

MODEL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT

BETWEEN SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

This “model interagency agreement” was developed from a template originally created between the State Department of Education Early Childhood Special Education Program (IDEA 619) and the Region 1 Office of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), specific to the Head Start Programs in Connecticut. The original model interagency agreement was developed to provide a framework for conversation and ultimately collaborative agreement between Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education programs specific to serving young children with disabilities receiving special education and related services. The template has been revised to present a number of considerations in various areas that community early childhood programs and public schools can use to establish dialogue and ultimately collaborative agreements regarding services and supports to young children with disabilities.

I. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Community early childhood programs and school districts should discuss and ultimately reach agreement on a number of basic principles and related joint activities regarding parental involvement that could include some of the following:

- **Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.** Public schools and community early childhood programs should discuss how they will work together to protect the rights of parents and their children as they work together to provide high quality services.
- **Parents need information in order to make informed decisions regarding their children.** Public schools and community early childhood programs should discuss and work together to provide parents with information, resources, training, and support to assist them in making informed decisions that best meet their child's and family's needs.
- **Parents are a partner and an integral part of providing early education to their children.** Public schools and community early childhood programs should discuss how to support the participation and eventual leadership role of parents in the planning and provision of programs and services for their children.

II. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of information is required for the protection of children and families. Public schools and community early childhood programs must respect the right of families to restrict access to personal information. Discussions and agreements between public schools and community early childhood programs could include how each can work together to ensure that:

- A. Each program understands each other's rules, regulations and/or policies regarding child and family confidentiality, and
- B. Each program serving a child and family obtains a family's informed and written consent before sharing information about a child and their family to the other program.

III. OUTREACH

Outreach efforts link children and families to needed resources. Public schools and community early childhood programs should discuss and consider how they can work together to:

- A. Share information about the services and resources available within each other's program;
- B. Provide information to families about child and family services available in their community;
- C. Provide families easy access to information regarding the availability of community resources, including using public awareness and informational materials, such as brochures and posters; and
- D. Provide written materials in the native/primary language of the family, as available and as appropriate

IV. REFERRAL

Referral means a referral for enrollment in one or both programs, the public school and/or the early childhood community program and includes activities for sending and receiving referrals within and across both programs. The public school and the community early childhood program should discuss and consider joint mechanisms to:

- A. Make referrals to each other's programs, as appropriate;
- B. Accept referrals provided from each other's programs with parental consent, throughout the year;
- C. Acknowledge that a referral does not guarantee acceptance into either program; and
- D. With parental consent, notify each other about the status of referrals made within thirty calendar days and throughout the referral process.

V. CHILD FIND/SCREENING

Child find is a term used in federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It requires public schools to locate, identify and evaluate children with disabilities or children suspected of having a disability. Public schools and community early childhood programs should discuss and establish procedures for the:

- A. Identification of children who may have disabilities;
- B. Participation in each other's screening or child find activities; and
- C. With parental consent, share the screening results carried out by one or both programs.

VI. EVALUATION

A child evaluation is a formal assessment of a child that is conducted by trained and qualified personnel. Child evaluations are conducted by school district personnel for the purpose of identifying whether a child is a child with a disability who requires special education and related services. The following information may be helpful in collaborative discussions once a child has been referred to the public schools for an evaluation.

- A. The school district will accept referrals based upon information obtained through the community early childhood program including screening information, child progress information and/or child observation(s) that have been conducted to gather information about a child. This information may result in a comprehensive evaluation being conducted by the school district for the purpose of determining a child's eligibility for special education and related services. Referrals will be accepted by the school district throughout the year and should be made by a parent and/or accompanied with written parental consent;

- B. Once a referral is made to the school district with the support of a child's community early childhood program, the school district may conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine a child's eligibility for special education and related services. The school district comprehensive eligibility evaluation must be completed within 45 school days from the date of the referral to the school district (not including time to obtain parental consent). The evaluation conducted by the school district must be provided at no cost to the child's family or to the community early childhood program;
- C. The school district's notice to families may include, with parental consent, an invitation to the community early childhood program, so that early childhood program staff are available to participate in the planning and placement team meeting (PPT) convened by the public school to plan and implement an evaluation for an individual child. The evaluation, when conducted, will assist in determining a child's eligibility for special education and related services. If the community early childhood program is a member of the planning and placement team, the program could agree to contribute to the development of the evaluation plan and/or conduct specific components of the evaluation, as appropriate. For example: community early childhood program staff may agree to conduct a classroom or home observation;
- D. The school district is responsible for assuring that all policies and procedures meet the requirements of the federal and Connecticut's rules and regulations for special education and that all standards and guidelines are met;
- E. The community early childhood program and the public school can work together to support parents throughout the special education process by ensuring that parents are provided ongoing information, support and training;
- F. The community early childhood program and the public school can agree to provide on-going monitoring of children evaluated and determined not eligible for special education. The nature and scope of monitoring should be determined by the respective programs based on the individual needs of the child and family and the resources available within each program;
- G. The community early childhood program and the public school understand and agree that the determination of eligibility is made by the child's planning and placement team (PPT), with the child's parents as members of the PPT ; and
- H. The school district can request and obtain parental permission to provide the community early childhood program a copy of the child's written evaluation to ensure that information is available so that appropriate services are provided through, and coordinated with, the child's early childhood program.

VII. IEP DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

If a child has been determined by the school district PPT to require special education and related services, an individualized education program (IEP) must be developed by a child's PPT. Public schools and community early childhood programs can work together in various ways including:

- A. The school district can invite the community early childhood program staff to the PPT meeting(s) held to develop a child's IEP.
- B. When the community early childhood program is invited to the PPT, the program should be given adequate notification of the meeting date, time and location;
- C. The public school can provide a copy of the child's IEP to the community early childhood program, with written parental consent, in order to ensure the provision of appropriate services, supports and/or carryover of activities across programs and personnel;

- D. The school district and the community early childhood program can work together to jointly address the goals and outcomes described in a child's IEP;
- E. The school district and the community early childhood program recognize the leadership role of parents in the development of a child's IEP; therefore, both programs should provide support to families in order to maximize opportunities for parent involvement. The community early childhood program and the public school can identify avenues for active parent involvement which can be included on the child's IEP, as appropriate;
- F. The school district and the community early childhood staff can work together to jointly meet with families at mutually agreed upon times to report on a child's progress and/or to coordinate service delivery;
- G. The school district and the community early childhood staff can work together to design systems of communication that ensure the timely and ongoing sharing of information related to the child's educational progress. The public school and community early childhood program will ensure that parents are included in information sharing and that parental written consent is obtained as needed;
- H. A child's IEP goals and objectives will reflect the child's strengths and needs. The public school and the community early childhood program staff should jointly coordinate and collaborate with regard to the implementation of each child's IEP across programs.

VIII. TRANSPORTATION

If the child's PPT determines that transportation is a related service required in order for a child to benefit from his/her special education program and includes transportation as a related service in the child's individualized educational program, then the school district must ensure that transportation is provided for the child to and from his/her special education. A school district's transportation obligations do not extend beyond the geographic boundaries of the district.

IX. TRANSITION

School districts and community early childhood program staff recognize the importance of a carefully coordinated and timely transition for children moving into or from various programs including public school programs, kindergarten or other community or school-based settings. It is critical that parents be fully involved in this process. Discussions between public schools and community early childhood programs can include:

- A. An ongoing sharing of transition policies, procedures and practices between sending and receiving programs;
- B. Mechanisms to include the following people in and/or inform them of the transition planning process for a child:
 - parents
 - early childhood program staff
 - Head Start, school district preschool special education program, kindergarten or other community or school-based staff
 - receiving staff (classroom teacher, principal, school nurse, special education and related services personnel, and others)
 - agencies involved with the child and family
 - others; and
- C. Maintaining a child's educational records to ensure helpful information for future curriculum and instruction planning while ensuring confidentiality. The transfer of records to other programs can

occur when parents provide written permission to share their child's records with a receiving school or agency.

NOTE: Transfer of records and confidentiality must meet the legal requirements for educational records and confidentiality under IDEA, HIPPA and under the Family Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA). Various categories of information have separate requirements. These categories are subject to restricted disclosure. Examples include information related HIV status, AIDS, and drug and alcohol information.

X. INSERVICE TRAINING

School district and community early childhood program staff recognize the degree of expertise available through the personnel of each program and a child's parents. Programs can agree to maximize these personnel resources by reciprocally training and consulting with each other. To this end, public schools and community early childhood programs should consider jointly planned and implemented training and professional development.

XI. RESOURCE SHARING

School districts are responsible for ensuring that special education and related services are provided, but are not necessarily responsible for providing all of the services or resources.

The IDEA and the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria stress the importance of the involvement of multiple agencies. To this end, agreements can encourage:

- A. Collaboration and coordination of services across multiple agencies to meet individual child and family goals;
- B. Shared responsibility in assuring that services to children eligible under the IDEA are provided with equal access, equal services and equal benefit and a free appropriate public education; and
- C. The sharing of financial, as well as non-financial resources to maximize available resources.

XII. PROBLEM SOLVING

In the event of misunderstandings or differences between public schools and community early childhood programs, particularly when a written agreement of collaboration has been decided upon, the signatories and/or their designees will meet to reach a mutually agreeable solution.

In the event that a resolution is not achieved, the signatories and/or their designees will appoint a mutually agreed upon mediator.

XIII. AGREEMENT REVIEW

The community based program and the school district will review and update this agreement on an annual basis.