merriam (2009) reports that case study researcher can be seriously challenged in trying to make sense of the data. It is important to give attention to data management under these circumstances.

Atkinson (2002) detailed steps that were followed to assist in the analysis of case study data (see Figure 5). Through a second cycle of coding and analysis the number of in vivo codes

were condensed to look at themes or dimensions of categories. Merriam (2009) reports that a second level of analysis involves developing categories, themes, or other taxonomic classes that interpret the meaning of the data. This analysis of the case study data included a review for themes, patterns, or issues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The third level of data analysis involved generating a theory from the data. Merriam (2009) states that the data often seems to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories. Merriam (2009) further explains that when categories and their properties are reduced and refined the analysis is moving toward the development of a model or theory to explain the data's meaning. Yin (2009) supports the strategy that focuses on the theoretical propositions that led to the development of the case study. The research analysis focused on the data that reflected the original objectives regarding the lived experiences of stakeholders during the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for children with disabilities.
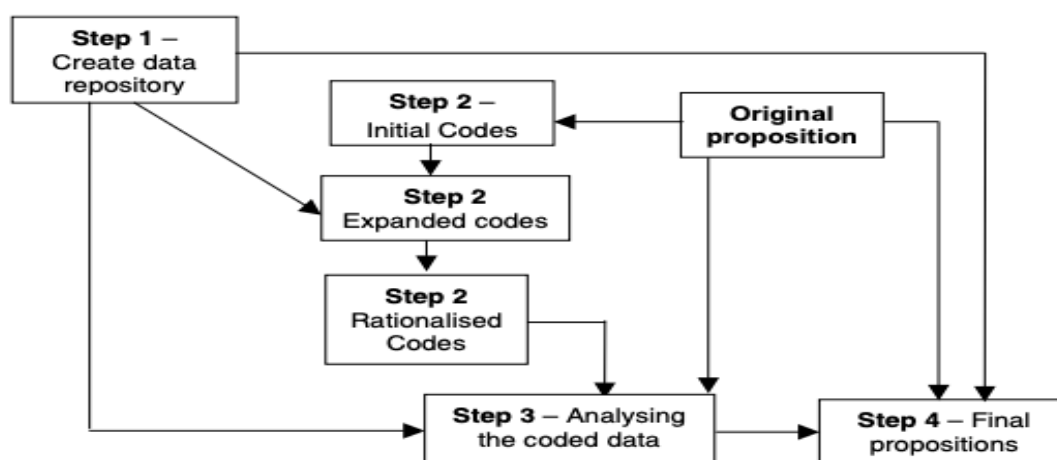
Figure 5

Figure 5. Case Study Structure. Reproduced from "Four Steps to Analyze Data from a Case Study Method," by J. Atkinson, 2002, *Proceedings of the Association for Information Systems, Australia, 38*, 1-11.

The findings from the interviews were all member checked. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2015), member checking is a process in which the researcher connects with one or more of the participants to share the findings and asks them about the accuracy of the information. This process was facilitated with at least one member of each group volunteering to review and ensure the accuracy of the findings. The member of each group was contacted via email with a review of the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that participants should be able to recognize their experiences in your interpretation and propose changes to capture their viewpoint. The selected members were asked to review a statement of findings and offer specific feedback regarding the validity of the findings.

Participants' Rights

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participants were able to withdraw from the research methods at any time. Participants were provided as informed consent agreement, which included requirements, risks, benefits, and privacy information. Participants had the opportunity to skip any question that they did not want to answer. Participants' privacy and anonymity was protected at all times. If at any time a participant did not feel comfortable the participant had the opportunity to withdraw from the research. Participants were sent a copy of Consent for Participation in Research (Appendix B) with the Letter to Potential Participants (Appendix A), which explained all of the participant's rights. All participants signed that they understood the risks and benefits with participation in the research. Participants were offered a copy of their signed consent prior to the start of the interview.

Research Design and Elements

The research design is a single-site case study. The case study design was chosen to allow for stakeholder input from teachers, and administrators. The case study was carried out in the

school district. This allowed the researcher access to pre-K teachers, Head Start administrators, kindergarten teachers, and school administrators. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) argued that a "case study is an exploratory form of inquiry that affords significant interaction with research participants, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study" (p. 45).

Potential Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study are the small sample size of participants. The sample size of the participants included three pre-K teachers, five kindergarten teachers, two Head Start administrators, and three elementary principals. This case study was designed to hear the voices of the stakeholders involved in the process of transition of preschool students with disabilities from pre-K to kindergarten. The small sample size could be viewed as a limitation in regard to the fidelity of the research. An additional limitation is that the research was conducted in the same school district where the researcher is a district administrator.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This research was conducted to explore stakeholders' perspectives of the process for children with special needs transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten. The participants' perceptions were explored in relation to how to improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities as they transition to kindergarten. Data were collected through a single-site case study utilizing semi-structured interviews with school administrators, pre-K administrators, kindergarten teachers, and pre-K teachers. Table 3 "Research Questions and Data Sources" details the alignment of the research questions and data sources. Common themes that emerged from the interviews will be presented as well as a description of how this data was organized, analyzed, and coded. Each interview question will be presented with selected quotations from individual participants to adequately reflect their perspective voice. Common themes and subthemes will be presented. In addition, a frequency word count will present the most frequent words used in response to each interview question. Information regarding how the findings are linked to research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework will be outlined.

Research Questions Investigated

The researcher's overarching goal was to uncover participants' experiences with the transition practices for pre-K students with disabilities moving from pre-K programs to kindergarten. The researcher developed a single site phenomological case study that included semi-structured interviews with transition stakeholders. The interview questions were aligned with the following research questions.

1. How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

    a. How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, Head Start administrators, and district administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

Table 3 outlines the alignment of interview questions with data sources as they are connected to the research questions.

Table 3

Research Questions and Data Source

Research Questions and Data Sources	

Research Questions	Instrument
How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?	Appendix D: Interview questions: school administrator questions 6, 7, 8 Appendix E: Interview questions: Head Start Administrator questions 6 ,7, 8 Appendix F: Interview questions: kindergarten teacher questions 6, 7, 8 Appendix G: Interview questions: pre-K/ Head Start teacher questions 6, 7, 8
How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, Head Start administrators, and district administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?	Appendix D: interview questions: school administrator questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 Appendix E: interview questions: Head Start administrator questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 Appendix F: interview questions: kindergarten teacher questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 Appendix G: interview questions: pre-K/ Head Start teacher questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9

Interview Process

All stakeholders were contacted through district email. The email to participants included

the Letter to Potential Participants (Appendix A) and Consent to Participate (Appendix B). The

email was sent to two Head Start administrators, three elementary school principals, five pre-K

teachers and six kindergarten teachers. Potential participants were sent a second email if they did

not reply within one week of initial email. As detailed in Table 5 three elementary school

principals, two Head Start administrators, five kindergarten teachers, three pre-K teachers were interviewed. Interviews were conducted at the location of preference of the participant. One interview was conducted via a phone conference due to school cancellation for a snow day. Each interview was initiated with the interview protocol in Appendix C. Each participant signed and waived their right to a copy of the signed participation consent form.

Table 4

Participant and Interview Demographics

Interview	Location	Word Count	Interview Time
School Admin #1	Elementary School	1,168	8 minutes, 1 second
School Admin #2	Elementary School	1,211	8 minutes, 8 seconds
School Admin #3	Elementary School	1,741	11 minutes, 45 seconds
HS Admin #1	Central Office	1,946	17 minutes, 12 seconds
HS Admin #2	Head Start Office	1,826	12 minutes, 20 seconds
K Teacher #1	Phone	754	6 minutes, 55 seconds
K Teacher #2	Elementary School	1,435	8 minutes, 38 seconds
K Teacher #3	Elementary School	1,516	10 minutes, 23 seconds
K Teacher #4	Elementary School	1,239	9 minutes, 2 seconds
K Teacher #5	Elementary School	801	5 minutes, 12 seconds
HS Pre-K Teacher #1	Elementary School	1,892	13 minutes, 6 seconds
HS Pre-K Teacher #2	Elementary School	1,543	10 minutes, 33 seconds
HS Pre-K Teacher #3	Central Office	1,080	8 minutes, 2 seconds

Two interviews were unable to be scheduled within the planned timeframe. Interviews that were conducted in person were recorded on the Rev© app on the researcher's iphone. The interview

that was conducted via phone was recorded using the Rev© call recorder app on the researcher's iPhone. All interviews were transcribed through Rev© and saved as a document on the researcher's password protected laptop. The researcher then cleansed the interviews of any identifying information. Each interview was assigned a title with the participant category and number. Member checks were completed with one participant from each group. A copy of the transcript was sent to the participant with the opportunity for the participant to provide feedback or request the removal of any information. All interviews will remain on the researcher's password protected laptop for one year after presentation of results. At that time, they will be deleted.

Description of Participants

The research participants all work within the same school district. The elementary principals and kindergarten teachers are employed by the school district. The Head Start program employs the Head Start administrators and pre-K teachers. Head Start has a memorandum of understanding with the school district to provide pre-K programming to eligible three and four-year-old residents.

Description of Roles

The elementary principals interviewed support all five of the elementary schools in the district. One principal is the administrator at a larger population elementary school (student population 243). Two principals each cover two smaller population elementary schools (student populations 65, 86, 102, 112). Each elementary school serves kindergarten through fifth grade with three schools that include pre-K programs within the building. Two elementary schools have pre-K programs that are located outside the school building at the Central Office.

The Head Start administrators included the Head Start director and the Education and Disabilities director. The Head Start administrators supervise the programs within the school district as well as two other school districts in the county. The Head Start director collaborates with the school district on the memorandum of understanding, communication regarding staffing, enrollment, wait-lists and student performance. The Education and Disability director provides direct supervision of staff, organization of early intervention services, student assessments, and referrals for support.

The kindergarten teachers that were interviewed provide educational programming to kindergarten students in a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. Four of the elementary schools are single grade schools. The larger elementary school has two classrooms of each grade. The pre-K teachers that were interviewed provide Head Start programming to eligible three and four-year-olds. Two of the pre-K teachers provide programming within an elementary school. One of the pre-K teachers provides programming within the district's central office/early childhood center.

Analysis Method

All transcribed interviews were uploaded to NVivo© coding software program. Interviews were organized within NVivo© by participants: elementary principal, Head Start administrator, kindergarten teacher and Pre-K teacher. Each interview was then coded using the in vivo coding method. In vivo coding was used to capture words or phrases that represent the participant's voice in response to interview questions.

Using the Atkinson case study analysis method, the first step was to create a data repository (Atkinson, 2002). This was established through using the NVivo© program to store all data. The second step in the Atkinson case study analysis was to review transcripts for

developing themes. From these themes, codes were developed. A second set of coding was completed and excerpts from the interviews were color-coded and arranged within the NVivo© program. Using the Atkinson case study analysis, the researcher reflected back on the research questions to ensure that the coding development remained aligned to the original proposition. The third step in the Atkinson case study analysis was used to rationalize or explain the coded data and themes that emerged.

Interview Data

The interview questions are aligned between the participant groups. It was apparent after the first group of semi-structured interviews with participants that there were common themes. This allowed for smooth coding using the NVivo© program. Once codes started to emerge, the researcher created theme folders within the NVivo© program. The researcher highlighted words or passages then dragged and dropped them into the theme folders. The main themes that developed from coding of the interviews were: mutual improvement practices, pre-K improvement practices and public school improvement practices. Table 5 details the themes, subthemes and number of codes per stakeholder group. These main themes and subthemes will be further detailed with excerpts from interviews in the presentation of results section.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub Themes	Administrator Comments	Head Start Administrator Comments	Kindergarten Teacher Comments	Pre-K Teacher Comments
Mutual improvement Practices	Collaboration	0	3	12	7
	Communication	10	1	5	4
	Parents	5	2	4	9
	Transition Meetings	14	7	10	8
Pre-K improvement Practices	Assessments	5	4	10	0
	Pre-K teachers	3	3	0	0
	Services in Pre-K		6	19	
Public School improvement Practices	Observations	4	4	7	1
	Services in kindergarten	3		8	

Presentation of Results

The findings are presented in sub categories based on the alignment of interview questions. Each participant group interview questions were aligned to elicit stakeholder's responses to a common subject area. Each aligned interview question results are discussed below with supporting excerpts from the stakeholders.

Interview Question 1. What is your understanding of the transition process within the school district for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 1 to uncover the school district's transition process for children with disabilities as they prepare to begin kindergarten. Elementary school administrators shared common themes regarding their understanding on the transition process. As Elementary School Administrator 2 stated, "We have our transition meetings for those kiddos which are IEP meetings or similar, and try to get everybody at the table, make sure that it's clear, what we're looking at, what supports we need in place." In addition, Elementary School Administrator 3 stated, "I do know that they have transition meetings with the pre-K, their supervisor of disabilities and the incoming kindergarten teacher." Head Start Administrator 1 shared their understanding of the transition process as well. She noted that, "We meet as an extended team and have wonderful conversations in and around the child focusing on strengths as well as needs." As with administrator responses, the kindergarten teachers all reported that they understood that there are transition meetings in the spring for incoming students with an IEP. One teacher reported out on her knowledge of the transition process including meeting participants:

> Pre-K students identified with special needs typically have a transition meeting with the
>
> district. Their pre-K teachers are there as well as the parents of the student and the
>
> kindergarten teachers from the district that they're going into, as well as administrators.

Pre-K teachers all reported that they understand that there is a transition meeting for incoming pre-K students identified with disabilities. Pre-K Teacher 2 shared her understanding of the timing of the transition IEP meetings. She indicated that, "We have a meeting at the end of the year, usually in May to go over their IEPs and their goals." The common themes that emerged from Interview Question 1 were mutual improvement practices and public school improvement

practices. Sub themes that emerged were transition meetings and observations. A word count was conducted on the responses for interview question 1 from all stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were transition-10; meeting-7; IEP-5; kindergarten-5; and meetings-5.

Interview Question 2. What are the strengths of the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 2 to uncover the school district's strengths during the process of transitioning children with disabilities from pre-K to kindergarten. Elementary school administrators all shared common language on the strengths of the process involving all parties involved with the transition process for incoming pre-K students with disabilities. Elementary School Administrator 3 reported, "I would think that one of the biggest strengths would be allowing the incoming teacher a good clear picture as to what the student's needs are so that those needs will be able to be met in kindergarten." Additionally, Elementary School Administrator 1 discussed the benefits of having parents involved in the transition process. Elementary School Administrator 1 shared, "Parents have their say at the table and it helps ease the parents' concerns of their child moving to the big school and taking that big step into kindergarten." In their conversations regarding the strengths related to the move from pre-K to kindergarten, Head Start administrators mirrored the comments of the elementary school administrators. For example, Head Start Administrator 1 stated "I think one of the most important things, for me, is for the teachers to be able to tell the story, the parents to be able to tell the story of who their child is, and the things that have worked." Collectively, the kindergarten teachers shared that the strengths of the process are around gathering information and the team meeting face to face. Kindergarten Teacher 1 stated, "I like that team meeting

because you get that face-to-face with the parent and the pre-K teacher because sometimes when you see an IEP it's just black and white, but you don't get all the nuances." When reflecting on her professional experience, Kindergarten Teacher 4 shared, "Personally, as a kindergarten teacher, one of the strengths for me is having a heads up for when the student is entering my classroom so I can prepare ... maybe plan ahead some strategies when they come to my class." Pre-K teachers provided a variety of viewpoints regarding the strengths of transition meetings. Pre-K Teacher 2 spoke specifically about the importance of getting students the services that they need prior to entering kindergarten. The teacher shared:

> Well, I feel that being in our pre-K classroom at least one or two years, our job is to get them set for kindergarten. We try to get them the services that they need and get them qualified so that when they go into kindergarten, all the paperwork and everything is completed. And then once they get into kindergarten then they'll work with the kids on speech and whatever there. Hopefully it's an easier transition from pre-K to kindergarten with their services. So, it's like they're not starting fresh there in kindergarten.

Just as Elementary School Administrator 1 provided her perspective about the importance of the role of parents, pre-K Teacher 3 also spoke about the involvement of parents in the transition meeting. She stated, "I think the biggest thing is to help reassure parents. From what I've seen, they have the need for more support in that transition process." Additionally, pre-K Teacher 1 mirrored the other stakeholder's comments on the strengths regarding transition meeting. The teacher shared, "I think being able to meet with the kindergarten teachers and the other supporting staff who will be involved in the child's next year is a great strength... I think that's awesome to be able to have that meeting." The common themes that emerged from Interview

Question 2 were mutual improvement practices and pre-K improvement practices. The sub-themes that emerged were parents, collaboration, services in pre-K and pre-K teachers. A word count was conducted on the responses for interview question 2 from all stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were: kindergarten-11; parents- 8; teachers-7; involved-6; and process-6.

Interview Question 3. What are the difficulties or barriers with the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 3 to uncover the barriers with the transition process for students with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten. Elementary school administrators had different responses to Question 3. As a result, varying themes emerged during the analysis process. Elementary School Administrator 1 brought to light that parental involvement is a notable strength in the transition process for children with disabilities as they move from pre-K to kindergarten. In contrast, he discussed that when a parent is not a part of the IEP process that it presents an obstacle. Elementary School Administrator 1 reported, "I think one of the biggest barriers, in general in this district, is the parent involvement. If we don't (have) a parent available at that meeting, we still have the meeting, but we might not get the parent input." When reflecting on the challenges associated with the transition from pre-K to kindergarten, Elementary School Administrator 2 took into consideration the distinct programming profiles of the two elementary schools she is responsible for. Elementary School Administrator 2 shared, "One of my buildings has pre-K in the same building, so the process I think is a little more fluid and is based on more understanding just and interacting with the students and the teachers more regularly". The administrator further explained, "(The school)

where we don't have the pre-K, it's pretty limited communication and sort of our first

understanding of what is going on with kiddos is that initial meeting." In contrast, Head Start

administrators had a more global view regarding the difficulties with the transition process. Head

Start Administrator 1 reported:

> The school systems that we have collaborations with really run very smoothly because
>
> we have established a presence in their schools. It makes all the difference in the world.
>
> The school system that we deal with where we are not collaborating, it's a much rougher
>
> process.

This statement refers to what Head Start calls *collaborative schools*. A collaborative school is

where the Head Start pre-K programs are located within the school buildings in the district. The

non-collaborating school districts are where the Head Start pre-K programs are located within

the school community in a separate building. Head Start Administrator 2 shared another view of

the difficulties with the steps to initially identify of a child with a disability and its potential

impact on the kindergarten transition process. For example, she shared, "We sometimes get

kiddos that are referred to CDS that aren't promptly put on an IEP. So maybe they're still in the

process of being identified at transition time and I think that makes for some difficulty." The

responses from the kindergarten teachers revealed two common themes regarding the difficulties

during the transition process. The first theme that emerged was regarding the need for classroom

observations of students. Kindergarten Teacher 2 reported:

> I don't think there's any specific difficulties, but something that I feel could strengthen the
>
> process would be for kindergarten teachers to be able to go in and observe a student

in their pre-K classroom environment before they make the transition into the kindergarten classroom.

Kindergarten Teacher 5 elaborated on the importance of observing the child in their classroom environment. She shared, "I wish we could have the classroom kindergarten teachers actually observe them in their setting because last year and this year we had IEPs on incoming kindergartners and they're nothing like their reports." Upon analysis of the data associated with the challenges related to the process of transitioning a child from pre-K to kindergarten, the theme that emerged was communication. Kindergarten Teacher 3 indicated, "The difficulties or barriers in this process is that there's a tendency to not believe what the pre-K people are telling us, to not take into consideration what they are saying when they say this kid really needs OT." Additionally, Kindergarten Teacher 4 shared her professional thoughts about the barriers associated with transition IEP meetings. Kindergarten Teacher 4 explained that, "Sometimes I wonder if we're getting all the pertinent information that we need at those meetings. Even for kids who don't have disabilities." It was noted that pre-K teachers provided a variety of viewpoints regarding the difficulties or barriers with the process of transition meetings. Pre-K Teacher 2 shared:

> Well, this is our first year when we've finally been able to get the services that they need through pre-K. Because it's hard sending them, the last couple of years we haven't had speech, we haven't OT, we haven't had the services to support our kids that have IEPs.

Pre-K teacher 2's response is in reference to the perceived lack of services that have been available to pre-K students in previous years. In terms of the level of staffing for a child, pre-K Teacher 1 reported, "So I think that is kind of hard going into kindergarten where they're coming

from three staff people all the time going into one staff person." The common themes that emerged from Interview Question 3 were mutual improvement practices and public school improvement practices. The sub themes that emerged were collaboration, communication, observations, and services in kindergarten. A word count was conducted on the responses for interview question 3 from all stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were transition-9; kindergarten-8; meeting-7; and school-7.

Interview Question 4. Describe the programs and special education services that your school provides for children with IEP's.

All stakeholders were asked a similar question regarding programming and special education services in their respective programs. Elementary school administrators reported on the specific services and programs available at their respective schools. Elementary School Administrator 1 reported:

> We have academic resource room support. We have what we call the transition room, the behavioral program for students with behavioral needs involved. We have functional life skills program for students that fit that need. We have speech/language and we provide counseling, social work services as part of IEPs, as well as OT.

In addition, Elementary School Administrator 3 reported on the special education services that incoming kindergarten students with disabilities could access in their building. The administrator explained, "They would have Special Ed services, pull out or push in additional time as needed academically if their goals were academic goals. Speech, they would have speech with the speech clinician either individually or in a small group." The Head Start administrators discussed the dynamic with CDS providing special education services and programming within the Head

Start/Pre-K classrooms. Head Start Administrator 1 shared "CDS provides the framework for most of our special education services, but because they do not have occupational therapy or physical therapy on contract at this point, we have pursued medical model." Additionally, Head Start Administrator 2 reported her perspective regarding the management of student services, "We mostly do the facilitation and the coordination through CDS and then through the district if possible." The kindergarten teachers reported about the special education services and programming available at their respective schools. Kindergarten Teacher 2 shared her knowledge of the special education services available to children with disabilities. Kindergarten Teacher 2 clarified that, "The services that I'm aware of include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, behavioral support and accommodations in the classroom, work with a social worker, and also work with a school psychologist." Kindergarten Teacher 4 shared her professional experience with the special education transition process:

> I had a student this year who came in with an IEP, so he was able to get right into the resource room, the special ed system, very quickly. I've noticed a great improvement with him. I think not having that gap from when they come in, being able to slide them right into what they need has been very helpful.

In contrast, Kindergarten Teacher 5 shared her understanding of services and support for kindergarten students, "As long as they have an IEP, they can get speech and language and OT and, depending, sometimes resource help. But other than that, if they don't already have an IEP in place, there isn't anything." Likewise, the pre-K teachers shared the various services and programming available in their respective programs. Pre-K Teacher 1 reported on her experiences with the provision of early intervention speech and language services in pre-K.

"Well, a lot of times children get diagnosed with a speech and language impairment. That's usually their first go-to. So, then they'll get speech therapy to support their language development." With respect to occupational therapy supports and services associated with CDS, this teacher additionally shared, "They no longer partner with occupational therapy at the hospital. So, they're not able to provide services, so we have to go through the doctor for that." Additionally, pre-K Teacher 2 discussed the frequency and format of special education services provided by CDS for students with disabilities. Pre-K Teacher 2 explained "Some of our children receive speech, and it's usually two times a week for thirty minutes, either individual or group. And then we have children with OT that receive [services] a couple times a week as well. Then we have SDI." The common themes that emerged during Interview Question 4 were supports and services in kindergarten, and supports and services in pre-K. The sub themes that emerged were services in pre-K, services in kindergarten. High frequency words were: speech- 19; therapy-7; services-6; work-6; children-5; language-5; and resource-5.

Interview Question 5. Describe the relationship between the transition team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS).

All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 5 to uncover the relationship between transition team members that include, administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, and CDS. Based on the responses of Elementary School Administrators, notable common themes emerged when analyzing the responses to this question. Elementary School Administrator 2 discussed the relationship between Head Start, public school and parents. Elementary School Administrator 2 explained, "I think we have a very positive relationship, at least my experience is positive relationship in terms of those meetings. And again, I think we do a nice job of transitioning not

just the students in, but the parents in." This administrator elaborated further on the transition team members, "I think we're all on the same page trying to make sure these kiddos get everything we have to give them and make the parents feel welcome and supported." In addition, Elementary School Administrator 3 shared their impression of the communication with administrators that are involved with the transition process. Elementary School Administrator 3 explained, "I would like to think that it's open communication relationship. I have to say that the head of the Special Ed Department for Head Start has been very open and forthcoming with communication. Touches base quite frequently so that's good." Moreover, when reflecting on the relationship between transition team members, Elementary School Administrator 1 responded, "I think it's a professional relationship."

Head Start administrators also shared a common view regarding the relationships between the transition team members. Head Start Administrator 1 explained, "This is a process that has been evolving over the years, and I think we're at a point where there's a fair amount of trust and belief in the information that the teachers and parents are going to bring forward." Head Start Administrator 2 reported that professional relationships of the transition team members to be positive and that there was a good flow of communication. She indicated that, "I think I already said...everybody else too, have pretty strong relationships and pretty good back and forth communication, which I think is very helpful."

In contrast, the kindergarten teachers shared a variety of perspectives regarding the relationship between the transition team members. In her discussion of the relationship between transition team members, Kindergarten Teacher 3 specifically discussed the absences of a professional connection. Kindergarten Teacher 3 explained, "I have no relationship with pre-K

or Head Start. I may not have a relationship with parents or CDS. I can go into that meeting and not know anyone except for our present administrators." In addition, Kindergarten Teacher 2 shared, "For some of the team members, I think this their initial meeting. They haven't necessarily met before." Consequently, Kindergarten Teacher 1 discussed the importance of parental involvement in the transition meeting. Kindergarten Teacher 1 explained, "I think we really try to build that relationship with parents right off of that because that's just so important." Moreover, Kindergarten Teacher 2 shared:

> They're having a meeting to share information for the student. They're all coming together to support the student, give information about what has worked in the past, and what they could do to support the student in the new environment. I know that they share all of the documentation and testing results and any information that they have.

> Pre-K teachers provided similar perspectives as kindergarten teachers regarding the relationship between transition team members. Pre-K Teacher 5 shared, "Well in my experience, I always feel more comfortable with CDS and the parents just because I know them. I think that transition meeting can be extremely intimidating for parents and even myself." Additionally, pre-K Teacher 5 discussed her own barriers to attending the transition meetings. Pre-K Teacher 5 shared, "I'm a very shy, quiet person so even for myself going into a room with ten people around the table it's very nerve-wracking." Pre-K Teacher 2 discussed the importance of allowing parents the time to talk about what they want for their children with disabilities.

> I feel the families need to talk more about what they want for their children. I know we go around, and I say what I want to say, and then the kindergarten teacher says what they ... and then special service people come in and say what their plans are to do with them. But I feel that the families need more time to talk about what they want for their children.

The responses to the interview question were supportive and positive regarding the relationship between transition team members. The interview participants provided insight into areas of improvement that can be taken into consideration when planning transition meetings in the future. The common themes that emerged during Interview Question 5 were communication and transition meetings. Sub themes that emerged were assessments, collaboration, observations and parents. A word count was conducted on the responses for Question 5 from all stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were parents-10; relationship-7; information-6; teachers-6; and kindergarten-5.

Interview Question 6. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the relationship between team members (Administrators, Pre-K, teachers, CDS, parents)?

As a follow-up to Interview Question 5, all stakeholders were asked interview Question 6 to discover research participants' suggestions on how to strengthen the relationship between the transition team members. Multiple themes emerged from the interviews with elementary school administrators. In order to improve the relationship between pre-K families and public school educators, Elementary School Administrator 2 suggested, "Just more opportunity to connect prior to the kids coming in or prior to that initial meeting. I'm not sure what that would look like, but maybe just more opportunities for parents and kids to come into the school." In addition that elementary school administrator's advice about increasing opportunities for transitioning families to visit the school, Elementary School Administrator 1 shared:

How do we get around it being that one-shot thing? Could it be maybe starting in the second half of the year, so roughly late January, early February, is that members of that team from here are going over and doing some observations and visiting with these kids.

Or we have an information night that parents can come visit and learn about what

services and stuff we provide here.

To explain how Elementary School Administrator 3 attempts to increase collaboration and

communication with the pre-K teachers, a specific example was shared, "I stop in during the day

to see if they have any questions, how things are going throughout the week so there's constant

open communication with them." Similar themes emerged when the Head Start administrators

shared their perspectives on how to strengthen the relationship between the transition team

members. Head Start Administrator 1 stated:

I've always thought that the kindergarten teacher meeting these children within the

context of their classroom would be helpful. We've done that in another school system

where the kindergarten teachers come down and just talk about kindergarten and they

watch the kids during center time or whatever and it gives them a real nice snapshot of

how kids function on a day to day basis. It also gives a little familiarity. There's a face

associated with kindergarten, and she also has an idea, or he has an idea, of the little faces

who would be coming to that classroom door in the fall. So I see that as the piece that

we're missing at this point, that connection with the child. We have lots of adult time, but

there's very little connect to the child.

In addition, Head Start Administrator 2 focused on the communication of student data as an area

to improve when discussing how to strengthen the relationship between transition team

members. Head Start Administrator 2 reported:

I think we're constantly communicating with everybody and I think that just has to

continue and I think we are doing that. I'm sure there's a way to formalize that. Just to

make sure that it's structured that you're visiting at a certain time each year and these are

the questions you ask or here's the ... put the data that you want to ask for from pre-K and

pre-K can always provide that data or whatever it is.

The kindergarten teachers shared common professional insights regarding how to strengthen the

relationship between the transition team members. The kindergarten teachers' replies were

optimistic regarding building opportunities that support collaboration. Kindergarten Teacher 2

shared:

> Possibly having more than one meeting or a check-in after the transition happens if a
>
> question came up for the student in the new environment that could be answered by
>
> somebody who had worked with the student in the past. I thought that that would help
>
> strengthen the relationship.

In their discussion about how to strengthen the special education transition process, Kindergarten

Teacher 2 and Kindergarten Teacher 5 both note the value of classroom observations.

Elementary School Administrator 1 also indicated that she believed classroom observations

might be a step to take in the process to strengthen the relationship between transition team

members. Kindergarten Teacher 2 postulated, "Maybe teachers going to visit. I know in the past

when we've known we were having students coming in that had special challenges, we could

always go to the pre-K and we could observe." Though conducting classroom visits creates

challenges, Kindergarten Teacher 5 also supports the strategy of formal observations of all

students within the pre-K classrooms. Kindergarten Teacher 5 shared:

> I'd like to be able to visit more. I know it's hard with scheduling and subs, but I think
>
> being able to go visit the preschools that our kiddos go to so they can see me more often
>
> throughout the year would help with the transition for those kiddos who are high risks or
>
> high-needs and for the other as well.

Though the kindergarten teachers shared similar responses to Interview Question 6, the pre-K teachers' interviews provided a variety of responses regarding how to strengthen the relationships between transition members. Elementary Administrator 1 and Head Start Administrator 1 both indicated that having parents involved as a part of the transition from pre-K to kindergarten to be a strength of the district's process. In addition, pre-K Teacher 2 provided suggestions on how to improve parental participation during the transition meeting. Pre-K Teacher 2 explained:

> Parents need to have more freedom in talking and expressing themselves and sometimes I feel that doesn't happen. I feel that's their opportunity to speak up now that they're going into kindergarten and making sure that ... because I've come out of a lot of them, that parents didn't get that opportunity to talk and express their thoughts on it. And some of them didn't dare to do that for some reason. Because it's over stimulating to have so many people in there looking at you.

Moreover, pre-K Teacher 3 suggests that service providers such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists are an important transition team member and recommends that they develop a system to communicate with parents in order to strengthen the relationship between transition team members. Pre-K Teacher 3 reports:

> I think the biggest thing would be to include parents more, particularly with service providers. As teachers, we have a lot of contact with parents. I'm not really sure how much contact the providers have, but I don't think it's as much as what we have. So, I don't know if there's a way to increase that communication, even if it was like a weekly report, this is what we're working on kind of thing, or whatever is easier for the parents,

whether it's a phone call, "Hey. This is what we've done this week. This is what we'll be

working on."

The common themes that emerged during Interview Question 6 were mutual improvement

practices, pre-K improvement practices, and public school improvement practices. The sub

themes that emerged were assessments, collaboration, communication, observations, parents, and

transition meetings. A word count was conducted on the responses for Interview Question 6 from

all stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were kindergarten-7; parents-7; kids-5;

school-4; and teachers-4.

Interview Question 7. Do you attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring? If not,

who from your building attends the meetings?

According to Chapter 101: MUSER (DOE, 2018), the required team members for an IEP

meeting include a school administrator, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher,

parent and the student at age 16 or in 9th grade. All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 7

to determine which research participants attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring. Table

6, "Transition Meeting Attendants" depicts each stakeholder and whether they attend the

kindergarten transition meetings, if they do not, or if they may not be able to attend, who attends

the kindergarten transition meeting in their absence. Table 6 shows that a majority of research

participants attend the transition meetings.

Table 6

Transition Meeting Attendants

Transition Meeting Attendants			
Stakeholder	Attend Transition Meeting	Does Not Attend Transition Meeting	If not, the person who attends the meeting
Elementary School Admin #1	X		Instructional Strategist
Elementary School Admin #2	X		
Elementary School Admin #3	X		
HS Admin #1	X		Pre-K teacher
HS Admin #2		X	Disability Director
K Teacher #1	X		
K Teacher #2	X		
K Teacher #3	X		
K Teacher #4	X		
K Teacher #5	X		
HS Pre-K Teacher #1	X		
HS Pre-K Teacher #2	X		
HS Pre-K Teacher #3	X		

Elementary School Administrator 1 reported that if he could not attend the transition

meetings, there was an instructional strategist that would attend the transition meetings in his

absence. Head Start Administrator 1 stated that she attempts to attend all transition meetings, but due to the number of meetings that are scheduled during that time, if she could not attend, they were working on the competency of the pre-K teacher to present information during the meeting. Head Start Administrator 2 reported that it was not her role to attend the meetings and that she had a competent disability director who attended the transition IEP meetings on her behalf. All kindergarten teachers reported that they attend the transition meetings at their respective schools. In addition, all pre-K teachers stated that they attend the transition meetings at the respective elementary school where the pre-K student will attend kindergarten.

Interview Question 8. Is there any information that you would like to see presented or shared at the transition IEP meeting?

All research participants were asked Interview Question 8 to ascertain if there was any information that they would like to see presented or shared at the transition meetings. An analysis of the interviews with Elementary School Administrators revealed a range of responses regarding what they would like to see presented or shared at transition meetings. For these transition meetings, Elementary School Administrator 2 reported:

> Maybe a little more again in a positive, appropriate way, a little more background
> information in terms of the family, the parents. Again, anything that would help us build
> a relationship and be as proactive as possible in supporting these little guys.

This statement complements responses that support parental involvement and participation that were shared in response to Interview Question 2 regarding the strengths of the transition process, Interview Question 3 about the difficulties or barriers with the transition process, Interview Question 5 regarding the relationship between transition team members, and Interview Question 6 regarding how to strengthen the transition team relationships.

Additionally, Elementary School Administrator 3 discussed the need for observations in the pre-K classroom saying, "I think it would be fantastic if the kindergarten teacher would go in and do some observations before the end of the year to see how they are acting within the environment that they're in now." Elementary School Administrator 3 response mirrored participant's reports regarding observations in Interview Question 1 about participants understanding of the transition process, Interview Question 3 regarding the difficulties or barriers with the transition process, and Interview Question 6 regarding strengthening relationships between team members.

Elementary School Administrator 1 provided insight regarding the transition to kindergarten for students with special needs, "We're always looking it saying, "How can we make it better? I think that's one of the biggest strengths we have is that we know it's not perfect, but how can we always keep working towards that target to best serve our kids." Head Start administrators provided varied responses to Interview Question 8 regarding what they would like to see presented at transition meetings. An analysis of the responses revealed an array of themes from Head Start administrators. Head Start Administrator 1 asserted that the transition meetings should be about the child and not necessarily about the paperwork. Head Start Administrator 1 stated:

> Like I said, it would be really nice if we had a way to connect the kindergarten teachers and special ed services to the children, not just all the paperwork, but to the children, because behind all of these pieces of paper, there are these little beings and they're the ones that we're trying to influence and make a difference for.

In contrast, Head Start Administrator 2 reflected on the staff that attends the transition meetings. Head Start Administrator 2 shared, "We're trying to build staff capacity so that they feel they can really own it and that's our long-term hope. Just to keep it moving smoothly." (This statement is in reference to the Head Start staff presenting information at the transition meetings.) The kindergarten teachers' interviews revealed themes regarding assessment data, student supports and parents as information that they would like to see presented at transition meetings. In terms of pertinent information that should be presented at kindergarten transition meetings, Kindergarten Teacher 2 explained that kindergarten teachers want to know how to best support the student when they enter their classroom. Kindergarten Teacher 2 had this to share:

> I feel like the most important thing for me to get from the meetings would be to know how to best support the student in the classroom and to find out what has worked for this student in the past and what hasn't worked.

With assessments, Kindergarten Teacher 1 reported, "And that's definitely a lot of information. I'm not sure if there's a way to align that a little bit with what we expect at the beginning." Another perspective was from Kindergarten Teacher 4 about student assessment information:

> I know in our district we've changed the kindergarten screening process, and I was wondering if that's anything we could go back to? Maybe screening all kids in the spring? Because sometimes there's kids that haven't attended pre-K, and we don't have an awareness. But if they come for screening, we say, "Hmm, this may be something."
>
> Concerning the parents of children with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten, Kindergarten Teacher 1 indicated that there was value in the parental perspective at the IEP meeting. Kindergarten Teacher 1 shared "We get a chance to listen to the parents and that's a huge thing and look at what plans they've had in place for the kiddos.

Especially like behavior plans or academic, you know scaffolding or anything like that." The analysis of pre-K teacher's responses to Interview Question 8 regarding what information they would like to see presented at transition meetings, revealed that they focused on how to best prepare students for kindergarten. Pre-K teacher 3 reported an interest in collaborating with kindergarten teachers on kindergarten readiness skills. Pre-K teacher 3 stated:

> I mean if there was anything that we could do to help prepare the kids more than we are, any feedback from the kindergarten teachers, "Hey. You guys can work on this." That would make it a lot easier or help with the kids when they transition.

Additionally, pre-K Teacher 1 discussed the desire to know specific skills that kindergarten teachers are looking for when students transition from pre-K to kindergarten. Pre-K Teacher 1 shared:

> I think as a Pre-K teacher it would be really helpful to kinda know some of those goals that kindergartner teachers are looking for. That way we know specifically how many sight words should they know, how many letters, the letter sounds, things like that. That way, because I have three children in my class right now who are right on the verge of reading and so I could be already hitting those targets.

Considering services for students in pre-K, pre-K Teacher 3 shared her frustration with the lack of early intervention services for students and the perception that it reflects on her performance as a pre-K teacher. Pre-K Teacher 3 explained:

It's just, my job, or our job, is to do as much as we can for the families throughout the

year. To get them prepared for kindergarten. And if we can get all the services in place,

get them so they're okay, comfortable in kindergarten, and everything is done and ready

for them. That's my goal anyway. I don't like it when, like the past two years before we

were sending the kids over there that hardly got any speech throughout the year, and I

feel that we weren't doing our job. We weren't fulfilling their dreams of getting the

services that they needed. And I just felt sad for myself, because as I said I didn't feel like

I was doing my job. And I felt bad for the families.

Additionally, in response to Interview Question 8 regarding information that participants would

like to see shared or presented at the transition meeting, pre-K Teacher 2 reported concerns

regarding the lack of early intervention services, regarding the impact on student growth, as well

as the perception regarding the pre-K teacher's performance as a teacher. Pre-K Teacher 2

shared:

But still when it goes on for 2, 2 1/2 years, and you have a child for two years and they're

not receiving anything, and you can't understand what they're saying say now okay we're

sending them into kindergarten, and they're going to think well, they didn't do their job,

right? But it is, our hands are tied.

The common themes that emerged during Interview Question 8 were mutual improvement

practices, pre-K improvement practices and public school improvement practices. The sub-

themes that emerged were assessments, collaboration, communication, parents, observations, and

services in pre-K. A word count was conducted on the responses for Question 8 from all

stakeholders' responses. The high frequency words were kindergarten-8; kids-7; children-5; and

services-5.

Interview Question 9. Thank you for your time and participation; is there anything else that you would like to share?

All stakeholders were asked Interview Question 9 to gather any further information that the participants would share regarding the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for children with disabilities. Only one Elementary School Administrator answered this question. The Elementary School Administrator stated:

> No. Most of what we're doing is, we have a strong team, we've got some great pieces in place and I think the biggest thing that we have going for us is we have a reflective practice. We're always looking it saying, "How can we make it better?" I think that's one of the biggest strengths we have is that we know it's not perfect, but how can we always keep working towards that target to best serve our kids.

The theme that emerged from this code was public school improvement practices. In addition, the theme public school improvement practice emerged from the following interview questions. Interview Question 1 regarding participants understanding of the interview process, Interview Question 6 about stakeholder's recommendations on how to strengthen transition team relationships, and Interview Question 8 concerning information that participants would like to see presented at transition meetings.

Summary of results

The purpose of this single-site case study was to explore improving practices regarding the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for students with special needs. Specifically, the study focused on the stakeholders' perspectives of their experiences during the transition process. There were many descriptive in vivo codes generated through using the Atkinson case study

analysis methodology. The results from the semi-structured interviews provided essential data that has been presented in Chapter 4.

A review of these in vivo codes generated three main themes: mutual improvement practices, pre-K improvement practices, and public school improvement practices. Nine subthemes emerged through the coding process: collaboration, communication, parents, transition meetings, assessments, pre-K teachers, services in pre-K, observation, and services in kindergarten. Total word count for all stakeholder's interviews reveled the following: kindergarten-46; parents-32; transition-32; meeting-27; teachers-27; services-26; school-25; speech-24; and children-20. The next chapter will explore how the themes and sub-themes relate to the original research questions and theoretical framework. Further implications for research, recommendations for action and a final conclusion of the research will be presented next.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to uncover stakeholders' perceptions regarding the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for students with special needs. A single site phenomenological case study method was used in a school district in Maine to explore the following questions.

1.   How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

    a.   How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, Head Start administrators, and district administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

With permission from the school district and Head Start program, the researcher invited stakeholders to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. Analysis of these interviews produced three main themes and nine subthemes. The following sections will provide an interpretation of the findings and significant themes in relation to the research questions and literature review. Implications for further research and program improvements will also be reviewed.

Interpretation and Alignment of Findings with Literature

The interpretation and alignment of findings are presented and connected to the themes that emerged and discussed in comparison to literature presented in Chapter 2. In addition, this

section also looks at the results against the theoretical framework. The following section is organized by themes and subthemes. It also includes the integration and synthesis of participants' perceptions.

Theme 1: Mutual Improvement Practices.

When reviewing the codes, word counts and data from the semi-structured interviews there were multiple subthemes that emerged that fell into the theme of mutual improvement practices. The subthemes that emerged were: collaboration, communication, parents, and transition meetings. Three out of the four stakeholders reported that there were areas in regard to transition practices that would benefit from mutual improvement practices. When reviewing the codes there were subthemes that fell under both the public school stakeholders and pre-K stakeholders.

Collaboration. The organizational development framework supports articulated structures that support an organization's efforts to improve transition practices. Gallos (2006) supports organizational development as an effort that is planned, organization-wide, managed from the top and designed to increase an organizations effectiveness. The results of this study are similar to research conducted by Nelson (1999) as the analysis of the results from this study indicated that collaboration was a prominent theme for both public school and Head Start participants. For the kindergarten teacher participants in this study, collaboration was described as time for teachers and student to visit each other's classrooms. This included time to get to know the students that will be transitioning into their classroom as well as sharing information about all students.

Elementary school administrators shared that collaboration was easier when the programs were in their schools and the pre-K programs and staff were seen as part of the school community. Head Start administrators and pre-K teachers noted that they would like to collaborate more closely with kindergarten teachers to develop a common understanding of kindergarten readiness skills.

Communication. Analysis of participant responses and evidence produced codes that revealed the theme of communication as a mutual improvement practice. All participants reported that while communication is viewed as a strength, there is room to improve (With respect to this study communication was viewed as either communicating with stakeholders or the communication of information). Thus, participant data from this study reinforces Nelson's (1999) recommended approach to communicating during the transition process that includes parents and teachers discussing their expectations for the transition process. Elementary school administrators reiterated that communications with programs within the school building are better than with programs within the community. They also reported that communicating with the administrators from Head Start and the district is easy and positive. The analysis of the data supported time for kindergarten teachers and pre-K teachers to meet and discuss student strengths and needs as well as expectations. The results of this study support and expand Hick's (2011) recommendation to have all participants have access to information about the child and family.

Parents. All stakeholders in this study recognized that parents are an important member of a child's transition team. The literature supports that parental involvement is an important part of preschool programming and is a key indicator of later educational success (Barnard, 2004). Interview responses showed that Head Start administrators see the transition period as the time for parents to build their advocacy skills. Yet, pre-K teachers acknowledged that parents attending the transition meeting can be difficult. The data revealed that this is postulated to be due to anxiety or lack of connection with transition team members. Literature confirms that IEP team members support the role of parent advocacy during the transition meeting (Barnard, 2004; Janus et al., 2007; McIntyre et al., 2010). Elementary School Administrators replies showed that there are barriers with parental participation district-wide. Responses from elementary school administrators and Head Start administrators demonstrated that the transition meetings are seen as an opportunity to establish a relationship with parents.

Transition meetings. The literature supports that the transition from pre-K to kindergarten is an important milestone for both parents and the student (McIntyre et al., 2010). All stakeholders who participated in this study had a clear understanding of the purpose of transition meetings, required participants and the intended outcomes. Results showed that stakeholders know that the meetings are held in the springtime and that CDS and the district work collaboratively to establish the meeting times. With regard to the purpose of the meeting, an analysis of participant responses showed that stakeholders acknowledged and supported that the meeting is to review student strengths and needs moving into kindergarten. The work of Rous et al. (2007) also

recognizes that the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities involves changes in services (programs and providers) and requires both the child and the family to make adjustments. Elementary school administrators in this study see the transition meetings as a time to meet parents and establish a connection if there is not already one present due to a sibling in their school. Interview responses from Head Start administrators in this study support that the transition meetings are not just about the IEP document, that they are about a child.

Theme 2: Pre-K Improvement Practices

When reviewing the codes, word counts and data from the semi-structured interviews there were multiple subthemes that emerged that fell into the theme of pre-K improvement practices. The subthemes that emerged were; assessments, pre-K teachers, and Services in pre-K.

    Assessments. Literature supports the early identification of a child with special needs, as it is essential to providing appropriate programming and services (Bagnato, 2007; Mann et al., 2007). Research of school readiness in children with developmental delays and disabilities showed that early intervention services that focused on early literacy skills, early academic skills, and school adjustment behaviors showed a decrease in the risk of poor school outcomes (Brown, 2015; Eisenhower et al., 2016; McWayne et al., 2012). The data from this research study revealed that there are multiple apprehensions with the role and purpose of pre-K assessments. For example, elementary school administrator's responses revealed that they are unclear on what screening assessment is used in pre-K. In addition, other responses from elementary school administrators speak to the administrator's lack of understanding on how to interpret the assessment information that is made available to them. Replies from interviews with Head Start

administrators revealed that they are interested in knowing what the public school administrators and teachers want for assessments and student performance data or how to interpret the data that they have from assessments. Responses from kindergarten teachers showed that they are open to conversations regarding pre-K assessments and sharing with the pre-K staff what they want to know about incoming students. Literature by Bagnato (2007) supports that authentic assessment of children includes the professional sharing information in respectful and useful ways.

Pre-K Teachers. In terms of the professional role of the pre-K teacher in providing service the results of this study are well aligned with recent literature. An analysis of the literature indicated that every child between four and eight years of age deserves a bachelor's degree-level teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and certification in the early childhood field (Early et al., 2006). In this study, the pre-K teachers provided early education curriculum in the district's pre-K programs. The pre-K teachers that worked within the district pre-K programs are hired and supervised by the local Head Start program. Yet, there are also pre-K programs within elementary schools and pre-K programs at the district's central office. The responses that developed from elementary principals when discussing the role of pre-K teachers revealed that there is an ill-defined relationship within an elementary school setting. Head Start administrators' replies showed that they focus on building the competency and confidence of the pre-K teacher within the classroom and transition meeting setting.

Services in Pre-K. The evidence from this research showed there are multiple difficulties with the provision of early intervention services for identified students and students in the referral process enrolled in the pre-K programs. A review of responses shows that timeliness of referrals is a concern. Literature supports timely screening, evaluation and early intervention for children with special needs (Bagnato, 2007; Mann et al., 2007; Pears et al., 2014). The responses

revealed that there are concerns with CDS providing early intervention services and programming for pre-K students. These concerns regarding services are reported as: lack of service providers, lack of services for extended periods of time, and OT as a stand-alone service. These concerns noted in this study are valid as research grounds the premise that quality early educational intervention programs may not only decrease the rate of referral into special education but may also reduce the length of time that special education services are needed (Mann et al., 2007). These concerns have been validated through literature specific to CDS and early intervention in the State of Maine (Kendrick and Poulin, 2002; Logue et al., 2015; Nelson, 1999). In addition, Head Start administrator and pre-K teacher responses revealed that Head Start programming has supported alternative avenues to provide services for students in the absence of CDS services.

Theme 3: Public School Improvement Practices

When reviewing the codes, word counts and data from the semi-structured interviews there were multiple subthemes that emerged that fell into the theme of public school improvement practices. The subthemes that emerged were observations and services in kindergarten.

Observations. This research study revealed that public school stakeholders and Head Start administrator responses described the frequency and organization of classroom observations as an area of improvement. Kindergarten teachers reported a willingness to go and visit pre-K classrooms. Participant responses indicated that even in elementary schools where the pre-K classroom is in the same building, in-formal and formal observations do not occur. Head Start administrator codes show that the Head Start classrooms support observations. Furthermore, elementary school

principals recommend that there be structure to the observation for all parties. The data from this study related to public school improvement practices is supported by the literature. For example, Rous et al. (2007) provides a framework that supports transition practices and activities. The framework from Rous et al. supports that the transition to school is an interagency process that features; communication and relationships, interagency administrative support and the alignment of systems in regard to programs, practices and expectations.

Services in Kindergarten. Literature supports that the early identification of children is essential to the process of providing appropriate programing and services (Bagnato, 2007; Mann et al., 2007). The results of this research study revealed that public school stakeholders are familiar with the services that their respective schools offer such as resource room support, functional life skills programming, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Kindergarten teachers perceived that all incoming kindergarten students would benefit from additional supports during their transition between pre-K and kindergarten. The research also revealed that if students enter kindergarten with an IEP plan then services begin seamlessly. If students do not begin kindergarten with an IEP, then there are no supports available or it is a long process to establish services. This is supported by literature from Logue et al. (2015) that found in Maine there are concerns with the timely provision of referral and special education services from CDS.

Implications

This study examined the perceptions of stakeholders in regard to the strengths and barriers to the transition team and the transition process for children with special needs. The results of this study are meaningful and relevant to the school district that was the site of the research as well as the larger school community in the State of Maine. It is anticipated that the

process of investigating the current transition practices will support public school and Head Start stakeholder's insight into their own practices within their school and district. In addition, public school and Head Start stakeholders may review the findings of this research and initiate further conversations at the district and state level.

The findings in this study show that the public school and Head Start program are operating through a collaborative effort to provide pre-K programming. However, there is evidence to support that the there are opportunities for improvement of practices. Research revealed that stakeholders are all willing to improve transition practices however; there was no formal organizational structure to support common expectations. The evidence supports the need for a formal organizational structure to improve transition practices. A further discussion of the recommended organizational structure based on the recent literature and results of this study are outlined in the next section.

Additional implications would support the dissemination of research results to interested and vested parties. According to Brownson, Eyler, Harris, Moore and Tabak (2018) dissemination efforts need to take into account the message, source, audience and channel. The following recommendations take into account effective strategies to communicate researchnresults in alignment with the intended audience. In addition, these recommendations suggest appropriate methods for the dissemination of research information.

This research would be relevant to the following stakeholders groups:

1. School district stakeholders: this could include special education staff, administrators, Head Start staff, CDS and parents.

2. State of Maine school leadership stakeholders: this could include Maine Association of Special Education Directors (MADSEC), Maine Principal's Association (MPA), and Maine School Superintendents Association (MSSA).

3. Maine State Department of Education stakeholders: this could include CDS, Special Services Department, and Early Childhood Department.

Information could be presented in a variety of professional development opportunities to stakeholders' groups throughout the State of Maine. Results can be customized and aligned to the individual audiences as recommended below.

1. School districts offer professional development in-services sessions. This research information can be shared with public school educators and pre-K educators. Format for this audience could include small group breakout sessions, large group presentations, and action oriented organizational development facilitation. Recommended modalities for research information would be PowerPoint presentations, hand-outs, and info graphs.

2. MADSEC's organization provides resources, professional support, professional development and representation at the state and national level for special educators. MADSEC provides professional development opportunities through statewide conferences in the spring and fall, collaborative professional development sessions with the Maine Department of Education, and collaborative professional development with the University of Maine. MADSEC provides executive guidance to legislative committees and representation on policy-making committees. Research dissemination for this audience could include small group break out conference presentations, guidance for input and representation during public comment sessions on early

intervention, CDS and special education legislative initiatives, and presentations at regional MADSEC groups.

3. The Maine Principals Association (MPA) and Maine School Superintendents Association (MSSA) are both school leader associations in the State of Maine. As this research has revealed, elementary school principals are a stakeholder group connected to the transition practices for students with special needs. In addition, school superintendents are ultimately responsible for all programs within their school system. Research distribution for these audiences could include breakout session for annual conferences, presentations at regional leadership groups, and individual school district presentation of research results.

4. The MDOE (2018d) is a state agency is responsible for administering of funding for state education programs, coordinating the authoring of rules for Maine State education statutes, provide professional development, and educator credentialing. Collaboration with MDOE for research distribution could include presenting information through a listen and learn webinars, which are scheduled monthly for educators to view. The listen and learn webinars are also archived on the MDOE website for future viewing. Another opportunity would be to present to educational leadership taskforce committees. This could be accomplished through educational leadership taskforce membership, presenting at taskforce committee meetings and providing a research brief to the committee for consideration.

The implications discussed will provide stakeholder groups within the State of Maine applicable dissemination of research results. The dissemination of research results to these specific

stakeholder groups will provide coverage of information statewide, as there is representation through regional sub groups and individual agencies. Ultimately the goal is for stakeholder groups to use the research results to implement a review of current practices within their respected school districts and agencies to improve practices for children with special needs transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten.

Recommendations for Action

The following recommendations for action are based on the 13 transcribed interviews with district stakeholders. Analysis of the interviews developed three themes and nine subthemes. These themes and subthemes give voice to the stakeholders in regard to the phenomenon of the transition process for pre-K students with special needs entering kindergarten. The following recommendations for action were developed based on analysis of the research in addition to the consideration of recent literature.

The first recommendation is the development of an organizational framework for collaborative pre-K programming. For school districts where the pre-K program is a collaborative agreement with another agency such as Head Start, having an articulated organizational framework with anticipated outcomes will provide clarity for stakeholders. Anticipated outcomes associated with the framework should include but are not limited to: collaboration, communication, parent involvement, observations, and, assessments. For pre-K programs that are not located within an elementary school this would include strategies to include pre-K staff, parents and students within the respective school community.

The second recommendation is the establishment of a service delivery model for identified pre-K students. There are gaps in the current system for provision of early intervention services. Presently CDS is responsible for providing services and programming for identified students in

the district's pre-K program. Communication regarding the lack of services in the district would initiate a collaborative effort between CDS, Head Start and the school district to develop a strategic plan to allocate resources and provide services for students identified with special needs.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study provided information and a voice to stakeholders regarding the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for students with special needs in a rural school district in Maine. The research provided information regarding the importance for developing organizational structures and service delivery models. Below are recommendations for further research.

The first recommendation for further study is the examination the parent's voice regarding the transition process. Literature reveals that parents have multiple concerns regarding the transition process (Janus et al., 2007; Mawdley & Hauser-Cram, 2013). There are gaps in the literature regarding parents' perceptions of the transition process when there has been a lack of early intervention services. Recommended methods for capturing parent's perspectives regarding the transition from pre-K to kindergarten include individual interviews, focus groups and survey questions. Due to the confidentiality protections under The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) there are potential barriers to accessing parental participation in future studies.

The second recommendation is for further exploration into the role that the school leader plays in the transition process is warranted. It is recommended that future research examine the role of the school leader in the transition process. Specifically, looking at when the pre-K classroom is located in a school building in comparison to when a pre-K is located in a community setting. This would provide further information to support the transition process

planning within different pre-K classroom settings. Recommended research methods include individual interviews, focus groups and survey questions. It is also recommended to include demographic information on school leaders in order to ascertain if the longevity of a school leader in the position has an impact on the transition process.

A third recommendation to further investigate is a comparison of the transition process between school districts that provide their own pre-K programming with school districts that collaborate with Head Start or other agencies to provide pre-K programming. Recommended research methods include demographic surveys of multiple school districts and programs that include information on the type of program, size of school, size of program, staff to teacher ratios, curriculum, enrollment criteria and teacher salary. In addition, individual interviews with stakeholders, focus groups, and survey questions from the comparative programs could provide information on the strengths and weaknesses of the transition process between comparative programs. The results from this recommendation for future research could provide valuable information to school districts that are in the planning stage to add pre-K programs to the district programming.

Conclusion

The transition to kindergarten is a magical milestone for children and families. For students identified with special needs, there are additional worries and celebrations to share with the transition team. This study revealed stakeholder's perspective on current transition practices as well as giving voice to stakeholders on strategies to improve the process from pre-K to kindergarten for students with special needs.

The evidence from this study suggests that there are strengths with the current transition process. This includes stakeholder's perception on communication, the relationship amongst the

transition team members and understanding of the transition process. The common thread that appeared in all of the interviews was the willingness of the stakeholders to collaborate and improve practices that focus on the family and child.

Stakeholder's insight regarding the transition process provided relevant and achievable strategies that can be implemented with little impact to the respective organizations other than time and commitment. This study adds relevant information in the area of transition practices for students with special needs, specifically for school districts that collaborate with an agency to provide pre-K programming and early intervention services. The results of this study show that a formal organizational structure that includes clear anticipated outcomes for all parties involved are justified. The research also supports an establishment of a service delivery model for early intervention services. These recommendations will require a collaborative partnership between stakeholder groups. This appears to be an achievable outcome as all stakeholders reported positive established relationships.

This study has provided a voice to the stakeholders involved in the transition from pre-K to kindergarten for students with special needs in a rural school district in Maine. These results can be used to provide professional development to stakeholder groups as well as information for further research on improving transition process. The transition from pre-K to kindergarten should be an exciting time for all families, including those with children with special needs.

References

Atkinson, J. (2002). Four steps to analyze data from a case study method. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Systems, Australia, 38*, 1-11. Retrieved from http://aisnet.org/acis2002/38

Bagnato, S. J. (2007). *Authentic assessment for early childhood intervention best practices.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*(1), 39-62. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2003.11.002

Bauml, M. (2011). "We learned all about that in college": The role of teacher preparation in novice kindergarten/primary teachers practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 32*(3), 225-239. doi:10.1080/10901027.2011.594701

Blacher, J., & McIntyre, L. L. (2006). Syndrome specificity and behavioral disorders in young adults with intellectual disability: Cultural differences in family impact. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 50,* 184-198.

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. F. (2016). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bogard, K., Traylor, F., & Takanishi, R. (2008). Teacher education and PK outcomes: Are we asking the right questions? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(1), 1-6.

Brown, K. L. (2015). *Ecological predictors of school service usage and early academic skills in kindergarten children with developmental disabilities and delays* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 2015)*.* Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/1794/19654

Brownson, R. C., Eyler, A. A., Harris, J. K., Moore, J. B., & Tabak, R. G. (2018). Getting the

    word out. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 24*(2), 102-111.

Council for Exceptional Children. (2004). *Policy and advocacy*. Retrieved from

    https://www.cec.sped.org

Crane, J. (2009). *Preschool children with special educational needs: Achievement, retention,*

    and classification through second grade (Doctoral dissertation, George Mason

    University, 2009)*.* Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses

    Global. (305242510)

Creswell, J. W. & Guetterman, T. C. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and*

    evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (6th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among*

    five approaches (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2009). *Organizational development and change* (9th ed.).

    New York, NY: Cengage Learning.

Early, D. M., Bryant, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Clifford, R. M., Burchinal, M. R., Ritchie, S., . . .

    Barbarin, O. (2006). Are teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom

    quality and children's academic gains in pre-Kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research*

    Quarterly, 21(2), 174-195.

Educate Maine. (2016). *Early childhood education a strong foundation for Maine.* Retrieved

    from http://www.educatemaine.org/docs/EarlyChildhood-Policy-Brief-2016-FINAL.pdf

Eisenhower, A., Taylor, H., & Baker, B. L. (2016). Starting strong: A school-based indicated

    prevention program during the transition to kindergarten. *School Psychology Review,*

    45(2), 141-170.

Esmaeili, M. R., & Baramond, S. (2014). *Organizational development in learning organizations.*

    Retrieved from https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Organizational+development

    +in+learning+organizations.-a0376391216

French, W. L., Bell, C. H., & Zawacki, R. A. (Eds.) (1989). *Organization development: Theory,*

    practice, and research (3rd ed.). Homewood, IL: BPI/Irwin.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Gallos, J. V. (2006). *Organization development: A Jossey-Bass reader*. San Francisco, CA:

    Jossey-Bass.

Glanz, K., Rimer, B. K., & Viswanath, K. (Eds). (2017). *Health behavior and health education.*

    Retrieved from https://www.med.upenn.edu/hbhe4/part4-ch15-organizational-

    development-theory.shtml?4.2

Graue, E. (2009). Reimagining kindergarten. *The School Administrator, 66*, 10-15.

Graziano, S. P. (2015). *Enhancing kindergarten transition practices for preschoolers with*

    special needs: Effects on child outcomes and parent-teacher involvement (Doctoral

    dissertation, The University of Utah, 2015). ProQuest LLC. (No. 3728403)

Hardin, B. J., Mereoiu, M., Hung, H., & Roach-Scott, M. (2009). Investigating parent and

    children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*(2), 93-102.

Hicks, L. Y. (2011). *Caregivers' experience during their children's transition process from early*

    childhood special education services to school-aged special education services (Doctoral

dissertation, Union Institute and University, 2011). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

(UMI No. 3477338)

Janus, M., Kopechanski, L., Cameron, R., & Hughes, D. (2008). In transition: Experiences of

parents of children with special needs at school entry. *Early Childhood Education*

Journal, 35(5), 479-485.

Janus, M., Lefort, J., Cameron, R., & Kopechanski, L. (2007). Starting kindergarten: Transition

issues for children with special needs. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue*

Canadienne De L'Éducation, 30(3), 628-648.

Kendrick, M., & Labas, L. (2000). *Building inclusive school and preschool communities*.

Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED439880.pdf

Kendrick, M., & Poulin, N. (2002). *Assessing quality inclusive child care placements for*

young children with special needs. Retrieved from

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED463110.pdf

Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Kowalski, T. J., McCord, R. S., Petersen, G. J., Young, I. P., & Ellerson, N. M. (2010,

December). *The American school superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*. Retrieved from

http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=458

Logue, M., Tu, S., Fisher, S., & Mason, C. (2015). Public preschool programs in Maine: Four

case studies of quality programs. *State of Education, 10*, 1-41. Retrieved from

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=cepar

e_state

Maine Department of Education. (2018a). *Chapter 124 basic approval standards: Public*

preschool standards (05-071). Retrieved from

https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Chapter%20124%20Basic%20Approval%20Standards.pdf

Maine Department of Education. (2018b). *Maine student enrollment data*. Retrieved from http://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/warehouse/student-enrollment-data

Maine Department of Education. (2018c). *Chapter 101: Maine unified special education regulation birth to age twenty (MUSER).* Retrieved from www.maine.gov/doe/cds/muser

Maine Department of Education. (2018d). *Child Development Services*. Retrieved from http://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/cds

Maine Legislature. (2018). Title 20-A: Education part 4: Specific Education Programs subpart 1: Special Education Chapter 301: General Provisions. Retrieved November 24, 2018 from http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-a/title20-Asec7001.html

Mann, E., McCartney, K., & Park, J. (2007). Preschool predictors of the need for early remedial and special education services. *The Elementary School Journal*, *107*(3), 273-285.

Marxen, C. E., Ofstedal, K., & Danbom, K. (2008). Highly qualified kindergarten teachers: Have they been left behind? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 29*(1), 81-88.

Mawdsley, H. P., & Hauser-Cram, P. (2013). Mothers of young children with disabilities: Perceived benefits and worries about preschool. *Early Child Development and Care, 183*(9), 1258-1275.

McIntyre, L., Eckert, T., Arbolino, L., DiGennaro-Reed, F., & Fiese, B. (2014). The transition to kindergarten for typically developing children: A survey of school psychologists' involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 42*(3), 203-210.

McIntyre, L., Eckert, T., Fiese, B., DiGennaro, F., & Wildenger, L. (2007). Transition to kindergarten: Family experiences and involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(1), 83-88.

McIntyre, L. L., Eckert, T. L., Fiese, B. H., DiGennaro-Reed, F. D., & Wildenger, L. K. (2010). Family concerns surrounding kindergarten transition: A comparison of students in special and general education. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 38*(4), 259-263.

McWayne, C. M., Cheung, K., Wright, L. E. G., & Hahs-Vaughn, D. L. (2012). Patterns of school readiness among Head Start children: Meaningful within-group variability during the transition to kindergarten. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 104*(3), 862-878.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nelson, D. (1999). *Enhancing community options for families of young children: Final report.* Durham, NH: Institute on Disability.

Pears, K., Healey, C., Fisher, P., Braun, D., Gill, C., Mar Conte, H., . . . Ticer, S. (2014). Immediate effects of a program to promote school readiness in low-income children: Results of a pilot study. *Education and Treatment of Children, 37*(3), 431-460.

Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (2003). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective.* Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books.

Phillips, D. A., & Lowenstein, A. E. (2011). Early care, education, and child

development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 62*(1), 483-500.

Quintero, N. & McIntyre, L. L. (2010). Sibling adjustment and maternal well-being: An examination of families with and without an autism spectrum disorder. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 25(*1), 37-46.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(2), 147-166.

Roberts, C. M., & Hyatt, L. Z. C. (2019). *Dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and... defending your dissertation* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rosenkoetter, S., Hains, A., & Dogaru, C. (2007). Successful transitions for young children with disabilities and their families: Roles of school social workers. *Children & Schools, 29*(1), 25-34.

Rous, B., Harbin, G., & McCormick, K. (2006). A child outcome framework for the early childhood transition process. *Opening Doors to Success Research Brief: National Early Childhood Transition*, 1-5. Retrieved from http://www.hdi.uky.edu/nectc/Libraries/NECTC_Webinar/A_Child_Outcome_Framewor k_for_the_Early_Childhood_Transition_Process.sflb.ashx

Rous, B., Hallam, R., Harbin, G., McCormick, K., & Jung, L. A. (2007). The transition process for young children with disabilities. *Infants & Young Children, 20*(2), 135-148.

Russell-Brinks, R. J. (2012). Early literacy skill development provides the key to success for preschoolers at risk for school failure. *The Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table, 2012*(1), 1.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Siddiqua, A., & Janus, M. (2017). Experiences of parents of children with special needs at school entry: A mixed method approach. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 43*(4), 566-576.

Sullivan, A. L., & Field, S. (2013). Do preschool special education services make a difference in kindergarten reading and mathematics skills? *Journal of School Psychology*, *51*(2), 243.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2011-2013). *American Community Survey 3-year public use microdata sample files (PUMS)*. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_pums_csv_2011_2013&prodType=document

Waldo County Action Partners. (2018a). *Head Start director job description*. Retrieved from https://waldocap.org/

Waldo County Action Partners. (2018b). *Head Start education coordinator job description*. Retrieved from https://waldocap.org/

Welchons, L. W., & McIntyre, L. L. (2015). The transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 35*(1), 52-62.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Administrators, General Educators, and Head Start Educators,

In addition to my professional responsibilities as the Director of Pupil Services, I am also a doctoral student in the University of New England's Educational Leadership program. I am conducting a research project titled: *A Case Study of Improving Kindergarten Transition Practices for Students with Special Needs.* I would like to invite you participate in this study which will be conducted with a sample of administrators, general educators, and Head Start educators who have experiences with or will have children with special needs transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten. The goal of the study is to shed light on the current transition practices. I intend to answer the following research questions.

1. How can a school district improve transition practices that support pre-K children with disabilities entering kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?
    a. How do pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, and administrators describe their experiences when transitioning pre-K children with disabilities to kindergarten programming in an elementary school setting?

Findings from this study may be of benefit in informing researchers and school districts about the process of transition for preschool students with disabilities. By reviewing current practices, barriers and successes, school districts may be better able to provide programming and supports for preschool students with disabilities as they transition to kindergarten.

I am inviting you to be a part of this study based on your relationship with pre-K students with disabilities transitioning into kindergarten. You will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Your involvement in the interview is completely voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate. You may choose to stop the interview at any time, or not to participate at all. Your participation will be kept anonymous and confidential. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julia "Sandy" Flacke, Director of Pupil Services and Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Doctoral Dissertation – A Case Study of Improving Kindergarten Transition Practices for Students with Special Needs

Principal Investigator(s): Julia "Sandy" Flacke

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

You are being invited to participate in a research project being completed by Julia "Sandy" Flacke, a candidate for the Ed.D in Educational Leadership at the University of New England. My faculty sponsors are Dr. Heather Wilmot and Dr. Peter Harrison.
The purpose of this research is to obtain and compare the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the transition practices for students with disabilities transitioning from pre-K programs to kindergarten. The results of this research will be shared in a written dissertation and presented orally in a dissertation defense. Research supports that high-quality early intervention programs for preschoolers identified with disabilities or at risk for developmental delays can reduce the incidence of future problems in their learning, behavior and health status. As a Director of Pupil Services and researcher, I want to better understand the transition practices that impact preschool students with special needs as they transition into kindergarten.

Who will be in this study?

The participants in this study have been identified as key stakeholders in the process of preschool students transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten. Teachers and administrators from Head Start, kindergarten teachers, service providers and administrators from RSU #3 will be invited to participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be held at the Pre-K/ Elementary school building. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be designed to gather information about a stakeholder's (teacher, administrator) perspective of students transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?
Except for time and inconvenience in participating in an interview, there are no risks to participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?
There are no direct benefits to you or your district for participating in this study. However, findings from this study may be of benefit in informing researchers and school districts about the process of transition for preschool students with disabilities. By reviewing current practices, barriers and successes, school districts may be better able to provide programming and supports for preschool students with disabilities as they transition to kindergarten.

What will it cost me?
There are no costs to participation.

How will my privacy be protected?
The interview will be recorded and coded. All names and identifiable information will be removed during the coding process to protect privacy.

How will my data be kept confidential?
Your responses will be confidential. There will be no identifiers connected with your responses. Focus study results will be kept on a password-protected computer. Research findings will be shared through a written dissertation and an oral dissertation defense, and then may be shared at conferences or in a research journal.

What are my rights as a research participant?
- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Julia "Sandy" Flacke.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
    - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?
- You may choose not to participate.

<u>Whom may I contact with questions?</u>
- The researchers conducting this study are Julia "Sandy" Flacke

    - For more information regarding this study, please contact Julia "Sandy" Flacke 930-9740 or jflacke@une.edu

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Julia "Sandy" Flacke

- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

<u>Will I receive a copy of this consent form?</u>
- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____

Participant's Statement
I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

_____   _____
Participant's signature or   Date
Legally authorized representative

_____
Printed name

Researcher's Statement
The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

_____   _____
Researcher's signature   Date

_____
Printed name

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you so much for meeting with me, _____. I know that you have little free time and I thank you again for choosing to spend some of it with me today. To facilitate my note taking, I will be recording the interview. Thank you for submitting the signed consent form. The only individuals who will have access to these recordings and my notes are faculty advisors, dissertation committee members, and myself. The recordings will be deleted within one calendar year of our meeting today.

Please remember:

(1) All of the information you share is confidential.

(2) Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time.

(3) I have completed the necessary steps to ensure no harm is caused to participants as a result of their participation in the study.

This interview should only last approximately 30 minutes I will ask you several questions that may include clarifying or follow up questions relative to your answer or the original question asked.

Your name, the child's name, and your school's name will not be used in the report. If you talk about a specific child or staff member during the course of this interview, please do not use their real name or other identifying information (e.g., parent's name, age, teacher, etc.). You can use the pseudonym for the child and the role for the adult (e.g., mother, father, speech therapist).

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have experiences with or will have experiences with children with disabilities transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten.

Transition questions:

Teachers, Administrators and Head Start educators

1. How many years have you been in education?
2. How many years have you been involved in the transition into kindergarten for children with special needs?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

School Administrator code: _____   Interview Date: _____

Student pseudonym: _____ Teacher/ Provider pseudonym: _____

1. What is your understanding of the transition process within the school district for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

2. What are the strengths of the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

3. What are the difficulties or barriers with the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

4. Describe the programs and special education services that your school provides for kindergarten children with IEP's.

5. Describe the relationship between the transition team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents).

6. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the relationship between team members (Administrators, pre-K, teachers, CDS, parents)?

7. Do you attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring? If not, who from your building attends the meetings?

8. Is there any information that you would like to see presented or shared at the transition IEP meeting?

9. Thank you for your time and participation, is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: HEAD START ADMINISTRATOR

School Administrator code: _____ Interview Date: _____

Student pseudonym: _____ Teacher/ Provider pseudonym: _____

1. What is your understanding of the transition process within the school district for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

2. What are the strengths of the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

3. What are the difficulties or barriers with the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

4. Describe the programs and special education services that Head Start provides for children with IEP's.

5. Describe the relationship between the transition team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents).

6. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the relationship between team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents)?

7. Do you attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring? If not, who from your program attends the meetings?

8. Is there any information that you would like to see presented or shared at the transition IEP meeting?

9. Thank you for your time and participation, is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Teacher code: _____ Interview Date: _____

Student pseudonym: _____ Admin/ Provider pseudonym: _____

1. What is your understanding of the transition process within the school district for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

2. What are the strengths of the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

3. What are the difficulties or barriers with the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

4. Describe the programs and special education services that your school provides for kindergarten children with IEP's.

5. Describe the relationship between the transition team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents).

6. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the relationship between team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents)?

7. Do you attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring? If not, who from your school attends the meetings?

8. Is there any information that you would like to see presented or shared at the transition IEP meeting?

9. Thank you for your time and participation, is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PRE-K/ HEAD START TEACHER

Teacher code: _____ Interview Date: _____

Student pseudonym: _____ Admin/ Provider pseudonym: _____

1. What is your understanding of the transition process within the school district for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

2. What are the strengths of the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

3. What are the difficulties or barriers with the process for children with disabilities moving from pre-K to kindergarten?

4. Describe the programs and special education services that pre-K provides for children with IEP's.

5. Describe the relationship between the transition team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents).

6. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the relationship between team members (Administrators, Pre-K/ Head Start, teachers, CDS, parents)?

7. Do you attend the transition IEP meetings in the spring? If not, who from your school attends the meetings?

8. Is there any information that you would like to see presented or shared at the transition IEP meeting?

9. Thank you for your time and participation, is there anything else that you would like to share?