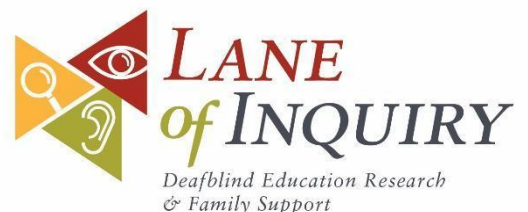


# Ensuring Positive Early Educational Transitions for Deafblind Students and their Families

Council for Exceptional Children Conference 2023

► *Lanya McKittrick, PhD*

March 3, 2023



# Ensuring Positive Early Educational Transitions for Deafblind Students and their Families

PRESENTATION AT COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN 2023 - LOUISVILLE, KY.

## ► ABSTRACT

- Transitions are challenging for deafblind children and their families. Much research has been done on postsecondary transition but the IFSP/IEP transition and transition from preschool to kindergarten are also fraught with challenges. Learn about current research and learn strategies for a positive transition for students and their families. Findings from interviews with 11 parents will be discussed.

## ► BACKGROUND

- Families of children who are deafblind report that transitions are stressful: from an IFSP to IEP, from preschool to kindergarten, to a new school, to a new teacher or classroom, to new, temporary or permanent service providers (McKittrick, 2022).
- Early transitions are important because these are some of a family's first exposure to IEP meetings.
- Past research has documented unique challenges that families of children of deafblind face in IEP meetings due to a lack of knowledge of deafblindness on the team and lack of understanding of unique needs (McKittrick 2022).
- During these early transitions, family support needs differ due to many factors, one factor being placement. Before the age of 6, two important placement transitions occur. Through these transitions, much change occurs: new IEP team members are introduced, service providers no longer see families in the home, it



may mean new staff not understanding deafblindness and the unique needs, and there can be a lot of emotions.

► METHODOLOGY

- The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the family perceptions of early transitions.
- 11 parents of children who are deafblind were interviewed in summer/fall 2022.
- 7 children have additional disabilities in addition to deafblindness.

► RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges and successes that parents of children who are deafblind experience when transitioning their child who is deafblind from an IFSP to an IEP?
- What are the challenges and successes that parents of children who are deafblind experience when transitioning their child who is deafblind from preschool to kindergarten?
- What are the strategies that IFSP/IEP teams use to make for a positive transition for the student who is deafblind and their family.

► FINDINGS

- Challenges surrounding diagnosis impact early childhood decisions (processing grief, long journey to/multiple diagnosis, not receiving proper resources & support).
- Parents who had the means, paid for additional early intervention services (i.e. speech, PT) and some who couldn't, went without. Vision services were not mentioned to some families who would have wanted them.
- Parents felt like they were on their own to advocate, find resources, and learn about special education law. Connecting with other families was vital.



- Parents know their children better than anyone. Feeling comfortable to share knowledge with the teams can make for more positive transitions.

► QUOTES

- "I think they (parents) are drowning and trying to get through the next 10 minutes. We don't give enough grace to that. I think they think we should be super grateful for anything that is offered. But wait, you may not be getting what you are entitled to or in a way that would be best for your child."
- "Most of them don't really understand what I was going through...I tell you, you just do not know what it means to have a child you do now know what she's thinking. You do not know what she wants at the moment. It can be really difficult. So, I wish people working with me or working around me were able to understand me better."
- "It would have been really helpful if somebody came alongside me versus came in as an expert. I knew my stuff but they still came in like, 'Oh well you are just the mom.' I hate that."
- "Not that there is a rule book or procedure manual for regular children, and people you can resonate with and talk to about it. But when you have a special needs child, it's floundering in the dark."
- "I was like, no, you just explained to us for 40 minutes in like another language, then, drop the bomb in actual language we understand. And, like no, I want to get out of this room (IEP meeting). I'm suffocating."

► DISCUSSION

- The early years can be fraught with emotions and grief. Meet families where they are at by using tools such as the National Center on Deaf-Blindness [Family Engagement Framework](#).
- There are benefits to helping families share their knowledge and feel their voices are heard.



- Early intervention services are unevenly implemented. A deeper look at how to ensure positive early intervention is warranted, especially as it pertains to vision services.
- Parent advocacy skills – finding ways to foster these in the younger years and to truly support the family in ways that are meaningful to them.
- There is a need to support the well being of the entire family.
- Physicians should use the opportunity to provide appropriate resources at time of diagnosis. This is an important moment in time that impacts a family’s early transition experiences.
- **“These teachers need to look at their jobs as a relay. When you get through with your section you know you did the best you could. You need to pass that off to the first-grade teacher. That first-grade teacher needs to step up and do as much as she is supposed to. And if she doesn’t know what to do, she needs to go back and get some more training or information. You keep passing that stick along until your job has been done. And if you need to go and help somebody before you, be available. So, people you cannot teach if you are ‘half-teaching’, finish the relay!”**

► REFERENCES

- McKittrick, L. L. (2022). Parents of children who are deafblind face challenges in fostering collaboration within individualized education program teams. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 0(0).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02646196221127103>Bulleted text

