Preschool Handicapped Transition Plans And Family Centeredness: A Policy Analysis

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PRESCHOOL HANDICAPPED TRANSITION
PLANS AND FAMILY CENTEREDNESS: A POLICY ANALYSIS

BY

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Ed. D.
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Dedication

My work has meant so much to me and could not have been accomplished without the love and support of those around me. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my family for all their support to my accomplishments. My family has been my inspiration, motivation, and resource throughout all of my course work and the creation of this document.

I wish to dedicate this work to my children, that they may recognize, as my parents instilled in me, that hard work can lead them to a path of success and satisfaction. Anything they wish to accomplish is within their reach.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As the pendulum continues to swing in the direction of special needs students being included, educators are witnessing growing numbers of preschool handicapped students entering in the regular kindergarten/first grade environment (Repetto & Correa, 1996; Jewett, Tertell, King-Taylor, Parker, et al., 1998; Rous & Hallam, 1998; Bruns & Fowler, 1999). As these numbers continue to grow, so does the diversity of disabilities; disabilities that ten years ago remained in the separate setting are now part of the regular education setting. These children typically enter the primary regular education setting from a self-contained specialized setting and are placed amongst their typically developing peers with minimal special support, for the teacher, child, or parent (Repetto & Correa, 1996). This process should be a smooth process, without abruptness of change, fear, apprehension, or unclear expectations for anyone involved in the education process of the child or the lives of the child and family (Repetto & Correa, 1996; Bruns & Fowler, 1999). As these numbers continue to grow and the diversity of special needs broadens, there is a greater need for effective, family centered transition programs for the preschool handicapped student for a variety of reasons (Rous & Hallam, 1998; Bruns & Fowler, 1999).
When one begins to look at the disabled child joining the environment of the typically developing peer, it must be considered what elements of a policy or plan are in place to prepare all children, staff, and the family for such a transition. As the scope of mainstreaming and inclusion reaches the more severely impaired, the preschool handicapped population, usually serviced in an isolated, the infant/toddler setting, will be entering the regular schoolhouse in much grander proportions. In order for this to be beneficial for all involved, there must be a carefully constructed, implemented, and evaluated plan. IDEA stresses the need for a family centered approach to transition and the education of disabled youngsters.

According to Saunders (1995), IDEA is a key component of federal legislation regarding special education.

Its roots are PL. 91-230, the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), which was passed nearly twenty five years ago on April 13, 1970. It was not until 1986, however, that amendments were made to EHA to guarantee that infants and toddlers with special needs and their families in participating states would receive the services they needed to maximize the child’s development. These amendments to EHA became PL 99-457, which passed both houses of Congress unopposed and was signed into law on October 8, 1986. This act was again amended in 1988, 1990, and 1991. In 1990, the original title of the act (EHA) was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act. (Saunders, 1995, p.40)

Part C of IDEA, formerly Part H of EHA, challenges educators to view decisions for the young, at risk child in the light of the child and the family. These infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities are to be considered for placement and services within the family centered approach to early intervention. A family centered approach to transitioning the child from the infant/toddler setting to the preschool handicapped setting needs to
incorporate and prioritize needs and aspects of the family. This legislation stresses such requirements as “to provide quality early intervention services to handicapped infants and toddlers and their families” (US Congress, 1986, 100 STATUTE, 1145-1146, as quoted in Romer & Umbreit, 1998, p. 95), as well as the strategically designed methods to bring in families to participate in the transition process and the educational planning for their child (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). It is evident that the law takes in to consideration the need for a family centered approach to transition for infant/toddler youngsters in Part H; this helps to articulate the need for infants and toddler students being classified and transitioning to the preschool handicapped setting. “Although federal and state legislation requires transition plans for children moving from Part C infant and toddler programs into Part B preschool programs, specific transition plans are not required for children transitioning from preschool Part B programs into general kindergarten or 1st grade classrooms. However, amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA,1997) contains mandates related to family involvement designed to encourage participation in educational planning such as the transition process” (LaParo, Pianta, & Cox, 2000, p.7).

However, the preschool handicapped to kindergarten transition is not a mandated policy, unlike that for infant to preschool and school to work/community transitions (Jewett, Tertell, King-Taylor, Parker, et al., 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Rous & Hallam, 1998).

Transition has been defined in many bodies of educational research, usually surrounding the transition for fourteen year old handicapped students and the school to work transition for graduating handicapped individuals. Transition, generally, can be viewed as a process for moving the handicapped individual from one setting to another
with a policy or plan to make for a smooth and useful change for both the child and family.

For the young handicapped child and his or her family, it is considered a policy or program component that is integral to successful services (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999). The legislation and research support the ideal that the transition process should include students, when appropriate, and family members in order to develop outcome-oriented plans that encompass the interests, needs, strengths and preferences of the student’s educational and family life. Transition plans, in a global perspective, enable this process to be thorough and more effective; this process puts all the cards on the table to make the most effective and well-informed decisions for the student. These factors are in addition to the apprehensions for a new school, kindergarten jitters, and the break-through from the self-contained to the general setting for the preschool handicapped child. These same apprehensions and issues effect the family build an encouraging case for the preschool to kindergarten/first grade transition policy analysis.

Within the state of New Jersey, there have been several districts that have participated in a program entitled Project TEEM (Transition into the Early Education Mainstream). This program is a national grant for the movement from preschool handicapped programs to the kindergarten setting. Districts participating in TEEM reported great success for the transition policy implementation, the students, the families, and the staff. Particularly, “all districts report: great satisfaction with the transition process, more successful adjustments of children to kindergarten, increased satisfaction, more active participation of families, increased comfort levels of families in the transition process, and increased opportunities for communication, collaboration, and sharing of information between families and district staff” (Leonard & Melzer, 1998, p.3). This
specific example of transition policy enactment further articulated the need for districts to consider bringing schools and families together to better serve students.

Family involvement, the inclusion of parents in decision making, and the need for parents or guardians as team members is integral to successful transitioning and educational processes. Parents play many roles in the education and developing life of their child. They are not only caregivers in the home, but teachers, role models, and 'tone setters' for the child's experiences. "Family members play a key role in providing information about the child's abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and interests" (Pinkerton, 1991, p.2). This information, and any other insights that parents bring to the table about their children's past experiences, successes, and failures, enhances any decisions that can be made regarding this child. Parents are in the position to see more of the impact of the decisions made for children - the impact that these decisions have in all settings and facets of the child's life. Moreover, parents bring to the decision making team the impact of past decisions and how these decisions have effected the child at school and in the home. These decisions have effects on the family as a whole - another factor to be considered in decision making. Parents being a part of the transition team enables the team to make more effective decisions that create a smooth transition for the school, child, and family.

As discussed by Geenan, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001), parents provide insights into their child that educators may not be aware of. By being a part of the transition team, parent involvement builds a firm 'partnership' that encourages better, more consistent educational decisions for the disabled student. Similarly, Finn (1998) pointed out that the home environment has a significant impact upon the academic success
of children. It was discussed that parents need to be engaged in the education of their child to build academic success (Finn, 1998).

Family centeredness in transitions is integral to transition success. Parents are the key to transition - they bring the transition to the home. Parents actively prepare the child to go to the general setting by practicing skills and generalizing the skills already mastered to bridge that gap between classrooms. The parents can arrange for visitations, playdates, and integration for the child beyond the school’s transition plan (Pinkerton, 1991). Without parents on board, resistance to the transition can build and lead parents to have apprehensions, apathy, and a lack of support - a message clearly communicated to the child embarking on the transition. The research suggests, and is supported by the law, that family centered approaches to decision making for the preschool handicapped is a proven route to greater success (Rock, 2000; Pinkerton, 1991). According to Rock (2000), the research also suggests that parents do not get involved on their own; they need to be invited to join the transition team. Parent interactions meet with many obstacles - the logistical obstacles of time conflicts, child care, and transportation; disinterest, as well as cultural or ideological barriers. To overcome these barriers that plague parent communication throughout the child’s school career, involve parents. Parental involvement in the transition team will alleviate misgivings and apprehensions, problems and obstacles to build a healthy school/home relationships that creates a more successful learning experience for children (Rock, 2000).

These policies, practices and programs need to be effective and useful, as well as monitored and in a constant state of change and improvement (Furney, Destefano, & Hasazi, 1997; Kemmis, 1993; Carnine, 1997). Policy analysis in education is an integral
part of program implementation, evaluation and improvement. There are multiple methods and ideas revolving around policy analysis that denote its rationale as a useful and necessary tool. According to Patton and Sawicki (1993), policy analysis needs to be a simple and effective process due to the complexity of the problems in current society. Characteristics of policy analysis include: the conducting of a “search phase” within which there is direction provided by a narrow scope of the issue, well evaluated and demonstrated alternative perspectives, appropriate problem perspective based upon the audience to which the analysis will serve, and comprehensive planning. As a policy analyst, the researcher must, to be effective, learn many basic techniques: focusing quickly and directly on the issue at hand at its main criteria, what actions can and/or should be taken regarding policy, maintaining a method that is not a standard or rubric approach, but one that addresses the specific problem being approached (the issue should define the method), maintain a simple, clear and easy to follow approach to relay information to the audience the analysis is serving, and being concrete in representing all facts and information. Additionally, again reflected in Patton and Sawicki (1993), the policy analysis should be able to reflect all the sides of the coin, the perspectives of others relative to the issue. By viewing the issue through a variety of lenses, the researcher or analyst can bring to the issue all perspectives, enriching the analysis and reaching all of its options.

Patton and Sawicki (1993) also conclude that there is an essential factor of policy analysis - “there is no such thing as an absolutely correct, rational, and complete analysis. Quality of analysis can be judged only in the context of time and resources available” (p.17). These rationales, characteristics and principles confirm the need and
appropriateness of policy analysis in any field, especially its usefulness in education; education being a complex field that would benefit from analysis.

This problem is particularly relevant to current and future administrators. Administrators are in the role of supporting the staff and students, guiding activities, fostering family involvement, and ensuring that educational experiences are successful for all students (Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001). School environments are growing more diverse with each passing year and the special education population is contributing to the heterogeneity. By monitoring the aspects of, and participating in the implementation of the variety of policies relevant to the special education population, administrators can gain insights in order to better perform their ever-changing tasks and responsibilities (Riehl, 2000). Some of these administrative tasks that are particularly relevant include: "fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programs, and building relationships between schools and communities" (Riehl, 2000, p.55). These tasks help administrators to bring transition planning to their school communities, bringing with it growth and changing, and bringing the family-school connection through family centeredness approaches in the policy implementation.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study of preschool handicapped transition policies with regard to the family centered approach is to ascertain whether the transition policies currently used in school systems are meeting the criteria for being family centered practices. This is a study significant to the field of educational administration due to the fact that the inclusion of special education students in the regular education setting has brought the concept of transition planning and policy to the forefront for administrators. These
handicapped youngsters are being integrated more and more; thus administrators have the increasing obligation to be more aware of the policies, partake in policy implementation and make the policies more useful. This study will delineate as whether or not the transition policies that are being enacted are creating a smooth transition for the preschool handicapped child and his/her family. This study will attempt to look into the following questions:

1. What framework can be devised from the literature base governing preschool transition planning to create a valid tool to inspect preschool transition policies?

2. How do existing preschool handicapped transition policies meet the criteria for being family centered?

3. Is there diversity among the existing, non-mandated preschool transition policies with regard to family centeredness?

**Significance of this Study**

The significance of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base regarding the transition of disabled youngsters into their new academic environment. More specifically, the significance is to contribute to the field regarding the valued family centered approach for the transition of the preschool handicapped student to the kindergarten setting. Additionally, the researcher wants to effect current practice by bringing to the forefront the similarities and differences that exist in current transition policies and their alignment with the criteria of a family centered transition plan. Finally, the researcher anticipates that this study could help substantiate the need for federally mandated requirements for preschool to kindergarten transition planning for the handicapped student, as well as guide
administrators to evaluate and implement transition policies and special education programs relevant to their educational environment.

Limitations

There are with this study, as with any study, some anticipated limitations. The primary limitation for this study is the factor that the policy for preschool handicapped transition planning is a voluntary plan - not mandated by any statute or law like it is for the infant/toddler transition plan, which is mandated. This limitation may have the following impacts on this study: limited number of transition policies available for evaluation, no state or federal statute to use as an evaluative tool specific to this population, and transition policies may be very similar or so diverse that comparison will be difficult.

By having very few transition policies to study, the researcher will not be able to draw many conclusions as to whether, on the whole, transition policies adequately incorporate family centered approaches. No regulations require this policy to be in place or require the family centered approach as one can see in IDEA, Part H for the infant/toddler transition. This factor leaves the researcher to develop a framework based on the merits of quality policy analysis in education and the effective practices of transition planning reviewed and discussed in the literature. If transition policies exist that are very similar, there may be little comparisons to draw to identify the effective methods displayed that revolve around the family centered approach because all may follow a mold - either effective or ineffective qualities. If transition policies are so diverse, one may not find commonality to determine that there are effective family centered practices that are a common thread through all transition policy attempts.
Another limitation for this study is the concept of socioeconomic status for the family participating in the transition process. The literature is very limited and makes very little reference in its discussions of transition and family centeredness. Nor is there reference to the effect of socioeconomic status on the transition policy development or implementation. There researcher will consider the issue as part of the individual variations in the families, but recognized this area as a limitation to the study.

A final limitation for this study is the narrow field of policy research in early childhood and primary education. This area is narrow, leaving the researcher to have to draw parallels and conclusions based on the general research and frameworks in the field of educational policy analysis.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be used as explained below.

**IDEA** - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, recently amended (1997)

**preschool handicapped** - students, ages 3-6, who have been evaluated, classified and have either an Individual/Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP), and are receiving special services as part of the educational process in a special education setting.

**typically developing peer** - students enrolled in the general education setting receiving no special services or having no classifications.

**transition services** - integral services provided for as part of service delivery systems for students changing educational environments from the preschool handicapped setting to the kindergarten or first grade general setting. These services demonstrate the following
characteristics to meet the criteria of IDEA, interagency collaboration, child preparation, family involvement, and staff training (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999).

**evaluation** - testing and observing by which students are assessed to determine the nature of disability, the need for special services, the appropriate setting in which these services should be implemented and the services to best address the student’s needs.

**LRE** - least restrictive environment; the educational setting that is closest to the general education setting, yet still meets all of the service needs for the handicapped youngsters.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will explore the current research and literature that revolves around the topic of family involvement, transition planning, and policy analysis. Through current literature, it is also demonstrated that the role of the administrator is integral in success for special education students and programs. According to Katsiyannis and Zhang (2001) "principals play a major role in making sure those services are educationally appropriate and meet the needs and wishes of the students and their families" (p.38). These researchers found that there exists a lack of parental involvement, particularly in the transition area. The role of the administrator should incorporate the responsibility of "ensuring success for all students, including those with disabilities" (Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001, p.39), which included family involvement. Katsiyannis and Zhang (2001) stated that the involvement of the family is vital, the most constant component of the child’s academic life. Family is the key to insights regarding the child and the window to the concerns for the transition process that might effect the child and the family. Moreover, they expressed that “administrators can promote family involvement by understanding the frustration family members may feel and by considering the following strategies: listen to parents, invite and facilitate participation, and prepare family member for transition planning meetings” (Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001, p.40-41). In their conclusion, the authors
reiterated the importance of the administrator in the transition process and the success of
the special education student.

Riehl (2000) explored the role of educational administrators with regard to the
ever changing complexion of public schools in the United States. The researcher
explained that there are tasks specific to administrators which create the more inclusive
settings for the diverse student population and create successful experiences for all
students. “These administrative tasks are highlighted: fostering new meaning about
diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programs, and building
relationships between schools and communities. Administrative work that accomplishes
these tasks can be thought of as a form of practice” (Riehl, 2000, p.55).

The author reflected upon these tasks as a set of challenges that are always facing
administrators. The special education population continues to increase with regard to the
diversity of schools and, according to Riehl (2000), there is a supporting body of research
“which more thoroughly explores what school administrators can do to promote schooling
that is fully inclusive and serves diverse students well” (p.57). Principals were in a strong
position of leadership that is a constant in public schools, according to Riehl, and should
be using their secure position of authority to create an effective and successful
environment for all students.

Three broad classes of tasks face educational administrators

as they respond to diversity: principal’s approaches to these
tasks determine the degree to which their practice can be
characterized as inclusive and transformative. The task
categories are fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive practices within schools, and building connections between schools and community. (Riehl, 2000, p.58)

Riehl found that these categories were applicable to the task of supporting activities for the diverse population. In fact, it was found that “principals are key agents in framing those new meanings” (Riehl, 2000, p. 59) which include the special education population. Creation of supportive environments, heightened awareness and bringing the administrative role to all aspects of diversity in the school community brought greater success to its programs, strategies, and the academic life for all students (Riehl, 2000).

Rieck and Dugger Wadsworth (2000) reflected upon the administrative role in inclusionary practices. The researchers found that IDEA had a profound effect on administrators and left many with new roles and new levels of involvement. A key factor for special education success was administrative support. Administrators need to be “stakeholders” in the process, effective “communicators and listeners, and consistent collaborators” (Rieck & Dugger-Wadsworth, 2000, p. 59). Rieck and Dugger Wadsworth (2000) conclude that “education is a team effort” (p.60) and special education programming is a clear cut example of that team effort in action.

Finally, Patterson, Marshall, and Bowling (2000) examined the readiness of administrators, specifically building level administrators, to effectively deal with special education policies and difficulties.

School administrators are facing new challenges in special education including the following issues: the new accountability
of the 1997 IDEA reauthorization, ambiguous and varying
definitions of LRE and inclusion, conflicts among advocacy
groups about the value of inclusive practices, the need for
collaboration between regular special education teachers
and specialist to alter their curriculum and pedagogy, and
the commingling of special education challenges with other
challenges. (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p. 9)

Administrators were demonstrated to be handling more special education
responsibility, especially at the building level. Policies and specific areas of special
education were being managed by principals, individuals who are integral components of
school success for the special education student.

Patterson, Marshall and Bowling (2000) breakdown the importance of the role of
principal for the effective development of special education programs and policy
implementation. Teachers found that principal support was a key factor to success;
similarly, parents found that involvement by the administration led to effective policy
implementation. “Principals need to have the knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes
that will enable them to provide leadership for special education programs in their
schools” (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p. 13-14). Given are six strategies for
principals to be effective leaders in dealing with special education policy and
programming:

1. Principals must have a basic understanding of special
education services, laws, and regulations court cases,
and funding. 2. Principals must understand district policies and their implications for the entire school. 3. Principals must understand district norms regarding support/guidance for policy implementation. 4. Principals must participate in ongoing education regarding change and trends in the field of special education, particularly multiple definitions of inclusion. 5. Principals must participate in ongoing education regarding leadership philosophy and strategies that facilitate both site based management and inclusive practices. 6. If principals assume greater responsibility for special education programs in their schools, district administrators responsible for special education must support them by providing more direct communication and dissemination of accurate and current information.

(Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p. 14)

They concluded that “the policy issues surrounding special education program implementation are multiple, complex, and ever changing” (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p. 19) and principals were the critical factors of the success and effective implementation of these policies.

The review of literature will be in the previously mentioned three categories, attempting to provide a direction and background for this study’s purpose.

Transition Planning Literature Review
Furney, Hasazi, and DeStefano (1997) have looked at the different policies, practices and promises as found in three states regarding transition plans. By collecting policies and then doing a cross-case analysis by state of their transition policy findings, they were able to generate qualitative, "holistic, first person accounts of the experience implementing the federal mandates for transition" (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p.343). Data was collected from three states for a period of two years; the data sources being relevant state documents regarding transition, transition policies, and interviews with individuals who were found to be leaders and knowledgeable of the topic. Seven themes emerged from their cross-case analysis, with the fourth theme linking directly to parental involvement in the transition process. Theme four: "building collaborative structures to promote systemic change" encompasses the "promising policies and practices" including "teams address individual and systemic issues; broad membership, including parents, students. And service providers; collaborative approaches to problem solving and decision making; and local teams emphasize community viewpoint" (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p. 348). Their findings brought to the surface that two of the three states used the concept of collaboration globally and consistently. The findings suggested that families are given the opportunity for participation and the opportunity for training and the availability of resources. Furney, Hasazi, and DeStefano (1997), in their discussion, bring to the forefront seven issues for further initiative and change in the area of transition. With regard to families, the authors felt that there is a need to "include research and evaluation activities at all levels of implementation" in order to "understand and improve practice" (p.353). Further understanding of parental feedback through
follow-up studies, information to lead to improvement of practice, recognition of effective practice, and greater reflection will build stronger transition programs in the future.

Repetto and Correa (1996) attempted to define transition from the early childhood “perspectives, propose and infrastructure for transition based on common components and advocate for a seamless model of service delivery for special education” (Repetto & Correa, 1996, p. 552). Within their perspective of transition for early childhood students, the authors reflect family inclusion as a component. “This ecological perspective supports a family centered approach that empowers people with disabilities and their families to make decisions about services and encourage them to become integral members of transition teams” (Nesbit, Covert, & Schuh, 1992 as quoted in Repetto & Correa, 1996, p. 551). They respond that the needs of the student and the family are paramount to the convenience factor of the school, agency or service provider. The mandate of PL 99-457, which requires transition plans for young preschool children is forcing the change for transition; however the authors have found that earlier research does not incorporate the family centered approach. They emphasize the following points as integral to successful transition planning:

Program planning content: a family directed assessment of their resources, priorities, and concerns; a statement of the major outcomes expected to be achieved for the child and family, and the criteria, procedures, and timelines used; a statement of specific early intervention services necessary to meet the needs of the child and family; and provide parents with information on placement
options.

Program planning follow-up: following enrollment... the receiving
program will evaluate the transition with regard to parent satisfaction...

(Repetto & Correa, 1996, p.554)

These components are to ensure the inclusion and satisfaction of the family in the
transition process.

Their guidelines for implementation recognize a key focus as being the family and
the student. They expressed the need for family perspective to be a component of the
individualized program, the use of surveys to better understand the family needs for the
impaired student, the need for a relationship between families and service providers that
includes trust, respect, and communication, the training of parents as self-advocates, and
providing families with “wrap around” services that they will have the ability to make
effective decisions and assist their children in a multifaceted sense (Repetto & Correa,
1996, 561). They also recognized that obstacles would be the service providers being
uncomfortable with serving the family, not just the child, and families may have a difficult
time realizing their ability to be active and effective in the transition process for their child.

Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999) reviewed a program called STEPS
(Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools) and its impact on transition
development. In this article, the authors recognized that PL 99-457 stresses the inclusion
of family involvement through IFSP goals (Individual Family Service Plan). They have
documented research that described the family feedback regarding transition planning as
historically stressful, time consuming, uncoordinated with service providers, and as a task
that required knowledge of the system and how it works (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster,
1999). The article described beliefs in parental/family training, as demonstrated through the STEPS model, which was a component of developing family involvement options. The authors conducted a focus group, exploring each component of STEPS, consisting of family members, transition team members, and program directors. All were trained in STEPS and were using it at their sites. The researchers sought responses to the following questions regarding the family involvement component: “Describe types of parent training that have taken place this year. What methods are used to provide information to families? How are families involved in the transition process? How are families provided information about supplemental services in the community?” (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1997, p. 44). The feedback from the focus group recognized the following issues regarding family involvement after the use of the STEPS model: there seemed to be a need for a change in the communication level between families and service providers, however, that change was not evident; the emphasis was felt more in the area of training and technical assistance for families (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1997). The focus group members also recognized a need for revisions to and/or new policies to be put in place to better facilitate the transition process as an effective tool for both children and families. The authors concluded that the need for new policies was not the solution, but a greater understanding of family involvement and empowerment might be more recognized and understood through policy revision and adoption.

Rous and Hallam (1998) recognized the importance of skills for students transitioning from early childhood setting. They recognized the stress for families that transitioning presents and that there exists a need to relieve that stress in order for transitioning to be positive, successful, and productive for all involved with the student.
“The preparation of students and families for the next programmatic environment has become an important component of program planning” (Rous & Hallam, 1998, p. 19) that incorporated discovering and addressing the needs of both the student and the family for success in the next educational setting. Family input was needed in ascertaining the skills of the child, individual needs that need to be addressed for the family and child, and concerns regarding the transition process for a smooth transition program. Families should be incorporated in the targeting of skills for preparedness for the next setting as well as addressing these needs for their children. The family’s input was invaluable to the assessment of student skills, as well as the family’s ability to address these areas in order to provide generalization, continuity and reinforcement as the service provider was addressing them. Families, with appropriate inclusion and training, could even carry over the skills throughout the summer. Rous and Hallam (1998) also emphasized the need for “collaborative planning among families, teachers, professionals and related services personnel. This tool holds promise for facilitating the transition process for young children and their families” (Rous & Hallam, 1998, p.25).

Bruns and Fowler (1999) discussed the needs of designing transition plans that are culturally sensitive in order to afford all families the opportunity to be included in the transition process. The transition role for families were discussed as the following: teacher, information source, decision maker and advocate, which were further broadened by the needs for continuity, communication, collaboration, and family concerns to then include family as guide, information specialist, and as ally. Each of these was discussed in the area regarding the flexibility that needs to be built in to transition teams and planning
for the best service and inclusion of families. Examples of the flexible and encompassing methods of including families in the transition process included:

Family is involved in identifying and deciding how to manage conflicting practice and expectations... Information exchanges should match the family preference (face-to-face meetings, etc.)... Include opportunities for feedback from families throughout the transition process... Families are encouraged to share their concerns... Families are consulted concerning culturally appropriate roles and levels of involvement in transition... (Bruns & Fowler, 1999, p.29)

The underlying theme to transition plans, according to Bruns and Fowler, needed to be flexibility to all families to determine their level of involvement. Involvement needed to be encouraged and solicited in order to build strong, family based transition teams.

Hall DeFur and Taymans (1995) conducted a study with "the purpose of identifying and validating competencies for transition specialist practitioners and to examine current training needs and job responsibilities relative to transition" (Hall DeFur & Taymans, 1995, p.40). The study was conducted by research review and a survey, using a Likert scale, of experts in the field. The results emphasized the need for providing information to and including the families of disabled children in the transition process. The researchers yielded results that found that transition specialists need to demonstrate competency in the interpretation and relaying of information regarding skills and assessments to families. They needed to be able to work with others, including family, as well as demonstrate a level of professionalism in the field. Competencies for these specialists were discussed: "these skills include collaboration, ability to facilitate change, a
working knowledge of other ‘team members’ skills and their roles, functional knowledge of agency practices and effective interpersonal communication skills” (Hall DeFur & Taymans, 1995, p.46). The ability to collaborate and communicate included families and their valued contribution to the transition team.

Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998) analyzed the relationship between families and professionals surrounding the transition process. They focused on early intervention environments that have included in their rationale working with families. These researchers felt that all facets of transition services should revolve around a family-centered approach and should incorporate families in all aspects of service. “The essence of a family-centered approach lies in the relationship that exists between parents and professionals. Desirable characteristics of this relationship include trust, mutual respect, open and clear communication, a collaborative attitude, follow through, and interpersonal skills” (Dinnebier & Rule, 1994; Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette & Hamby, 1991 as quoted in Bailey, et al, 1998, p.315). Surveys of families experiencing the transition process were conducted and their perceptions and the impact on the family were reported. Policy implications were developed from the responses. Articles on the subject were also extensively reviewed. One of the general themes that emerged was family empowerment. Parents needed and desired the perception of control over access to support and services. This can be enhanced by developing practices that support and work with families making them feel empowered, not powerless (Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, & Wagner, 1998). Additionally, a theme that also emerged was families needing to feel optimistic toward the future throughout and during the transition process. There was a need, if the transition
process is going to be successful, for families to feel that their needs and wants will be heard, valued and attended to. The key for policy implications, according to Bailey et al (1998), was policy was best framed “in the context of how family and child needs can be integrated into a comprehensive system of early intervention services” (p.324).

Drinkwater and Demchak (1995) looked at the necessary skills and preparation of students for the move to the elementary setting from the preschool handicapped environment. They reflected briefly, but agreeing with all other researchers, that the family involvement component was integral to the success of transition. There needed to be “increased communication skills with peers and family members” (Drinkwater & Demchak, 1995, p.7) for successful gains in the transitioning process for the preschool handicapped youngster. Families were defined as the key information provider as to the skills and abilities of the child, especially in the generalized environment.

Smith, Edelen-Smith, and Stodden (1995) analyzed the pitfalls and how to avoid them with regard to transition planning. They explored a pitfall that revolves around families: “Transition planning without the input of representative partners or personally involved participants” (Smith, et al, 1995, p.43). Those with a vested interest, i.e.: families, directly involved staff and related services providers, were less likely to marginally respond to situations, ignore needs, or make decisions in interests other than those of the child. Families were able to provide any array of information and insight into the best situations for the child. They criticized those who limit the involvement of parents or contrive the areas that include families as self-serving and express the reason for these limiting actions as “scheduling problems, to fear of open disagreement among team members, to saving time and effort” (Smith et al, 1995, p.43).
National TEEM Outreach was a project funded by the United States Department of Education that spanned several states, including New Jersey. It had two main goals: the establishment and implementation of best practice regarding transition plans and policies and setting guidelines as a more universal process of transition.

Project TEEM started several years ago in New Jersey in an effort to help bring the transition from preschool handicapped classes to kindergarten. “In collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Education, The Boggs Center University Affiliated Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey has provided training and technical assistance to ... school districts in developing and implementing transition procedures” (Leonard & Melzer, 1998, p.3). The program recognized that there are several key components to successful transition:

- ensure continuity in needed services for the child;
- enhance the child's successful adjustment to and participation in the elementary school setting; 
- increase the likelihood that the will generalize and maintain previously learned skills; promote 
- the family's participation as partners in their child's educational program; and increase the ability of school staff to 
- accommodate children with special needs. (Leonard & Melzer, 1998, p.2)

Project TEEM participants were asked to complete surveys and generate activities in order to develop a core set of transition activities. These were compiled, discussed and grouped into three main categories: family activities, child activities, and school activities. Each was described and the tasks were assigned to specific parts of the transition team.
They were compiled to create activity lists that districts could use to create successful policies. Some activities were denoted as necessities to successful transitions, others as activities that enhance the process. It was noted that the activities compiled all related to family were listed as needed activities, not enhancing activities. This was done in an effort to foster team building on the transition team and keep open the communication between the family and the school (Leonard & Melzer, 1998).

**Family Involvement Literature Review**

The research regarding family involvement in school decision making does not differ much from study to study, researcher to researcher, and educational field to field. Whether for transitions or the general school community, it is emphasized that parents were an instrumental component of student success.

Mills et al. (1988) looked at issues regarding families living in rural areas of the United States and the implementation of rules and regulations established at the federal level. According to their research, parents of the disabled should be represented in decision making bodies, especially policy making groups.

The evidence indicates that the family is the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the development of a child. The evidence indicates further that the involvement of the child’s family as an active participant is critical to the success of any intervention program. Without such family involvement, any effects of intervention, at least in the cognitive sphere, are likely to be ephemeral, to appear to erode
once the program ends. In contrast, the involvement of parents as partners in the enterprise provides an on-going system which can reinforce the effects of the program while it is in operation, and help sustain them after the program ends. (Bronfemembrner, 1974 as quoted in Mills, et al., 1988, p.3)

Also discussed was transition efforts for early childhood programs relevant to the needs of parents and their children with disabilities. Recognized was the fact that the needs of these children and their families change frequently; therefore, so must programs. Mills et al. (1988) identified “fundamental components” for transition program services relative to families: “a written timeline of transition events”; “the advocacy of parent involvement in the transition planning and decision making processes”; and “post placement procedures to ensure successful transition of individual children” (p.6). Mills et al. (1988) concluded that complete transition programs would lead to better placements, greater understanding of educational processes, and improved adjustments for children and their families.

Miller and Gallagher (1997) discussed the family-centered approach for early intervention services within the parameters of Part H of IDEA (PL102-119), which stressed the family centered approach. Their work discussed the necessity of active parental involvement in decision making for children, a level of involvement that is encouraged and supported by professionals. Collaborative partnerships, according to Miller and Gallagher (1997), with both the professionals and the families, needed establishment that is “based on equality and shared decision making” (p.52). Professionals needed to be well versed in family dynamics, as well as need appropriate training. It was
concluded that the family centered approach enabled true support for the need of children with disabilities and their families.

Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998) suggested a framework to evaluate a family centered approach to early intervention. This approach was recognized as a method of supporting families of disabled children. The authors identified three general themes that drove the rationale of the family centered approach. Every family should be dealt with in an individual manner, considering the fact that “families vary considerably in resources, priorities, concerns, and culture” (Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998, p.314). Processes benefited partnerships between professionals and families in both the planning and service aspects. “Finally, families are viewed as the ultimate decision makers, and long term caregivers of their children, thus, enabling families to feel competent as advocates is of paramount importance” (Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998, p.314).

Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998) discussed that family centeredness should be completely incorporated in the transition process. Through case studies, it was shown “that the essence of a family centered approach lies in the relationship between the parents and professionals” (Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998, p.315). According to their research, these relationships were not simply surface relationships, but must be based on concepts of “trust, mutual respect, open and clear communications, a collaborative attitude, follow through, and interpersonal skills” (Bailey, McWilliam,
Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, (1998, p. 315). The goal of this family centeredness was to bring empowerment of families.

Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998) suggested the following eight questions as a framework to evaluate the family centered approach:

Family Perceptions:

1. Does the family see early intervention as appropriate in making a difference in their child’s life?

2. Does the family see early intervention as appropriate in making a difference in their family’s life?

3. Does the family have a positive view of professionals and the special service system?

Impact on the Family:

1. Did early intervention enable the family to help their child learn, grow, and develop?

2. Did early intervention enhance the family’s perceived ability to work with professionals and advocate for services?

3. Did early intervention assist the family in building a strong support system?

4. Did early intervention help enhance an optimistic view of the future?

5. Did early intervention enhance the family’s perceived quality
of life? (p. 316-322)

Similarly, Romer and Umbreit (1998) analyzed the level of family satisfaction of a family centered service for disabled youngsters. Their research suggested that all facets of special education programming for handicapped children supported by Part H of IDEA, should infuse a family-centered approach. They recognized that researchers have focused on “key elements of family centered care, have defined a family centered model and practices have described methods for implementing a family centered philosophy in early intervention practices” (Romer & Umbreit, 1998, p.96).

Their research concurred with findings in the field: “a family centered approach constitutes best practice” (Romer & Umbreit, 1998, p.104). Romer and Umbreit (1998) found that providers needed more comprehensive training to implement a family centered approach. Moreover, their research identified that the need for further investigation would benefit the field, especially in the areas of support to professionals who are implementing a family approach, how family centered approaches are effecting the providers, and the impact of training.

Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) looked at team decision making for students and the integration of families of diverse backgrounds as participants. Their article suggested various methods of family involvement to increase such activity, especially among the families of diverse backgrounds with special needs children.

They reviewed the then current literature, breaking down the following as key benefits of a:

partnership between schools and parents. It enables
people having diverse experiences to interact with the
goal of reaching agreement in specific issues. Such interaction
can result in: shared ownership of problem definitions and
solutions; shared knowledge and expertise; increased
cohesiveness and willingness to work together on future
issues (Thousand, Villa, Paolucci, Whitcomb, and Nevin,
1996). When family members collaborate with professionals,
there is also a recognition that the family is the constant in
the child's life, while services and professionals within
the system are always in a state of flux (Shelton, Jeppson,
and Johnson, 1987). Close working relationships between
professionals and family members also ensures that service
recommendations are flexible, accessible, and responsive to
family needs (Angelo, 1997; Parette and Brotherson, 1996).

(Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000, p.5)

Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) developed, based on the work of Anderson and
Goldberg (1991), a framework of questions to bring about greater family involvement in
the following areas: assessment design, professional collaboration, cultural issues, values,
family factors, acculturation, ethnicity, social influences, past experiences, and
developmental expectations. They described many key factors to be considered when
working to establish and implement a family centered approach. Professionals needed to
be proactive to bring together school and families, always maintaining an awareness of the
individual needs of the family (Parette and Petch-Hogan, 2000). Another factor was
training for families to enable them to work with their disabled child, utilize the recommended strategies given to them for reinforcement and home use, and be involved. Incorporated into family training was also ongoing support to help keep the training current and useful.

Professionals needed to recognize the needs, priorities and resources of the families they work with, according to Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000). Families varied from each other and professionals in their perceptions of the best interests of their child and their family. "These perceptions are influenced by a range of factors, such as family life span issues, functions, and communications styles" (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000, p.8). According to their findings, Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) concluded that the family centered approach needed to be supported with many strategies in order to be successful and benefit the disabled child.

Geenan, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) surveyed over three hundred multicultural parents to ascertain their level of involvement in transition planning beyond school. Although their focus was the cultural diversity aspect, they also discussed the relevant role of parental involvement as "an important factor in promoting the successful transition" (Geenan, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001, p.266). Their research regarding parent involvement reflected upon the positive effects of strong parent-school relationships. They found that student experiences were more successful if parents were involved in the transition planning process (Geenan, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Particularly, their study showed that there existed even greater benefits for culturally and linguistically diverse disabled students when there is parental involvement in transition planning; this involvement brought more than successful experiences and information to
the child. The “parents can be a valuable resource in helping educators understand, identify, and support transition outcomes that are valued within a family’s culture” (Geenan, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001, p.266).

The findings of the study produced implications for improved practice, such as training parents and educators for the increased effectiveness of parental involvement, reduction of cultural bias for involvement, and identification of strategies that encourage skill building for parents in the areas of both home and school involvement (Geenan, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001).

Policy Analysis Literature Review

Bowers (1988) discussed the uses and roles of policy analysis that exist in local school districts. Policy analysts served multiple roles, but most importantly, the policy analyst needed to serve the policy maker as a “prescriptive policy analyst” (Bowers, 1988, p.1). This role served to advise the policy maker in order to “help clarify the options and advise the body on the many decisions that must be made as it implements a policy” (Bowers, 1988, p.1). Through a review of current research, it was demonstrated that despite the need for policy analysis at the local level, most occurred at the state and federal levels.

Local level analysis tended to focus on pre-established issues, find trends and break larger issues down to identify the district’s needs in terms of sub-issues. The analyst then, according to Bowers, presented options for policy formation that come from all possible perspectives and opinions.

The role of the policy analyst is to identify all such
potential conflicts and to provide a comparison of options
along lines that are of particular concern ... some tools that
a policy analyst may rely on here include cost benefit analysis,
decision analysis, program analysis and review (PAR) and
other types of futures analysis". (Bowers, 1988, p.2)

The final phase for the analysts was to evaluate the policy's implementation by monitoring,
examining, and reporting observations. An analyst brought in for this outcome phase
alone could be utilized to alter or halt the current policy as it is and to start the process for
new work.

Green (1994) attempted to define policy, the etiology of policy questions,
presuppositions regarding policy, and the process of policy. Policy was an extremely
broad term, encompassing the many nuances of decision making, procedures, general rules
of thumb, nested complex issues, spoken and unspoken policies, personal and professional
practice, and the expression of standard requirements. In general terms regarding public
policy questions, there was an attempt to "request for a fairly stable, but modifiable, line of
action aimed at securing an optimal adjustment of the conflict between different goods, all
of which must be pursued, but which, taken together, cannot all be maximized" (Green,
1994, p.2).

Based on these complexities, according to Green, there was simply no technical
solutions to posed policy questions. Policy questions yielded "a line of action" (Green,
1994, p.3). They began by asking what to do, how to arrive at what needs to be done.
Green suggested that these answers to the policy questions can be improved. Answers
should be more rationally persuasive.
Green's (1994) etiology of policy questions stemmed from the following areas: scarcity, conflict of goods, policy, politics and utopia. These categories led to analysis of the policy process, evaluated in several categories: policy and analysis, policy formation, policy decision, and political analysis. Each was recognized for its distinct theory and unique practices. Green (1994) made the following distinctions for each:

These activities are roughly analogous to the distinction I want to make in the case of policy. Merely setting forth the marginal costs and benefits of a range of choices is one thing - policy analysis. Selecting one balanced choice or a range from within the possibilities is another thing - policy formation. The decision as to which choice or choices to make is still a third - policy decision, And performing the market analysis needed for that is yet a fourth - political analysis”. (Green, 1994, p.9)

Related to this study, the process of policy analysis was discussed. Green (1994) defined policy analysis as “the rational or technical assessment of the net marginal tradeoffs between different policy choices”. (p.9). Policy analysis was finding the balance amongst all the competing variables for the greatest all around benefits. Green expressed that policy analysis is more than mere comparison of consequences between the consequences of multiple policy possibilities. It was concluded that the evaluator in policy analysis is the only role that remained strictly that of the evaluator - not sidetracked by forming policy or agenda - simply evaluation of the policy.
Special education reform in general led down the path of policy analysis on its own. Policy analysts looked at a variety of facets of special education; one example was inclusion. Galis and Tanner (1995) looked at inclusion and its implications for policy. This researcher surveyed, by random sampling, 126 school systems, within which surveys were distributed to special education directors, elementary school principals, regular education teachers, and special education teachers. The survey was designed to ascertain whether or not there was a statistically significant difference among the independent variables regarding: 1) effective strategies for meeting students' needs, 2) support for educational change, and 3) inclusive education (Galis & Tanner, 1995, p.8). Her results led to several policy implications. These implications expounded upon the issue of policy driving needs for modifications for students, the individualization of instruction, preservice preparation for staff regarding special needs, providing appropriate learning experiences for all student levels, and state funding to reduce class size.

Kemmis (1993) took a broad approach to educational research to pose a challenge for change in the traditional fundamentals of policy analysis - incorporating action research principles and making sure the research was aligned with the needs and issues viewed as important by the professionals in the education field. Research and theories of action research were reviewed. Moreno's and Lewin's influences and theories were considered the founding research, "a view of action research in which the 'action' was about activism, not just about changing practice or behavior understood in narrowly individualistic terms" (Kemmis, 1993, p.2). Advocates and the evaluation of action research helped the theory to evolve over the past 45 years to see "wants of different groups in different places reviving, revitalizing, and refurbishing 'the' idea of action research to meet different and
changing needs and circumstances” (Kemmis, 1993, p.3). Kemmis personally viewed action research as a vehicle to “increase the level of involvement and participation in the research process” (Kemmis, 1993, p.3).

He also briefly explored the issue of traditional “micro” and “macro” analysis, being that the macro applied to the larger bureaucratic setting, whereas the setting of a smaller, less formal environment utilizes a micro practice of research. Then Kemmis (1993) proposed alternatives to these traditional approaches related to social construct in order to develop a newer and different lens to view issues through - a variation in the method, actions, and whose behalf the research may be approached from. [For the purpose of this study, this concept was useful in the viewpoint askew from that of the policy maker in that it was to evaluate the inclusion of family.]

Kemmis (1993) concluded that a mere adaptation in the supporter of the analysis (from the large to smaller structure, for example), research methods, or viewing research as more action was not enough to meet the challenge educational policy analysts and researchers needed to recognize. A whole reform in the different types of research employed, methodologies and viewpoints was needed; having seen the issue from the vantage point of those implementing it to better understand their concerns and goals for a richer analysis. Kemmis did find some researcher and theorists support this perspective, and equally some dispute it. He does summarize by stating that no matter the approach, theory, or practice, “our task as educational researchers involves us in taking concrete and explicit steps toward changing the theory, policy, and practice of educational research, as well as participating in the work of changing educational theory, educational policy, and educational practice more broadly” (Kemmis, 1993, p.5).
Carnine (1997) explored the need for effective research to build better educational structures in America. Effective educational research, in Carnine’s view, should be useful, relevant and accurate for practical use by practitioners. The focus was to move past the roadblock - building a better bridge from research to practice by finding issues of quality to evaluate and improve upon. Isolated were three areas of quality: trustworthiness, usability, and accessibility - and their relatedness to effective research for policy to build more effective educational structures (Carnine, 1997).

Carnine (1997) explored trustworthiness:

...which is defined by technical considerations of methodology and analysis, determines the confidence with which a given set of findings can be acted upon by practitioners, policymakers, publishers, and other knowledge consumers (Carnine, 1995a). In many ways, special education research has earned the trustworthiness of teachers as well as individuals with severe disabilities and their families. (p. 514)

The concern discussed relative to trustworthiness was that schools were left unable to choose and select wisely between researched areas in the field without “credible” evaluations that were of “high quality” research (Carnine, 1997).

Usability was related to research, according to Carnine (1997), in the vain that there needed to be a great possibility that findings would impact practice in the field. The usability of research was evidenced in the appropriateness of language, relevance of topics, and interest to those in the field.

Accessibility simply referred to appropriate dissemination of the research, as well as the quick process of dissemination and the ease of obtaining the research for the
practitioner (Carnine, 1997). Carnine presented that research which was difficult to obtain or interpret was usually overlooked by practitioners.

What did these areas of quality imply, and, moreover, where was there room for improvement was pondered by Carnine. These three weaknesses in quality research, according to Carnine (1997), “undermine the demand for research findings”, which presented two major challenges to both policymakers and researchers: 1) rising to the challenges and committing to improving these weaknesses and advocating the research impacts, and 2) find ways to increase and cultivate the interest in research findings by those in the field (p.516).

Hazasi, Johnstone, Schattman, and Liggett (1994) took an in-depth look at the federally mandated policy of least restrictive environment (LRE) in special education - its implementation and interpretation in the field. They reflected on the research in the area that identified that various practitioners, policymakers, administrators, parents, and others have taken different approaches to implementing the LRE policy. Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, and Liggett, (1994) have developed the purpose of this study to “identify and describe factors and conditions that contributed to varying approaches to the implementation of LRE policy across states and local school districts” (Hasazi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994, p. 492). Their qualitative study based in naturalistic inquiry evaluated six states; within these six states they looked at two local school districts (breaking down to twelve local sites and six states sites) by interviewing sixteen to twenty-four people per site (350 interviews total). The interviews were to achieve the goal of understanding “what means were used by implementers and what forces and conditions
they understood were important in the implementation of the provision” (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994, p. 492).

Through their data analysis, they developed reports to reflect three commonalities across sites:

1) described factors that were influencing the implementation of LRE, 2) drew relationships among the factors studied, and 3) drew inferences regarding differential implementation of the LRE policy across state and local sites. (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994, p. 496)

The findings identified several factors that contributed to the variety in implementation techniques of the LRE policy: finance, organizational structure, the authority role, advocacy, influence of implementers, knowledge and values, and the context that existing in the state and local arenas. (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994) Finance and financial support were found to influence policy implementation in terms of the reliance on the support funding for special education programming, as well as the simple expense of providing a full range of options in educational environments to suit each and every individual need or disability. The organizational structure also influenced policy use “at all sites, special education was organized and financed in such a manner that it was the “specialness” of special education or the separated categorical system that had become a dominant influence over how LRE was implemented” (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994, p. 501).

The mandated, federal compliance aspect of the policy also effected its implementation in this sample, with four key factors demonstrating this influence. According to Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, and Liggett (1994), first was simply the
authority of the mandated law; second, leadership from the state and local administration; third, the funding presented to implement the initiative; and fourth, the factor of monitoring for compliance.

Advocacy, especially that of parent groups, had a significant impact in the policy implementation in all sites. In some instances, parents were even utilized as partners in the implementation and interpretation of the policy; in others, parents were viewed as catalysts for change. In almost all sites, according to Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, and Liggett (1994), parent advocates for policy spoke out when they felt that the LRE policy was not being implemented appropriately and did consider litigation as a last resort.

The influence of implementers impacted policy from all levels of influence, especially seen in the areas of change proposals to the policy, its implementation and its funding, influencing policy interpretation by methods of dissemination, explanation, and preparation of practitioners. The state and local context impacted policy based on the politics, agenda, and attitude towards change at the individual site (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994).

Knowledge and values had “immeasurable” impact upon the policy in terms of commitment and the ability to implement the LRE policy. Each site defined knowledge and values differently and placed a different amount of stock in each. “In one view (at high-user sites), knowledge and values were the definitive rationale for maintaining the system; in another view (at low-user sites), they provided the fundamental reason for change and provided implementor with the capacity to carry out the change” (Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, & Liggett, 1994, p.517).
In conclusion, Hazasi, Johnston, Schattman, and Liggett (1994) pointed out that “policy can truly make a difference” (p. 517). Their findings indicated that implementation of the policy, however, was in a constant state of change, driven by circumstances and influence beyond the policy itself.

Bines (2000) looked to the formation and implementation of special education policy, particularly that regarding inclusion. Additionally, Bines (2000) researched methods to analyze policy strengths, weaknesses, and needs for more effective policy making and implementation. In this article, the concept of policy legacy and its relationship to policy making regarding the needs of special education was examined. Recognized by Bines (2000) were the factors of past inadequacies of national level policies and the more current attempts to bring special education policy making closer to the general education arena.

Bines (2000) identified weaknesses regarding special education policy, in this case inclusion policy. One weakness appeared to be that a concept of commitment to the inclusion concept was evidenced, but the policy was not there to substantiate the interest. The context of educational reform also impacted policy creation and implementation. Another weakness identified by Bines (2000) recognized that the environment for change, existing practices and agendas can limit growth and the “potential for change” (Bines, 2000, p.22).

Bines (2000) identified three major concepts that existed to impact the development of policy and its implementation - this was referred to as ‘policy legacy’. “Three major elements can be identified, namely the traditional system of special education provision, government-led reform of school management and curricula, and professionally
led redefinitions of good practice in relation to roles and provision” (Bines, 2000, p.23).

These factors leave the policy process to be viewed as:

both complex and problematic. Centralized and prescriptive
approaches to curriculum and assessment, couples with market
pressures and reductions in resources, have reinforced these features
of the traditional system which encouraged schools to seek external
solutions for providing special education needs and have thus
undermined the re-orientation of special education professionals
toward changing the curricula, pedagogy, and school organization to
make schools more inclusive. (Bines, 2000, p.23-24)

Bines (2000) found that a response to these weaknesses did exist. The existing
policy situation was viewed to raise the educational standards, assumed to include
standards within special education. Additionally, a growing perspective existed that
viewed the current situation as needing policies to be generated specifically addressing the
needs of special education. Bines found this new policy making drive as an inevitable
reality. It was recognized that policies were usually rooted in needs, routines and
priorities of the past; as well as conflicts between these past structures and special
education needs today. These conflicts seem to be explained by the following three
factors: 1) policies can be very difficult to change, 2) “policy is inevitably a balancing act
between different pressures and has to mesh with contexts and legacies and competing
associations and views” and 3) “there do remain some substantial and possible irresolvable
dilemmas in relation to policy and provision for special education needs” (Bines, 2000,
Bines then looked to reflect on the outcomes of then current policies, albeit a difficult task to predict such outcomes. Bines recognized the characteristics:

the first involves the likelihood of achieving certain short-term policy intentions, such as the reduction of statements of special education needs. The second concerns longer term objectives, such as developing inclusion and increasing schools’ capability to provide for special education needs. The third is more general and is related to strategic approaches to continuing educational reform, including implications for special education needs in particular. (Bines, 2000, p.27)

There existed major weaknesses that are the crux of policy that undermine change, both specific to inclusion and/or special education policy in general. There were also “some crucial gaps in the knowledge and experience of successful change” (Bines, 2000, p.30). Bines concluded that although there didn’t appear to be much opportunity for extreme or revolutionary change in special education policy, there existed some current approaches that would create better educational policy, effective reform, and practice. Major change in policy, according to Bines, would be a “major achievement in relation to special education needs” (Bines, 2000, p.30).

Furney, Hasazi, and DeStefano (1997) have looked at three states policies regarding the implementation of transition policies and practices. They found in the current literature that transition policy and practice is complex; these complexities make “it difficult to ensure nationwide implementation of IDEA’s requirements (Emerson and McNulty, 1992)” (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p.343-344). They looked at the
transition plan process in the literature from three different vantage points: the individual planning level, systemic level, and general policy implementation. The students and parents, at the individual level, were often found to demonstrate feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and apprehension, as well as felt uninformed as to their options. (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997) They observed the systemic level as the area that required major changes in schools for successful transitions, in this case high school to adult life in the community.

Finally, the more general literature on policy implementation suggested that the implementation of any policy is a challenging prospect. The current literature regards policy implementation as a slow, incremental, and multifaceted process that must take into account local context and values (Fullan, 1991; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Stone, 1988); encourage the development of local capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987); and empower local implementers to take ownership for implementing, evaluating, revising and incorporating changes into daily practice (Fullan, 1991, p.11). (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p.344)

Through this study, the researchers were looking to “explore the contextual characteristics and change strategies that have helped change policy into practice. Throughout our attempts to understand, describe, and compare the policies and practices that work in these states, we hope to contribute to the successful implementation of this and other federal policies” (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p.344). In this study, three states, ahead of their colleagues in their dedication and practice to transition, were
selected. These states were visited for data collection that were then compiled as individual case studies and then cross-case analysis formats. The final product was the emergence of common themes from cross-case study. The themes that emerged were found to summarize “promising practices for the future” (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p.347) and were considered driving points of the transition policies and practices. The seven themes were:

1) the role of shared values and beliefs in creating an environment conducive to the implementation of transition policies and practices, 2) using direct policy approaches to create changes related to transition, 3) paving the way for change by uniting leadership and advocacy, 4) building collaborative structures to promote systemic change, 5) using the results of research and evaluation to inform change efforts, 6) building the capacity for long-lasting change, and 7) looking ahead: linking transition to other restructuring efforts”. (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p. 348)

Furney, Hasazi, and DeStefano (1997) recognized the complex challenges and difficult process of policy practices, but did find that these themes were building blocks and strengthen policy and practice. They concluded that there existed seven key practices that emerged from these effective themes to improve transition policies:

1) Define and highlight values and beliefs that foster the development and initiation of transition policies and practices.
2) Develop and implement federal and state policies on transition in ways that strengthen existing practice and empower communities to make change. 3) Reinforce a collaborative and comprehensive view of leadership. 4) Add or strengthen collaborative structures and the state and community level to promote high-quality transition practices and services. 5) Implement a variety of capacity building and evaluation activities that empower local schools and communities to make change. 6) Include research and evaluation activities at all levels of implementation. 7) Link current transition initiatives to related and future initiatives. (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997, p. 352-353).

These conclusions reflected that the implementation of federally mandated policies were complex and were dealt with in a unique fashion in each environment; yet, change could be fostered with the themes and suggestions that emerged for more effective improvements in current policies.

Croll and Moses (2000) looked at policies, policy reform and the area of inclusion in the United Kingdom. There were able to, through their research, draw conclusions relative to the efforts of policy analysis in education. They looked specifically at the relationship between policy making and policy implementation through the window of policy analysis in special education. “A major purpose of this article is to address the sharp contrast between a prevalent set of policy proposal and educational and social ideals which support the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools and the continued
maintenance and in some cases, expansion of segregated special school provision” (Croll & Moses, 2000, p.178).

Interviews were conducted to ascertain information as the process and end result of local policy making efforts. Documentation relevant to the area was also evaluated to achieve the same goal. Various keys to policy analysis emerged. Policy analysis of inclusive policy at the local level reflected local political and popular interests. The relationship between local interest and rational policy making, albeit not a focus, was noted. (Croll & Moses, 2000)

“An important issue in the analysis of public policy-making is the contrast between ‘rational’ approaches to policy making, which may entail large scale structural reform, and ‘incremental’ approaches, which proceed through small scale modification to the status quo” (Croll & Moses, 2000, p. 184). Reflected upon by Croll and Moses were the influences of Lindblom and Etzioni, and their conflicting opinions in the policy making field.

Particularly influential had been Lindblom’s (1959)
critique of rational models of policy analysis, which both disputes their descriptive accuracy and, implicitly, challenges their prescriptive features. Lindblom characterized policy making as a process of ‘muddling through’ and used incrementalism as an account of how policy makers both do and should proceed. Critics of this account, such as Etzioni (1967), have argues that incremental policies are inherently conservative
and unlikely to effect significant change. While Lindblom (1979), in a later article, has argued that there is no reason why incremental small steps cannot be taken no rapid succession to accomplish major reforms by incremental means, Etzioni and others have claimed that incrementalism is typically change which is ‘not going anywhere’, as policy developments are circular or incoherent or cancel each other out. (Croll & Moses, 2000, p.185)

The interview also led to the conclusion that the local interest were represented by the locally influential - the opinions of those individuals were actually the view determining the policy and it implementation. These interviews led to substantiating their argument that “a policy involving major initiative is more likely to achieve reform of special education needs provision than a policy consisting entirely of minor adjustments” (Croll & Moses, 2000, p.187). Croll and Moses (2000) also concluded that certain policy making influences should be kept in mind: the importance of parental preference and structural explanations. The agenda of key influential figures within the structure making the policy did appear to be the force driving the reform.
Chapter Three
An Evaluative Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a framework that outlines the essential dimensions of a family centered transition policy and to use this framework heuristically to evaluate current transition policies. The framework developed will utilize the current literature and synthesize it to create a tool that is useful in the evaluation of the family centered approach reflected in transition policies.

The current research led to several conclusions that could be drawn in order to develop a useful tool to reflect upon the current transition plans enacted and analyze their weight regarding family centeredness. The matrix can be broken down into four dimensions, each with a set of indicators that are the crux of family centeredness. The four dimensions are: recognition of cultural variations among families, family/school collaboration, sensitivity to individual variations among families, and preparation/training. The explanation following the matrix will briefly explore each dimension and its indicators based on the current literature in the field.

The following matrix (see Figure One: Criteria Matrix), supported by current and relevant literature in the field, will serve as a tool to evaluate the existing preschool transition policies in terms of the family centered approach taken:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECOGNITION OF CULTURAL VARIATIONS AMONG FAMILIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the diversity of families utilizing cultural tools and resources available</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Bruns and Fowler (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of trained translators/liaisons to keep open and useful communication with family</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess and understand family cultures and values in relation to educational decision making</td>
<td>Bruns and Fowler (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<th>FAMILY/SCHOOL COLLABORATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations, and information; Parents as team members</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Miller and Gallagher (1997); Smith, Edelean-Smith, &amp; Stodden (1995); Bruns and Fowler (1999); Repetto ad Correa (1996); Romer and Umbreit (1998); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner, 1998; Mills et al. (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and provisions to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal</td>
<td>Romer and Umbreit (1998); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner, 1998; Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, frequent and reliable two-way communication with quick and accurate responses to inquiries</td>
<td>Romer and Umbreit (1998); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner, 1998; Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999); Drinkwater and Demchak (1995)</td>
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<th>SENSITIVITY TO THE INDIVIDUAL VARIATIONS AMONG FAMILIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition of the family as the strongest expert and the true decision-maker for the child</td>
<td>Romer and Umbreit (1998); Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999); Rous and Hallam (1998); Bruns and Fowler (1999); Miller and Gallagher (1997); Mills et al. (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize tools to assess and be responsive to the family’s individual needs; Ability to get to know the family</td>
<td>Romer and Umbreit (1998); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner, 1998; Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family involvement in the actual process of the transition</td>
<td>Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999); Repetto and Correa (1996); Bruns and Fowler (1999); Miller and Gallagher (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up assessment of family satisfaction</td>
<td>Hall DeFur and Taymans (1995); Repetto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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with the transition planning process and the transition itself and Correa (1996); Romer and Umbreit (1998); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998)

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<tr>
<th>PREPARATION / TRAINING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental training options to work effectively with their children</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/family training to understand transition process and options</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Miller and Gallagher (1997); Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and professionals training for working with families</td>
<td>Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000); Miller and Gallagher (1997); Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999)</td>
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Figure 1. Criteria Matrix
Discussion of the Framework

Recognition of cultural variations among families is a dimension that recognizes the importance of family characteristics, personal philosophies of education and their values in successful transition programs. The first indicator, supporting the diversity of families utilizing cultural tools and resources available explored the need to develop a set of resources and opportunities to best serve the culturally diverse family (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Bruns & Fowler, 1999). Examples of this could be in the form of providing support groups of similar cultural backgrounds and/or exploring the culture of the family through research, community and interviews.

The second indicator related to cultural variation is the availability of translators/liaisons to keep open and useful communication with the family (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000). This ensures that opportunities for open and useful communication with the family exist. Transition policies need to provide the opportunity for parents to express their needs and their children’s needs (whether they are able to speak English or need to express themselves in the native language to provide the greatest clarity for the student involved). The inclusion of these opportunities will bring a sense of security, trust, and comfort to the transition process (Bruns & Fowler, 1999).

The third indicator related to cultural variation is to assess and understand family cultures and values in relation to educational decision making, which is reflected in the work of Bruns and Fowler (1999). This indicator suggests the transition policy should include the use of interviews to acquire a the true understanding of the family background and values, which will only enhance the concept of educational decision making as a team. The transition policy needs to implement methods that include interviews, home visits, and
time spent getting to know the family's cultural perspectives and their values. This provides valuable information for sound and effective decision making by team members in the best interest of the child (Bruns & Fowler, 1999).

The second dimension, family/school collaboration, has three indicators. The first indicator, shared/collaborative approach to defining problem, issues, situations, and information; parents as team members, reflects the bringing together of all the professionals and the family to build a cohesive team. Transition policies need to involve the family throughout the transition process, which will encourage all members of the team to 'buy into' the transition policy purpose. Transition policies that include complete and open sharing of information will keep everyone aware and cognizant of the limitations, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the student being discussed. This flow of information during transition policy implementation provides a more complete decision making process (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Smith, Edelen-Smith, & Stoddern, 1995; Bruns & Fowler, 1999; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998; Mills et al., 1988).

The second indicator is activities to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal (Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Rous Hemmster & Schuster, 1999; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker & Wagner, 1998). Transition policies should contain provisions that allow parents to be aware of resources to help them handle the changes and difficulties in their family life. Opportunities to meet other parents in similar situations that can help and support one another and learn more about their child's disability should also be provided. Parents are
often not aware of the resources available, especially since they have very little experience in dealing with disabilities. Transition policies need to provide the opportunity for families to be exposed to these areas (Rous, Hemmeter & Schuster, 1999).

The third indicator is open, frequent and reliable communication between the family and school. This communication should be accurate and informative with timely responses. Parents should be given the same accuracy, timeliness and courtesy as professional team members. By setting the tone of a team atmosphere where each team member is valued and given the same respect as the others, the transition policy provides a more cohesive group that is able to arrive at better decisions for the child. Parents will feel valued, listened to, and integral to the success of the transition policy implementation (Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Rous Hemmeter & Schuster, 1999; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker & Wagner, 1998; Drinkwater & Demchak, 1995).

The third dimension is sensitivity to the individual variations among families, which recognizes that each family needs to be dealt with as different from any other. The four indicators describe what the essentials are in order to recognize and deal with the uniqueness of each family participating in the transition policy. The first indicator is recognition of the family as the strongest expert and the true decision-maker for the child (Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999; Rous & Hallam, 1998; Bruns & Fowler, 1999; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Mills et al., 1988). The research indicated that there is no one that knows the child better, spends more time with the child, and has watched the child develop this far, than the family members. The transition policy needs to provide the opportunity for parents to express their expertise regarding their child. This information is necessary for the best decisions to
be made for the disabled child. Parents are able to see all facets of the child, from carry over and generalization skills, to habits and routines, to likes and dislikes. Transition policies need to reflect the concept that parents are considered the key component to creating a full and comprehensive picture of the child.

The second indicator is utilize tools to assess and be responsive to the family’s individual needs and demonstrate the ability to get to know the family. Transition policies should include the use of tools such as home visits, parental conferences that occur periodically, and phone conversations. Transition policies need to reflect the goal of truly knowing the family. This can be accomplished by getting to understand their aspirations and learning their expectations and perspectives of their child. As well as finding what the life span issues are for that child and the way in which this all fits into their family perspective of creating a successful transition for the child (Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000). By utilizing formal assessment tools, district created tools, or scheduled and structured periods of time spent with the family, family centered transition policies can accomplish the goal of truly knowing the family.

The third indicator, family involvement in the actual process of transition, is based on the research discussed by Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), Repetto and Correa (1996), Bruns and Fowler (1999), and Miller and Gallagher (1997). The family can not be on the sidelines for the transition to be successful and useful. Transition policies need to provide opportunities for families to be included in most meetings, be considered team members by professionals, and be involved in exploring all possible placement options.
Transition policies should allow parents to observe current and potential placements for their child and be the key decision makers for final placement.

The fourth indicator, is integral to the constant evaluation and improvement of transition plans and policies: follow up assessment of family satisfaction with the transition planning process and the transition itself. The process cannot improve without the fair, complete and consistent evaluation by the family. Transition policies should recognize that within the family is where the true impact of the decision making process and placement occur. Transition policies providing opportunities for feedback about implementation will acquire information from the families that allows the process to be refined. This refinement will create a more family centered, more effective, and more appropriate transition experience for the future families involved (Hall DeFur & Taymans, 1995; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998).

The final dimension is preparation/training. This dimension includes three indicators that recognize the need for transition policies to provide for preparation and training of both families and professionals. The first indicator, parental training options to help parents to work effectively with their children, allows for parents to be trained and well-versed in the interventions, methods and approaches viewed as the best educational options for their child. Transition policies need to provide opportunities that prepare parents to work with their children at home. Additionally, parents need to be able to provide information to all working with the child regarding progress. Transition policies that provide these training opportunities will bridge the school to home gap by helping to generalize skills and strategies for the life span. Parents are the most involved with their
child, spend the most time with their child, and the transition policy should afford the opportunity for parents to learn to be their child's best advocate and ally (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998).

The second indicator regarding the training dimension is to provide parent/family training in the actual transition policy process. Parents and family are often not exposed to the process or components of transition, and are usually not familiar with the educational decision making process. At the inception of a child's participation in the transition planning process, parents should be well trained and become knowledgeable of the rights as parents and team members. The transition policies should provide the opportunity for the goals of the transition plan, as well as the process, to be clearly articulated and understandable by parents. The expected outcomes of a successful transition should be clearly articulated at the beginning and reviewed carefully and throughout the transition policy implementation. The transition policy should ensure that parents feel comfortable to inquire when they do not understand and the answers to these questions should always be readily available (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999).

The third indicator for preparation/training is integral to the success of the transition program. The transition policy needs to provide the professionals with opportunities to have rich backgrounds in working with families (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999). Via transition policy parameters, professionals should be trained to interview, visit, and communicate effectively with families. The understanding of individual diversity and values should be
included in this training to allow professionals to be most responsive and insightful when dealing with the families’ needs. Professionals usually do not receive training in family dynamics and have limited experience working this closely with parents. Transition policies need to afford opportunities for professionals to receive initial and on-going training in working with families for successful programs and family centered approaches in this field (Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999).

In summary, transition policies need to represent the factors discussed in the current literature in order to be truly family centered and successful. This discussed dimensions and respective indicators gleaned from the research combined to create an effective tool to evaluate preschool handicapped transition policies.
Chapter Four
Methodology

Methodology of Policy Acquisition

Public school districts in the State of New Jersey were selected based upon their reputation and in house preschool programs for policy acquisition. All districts were selected randomly for preliminary review by searching district websites for preschool handicapped applications and for their involvement in the Project TEEM program as either documented in the Project TEEM literature or relayed by a Project TEEM coordinator. Letters were sent to eight school districts requesting a copy of their transition policy. Also solicited was written permission to analyze their transition policy for the purpose of this study, assuring voluntary status and anonymity, and requesting a contact name and phone number to conduct a follow-up interview. Four school districts responded.

Description of Interview Questions

The follow up interviews were conducted by telephone with contacts from the participating districts. Each district contact was asked twelve specific questions and then wrap up questions allowing for the contact to elaborate or give general feedback beyond the questions asked. The purpose of the interview was two fold: 1) to collect basic demographic background and 2) to collect basic background information about the transition policy itself. These questions were designed to assist in providing a context to
view the transition policy. The following is each question with a brief explanation as to its rationale.

Contact person’s background: This set of questions established the person’s place in the history of the document, exposure and use of the transition policy, and familiarity with the subject at hand. These facets will enhance the environmental perspective of the transition policy.

1. What is the size of the district? This question set the stage for the overall size of the district, the ability to determine the size of special needs and preschool handicapped students that were transitioning to kindergarten in relation to district size, and the need recognized for special education in a large or small district.

2. What is the size of the special education population? Along with setting the stage for the overall size of the special education population, this question allowed for comparison to the district size as a whole, as well as to observe the relative ratio of preschool handicapped students that were transitioned to the whole of the special education population. This may yield another clue to the emphasis on preschool handicapped programming within the department.

3. What is the size of the preschool handicapped population? This question will give the relative number of special education students that were preschool age. Also, this information would provide a perspective of how needs for these children were be addressed, and present the researcher with the number of students that were likely to be impacted by the transition policy implementation.
4. Please describe the diversity of the community culturally. Please elaborate as to language barrier, etc. This question placed the transition policy in its environment, particularly with regard to the cultural aspects of the criteria for analysis. This insight will help the researcher to determine why there may have been a weight in some districts with regard to diversity and a lack in that area in other districts.

5. Approximately how many students “transition” each year from preschool handicapped? This question allows the researcher to understand how many times the transition policy had been implemented. This information will provide the frequency of transition policy implementation, revisions, and opportunities for reflection on the transition policy.

6. When was the transition policy first constructed and implemented? This placed a historical perspective for the transition plan, giving the researcher the ability to understand its construction, implementation, and revisions.

7. What was the impetus? This question allowed the researcher to have the insight as to the driving force behind the transition policy: was it driven by IDEA, the parents of the students in need, the staff that were working with the students, or preschool grant money. If the impetus came from the families, this could have a strong influence over the crafting of the document in a manner that is congruent with family centered principles.

8. What was the construction process? This question allowed the researcher to view the influences in the process of designing the transition policy. The transition policy development may have been formed under the guide of a pre-
existing model, constructed by an outside consultant that had a particular perspective, or collaborated upon by those who will use it to best serve the district’s specific needs. These and other types of construction influences again lend themselves to highlighting the family centeredness and underpinnings for the transition policy.

9. Is the document fixed or flexible? This question gets at whether the transition policy was either shaped to the individual situation for each child’s transition or was rigidly adhered to for all children. If the information gleaned from the responses shows flexibility, it underscores the dimensions of family centeredness by being flexible to each of the needs of the family.

10. Where there any problems with the implementation of the transition policy? The researcher can learn from the answer to this question whether or not the transition policy had been utilized and if there had been feedback on its implementation. This lends itself to describing further influences, stresses and successes of the plan.

11. What are the constraints? High points? The district was able to identify the constraints of the transition policy and the researcher will be able to gain some knowledge of the transition policy’s shortcomings. These shortcomings may be described as future plans for revision, which will provide insight into the further influences on the program. High points will illustrate the feedback given regarding policy implementation and the focus that the district had found to be positively regarded.
12. Have there been any modifications to the transition policy? What kind, how many, and why? Again, the insight here was to identify the influences, successes and failures of the transition policy. This allowed the researcher to understand the evolution of the transition policy and the potential shift in the driving force behind the current document.

13. What is the parent response to the program? Answers to this question allow the researcher to highlight parental level of involvement, focus on parent opinion, and to recognize the areas of the program within which the family centeredness was a major component.

14. Please describe the ideal role of the educational administrator in the transition process. This allows the researcher to glean information as to the needs of the transition team and the impact that an administrator can have on the transition process.

15. Any other feedback: This allowed for the district representative to provide the information to the researcher that they felt was important with regard to the family centered approach to the transition process for that particular district’s needs.

**Description of the Districts**

District A was an urban school district in New Jersey. The district educated approximately 23000 students yearly. District A had approximately 2,700 classified special education students; of that 135 were preschool handicapped students in the 2000-2001 school year. This district was considered culturally diverse, with many cultures represented, including: African American, Hispanic, Arabic, Asian, American, and other
cultures. Of the 135 preschool handicapped students in the district, approximately one third of the four and five year olds transition to a kindergarten program each year. The district had observed that the number of the transitioning students had increased each year.

District B was a consortium district, consisting of seven districts. The specific subdistrict of the consortium studied was approximately 900 to 1,000 kindergarten through eighth grade students. There was no defined number of classified students for the sub district. Within the region housed in this district, there were a total of forty-eight classified preschool handicapped students. The region and the district were very culturally diverse. Approximately five students of the forty-eight were to transition in the 2000-2001 school year's program, but it was noted that each year the rate varied.

District C was a suburban district, with a district size of approximately 2,230 students. The size of the special education population was noted to be approximately two hundred and sixty, with sixteen of those classified as preschool handicapped students. There were very few language barrier issues in the district, although the district noted that it was a diverse area in terms of cultures. Approximately five children were to transition in the 2000-2001 school year.

District D was a district with approximately 10,000 students. The special education population included approximately 1400 students. Of that number, the district had classified eighty children as preschool handicapped. The district did not consider itself to be culturally diverse at all, remarking that there was only one IEP in the district in Spanish. Approximately fifteen preschool handicapped students transitioned in the 1999-2000 school year, and approximately thirty were anticipated to transition in the 2000-2001 program.
Description of District Contacts

Of the eight districts solicited, four responded. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a representative from each district. In District A the Supervisor of Special Services served as a contact. The contact was in this position for sixteen years at the time of interview and served as a member of the team to create the district's transition policy. The follow-up interview was conducted with the Director of the Region who also was the Assistant Principal for the middle school in District B. The contact was in the district for over thirteen years, holding the director's position for the past five years at the time of interview and in the assistant principal's position for the first year. This contact was not involved in the creation of the district's transition policy. District C was represented by the Director of Special Services. The contact had been in the district six years at the time of interview. This contact served as a member of the team to create the district's transition policy. District D was represented by a departmental resource teacher and a preschool handicapped teacher. These contacts had been in the district thirty-one years and ten years respectively. Both participated in the team to create the district's transition policy.

Criteria Review

Analysis of the four transition policies was based on the framework outlined in Chapter Three. This framework was comprised of four dimensions that reflected a family-centered approach to transition policies. The first dimension, recognition of cultural variations among families, reflected the need for transition policies to support the diversity of families, their backgrounds and culture. The dimension subsumes three indicators. These were the extent to which the transition policy incorporates support for parents,
open and easy communication between professionals and families, and to encourage
professionals to have an understanding and consideration for the cultural values a family
brings to the decision making process (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Bruns & Fowler,
1999).

The second dimension, family/school collaboration, set the parameters for bringing
parents on board as team members for decision making regarding the educational future of
the child. Each of the three indicators of this dimension incorporated the team making
approach to include parents with professionals and parents sharing in all facets of the
process. Such activities included information gathering, issue resolving, decision making,
building a network of support, providing resources at the disposal of families, and open
communication between the family and the professionals (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000;
Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998; Miller &
Gallagher, 1997; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999; Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Reppeto
& Correa, 1996; Bruns & Fowler, 1999; Rous & Hallam, 1998; Smith, Edelen-Smith, &
Stodden, 1995; Drinkwater & Demchak, 1995; Mills et al., 1988).

Sensitivity to individual variations among families, the third dimension, had the
expectation that each family is a separate entity. The four indicators of this dimension
incorporated the concept that the family should be recognized as strong and valuable
components of the transition. The first indicator stated that the parents are the true and
strongest experts about the child. The second indicator stated that the transition policy
should provide the opportunity for professionals to take the time and develop the skills to
get to know the family dynamic. The inclusion of the family in the process of the
transition was a key component in this dimension. The opportunity to use parental
feedback to continue to improve the transition policy was also valuable to the success of
the transition policy (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler,
Simeonsson, Spiker, & Wagner, 1998; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Rous, Hemmeter, &
Schuster, 1999; Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Reppeto & Correa, 1996; Hall DeFur &
Taymans, 1995; Bruns & Fowler, 1999; Rous & Hallam, 1998; Mills et al., 1988).

The fourth dimension, preparation/training, implied that the transition policy
should reflect the need for professionals and parents to be trained in the areas of transition
and disabilities. Further, the transition policy should provide for ongoing professional
development to work with families and build effective transition teams. The indicators of
this training dimension reflected the need for parents to be trained in order to work with
their children during both the transition and lifespan. The training of professionals and
parents to be well versed in the transition process, and the training of staff and
professionals to work effectively with parents should also be delineated in the transition
policy (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson,
Spiker, & Wagner, 1998; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999).

Methodology of Policy Analysis

Through policy analysis, a content analysis will be conducted. The content of each
policy will be analyzed with regard to the developed criteria matrix its dimensions, and
indicators. Each transition policy was analyzed for consistencies, inconsistencies and gaps
in relation to the framework developed. The components of each district’s transition
policy was compared to each indicator of the framework and rated as present or not
present. The ratings were totaled and recorded for each district’s transition policy
individually. The frequencies of alignment with the criteria were recorded for all districts’
transition policies combined. The trends that emerged as being inconsistent or consistent with the framework were reported and the gaps in the existing transition policies were identified. The congruence, or lack there of, between districts' transition policies, was reflected upon as conclusions were drawn.

In general, four areas were measured: 1) the extent to which each criteria of the framework was present in each district's transition policy, 2) how each criteria was represented across the districts, 3) how each criteria was presented, and 4) the commonalities and differences specifically between the districts' transition policies. Each of these four areas were looked at in the following way. First, the transition policy environment, the evolution of the transition policy, and its implementation were examined and recorded. Second, the transition policy for each district was examined individually to ascertain the extent to which each dimension was present or not present and link it to the impetus of the transition policy creation. Third, there was a comparative examination of the districts' transition policies to identify similarities and differences in the recognition of these family centered issues. This analysis was presented in matrix form and explained. Fourth, the extent to which the transition policies were being enacted was examined. This examination was done by comparing the satisfaction level reported, the implementation information shared and the needs viewed by the district in relation to educational administrators.
Chapter Five
Policy Backgrounds and Policy Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the four district transition policies based on the framework developed in Chapter Three. The first analysis focuses on the transition policy environment of each district. This is followed by an evaluation of each individual transition policy and a comparative analysis of all four transition policies (see Figure Two: Cross Policy Analysis on Family Centered Dimensions Matrix. Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of transition policy enactment.

Policy Environment, Evolution, and Implementation

The transition policy for District A was initiated at the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year with Project TEEM as a guide. The impetus behind its development was staff concern. Project TEEM spokespeople were invited to come and meet with staff to explore development of a transition policy. The transition policy was developed in conjunction with a member of Project TEEM over a two year period. The transition policy was developed with the special education staff, general education staff, administrators, and parents as members of the team. The district considers the document flexible, changing with the transitioning needs from year to year.

Constraints to the transition policy include lack of resources for teachers, lack of facilities and a lack of space. Transition policy high points include: more frequent
inclusion of special needs students in various general education programs and general education teachers are more accepting of these transitioning students as part of the class. Additionally, general education teachers and special education teachers are working more collaboratively. The decision making process has developed to be more informed decision making. Parental response is considered favorable. The parents are pleased to have their children participate in the kindergarten programs, and they understand the expectations for the children once they get there. The district contact perceives the role of the building principal within transition as global, not specific to the scope of family. For successful implementation of their transition policy, building principals are needed to provide for staff meeting times, better scheduling to give more collaborative work sessions to teachers, and all around support for the transition team members, including parents.

District B initiated their transition policy in March of 1995. The concept of preschool transition was initiated by the Child Study Team. As a unit, the Child Study Team built support for a transition policy and constantly attempted to stay ahead of any mandates provided by the state. By initiating such a transition policy, the team felt that they were preparing for the inevitable mandates for preschool handicapped students and they would be able to then build upon their forward thinking. They presented their ideas and the district supported the initiative.

The Child Study Team was the primary developer of the transition policy. They reached out to other districts in order to observe working models. The document created is considered flexible - a working document that is tailored to each students needs. Since the plan is considered by the district to be very individualized, the district has not seen the need to recently adapt, revise, or modify the document.
District B experienced a variety of responses to the initial implementation of the transition policy. There were hurdles: getting the staff, particularly the regular education staff, to “buy in” to the idea and building enough interest to make for productive training opportunities. This cohesiveness is observed to have built nicely over time; the district describes the transition policy implementation as a “way of life”.

The transition policy is considered to experience great success. A major high point is described as the shift in the response of the regular education staff. The regular education teachers are described as taking the role and responsibility to implement transition activities upon themselves as the success of the program grows. The general education teachers are also observed as more willing to get involved with the special education population. Parental response to the transition process is excellent. The parents support the transition process, the transition activities for their children, and have been responding favorably to the program outcomes.

The district contact felt that the key to successful transition policies is communication between all the individuals participating in the program. Communication, based on the contact’s experience, is integral to the program success, because it allows the team members understand all the parts of the transition policy. Another crucial issue includes time for meetings. This ability to meet regularly and at length fosters greater knowledge of the transition policy and its specific implementation; which contributes to the positive response. These issue are directly related, in the contact’s perspective, to the role of the building principal. District B describes the role of the building principal as needing to be supportive of all efforts, well-versed in the transition process, a resource to team members, and available to all team members as needed.
District C's policy governing the transition of the preschool handicapped students was initiated in the early 1990s. This transition policy was found to ineffective and was revised in 1998. The impetus for developing the transition policy came from parents. Parents expressed a need for greater inclusionary programs for their children. Both before and subsequent to transition policy development, the problem experienced was that the inclusionary programs and transition policies were all skills based. The teachers were not prepared for inclusionary programs, nor trained, therefore there were great failures. To increase the effectiveness, the district brought together regular education teachers, special education teachers, aides, related service providers, child study team members and parents to reconstruct the transition policy. Goals were written by this team for the benefit of the child. The transition policy's philosophy became educating and servicing the preschool handicapped children to foster a more integrated community as early in their education as possible. The revised transition policy is determined as having effects beyond the school and classroom; special education students are included in community activities (i.e.: soccer, birthday parties, etc.).

The transition policy has the transition process built in to the IEP process, rendering it a living, flexible document. The most difficult obstacle to implementation for District C is the issue of teacher preparation. Factors such as time for training, interest building, confidence in working with the new students, and time for teachers to work together all contribute to difficulties in transition policy implementation. Another constraint is described as the strength of the case manager to organize meetings, network, provide a solid foundation and prepare team members in advance. These shortcomings
prevent smooth meetings, information exchanges, and responsiveness to the needs of each specific case.

Parental response is considered very positive and the parents feel that over time their needs were met by the transition policy. According to the observations of the contact, every year seems to get easier for all team members. Resistance from past experiences with the special education population began to wane. Once the students are included regularly, the comfort level increases and there seems to be no more ambivalence. The contact felt that the transition policy truly embodies the philosophy of inclusion; transition unifies a school community to grow together. The students have a greater respect for one another and, moreover, the teaching staff is working collaboratively for the benefit of the transition policy and the students. The contact felt that the most important role of the building principal is to be an active team member of the transition team. Additionally, the administrator should be a source of information, a provider of resources, and a problem solver in order to be of assistance to the transition team.

District D initiated their transition policy in January 2000, with its first implementation in September for the 2000-2001 school year. The impetus came from the attendance at a Project TEEM workshop in June 1999. District member interest was peaked and the district felt that they had the appropriate students to initiate the program. They applied for and received grant to begin the transition policy development and implementation process. By attendance at Project TEEM workshops and following the guidelines set forth by Project TEEM, District D selected two students to begin the process of transition and policy development.
The document is considered a very flexible, living document, the 2000-2001 school year was its first year of implementation. Implementation problems include the time for training. This is attributed to the kindergarten teachers having a full schedule in addition to participation in the transition policy training. The reality of the transition policy implementation is very different than that of the training and that time, especially for the general education staff, for acclimation is an issue for program success. Coordination of related services is a difficulty as well, because scheduling for the transitioned youngster is complex. It is noted that the general education staff found they needed resource support to make the transition more successful. Aides are also used to help with the program adjustments, however, that is another change for the general education teachers to acclimate to during the transition policy implementation. Communication is a key factor to the program's success, and the contact for District D found that the use of email is integral to communication remaining open and two way.

Parental response is recognized as excellent. The children are involved more in community and after school activities because parents are more aware of the options and feel better informed of their child’s potentials for participation. Parental awareness of age appropriate activities is peaked through the transition program.

Staff concerns are particularly related to dealing with behavioral issues of the transitioned students and the need to feel confident and prepared. Overall, the staff response to the transition policy and program is positive and the program will continue as crafted for the next school year. The contact for the district felt that an area for improvement is the use of a transition facilitator with the following responsibilities: being available to the transition team, providing support for receiving teachers, flexible time for
planning, collaborating, and analyzing class-size issues for the receiving class. The role of the building principal for District D is described as involvement. Parents should be familiar and comfortable with the administrator and his/her knowledge of transition. The transition team needs support and resources, flexible scheduling for meetings, classes, and related services. The administrator needs to be visible in these areas of the transition process.

**Policy Analysis: Individual Examination**

District A presents a complete transition policy with a philosophy statement, goals, activities, a parent guide (in both English and Spanish), and sample letters for the program. The philosophy statement focuses on the child, but also includes the importance of the family's involvement, needs of the family, and the necessity to respect cultural diversity. Each goal is articulated in isolation and then all activities that assure the achievement of the goal are listed under each - as a set of goals and objectives. District A, besides incorporating the family in a variety of activities, has a goal that is devoted to family centeredness: “family member will be actively involved and respected as equal members of the transition team”.

Under the guide of the first dimension, Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families, District A's transition policy contains elements of all three indicators. The transition policy reflects support for the diversity of families utilizing cultural tools and resources available in the philosophical statement: “…respects cultural diversity” (Policy from District A, p.1). Additionally, the district's transition policy provides for a parent handbook in multiple languages and a contact list of bilingual staff contacts for parents. This language implies that implementation of the policy should include respecting and
understanding the cultural backgrounds of each family and dealing with each family within that realm to best serve their individual needs.

District A's transition policy contains elements of availability of trained translators/liaisons to keep open and useful communication with the family by providing multilingual contacts available to families through the parent handbook. This activity infers that these contacts could serve as translators or liaisons. The transition policy meets assess and understand family cultures and values in relation to educational decision making by respect for cultural diversity in their philosophy statement and their parent handbook. The transition policy articulates the following: activities of the transition: "conduct transition workshop(s) for parents", "include family as member of transition team", "give Parent's Guide to Transition to family", and "conduct transition conference involving family, preschool, and elementary staff" (Policy from District A, p.3). The language of these proposed activities implies that parents should be well versed in the transition process and included in all facets of the transition in a meaningful way. Working with the families through these activities implies that the staff may get to know more about the families' decision making processes.

Referencing dimension two: Family/School Collaboration, District A's transition policy meets all the criteria. District A's transition policy meets the indicator shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations, and information; parents as team members through the philosophy statement, "...it is necessary to involve to families and school community in a collaborative process..." (Policy from District A, p.1). This implies that the policy implementation should stress the inclusion of families as strong team members. Additionally, the parent handbook has forms to help prepare
parents for meetings and conferences by allowing for them to collect their thoughts, concerns and views of their child to share at the transition team meetings. District A’s transition policy meets the indicator activities and provisions to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal through the activity: “provide the opportunity to talk with other families whose children have transitioned out of preschool”, as well as the parent handbook resources (Policy from District A, p.3). These activities provide families with opportunities to learn from others having gone through the transition experience. The indicator open, frequent, and reliable two-way communication with quick and accurate responses to inquiries is met by providing a comprehensive list of district contacts for families. Additionally, the transition policy provides a timeline (available to parents) and encourages parental feedback. The language of these areas that meet the indicator appears two fold because, as it does address the indicator, it also places the responsibility of the initiation of communication on families.

Under the guide the third dimension, Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families, District A’s transition policy meets two of the four indicators. The indicator recognition of the family as the strongest expert and the true decision maker for the child is met by a variety of goals and activities in District A’s transition policy. This indicator is contained in the goal “family members will be actively involved and respected as equal members of the transition team”, the activity “include family as member of transition team”, and through their parent handbook that allows for parents to organize all the information that is crucial to be presented at meetings (Policy from District A, p.1 and p.3). This policy language implies a strong focus on the families as valuable contributors
to the transition process. The indicator family involvement in the actual process of transition is contained in the goal “family members will be actively involved and respected as equal member of the transition team”, the activity “reinforce developmental skills—Kindergarten Survival Skills Checklist” (parents are responsible team members), “conduct transition conference involving family, preschool, and elementary staff”, “provide all participating staff, administrators, parents with Project TEEM Transition Packet which includes activities, timelines, and parent/teacher forms”, and the parent handbook, which guides parents through the process by reinforcing their involvement (Policy from District A, p. 1,3,6). These policy activities imply a focus on bringing parents in to the process prepared and informed.

Referencing the fourth dimension, Preparation/Training, District A’s transition policy meets two of the three indicators. The indicator parent/family training to understand transition process and options is met through the activity “conduct transition workshops for families”, provide opportunity for family to observe current transitioning classroom”, and “provide opportunity for family to observe classroom representative of a new placement and conference with that teacher” (Policy from District A, p. 3). This language provides a clear cut example of the issue of training and preparation. The indicator staff and professionals training for working with families is met through the activity “in-service training session is provided for Child Study Teams on the importance of teacher, specialist, and family input in Transitioning” (Policy from District A, p. 4). District A’s transition policy language implies that informed team members, both family and staff, are the key to effective transition policy implementation. Inservice training that is maintained by staff will strengthen their abilities.
District B’s transition policy document consists of a philosophy statement, goals, activities related to each goal, a checklist for each activity and a timeline for transition activities. The family centeredness of the transition policy is reflected in the philosophy statement “transition procedures will reflect our commitment to meaningful and effective partnerships between family and school. These partnerships will focus on shared responsibility for the child’s development and preparation for the next educational setting” (Policy from District B, p.1). The transition policy has four goals, with two directly related to family. “family members will receive necessary information, support, and opportunities to participate as equal partners in all aspects of the transition process” and “the school community will provide an exchange of information, support and resources to promote a positive and successful transition of children and their families to the next program” (Policy from District B, p.2). This transition policy language implies the imparting of information from one group to another, not a shared process of decision making. This exchange of information can be considered collaboration, however it is in the most basic form. The checklist for each activity denotes whether or not the activity is being implemented, is being modified, or is not being implemented for that particular case. The timeline establishes a time frame for each activity and marks who was responsible for the implementation of that activity. The timeline began prior to the last year in preschool, continued throughout the entire last year in preschool, and ended at the end of the second month of the first year of the elementary placement.

Referencing dimension one, Cultural Issues/ Family Values, District B’s transition policy has none of the three indicators. There is no evidence in the transition policy that reflected any acknowledgment of cultural diversity.
Referencing the second dimension, Family/School Collaboration, District B’s transition policy meets three of the three indicators. The indicator shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations, and information; parents as team members is met by the statements “involve family as members of transition team”, “provide understandable information on legal rights to families” (Policy from District B, p.5). Parents are given specific responsibilities: to “share pertinent medical/health background on the child” and “complete positive child profile” (Policy from District B, p.5). “Discuss placement options with family”, “provide family with classroom observation forms for use when visiting potential future placements”, “provide family conference to consider specific placement options and to discuss transition plans”, and “provide opportunity for families to visit the next classroom and conference with receiving teacher” all explain the transition policy opportunities for family involvement (Policy from District B, p.12 and 14). The implications of the language of this transition policy as it applies to this indicator includes parents as sources of information and informing parents about transition options for their child. There is the opportunity for parents to participate by gaining and sharing information.

The indicator activities and provisions to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal is met by District B’ transition policy statement “provide families with transition procedures/handbook” (Policy from District B, p.6). The transition policy also articulates the need to “conduct workshops and provide other opportunities for families to: a. discuss potential elementary programs with other families, b. provide support group information, c. provide information describing elementary special education procedures” (Policy from District B, p.6). These activities
provide families with the opportunities necessary for family centeredness by giving them a clear picture of what is available to them. The timeline establishes team meetings, as well as evening meetings for parents.

The indicator open, frequent, and reliable two way communication with quick and accurate responses to inquiries is met by District B’s transition policy through the following activities: “provide families with information regarding school policies and procedures”, “advise family of accessibility of teacher to discuss problems/issues as they arise”, “provide family conference to consider specific placement options and to discuss transition plans” (Policy from District B, p. 5-7). The transition policy also provides opportunities for families to participate in flexible meeting times, making placement decisions and follow-up meeting that address the child’s adjustment to the transition. The transition policy language implies that parents are informed and given the opportunity to share their opinion. Additionally, the staff was available to families as needed. These opportunities are both provided for the parents on a scheduled basis and available to be initiated by the families.

Regarding the third dimension, Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families, District B’s transition policy contains two of the four indicators. The indicator family involvement in the actual process of transition is met by the following activities: “provide family conference to consider specific placement options and to discuss transition plans”, “schedule re-evaluation meeting during which placement decision will be made” (which included family as responsible persons to complete the activity), and “conduct meeting to review child’s adjustment to the transition process” (which included family as responsible persons to complete the activity) (Policy from District B, p. 7). These
activities reflect the family as included in and responsible parties for the implementation of the transition policy.

The indicator follow-up assessment of family satisfaction with the transition placement and the transition itself is met by the activity “conduct meeting to review child’s adjustment to transition process” (which included family as responsible persons to complete the activity) (Policy from District B, p. 7). This single activity allows for the district to glean powerful information to improve the policy for future students.

Regarding the fourth dimension, Preparation/Training, District B’s transition policy meets two of the three indicators. The indicator parental training options to work effectively with their children is met by three policy activities: “provide family with developmentally appropriate checklist and curriculum”, “arrange conference to exchange information, strategies and techniques for working with the child” (which included family as responsible persons to complete the activity), and “continue to practice and review survival skills with children” during the summer months (which included family as responsible persons to complete the activity) (Policy from District B, pp. 13 and 15). This transition policy language implies that families are accountable for policy activities. Furthermore, families are team members with anticipated responsibilities for transition policy implementation success.

The indicator parent/family training to understand transition process and options is met by District B transition policy through the following policy proposed activities: “provide information to families on legal rights”, “provide families with information regarding school policies and procedures”, “conduct workshops and provide other opportunities for families”, “provide family with transition handbook/procedures”, and
provide evening meeting on transition process” (Policy from District B, p.12-13). These activities imply that the policy has a strong basis in family centeredness regarding this indicator.

District C’s transition policy is descriptive as to activities and procedures. The policy is in narrative form. The district considers their program highly individualized and their transition policy is more descriptive in nature based upon that factor. Their transition policy articulates four goals, and then descriptive narratives as to how those goals may be met.

Referencing the first dimension, Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families, District C’s transition policy does not meet any of the three indicators.

Under the guide of the second dimension, Family/School Collaboration, District C’s transition policy meets two of the three indicators. The indicator shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations and information; parents as team members is met by including parents in meetings and providing vital information about their child. Additionally, the transition policy providing opportunities for “establishing an Individual Support Team for each child. The team, at minimum, includes the child’s family…”, and “collaboration and cooperation between teachers, support staff, specialists, and parents need to be encouraged and fostered as educational services are being provided for the children” (Policy from District C, p.3 and 5). This transition policy language implies that families are very accountable in the transition process and should be brought in whenever possible for true collaboration. The indicator activities and provisions to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal is met by the proposed opportunities for parents to “be provided with information
about regular education programs which are available for their children” (Policy from District C, p.5). This activity provides a limited awareness of available resources and may vary based on the staff members implementing the policy.

Regarding the third dimension, Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families, District C’s transition policy meets one of the four indicators. The indicator family involvement in the actual transition process is met by the following policy goal: “to provide parents of special needs students with the information they need to plan cooperatively with the school district for the transition of their children”, and “they [parents] must also be included in the planning, goal setting, and the designing of the specific program to meet their children’s special needs” (Policy from District C, p.5). This transition policy language infers that parents need to be informed of all the facets of transition; in addition to being fully involved from start to finish.

Under the guide of dimension four: Preparation/Training, District C’s transition policy contains three of the three indicators. The indicator parental training options to work effectively with their children is met by the transition policy goal “to provide transition/inclusive education training and support to regular classroom teachers, special “education teachers, support staff and parents” and “parents need systematic training in the transition process and inclusive education. The training and support should be ongoing and focus on: differences in learning styles, strategies for accommodations, instructional techniques that are developmentally appropriate for the students, and behavior management issues” (Policy from District C, p.5). This transition policy language implies that effective training for families is a well-rounded and inclusive approach to transition.
The indicator parent/family training to understand transition process and options is contained in District C’s transition policy in the goal “to provide transition/inclusive education training and support to regular classroom teachers, special education teachers, support staff and parents” (Policy from District C, p.5). “Parents need systematic training in the transition process...” and “to provide transition/inclusive education training and support to ... parents” are also opportunities that meet this indicator (Policy from District C, p.5). These opportunities exemplify clearly that the district values the training of parents in their transition process by providing multiple opportunities for such experiences.

The indicator staff and professionals training for working with families is contained in District C’s transition policy in the goal “to provide transition/inclusive education training and support to regular classroom teachers, special education teachers, support staff, and parents” (Policy from District C, p.5). “Special education teachers, regular education teacher, support staff, and parents need systematic training in the transition process...” is also a proposed activities that meets this indicator (Policy from District C, p.5). Regarding this indicator, the document comments in their description the training goal: “staff has realized the difficulty in coordinating efforts of all school personnel in accommodating and modifying educational services for the special needs children, however, through the use of specialists and consultants, frequent meetings, as well as taking advantage of professional development opportunities, the staff members’ transition/inclusion knowledge base and skill levels are becoming increasingly effective” (Policy from District C, p.6). This commentary lends itself to exemplifying the emphasis
placed on the concept of professional development opportunities for the transition team members.

District D's transition policy is a descriptive narrative policy. The transition policy is simply an outline of activities that comprise their transition plan draft. Under the guide of dimension one: Sensitivity to Cultural Variations Among Families, District D's transition policy does not meet any of the three indicators.

Under the guide of dimension two, Family/School Collaboration, District D's transition policy includes one of the three indicators. The indicator shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations and information; parents as team members is met by the following statements: "with the parents, the school district participated in a two day institute" and "parents of the students in the four year old transitioning class were invited to a parent meeting" (Policy from District D, p.1). This transition policy language implies that information is being imparted upon the families as opposed to parents being integral contributory team members; however, they are being involved in the process.

Under the guide of dimension three, Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families, District D meets the criteria for one of the four indicators. The indicator family involvement in the actual process of transition is met by the following: "parental activities have been ongoing throughout the school year", "one of the goals is to make transitioning to elementary school smoother not only for the student but for the family as well", and "arrange to visit throughout the year the kindergarten class and/or the self contained class the student might attend" (Policy from District D, p.1). This transition policy language
implies that the actual involvement, although it does exist, may be limited. It can be inferred that parents are involved, but to what extent cannot be determined.

Under the guide of dimension four, Preparation/Training, District D's transition policy meets three of the three indicators. The indicator parental training options to work effectively with their children is met by the following: "with the parents ... participated in a two day institute" and "parents were instructed at this meeting as to what should be done during the school year to help prepare their child for the transition to elementary school. Some suggestions given were to register the student for the pre-school library program in their home school..." (Policy from District D, p.1). These activities inform families as well as enable them to work toward a smooth transition with their child.

The indicator parent/family training to understand transition process and options is met by the following: "A variety of transition information for the TEEM program was shared with the parents. This meeting was presented by one of the pre-school teachers and the psychologist for the pre-school team" (Policy from District D, p.1). This language implies that parents are able to learn about the process of transition before it beings.

The indicator staff and professionals training for working with families is met by the following activities: "the school district participated in a two day institute", "in the fall an afterschool meeting was held for kindergarten teachers on Making Inclusion Work in Kindergarten", "follow-up transition workshop for the kindergarten teachers" (Policy from District D, p.1). The language implies that the transition policy developers took in to consideration the need for professionals to be able to work with and continually refine their abilities to work with families.
Policy Analysis: Cross Comparisons

Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Diversity Among Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Support the diversity of families utilizing cultural tools and resources available</th>
<th>Availability of trained translators/liaisons to keep open and useful communication with family</th>
<th>Assess and understand family cultures and values in relation to educational decision making</th>
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Dimension Two: Family/School Collaboration

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<th>Shared/ collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations, and information; Parents as team members</th>
<th>Activities and provisions to make family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal</th>
<th>Open, Frequent, and reliable two-way communication with quick and accurate responses to inquiries</th>
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Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families

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<tr>
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<th>Recognition of the family as the strongest expert and the true decision maker for the child</th>
<th>Utilize tools to assess and be responsive to the family's individual needs; ability to get to know the family</th>
<th>Family involvement in the actual process of transition</th>
<th>Follow-up assessment of family satisfaction with the transition planning process and the transition itself</th>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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Dimension Four: Preparation/Training

<table>
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<th>Parental training options to work effectively with their children</th>
<th>Parent/family training to understand transition process and options</th>
<th>Staff and professionals training for working with families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</table>

Figure 2. Cross policy analysis on family centered dimensions matrix
Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families consists of three indicators. Only one transition policy meets the first indicator. District A’s transition policy is the only one to address support for the diversity of families throughout the utilization of cultural tools and available resources. Only one transition policy meets the second indicator. District A’s transition policy makes translators/liaisons available to maintain useful communication with the family. Only one district’s transition policy meets the third indicator. District A’s transition policy incorporates activities and philosophical statements that address the need to recognize the cultural differences among families regarding educational decision making.

Dimension Two: Family/School Collaboration consists of three indicators. All four transition policies meet the first indicator. Policies from Districts A, B, C, and D all address the inclusion of parents as team members and the importance of collaboration with the family. Three of the four transition policies include the second indicator. Policies from District A, B, and C all provide activities that present families with varied resources and support groups. Two of the four transition policies meet the third indicator. Policies from Districts A and B provide opportunities for two-way communication that is open and reliable between the family and school.

Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families consists of four indicators. Only one district’s transition policy meets the first indicator. District A’s policy includes provisions for parents to be recognized as the primary decision maker and true expert regarding the child. The second indicator of dimension three is not met by any of the transition policies studied. There is no indication within any of their transition policies that the in-depth knowledge of the family is assessed or pursued. Only one
district’s transition policy meets the third indicator of this dimension. District B’s transition policy provides the opportunity for the family to give the district feedback regarding the transition process and the transition for their child.

Dimension Four: Preparation/Training consists of three indicators. The first indicator is met by three of the four transition policies studied. District B, C, and D’s transition policies provide training opportunities to families that focus on working effectively with their children. All four of the transition policies meet the second indicator of this dimension. Policies from Districts A, B, C, and D all provide training opportunities for the family to help them understand the transition process. Three of the four district transition policies meet the third indicator. Policies from Districts A, C, and D provide opportunities for staff and professionals to be trained to effectively work with families throughout the transition policy implementation.

Extent of Policy Enactment

This analysis focuses on four areas: a comparison of the level of satisfaction expressed by the parents of each district, a comparison of the implementation strategies used, a comparison of the extent to which the districts met the dimensions of the criteria, and a comparison of the issues presented related to educational administration.

Each of the four districts provides an evaluation of parental satisfaction or opinion about the transition process. Although the descriptions and parental responses vary among the districts, there are some common threads. District A considers parental response to the transition program to be favorable. Parents are viewed as being pleased with the new programs (kindergarten classes). Parents are clear about the expectations for their child and felt the transition was smooth. District B describes parental response as
very positive. Parents are described as being very supportive of the transition process and very involved in the activities revolving around the program. Parental response to the outcomes of the transition process are described as favorable. District C felt that parental response is highly positive, more positive than they had expected. The parents feel that over time their needs had been heard and met. District D felt that the parental response for their newer program is excellent. Parents are involved in the activities and, in turn, involved their children in more extra-curricular activities with their mainstream peers. This district felt that the families' awareness grew in regard to the skills expected in the 'regular education setting' with respect to the limitations and strategies for their preschool handicapped youngster. Overall, the four districts' perspectives felt that the preschool transition programs are positively regarded by the family.

The degrees of implementation vary from district to district, not necessarily in technique, but more in comfort levels and experience. District A initiated their transition policy in 1992, giving them many years to explore their program, revise their transition policy, and seek the most effective method of implementation. The district's transition policy includes the transition process outlined, a parental handbook and multilingual presentation. District B initiated their program in 1995, again building experience in implementing a more individualized, more effective program. They have a transition policy, parent handbook (which was not presented), an individual checklist for each child's program, and a timeline for program execution. District C initiated their transition policy in the early 1990s, which was found to be ineffective. In 1998 they revisited their transition and developed the transition policy that is presented. The transition policy is a narrative with descriptions of their goals and activities. Their transition policy is
anticipated to be revised and formalized as their experience develops. District D initiated their transition policy in January 2000. District D’s transition policy is a narrative descriptions of their goals. They focus more on the implementation of training and preparedness, considering their program is new and developing.

The extent to which the districts’ transition policies meet the criteria matrix vary greatly. District A’s transition policy meets ten of the thirteen indicators. They represent three of the three indicators for Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families; three of the three indicators of Dimension Two: Family/School Collaboration; two of the four indicators of Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families; and two of the three indicators for Dimension Four: Preparation/Training. District B’s transition policy meets seven of the thirteen indicators. They represent zero of the three indicators for Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families; three of the three indicators for Dimension Two: Family/School Collaboration; two of the four indicators for Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families; and two of the three indicators for Dimension Four: Preparation/Training. District C’s transition policy meets six of the thirteen indicators. They represent zero of the three indicators for Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families; two of the three indicators for Dimension Two: Family/School Collaboration; one of the four indicators for Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families; and three of the three indicators for Dimension Four: Preparation/Training. District D’s transition policy meets five of the thirteen indicators. They represent zero of the three indicators for Dimension One: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families; one of the three indicators for Dimension Two:
Family/School Collaboration; one of the four indicators for Dimension Three: Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families; and three of the three indicators for Dimension Four: Preparation/Training.

There is consensus among the four districts as to the needs for successful educational administration in transition practices. Although District A specified that the needs stem beyond that of family, the ideals and concepts are essentially the same. The crucial roles of educational administrators are: allocation of time for meetings and collaboration, scheduling for classes, services, and meetings, support to parents, support to the transition staff, team membership, and a presence that is seen and felt amongst the team members.
Chapter Six

Discussions and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter is divided into five sections: the Introduction, Discussion of the District's Meeting the Criteria, Discussion of Diversity Among the Policies, Conclusions, and Areas of Consideration and Recommendations. The discussion sections are based upon the research questions developed and discussed in Chapter One; particularly, how do the existing preschool transition policies meet the criteria for being family-centered and is there diversity among the existing, non-mandated preschool transition policies with regard to family centeredness? Conclusions are drawn based upon the data analysis that was conducted on the policies with the criteria matrix. Considerations and Recommendations is constructed based upon the discussion and conclusions drawn, as well as the predictable paths this study could lead future researchers down.

Discussion of How Districts Met the Criteria

The purpose of this study is to, based upon the research, develop a framework that could serve as a heuristic device for evaluating preschool handicapped transition policies. Specifically, the framework allows one to evaluate whether the transition policies meet the criteria for being family centered. Family centered transitional policies should incorporate the following features: Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families (Dimension
One), Family/School Collaboration (Dimension Two), Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families (Dimension Three) and Preparation/Training (Dimension Four).

The first dimension, which has three indicators, is represented to some extent by the district’s transition policies. The first indicator, as discussed at length by Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) and Bruns and Fowler (1999), represents the need for resources to be developed to support the culturally diverse families being served. Only one district’s transition policy, District A, clearly meets this criterion. The transition policies of the other three districts do not contain this element. The three transition policies do not seem to be influenced by the research that demonstrated a need for strength in the area of providing resources and support to the culturally diverse family.

The second indicator, as discussed by Bruns and Fowler (1999) and Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), stresses the need for translators and liaisons for useful communication with the family. Again, only one district’s transition policy, District A, contains this provision. The research stresses the need for this type of comfortable communication for families to be richly included in the policy implementation. In cases where this opportunity does not exist, a breakdown in the effectiveness of the policy is possible. This breakdown could result in a lack of trust and security, as well as comfort, during the transition process (Bruns & Fowler, 1999).

The third indicator, to assess the family’s culture and values, as discussed by Bruns and Fowler (1999), is an aspect of family centeredness that allows for the staff to see the cultural influences of the family that impact their educational decision making philosophies. This indicator, which brought the family closer to the full inclusion of the transition team, is included only in the transition policy of the district whose transition
policy meets the first two indicators of this dimension, District A. The other districts fail this component of family centeredness, leading, according Bruns and Fowler (1999), to a further breakdown in the transition process.

Interestingly, the Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families is not met by most of the districts analyzed. However, the single district that does represent all the indicators of this dimension described itself as extremely culturally diverse; therefore the conclusion could be drawn that cultural aspects of family centeredness is a greater need for District A’s transition policy. The other districts did articulate a range of diversity, from minimal to significant, but did not reflect upon it further.

The second dimension, Family/School Collaboration, is represented by three indicators that are derived from the research reviewed. This dimension includes the clarification, defining and presenting of issues and information to help build parents as true team members, as described by Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), Miller and Gallagher (1997), Smith, Edelen-Smith, & Stodd (1995), Bruns and Fowler (1999), Repetto and Correa (1996), Romer and Umbreit (1998), Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker and Wagner (1998), Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), Drinkwater and Demchak (1995), and Mills et al. (1988). This dimension is represented by the districts overall, with most meeting the indicators. The first indicator, a shared/collaborative approach to defining problems, issues, situations, and information; parents as team members, is described in the literature as integral to having all team members ‘buy in’ to the mission of the policy implementation. This factor is crucial in the research to a complete decision making process. It ensures that all team members are aware of options and decisions in order to build a true team that strives to work together
for the common goal of the child (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Miller & Gallagher, 1997; Smith, Edelen-Smith, & Stodden, 1995; Bruns & Fowler, 1999; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Romer & Umbreit, 1998; Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker & Wagner, 1998; Mills et al., 1988). All four of the districts clearly meet this indicator in their transition policies. This demonstrates that there is a value across the districts to build effective and open teams with the family. This crucial component of family-centeredness appears to be fully recognized and achieved by the districts studied. Each district describes and demonstrates the need for parents on all levels of the policy development and implementation to meet with success.

The second indicator of the second dimension, activities and provisions to make the family aware of all support groups, local resources, and valuable sources at their disposal, is discussed by Romer and Umbreit (1990), Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), and Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker and Wagner (1988). The research suggests that this indicator allows for families to seek support from others in similar situations as their own and learn more about their child's disability. Three of the districts' transition policies clearly meet this indicator (Districts A, B, and C). One district's transition policy (District D) does not meet this criteria. According to Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999), the responsibility of the district is to help to create this better equipped parent for them to act in the best interests of the child - a family centered criteria component that can be considered valued by the districts in the study. The district contacts describe the supported parents as able to act without the assistance of the team in decision making for their child. This independence demonstrates the family-centered criteria indicator in action and meeting with success. The district that does not
demonstrate the indicator is the newest policy in development, perhaps this issue will present itself and be addressed as they seek improvement and development of their policy.

The third indicator, open, frequent, and reliable two-way communication with quick and accurate responses to inquiries is stressed in the literature reviewed as integral to comfort and cohesiveness of the transition team, particularly the family component. This family centered criteria, discussed as vital by Romer and Umbreit (1998), Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998), and Drinkwater and Demchak (1995) explains that parents are more significant team members who felt included, valued and listened to by the district team members. Two of the four districts’ transition policies (Districts A and B) meet this indicator and two do not (Districts C and D). This indicator is not as strongly valued in the transition policies studied as it is by the researchers.

The third dimension is the Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families. The researchers stress that treating each family as different and unique reflects a family-centered approach. The first indicator, recognition of the family as the strongest expert and the true decision maker for the child, is researched by Romer and Umbreit (1998), Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), Rous, Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), Rous and Hallam (1998), Bruns and Fowler (1999), Miller and Gallagher (19970, and Mills et al. (1988). The parents have the need to be recognized as the window in to the child’s life, and are entitled to be treated with the respect of an expert. Parents are regarded by the researchers as having the ability to provide information about the child that no one else has access to. Parents also have the right to make a final decision, and should be treated as such. Of the transition policies studied, only one presents a policy that focuses upon the
parent as the strongest expert (District A). The other three districts' transition policies do not concur with the perspective of the researchers. In the other three districts, the parents are regarded as those who were told about the students and suggested to the best placement. District A has the longest standing and most extensive policy regarding family, perhaps their experiences and revisions led them to value this indicator as part of a family-centered process.

The second indicator is utilize tools to assess and be responsive to the family's individual needs; ability to get to know the family. Romer and Umbreit (1998), Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998), and Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) find this component of family centeredness to be vital - a true and only method of getting to really know the family. This goal should be met with regular contact and a true view of the family as a whole. This indicator is not met in any of the district transition policies studied. The transition policies across the study do not concur with the research. Transition policies provide opportunities for parents to primarily meet with staff at team meetings and training sessions, but not as individuals for the purpose of getting familiar with them.

The third indicator is family involvement in the actual process of transition, based upon the research of Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999), Repetto and Correa (1996), Bruns and Fowler (1999), and Miller and Gallagher (1997). The family, according to their research, must be actively involved in the transition process, from the beginning to the end. Fully inclusive, active and vital participants are the key roles of the family in a family centered approach. Of the four district transition policies studied, all four policies provided activities that clearly meet this indicator. There is clear alignment with the
indicator and the research in all of the district transition policies. Each district representative discusses the importance of the family in either the impetus of the policy, its development, and/or its implementation process. The family is consistently discussed as valuable to the process in the interviews and in the transition policies. The districts value this concept in creating family centeredness in their policies.

The fourth indicator of this dimension is follow-up assessment of family satisfaction with the transition planning process and the transition itself, discussed by Hall DeFur and Taymans (1995), Repetto and Correa (1996), Romer and Umbreit (1998), and Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998). This indicator stresses the importance of follow up with families to ensure that the needs and expectations of the family are met, as well as the needs of the child in transition addressed. This tool serves to help districts improve their transition policies to make them more effective and provide for constant improvement. Only one district transition policy of the four clearly meets this indicator (District B). District B’s transition policy concurs with the research; it reflects the importance of follow up and constant change and improvement in their policy for greater success. The other districts’ transition policies do not meet the criteria. This result is surprising, when it is considered that all of the districts responded during the interviews as to how they are constantly evaluating their programs for improvement and effectiveness, yet three of the four do not evidence this in any way in their transition policy.

The fourth dimension is Preparation/Training. As discussed by Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), Rous Hemmeter and Schuster (1999), Miller and Gallagher (1997) and Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker and Wagner (1998), this
dimension has three indicators that are applied to the training and preparedness of both families and professionals to best serve the children and families. The first indicator, parental training options to work effectively with their children, stresses the importance of the parents being the primary source of information and guidance in the child’s life. Additionally, there is a need to help parents to work most effectively with their child’s disability. Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) and Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker and Wagner (1998) state that such a level of knowledge enables the parent to be a vital advocate for their child. Of the four districts studied, three transition policies meet this indicator (Districts B, C, and D). District A’s transition policy does not articulate such training in their policy. With the three of the four transition policies, this demonstrates alignment with the criteria matrix. It is interesting to note that the district policy implemented for the longest period of time is lacking in this area; whereas the districts’ transition policies that are newer and developing provide opportunities for this training as a valuable component to a family centered approach of the transition policy. These districts’ transition policies align themselves with the current research in this area.

The second indicator, parent/family training to understand the transition process and options, explore the necessity of preparing families for what is to come. This preparation should include: the actual process of transition that the district transition policy provides, what their options are, and how to best make educational decisions within such a process. Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), Miller and Gallagher (1997) and Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999) address this issue as creation of a comfort level for families as they embark on this new and all important process. This education for families component allows for clear goals of transition to be articulated to create greater success.
Of the four district transition policies studied, all four meet this criteria indicator. The transition policies articulate alignment with the current research and a great value placed on the preparedness of parents as a strong indicator of family centered transition policy success. All four districts’ contacts described the parents as invested in the program. This is attributed to the parents having a clear concept of their role, goals, expectations, and an understanding of the process as a whole before they begin the transition process.

The third indicator of the last dimension, staff and professionals training for working with families, is focused on in the research by Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000), Miller and Gallagher (1997) and Rous, Hemmeter, and Schuster (1999). The research indicates that professionals need training to work with transitioning families in order to effectively interview, communicate with and be responsive to the individual needs each family. The researchers also indicated that this training is not usually the case in school district with transition policies, however greatly needed. Based upon the four districts’ transition policies studied, three of the four contains this training component (Districts A, C, and D). This aligns with the matrix and the literature discussed in this study. All four districts’ contacts describe their staffs as active participants the process, a factor that could be attributed to their training to work with these families. Additionally, each district staff participated in training through Project TEEM, which again builds this comfort level for dealing with families and emphasizes the importance of professionals and training.

Discussion of Diversity Among Policies

Each policy presented by the four districts is looked at individually or collectively. This next section will look at the policies collectively to identify trends that exist across policies. There will be two sets of trends pursued, one in relation to the criteria matrix,
the other in relation to the responses to the interviews conducted regarding development and implementation.

Regarding the first dimension, Recognition of Cultural Variations Among Families, the districts do not emphasize this aspect of family centeredness in their policies. Three district transition policies do not meet any of the indicators of this dimension. District A’s transition policy meets all the indicators. District A is larger in size, more diverse, and has a transition policy in place for a longer period of time, which may account for this difference.

The second dimension, Family/School Collaboration, demonstrates a trend among the districts that the type of collaboration for family-centeredness is valued. All the districts’ transition policies contain at least one or more of the indicators. This trend demonstrates that the transition policies studied valued a professional type of collaboration with families for successful implementation of their policies.

The third dimension, Sensitivity to Individual Variations Among Families, is included to varying degrees by the districts’ transition policies. The transition policies all demonstrate the trend of strong support for the research in the area of family involvement in the actual transition process. Conversely, none of the districts’ transition policies demonstrate the trend of value in the utilization of tools to assess and be responsive to individual families by not meeting this indicator.

The fourth dimension, Preparation/Training, is strongly evidenced by the districts’ transition policies, containing support for family centeredness in transition planning and alignment with the research. At least three of the four districts’ transition policies
demonstrates value in each indicator. This trend of focusing on preparation and training
aligns the districts’ transition policies with the current research in the field.

As for trends in transition policy development, all four districts participated in
some extent in Project TEEM. The district transition policies all reflect the influence of
the Project TEEM method of development. All contacts articulated that Project TEEM is
either an impetus to the transition policy development or the reference upon which they
relied for construction. There are similarities in transition policy structures and timelines
that reflect the Project TEEM method.

Another similarity among the districts in the transition policy development stage is
the inclusion of the child study team members as developers of the policy. These
individuals were credited, in some districts alone and in some as part of a larger group,
with being the backbone of transition policy development.

All districts consider their documents as flexible, working, living documents that
are adaptable to the individual child. This trend is discussed by all the district contacts.
However, their documents are not open ended, but rather rigid. The contacts clarify this
flexibility that the transition team has the freedom to use the document as they see fit for
each individual case.

All districts consider the parental response to the transition policy implementation
to be favorable. They all discussed that the parents are “on board” with such programs in
their district and the families are benefiting greatly from the transition policy
implementation. All reflect that the parents are involved, some to greater extents than
others, but that involvement is an individual choice. The districts’ transition policies all
demonstrate the trend that this involvement should be valued, welcomed, and held in high regard for program success.

All districts note a shift in staff attitudes and perceptions after training and transition policy implementation. Some districts note that the staff was dedicated from the beginning, while others comment that there was anxiety and hesitation at the onset of the transition policy training. However, the trend that is extrapolated is that the involvement in preschool transition planning seemed to bring about a positive change in attitudes and perceptions among the various staff members effected.

In terms of transition policy development, each district presents information to the transition policy impetus. The impetus varies from district to district and accounts for the difference in the transition policies. District A, B, and D’s transition policies were developed based on staff concerns and was fostered by involvement with Project TEEM. District C’s transition policy was developed as a result of parental initiatives. This parental impetus accounts for more detailed parental inclusion, strong activities related to preparation, and a firm representation of collaborative efforts. In the other three districts, albeit that this area is represented in the language of the transition policy, it is implied that in many activities the parents are provided with information.

Another variation in the transition policies between districts is that some transition policies presented are more general, while others are very specific. It is inferred that these difference are for a variety of reasons. Some transition policies are in their earlier developmental stages, which accounts for the generality, whereas other policies were developed and initiated for a longer period of time, allowing for revisions and greater specificity as districts reevaluate their policy and its impact. Another reason for this
difference is the district need. Some districts are larger with more diverse needs, those transition policy developers may have recognized a need for greater specificity in the transition policy or order to meet with greater success. Finally, the district policies that were more specific are describe to have more diverse, larger transition policy development teams. This factor contributes to greater specificity in order to represent the needs and perspectives of all contributors.

The issue of generality versus specificity in transition policies also impacts implementation. The transition policies that are more detailed, for example, with time lines and denoted responsible parties for implementation, may be more rigidly followed than looser policies that suggested activities but left no team member accountable for implementation. Conversely, the more general policies may enable the implementers to utilize the policy guideline on a more individualized bases based upon the individuality of the child and family.

A final trend observed among the districts is that all districts felt there is a greater need for administrative involvement and visibility in the implementation process. All districts describe that administrators needed to be considered active team member to truly comprehend the cases involved. As discussed by Katsiyannis and Zhang (2001), administrators are essential to the success of special education programs. The districts discussed the role of the administrator as supporting the parents and helping the transition team to meet the needs of families, similarly discussed by Katsiyannis and Zhang (2001). All district interviews express the need for administrators to be involved to help build family involvement.
The district views also align with the educational administration research of Riehl (2000). Educational administrators are responsible to nurture an acceptance of diversity and change (Riehl, 2000). The administrator is discussed as a bridge to success for the implementation of the transition policy, a breeder of change and an initiator of acceptance of new cultures in the schools, for example, the inclusion of the special education student in the general education environment. According to Riehl (2000), and in alignment with the district opinions, the success of the school environment can rest in the hands of the educational administrator. The key to that success - administrator involvement.

Rieck and Dugger Wadsworth (2000) expresses the need for the administrator to have a role in the process of inclusion. The districts expressed the need for administrators to be listeners and providers to the transition team members. Moreover, the research and the districts value the educational administrator as a team member.

The educational administrator as a leader who supports teachers and leads the policy implementation process is a valued role by the districts interviewed. Aligned with the discussions provided by Patterson, Marshall, and Bowling (2000), in order to adequately deal with policy and programming the educational administrators “need to have the knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes, that will enable them to provide leadership for special education programs in their schools” (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p.13-14). As a trend, the administrator’s vital role is viewed by both the research and districts as the resources allocator, support network, and team member for successful transition policy implementation.
Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the transition policies, the criteria matrix and the discussion regarding the data. These conclusions are related to the family-centered approach to preschool transition planning and effectiveness in reaching that goal.

Conclusion 1: All districts have the goal for preschool handicapped transition policies to be family-centered in development and implementation. Each district discussed this concept in their interview. All districts represented some of the indicators for family-centeredness in their transition policies.

Conclusion 2: The transition policies incorporate the involvement of the family as a valuable, knowledgeable, and active team member. Of the districts transition policies studied, three indicators are demonstrated across policies. A shared collaborative approach with parents as team members, family involvement in the actual transition process, and parent/family training to understand the transition process and options are included in all four districts’ transition policies.

Conclusion 3: All transition policies present similarities that are rooted in the philosophies of a family-centered approach. Districts all utilized Project TEEM and reached out to other districts that implemented such transition policies that are family-centered to develop and implement their own policies.

Conclusion 4: The transition policies all concurred in the inclusion of educational administrators as integral components of a successful transition team. Each district reflected to some extent that administrators would be a valuable asset to the family-
centered transition team. The districts all discuss an involved and visible administrator with clear knowledge of the transition policy as key to policy success. Also pertinent to the role of the administrator is knowledge of the transition process and an understanding of the needs of the team members, families, and children.

Conclusion Five: During the methodology process of the study, an interpretive issue emerged. The use of policy analysis with this criteria matrix was highly subjective to the researcher's interpretation of the policy document. A possible remedy to this issue for future similar studies would be to conduct a pilot to ensure that the results did not reflect any researcher bias and to corroborate interpretation of policy statement. Additionally, the researcher could be conducted by a team of researchers rather than an individual, in order to again prevent bias and ensure corroboration of interpretation.

Additionally, with regard to the criteria matrix and methodology, the matrix developed could be useful to administrators on a global level. The criteria matrix is a tool that administrators could use to measure the level of family involvement through their school programs. The dimensions and indicators can be transferred to areas beyond special education and transition to raise the level of awareness of family involvement across the school community.

In conclusion, the issue of family-centeredness in preschool transition policies is being addressed to varying extents across districts. With regard to the first research question, a valid and useful tool was created, a criteria matrix, based upon the current literature in the field. This tool was effective in evaluating implemented transition policies. Overall, referencing the second research question, the policies met several of the indicators of the criteria matrix, demonstrating that existing policies have family centered philosophy.
There does exist diversity among these transition policies, regarding the final research question, in the methods of presenting a family centered transition policy. There is also variation in the areas of family centeredness that were focused upon in the policies, which varied form district to district. This variation was contingent on district needs. The need for such policies is being recognized and the need for families to be part of those programs is also being recognized. Districts are meeting the literature-based criteria for family-centeredness to best serve the needs of preschool handicapped children and their families. Administrators are being identified as key players for success in transitioning. Overall, the families and the children participating in the transition process are being recognized as the key players in transition policy development and implementation. These key roles of parents include: team members, experts on their children, and key decision makers.

Families need to be recognized as individuals coming from different cultural backgrounds, having different values, experiences, and ideas that bring expertise to the transition team.

**Areas of Consideration and Recommendations**

There are several considerations that may play into districts developing and implementing preschool handicapped transition program policies. These areas are underlying in the districts studied to some extent, need to be considered in further research, possibly foundations for future research, and decision making factors for districts considering embarking upon such a project.

The need for recognition of cultural diversity is discussed in the literature as a necessity for family centered transition policy success. However, some districts do not have a diverse population. This dimension of family centeredness may not be an issue or
focus for such districts, yet they contain the other indicators in the development and implementation of their transition policy.

Additionally, the socioeconomic status of families as a factor in dealing with families may be overlooked when focusing on family centered transition. The literature reviewed was found to be very limited regarding transition policies for preschool handicapped students and the socioeconomic status of their families. This consideration could lead to further study to analyze the influence of socioeconomic status of the family in the transition process.

Attitudes, preparedness, and shifts or changes in routine all effect the reaction and responses of the regular education classroom teacher and general education teacher with regard to the inclusion of special education students in their classroom. Seasoned teachers that are limited in exposure and training for handling and educating the special education child may be resistant to a transition program in their classroom. This fear and lack of knowledge is not something to be taken lightly. On the contrary, it should be considered a major component of the transition program to train these teachers, raise their level of comfort, and build a network within the district between the special education and the regular education to best serve all students. As is seen in some of the district policies and described in the matrix, staff training is a key factor to successful transition, and in turn, a successful educational experience of the student, family and staff. This training, along with support for the reluctant teacher, may help to build a stronger program. Policies must take into account these attitudes and make arrangements for defining their shift.

There is also the issue that this type of program would be much more cumbersome for some districts than others. Some districts, especially urban districts, have a larger
concentration of special education students, this concentration bringing more students to transition plans and programs at the same time. This could be more costly, more time consuming, and far more expansive than for a smaller rural district. This consideration is evidenced by the varying number of students in preschool handicapped programs, the number transitioning each year, and the overall special education population totals between the districts studied. On the opposite end of the spectrum, district support in a district with very few preschool handicapped transition candidates might not find the support for initiating and developing a transition policy. As heard from districts studied, a lack of support bred failure.

Another consideration involves the role of the administrator. The administrators involvement in the transition policy development and implementation can be limited by a lack of involvement with the function of the Child Study Team. The dissonance between the administrator and the Child Study Team prevents the effective communication between the two, who each have vital roles in successful transition policy implementation. An awareness of and a method of closing this gap is necessary for family centered transition policies to be effective.

Finally, there exists the issue of the district being able to allocate the necessary resources for developing, implementing, and constantly improving such a transition policy and program in their district. This type of program is geared to a limited population, a specific focus within that population. The need for financial and administrative support could be that of a larger program. The development process, based on the reporting of the districts interviewed, required training, workshops, and time for the team members to develop a comprehensive and coherent transition policy. Additionally, the implementation
process take time from a teacher's and administrator's already busy schedule - an area that
involved classroom coverage and further financial outlay. The constant development of
transition policy improvement to revisit the issue of effectiveness time and again involves
the commitment of further time and resources. Additionally, staff development, training,
time with families to pass along such development and training, and the need for increased
resources over time could be an issue as well.

The study conducted opens the door for several areas of further research in order
to delve deeper in to the policies surrounding preschool transition planning. The policy
analysis measures the policies against a criteria; that was intended to stand alone. There
are areas for further research that can delve in to the farther reaching effects and
perspectives of preschool transition policies.

An area of further research that could be very significant the ever-changing field of
responsibilities for the educational administrator would be to evaluate the impact of
administrator involvement in the development and implementation of preschool
handicapped transition policies. The interviewees throughout this study reflect upon the
administrator’s support as integral and, moreover, lacking in the implementation
component of the transition policy. Research delineates that an the administrator’s
involvement brings more knowledge to his/her position and more strength to the work at
hand. It would be very telling for research to delve in to this specific area of special
education to observe the impact of administrator involvement.

Parental views and perspective of the effectiveness of family-centered preschool
handicapped transition policy would be an area of research that would complement this
policy analysis. Since the target of the family centered approach is to provide transitioning
that is easy, understandable, inclusive and effective for both the child and the family, this perspective could be invaluable. Study of this area could lead policymakers to improve and edit policies to best serve the target population.

A third area for further research in the area of preschool handicapped transition policy could be to evaluate the perspectives of sending and receiving teachers participating in the implementation of the transition policy. Based on the districts in this study, teachers in different positions have different and valuable perspectives regarding transition programs, the process, and the family. These teachers could shed light on the aspect of transition that occurs throughout the implementation process and after. Such research can lead to transition policy revision and the identification of strengths for future policymakers regarding transition policies.

Finally, an obvious area for further study would be the evaluation of the global effect on the preschool handicapped child and the typically developing peer. This global insight would reflect the classroom environment, the social experience in and out of the classroom and the changing experiences that the child and parents experience at home and in the community. The impact of all transition policy aspects should be visible in all aspects of the preschool handicapped child’s life for success.
References


Policy from District A. 1996.

Policy from District B. 1995.

Policy from District C. 1998.

Policy from District D. 2000.


Appendices
Appendix A

Permission Form
Permission for Inclusion
in Transition Plan Study

Date

By signing this agreement, I give Dana Ann Swarts permission to use ____________Public School’s Transition Plan as part of her dissertation study. I understand that thedistrict and plan will be coded and the anonymity of the district will be maintained.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked havebeen answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in thisactivity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

______________________________  ____________________
Subject or Authorized Representative  Date

Contact Information for follow-up questions:

Contact:__________________________

Phone:__________________________

Email:__________________________

Best time to contact:__________________________
Appendix B

Solicitation Letter
Dear,

I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the K-12 Administration and Supervision Program. I am currently completing my dissertation. It has been brought to my attention by your peers and colleagues that your district has taken the initiative to develop and implement a formal transition plan for preschool handicapped students moving to the kindergarten environment. I am study these plans in order to conduct a policy analysis for my dissertation.

This informed consent provides you with information regarding this study, information to contact me with any questions, a request for you your district’s plan and permission to be included in the study. The purpose of the study in preschool transition planning focusing on the family centered approach is to ascertain whether the policies currently used in school systems are meeting a researched criteria for being family-centered practices.

The researcher will be collecting the transition plans/policies from several districts for review and conducting follow-up interviews in order to establish a clear picture of the background of the policy as set in the environment of the district. As a subject, the district’s and contact’s involvement includes providing a copy of the policy and participating in a ten minute follow-up interview.

All participants, policies, and responses will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. Each district will be coded to maintain anonymity, as will all the interviewees and responses remain anonymous. Participation in this study is voluntary, you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

To confirm your voluntary participation in this study, please sign and return the attached permission form. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate, understand the study, and the anonymity of all involved.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office if Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of the Office is 973-275-2974.

The permission form and transition policy should be mailed to the above address. I can be reached there for any questions. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Dana Ann Swarts
Appendix C

Interview Questionnaire
Dissertation Interview Questions

Contact's Background:

a. What is your position?
b. How long have you been in the district?
c. What is the central coordination of the special education dept (IE Director of Social Services, CST Coordinator, etc.)
d. Were you on the tram to create the plan or policy?

1. What is the district size?

2. What is the size of the special education population?

3. What is the size of the preschool handicapped population?

4. Please describe the diversity of the community culturally.

5. Approximately how many students 'transition' to kindergarten each year?

6. When was the transition policy first constructed and implemented?

7. What was the impetus?
8. What was the construction process of the plan? (For example, did you reach out to districts for a model or use a consultant)

9. Is it a document that is fixed or flexible?

10. Where there any problems with its implementation of the policy?

11. What are the constraints? High points?

12. Have there been any modifications to the plan? What kind, when and why?

13. What is the parental response to the plan? Staff?

14. Please describe the ideal role of the educational administrator in the transition process.

15. Any other comments, insights, etc. that you would find helpful?