

Easing Transitions between Preschool and School

Young children with disabilities who have not yet entered elementary school are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to receive special education and support services. Preschool services must include individual education programs, development of goals and objectives, decision making by multidisciplinary teams, and placement in the least restrictive environment. As these children get ready to move to elementary school, IDEA requires states, districts, and schools to coordinate a smooth and effective transition to this new setting. Below we report on the progress states and districts have made toward helping children with disabilities transition from preschool to school over the 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 school years. Findings are from the 2004-2005 school year; unless otherwise noted, no significant changes were found in the 2002-2003 school year.

An increasing proportion of states employed coordinators to support the transition of children with disabilities from preschool to school, but each state employed very few coordinators.

For instance, our study found that:

- The percentage of states employing transition coordinators increased from 53 percent in the 2002-2003 school year to 65 percent of states in the 2004-2005 school year. However, among states employing early childhood transition coordinators, a median of one coordinator was employed per state in each data collection year.

IDEA funds were the predominant source of funding used by states in all school years to support preschool transition coordinators.

(See Figure 1)

For instance, our study found that:

- In the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, almost two-thirds of states (63 percent) used IDEA funds to support transition coordinators responsible for the transition of young children with IEPs from preschool to school; about half the states (51 percent) used IDEA funds in the 2002-2003 school year.
- In comparison, general state funds were used by only 13 percent of states in the 2002-2003 school year, and 22 percent of states in the 2004-2005 school year. Almost no states used Head Start, Even Start or Title I funds for this purpose.

Almost one-quarter of districts (24 percent) employed early childhood transition coordinators. *(See Figure 1)*

For instance, our study found that:

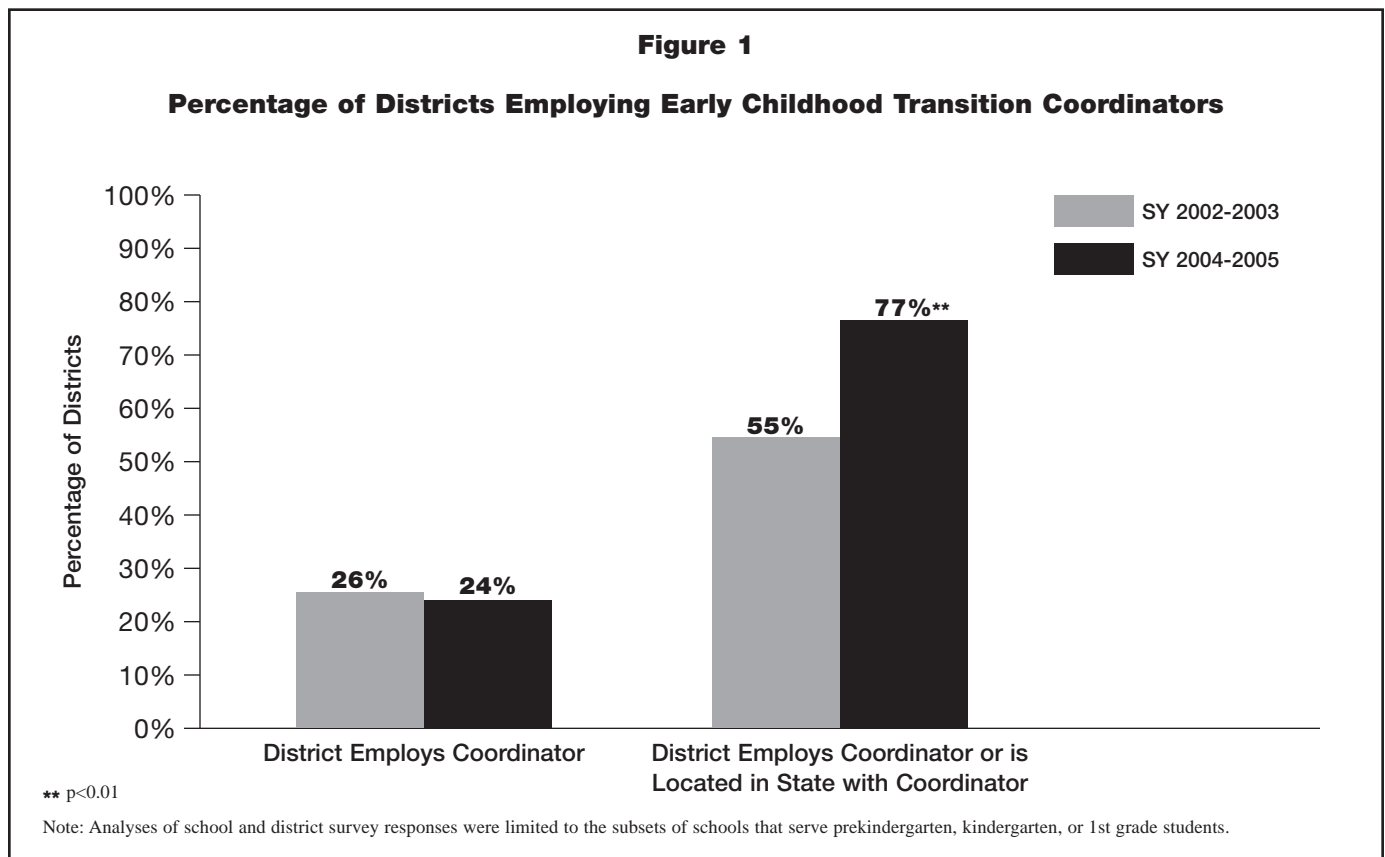
- Seventy-seven percent of districts either employed an early childhood transition coordinator or were located in a state employing a coordinator, or both, during the 2004-2005 school year. This percentage increased from 55 percent of districts during the 2002-2003 school year.

The coordination of services provided by various agencies can make the delivery of transition services to young children with disabilities more effective. The majority of states and districts have agreements in place for interagency coordination.

For instance, our study found that:

- About three-quarters of states (75 percent) and almost two-thirds of districts (63 percent) had written interagency agreements for the purpose of assisting with the transition of preschool children (ages 3 through 5) to school.

- All states reported that Head Start was involved in delivery of services to children with IEPs in their state, 96 percent of states said the same of Even Start, and 92 percent reported that public social service agencies were involved.
- Districts may also benefit from interagency agreements established at the state level. Eighty-eight percent of districts either had written interagency agreements regarding early childhood transitions or were located in a state with such an agreement.



The results summarized in this fact sheet are based on the six year *Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of IDEA (SLIIDEA)* supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, as part of Contract ED-00-C0-0026, conducted by Abt Associates Inc. Any points of view expressed in this fact sheet are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education.

Surveys were mailed to key personnel responsible for or familiar with special education issues in all 50 states and the District of Columbia - a total of 959 districts and 4,434 schools. For state, district, and school surveys, response rates were 100 percent, 89 percent, and 80 percent, respectively in the 2004-2005 school year. Similar response rates were obtained for the 2002-2003 school year.

From Abt Associates Inc (2006 April). *Marking the Progress of IDEA Implementation and Volume I: The SLIIDEA Sourcebook Report (1999-2000, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 School Years)*. Study reports, data tables and technical documentation are available at <http://abt.sliidea.org>.