

Parent Survey Findings

Transition from the  
Connecticut Birth to Three System  
to Preschool Special Education

**Summary**

*Connecticut State Department of Education  
Preschool Special Education Programs and Services*

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IDEA General Supervision Enhancement Grant: Special Education - Technical Assistance and  
Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (CFDA 84.326X)  
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# Survey Summary

## Background Information

The Connecticut State Department of Education received a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The federal grant was entitled the IDEA General Supervision Enhancement Grant: Special Education - Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (Grant Number: H326X010004). The IDEA General Supervision Enhancement Grant provided funds to the Connecticut State Department of Education for the design, implementation and analysis of a parent survey on early childhood transition, specifically transition from the state's early intervention program (IDEA, Part C) to special education at age three (IDEA, Part B, Section 619). The recognition that information on parent perceptions of the transition process was needed was identified during the state's 'self-assessment' of the status early intervention and special education in Connecticut in 2001. The intended outcome of conducting a parent survey was to obtain information from parents on their experiences and perceptions of the transition process in order assist the state in evaluating the relative strengths and challenges of state policies and procedures in the area of transition from early intervention to special education at age three.

The Connecticut State Department of Education contracted with the United Way of Connecticut Incorporated to design, implement and analyze a parent survey on early childhood transition from the state's early intervention system to special education at age three. The United Way of Connecticut Incorporated enlisted the support and resources of MJ Carey and Associates to lead the project activities for the parent survey. MJ Carey and Associates began work on project activities in October 2002. A draft Final Report and Executive Summary were submitted to the State Department of Education in October 2003.

The state's preschool special education program at the State Department of Education and state's early intervention program, the Connecticut Birth to Three System, housed at the State Department of Mental Retardation, worked collaboratively on all aspects of this project. Dissemination of survey results will be undertaken by both the state's early intervention and preschool special education program. It is anticipated that survey findings will contribute to the continued development, implementation and evaluation of transition policies and practices across both state service systems for toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities and their families.

## Parameters of the Survey

Personnel representing preschool special education, the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the United Way of Connecticut Incorporated and MJ Carey and Associates met to design the parameters of the survey in accordance with the grant application awarded for this project activity. The parameters of the survey included the following:

- A parent survey would be sent to all parents whose children (a) received early intervention services for a minimum of 6 months, (b) exited the Connecticut Birth to Three System at age 3 and (c) who were determined eligible for preschool special education by the time of their exit from early intervention.
- Data from the Connecticut Birth to Three System would be used to identify all children who received early intervention services for a minimum of 6 months (first IFSP date), who exited early intervention at age 3 (Birth to Three exit data) and who were identified as eligible for special education at age three (Birth to Three exit data).
- The Connecticut Birth to Three System would provide mailing labels of parent names and addresses on a monthly basis to the contractor. The mailing labels would be used to mail out the survey to all parents whose children had exited the Connecticut Birth to Three System between the first and last day of the month.
- Surveys would be mailed to all parents whose children met the criteria 8 to 12 weeks after the child and family exited from the Connecticut Birth to Three System.
- The survey would be a 'rolling' survey rather than a 'point in time' survey. Surveys were to be mailed from February 2003 to September 2003 to parents whose children exited the Connecticut Birth to Three System from November 2002 to June 2003.
- The survey would be specifically designed to be short as well as targeted to those areas of policy and practice that would measure the relative successes and challenges of transition. Opportunity was to be provided throughout the survey for parents to provide comment.
- The survey would be designed to be easily returnable as well as short and simple to complete with the expectation that the survey would more likely be returned.
- The survey would be designed as a 'tear-off', fold and return.
- All surveys were to be pre-addressed and pre-paid; hence surveys would be returned to the contractor at no cost to families.
- Surveys were to be coded in order to help identify demographic information.
- The parent survey would be provided in English and Spanish. Data from the Connecticut Birth to Three System would be utilized to assist in identifying all families whose primary language was Spanish and those families would receive the transition survey in Spanish.
- Surveys would be brightly colored so as to be easily identifiable in the mail. English surveys would be bright pink. Spanish surveys would be bright yellow.
- The survey itself would include a letter to parents inviting them to share their experiences about their child's transition from the Connecticut Birth to Three System to special education at age three as well as providing opportunity for parents to provide general comments.

### Survey Design

The state's preschool special education (IDEA Part B, Section 619) and early intervention programs (IDEA, Part C) worked with the contractor and sub-contractor to begin the process of identifying the survey questions relative to the grant award and within the survey parameters identified. An initial first draft of a parent survey was prepared by the contractor based on the outcomes intended to be achieved. The draft parent survey was vetted by groups of parents whose children transitioned from the Connecticut Birth to Three System to preschool special education. Parents were asked to review the survey questions, look for clarity and understanding in the stated questions, make comments and recommendations for revisions, changes, amendments, etc. There were bilingual parents included in this process who were able to assist in making recommendations for the Spanish survey. The recommendations from parents were

incorporated into the final survey. The survey was developed in English and translated into Spanish. Parents received a stipend for the assistance and expertise in helping refine and finalize the survey.

The parent survey began with an opening letter inviting parents to complete the survey and share their experiences and perceptions of the transition process for them and their child. The survey itself was one-page and was composed of five questions. Provision was made for 'additional comments' after each question to provide parents opportunity to further respond to the question posed.

The five questions included:

1. Did your Birth to Three provider prepare you for leaving the Connecticut Birth to Three System and entering Preschool Special Education?
2. Once the referral was made to your school, did you hear from your child's school district?
3. Was a meeting held with you, your Birth to Three provider and a member of your school district? If so, when? Did you feel you were an active participant?
4. Did the school district begin providing services to your child by his/her third birthday?
5. Are the services provided by the school district meeting your child's needs?

The survey provided an opportunity for parents to identify their school district, provided space for any additional comments that parents wanted to make and provided an opportunity for parents to identify whether they wanted a copy of the survey results.

The opening letter and survey questions were embedded within the survey as part of a singular document. The back of the survey was designed as a tri-fold with a tear-off, fold and seal. It was pre-addressed and stamped for ease of return.

### Survey Implementation

A total of 1039 surveys were mailed over a period of eight months. There were sixteen (16) households that received the survey in Spanish. Between 107 and 143 surveys were mailed out per month. Out of the 1039 surveys mailed, 364 were returned, a thirty-five percent (35%) return rate. Fifteen surveys were returned to the Connecticut State Department of Education as 'undeliverable' for reasons that included (a) moved, no forwarding address, (b) not at this address, (c) recipient unknown, etc.

### Family Demographic Information from Survey

Demographic information was obtained via matching data provided by the Connecticut Birth to Three System to the surveys that were coded by the contractor. This allowed the contractor to match demographic information from the data provided by the state's early intervention system to the surveys returned.

The 1039 surveys mailed to parents indicated that the surveys were mailed to families that represented the following demographic characteristics: seventy-one percent (71%) of parents were identified as White

(n=740), nine percent (9%) were identified as Black (n=97), sixteen percent (16%) were Hispanic/Latino (n=166), three percent (3%) were Asian (n=27) and one percent (1%) were unknown (n=9).

Survey respondents included the following representation of parents: White parents (n=304, 84%), followed by Hispanics/Latino (n=30, 8%), Blacks (n=18, 5%) and finally Asian (n=10, 3%). Two families race was coded as unknown (n=2, 1%). Of the thirty Hispanic/Latino households who responded, sixteen (16) had received the survey in Spanish.

Survey results cannot be analyzed by parent race or ethnicity because the returned surveys do not adequately represent the population of parents to whom the survey was mailed.

### Community Demographic Information from Survey

The one hundred and thirty-four (1039) surveys were mailed to parents residing in one hundred and twenty-three (123) local or regional school districts. The returned surveys represented one hundred and twelve (112) local or regional school districts out of the one hundred and fifty-nine (159) serving 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children with disabilities. More than 70% of the towns were represented with at least one returned survey.

### Summary Survey Results

Responses from parents on the five main questions were overwhelmingly positive ranging from a high of ninety-seven point five percent (97.5%) to a low of eighty percent (80%). Parents took the opportunity to provide additional comments, clarification and notes to each of the questions as well as providing general comment at the end of the survey. A number of parents requested that a copy of the survey results be provided to them.

Ninety-seven point five percent (97.5%) of parents reported that their Birth to Three provider prepared them for leaving the Connecticut Birth to Three System and for entering special education at age three. A number of comments received indicated that specific individuals were of great support and assistance to the parents. In addition comments identified specific activities and supports that were appreciated by the parents reporting.

Ninety-seven point five percent (97.5%) of parents identified that a meeting was convened with them, their Birth to Three provider and the school district. Thirty-three percent (33%) of parents identified that the joint meeting was convened 90 days or more before the child's third birthday while most parents (56%) reported that a meeting was convened less than 90 days before the child's third birthday. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of parents identified that they felt they were active participants in the meeting that had taken place.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of parents identified that they heard from their child's school district once a referral to the school district had been made. A number of parents (28) commented on the timeliness of the response from their child's school district while some parents (8) shared their concerns and frustrations. Eighty percent (80%) of parents identified that the school district began providing special education and related services by the child's third birthday. A number of parents who reported provided comment about

why their child did not begin their special education program by age three most sighting parent choice in the matter. Eight-one percent (81%) of parents felt that their child's needs were being met by their child's school district. The responses to this question received the greatest number of written comments with a total of one hundred and eleven (111) written comments being received from the survey. Written comments from parents ranged from a high number of comments reflecting satisfaction to other comments noting concerns and frustrations about not enough services or supports.

Parents provided a total of eighty-eight (88) general comments. Those comments were consistent with the information obtained from the comments parents provided to the five main questions posed. A number of parents also identified that they were interested in receiving a copy of the final survey results.

Overall, the data analyzed from parents was overwhelmingly positive. The identification that information from parents was 'overwhelmingly positive' was reinforced in the written comments that parents provided as a supplement and/or in addition to answering the survey questions posed.

## Survey Question Findings

This section reports the responses to the five (5) questions on the survey instrument.

### Question 1

Did your Birth to Three provider prepare you for leaving the Connecticut Birth to Three System and entering Preschool Special Education?

Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
355	6	3	0

Ninety-seven point five percent (97.5%) of parents who responded to question number 1 reported that their Birth to Three provider prepared them for their child's exit from the Connecticut Birth to Three System and their child's entry into preschool special education. In addition to responding yes/no/don't know to the question posed, seventy-two (72) parents added comment. The majority of the comments (64) were positive, five (5) parents shared concerns or frustrations and three (3) parents provided general comment. Examples of positive comments included: "excellent preparation", "my provider was wonderfully informative, helpful and supportive and the school staff are following the same level of support" and "everyone was extremely helpful in getting us set up for preschool every step of the way". Examples of parent frustrations and concerns included: "not adequately prepared" and "nothing prepared me for the lack of family support". Examples of general comments included: "special education not needed, has speech services" and "our son did not need special education".

### Question 2

Once the referral was made, did you hear from your child's school district?

Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
339	17	4	4

Ninety-four percent (94%) of parents who responded to question number 2 reported that they were contacted by their child's school district after a referral was made to the school district. Twenty-eight (28) parents provided comment that elaborated upon when and how the school district contacted the family. Twenty (20) of the parents providing comment reported on the timeliness of the school district's first contact with them. Eight (8) parents shared a frustration due to lack of timeliness on the part of the school district. Examples of positive comments included: "we were contacted quickly and introduced to the transition process - we were very pleased with everything" and "\*\*\*\* contacted me and was very flexible setting up our PPT meeting as I had a new baby". Examples of parents concerns and frustrations included: "it took a while before they responded" and "I sent a letter to the school to remind them of our desire to start the transition early".

**Question 3**

Was a meeting held with you, your Birth to Three provider and a member of the school district?

Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
353	9	0	2

Ninety-seven point five percent (97.5%) of the parents who responded to question number 3 identified that a meeting was held with them, their Birth to Three provider and the school district. Thirty (30) parents provided comment. All parents providing comment elaborated upon who attended the meeting as well as providing comment on the meeting itself. Examples included: "they pleasantly came to our home", "two meetings held, one in April and another in June to assess our needs" and "I was impressed with meeting and participants".

**Question 3a**

If yes, please indicate when the joint meeting was held.

90 days or more	Less than 90 days	Don't Know	Other	No Answer
117	197	20	16	14

Thirty-three percent (33%) of parents who responded to question number 3a reported that a joint meeting was held 90 days or more before their child's third birthday while fifty-six percent (56%) of parents identified that a joint meeting took place less than 90 days before the child's third birthday. Seven (7) parents provided comment to this question. Responses varied and included "had two meetings, one 90 days or more before the third birthday and one less than 90 days before the third birthday", "don't remember but feel it was within the time it should have been done, "week before third birthday", "at 90 days", and "one day after the third birthday".

**Question 3b**

If yes, do you feel you were an active partner in the meeting?

Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
342	6	1	15

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of parents who responded to question number 3b reported that they felt they were an active partner in the meeting. Thirty-four (34) parents provided comment. Many parents identified that their questions were answered and that their opinions were valued by the other meeting participants. Examples of comments included: "we were encouraged to ask questions and slow down the meeting if we needed to", "very much so", "full input and consideration was given to myself and Birth to Three provider regarding services and experiences with my son and "everyone listened and made the best efforts to comfort my son". Eleven (11) parents reported frustrations and/or concerns including: "although they listened to what we had to say about our daughter they didn't seem to take it all seriously", "I felt some of

my suggestions were completely looked over” and “we (parents) felt it was more or less a meeting for paperwork rather than parent input”.

**Question 4**

Did the school district begin providing services to your child by his/her 3rd birthday?

Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
285	69	2	8

Eighty percent (80%) of parents who responded to question number 4 reported that the school district provided special education and related services to their child by their child’s third birthday. Fifty-six (56) parents provided comment. Eleven (11) parents identified that they as parents decided not to have their child start receiving services by their third birthday even though the school district made available a program by their child’s third birthday. Comments included: “school was willing to have her start on her third birthday – we had family plans scheduled – she started after” and “we decided against enrolling her in the middle of winter due to health issues”. Comments provided by parents identified what occurred when children had their third birthday during the summer months. For example: “his birthday falls during the summer – at the PPT meeting, the decision was made to wait for the school session to start” and “school purchased Birth to Three services for the summer to continue speech and OT until school began”. Two (2) parents identified that they were disappointed in what had taken (or not) taken place when their children turned three, for example, “I was very disappointed – they only offered my son one hour a week for school – I felt he needed more – one hour is nothing”.

**Question 5**

Are the services provided by your child’s school district meeting his/her needs?

Yes	No	Don't know	No Answer
281	26	39	18

Eighty-one percent (81%) of parents who responded to question number 5 reported that their child’s needs were met by their school district. There were one hundred and eleven (111) comments to this question representing a wide range of perspectives and information. Comments ranged from being very satisfied with the process and the progress being made by their children to concerns about not enough services or support within their child’s special education program. There were also parents who felt that it was too soon to tell if the school district was meeting their child’s needs. Positive comments included: “we have seen dramatic improvement in the short time in the program”, “wonderful preschool”, and “wonderful program, everything that is needed is offered”. Concerns and frustrations included: “we would like to increase OT”, “many services jammed/overlapping into short school time – child misses much socialization at school, pulled out too often”, and “I am pushing for time they feel is not needed – I feel it is vital”.

**Additional Comments Provided:**

There were eighty-eight (88) general comments. While consistent with the information shared in the five question-related comments, many comments were lengthier and therefore provided more detailed

information including child specific information. Parents also used this as an opportunity to recognize and acknowledge those who were helpful and supportive in both the Connecticut Birth to Three System as well as in the preschool special education program provided by their child's school district.