

***PROCEEDINGS FROM the BALTIMORE and SALT LAKE  
CITY COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETINGS: PART B  
SECTION 619 LRE***

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SECTION 619 LRE  
JULY 2003***

*Two meetings were held in July 2003 in Baltimore, MD and Salt Lake City, UT to build the foundation for a Communities of Practice around serving preschool children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment. These proceedings include challenges, strategies currently used by states and ideas for future functioning of the Community of Practice.*

***I. Challenges***

**Concerns around data collection included:**

- Confusion or misunderstanding around the 3-5 OSEP environments data tables. People are eager to have better definitions; have been using school age descriptions for preschool
- There is a lack of understanding that there is a difference in the data collection between 6-21 and preschool
- Although WESTAT has compiled new data to be reviewed regarding data collection around definitions and categories there may not be a change in definitions for one to two years
- A challenge around using the data to represent what is actually happening.
- Problems with cross walking; data probably looks better than it really is
- Focus on one type of data collection and challenges within the data collection systems
- Some states do not use the federal for state planning

**Concerns around lack of placement options included:**

- Lack any state funded programs for 3 and 4 year olds
- Great variation in what is available in large cities vs. very rural areas
- Lack of options in remote/frontier areas
- Issues of capacity affecting local ability

**Challenges around collaborations included:**

The need for good collaborations to be sustained over time, especially with staff turnover

- Community programs include a lot of church preschools but state law prohibits collaborating with them
- The large number Head Start grantees in a state increases the challenge of collaboration

- The need to rely on other community organizations that don't lend themselves to coordination
- Planning time is often too limited to include the time necessary for collaboration

**Issues around attitudes and holding on to old ways included:**

- States having a history of segregated programs
- What some states currently have available are self-contained special education programs where everyone gets the same.
- States are using old solutions to new problems, have built new beautiful self-contained classrooms that are hard to let go of
- History of local autonomy
- Transition from a medical to an education model
- Difficulty for teachers in ECE to give up the classroom idea, may not have the training for the itinerant role
- Continuing debates about "separate is better" in programming for specific disabilities
- There is still an assumption that children should be at home with parents.
- That there is a difference between services and education that has remained undefined or not well articulated.
- Still living with the attitude that children are too young for services - prevailing attitudes about things being important at age 5 or 6, not earlier
- Success for children is hard to see in some settings
- Preschool educators need to know more about secondary transition - in order to keep the long term, life-planning perspective

**Administrative Issues included:**

- Lack of leadership and administrators at times lack awareness of the issues
- State Infrastructure: 6-21 system imposed on early childhood
- States currently facing a significant budget reduction - how to continue successes and provide inclusive educational opportunities where there is no money.
- Lack of inclusive options when children transition out of preschool
- Different lead agencies for infant/toddler and preschool services create problems at transition
- Leadership issues - school administrators are used to children coming to their school, it is a new orientation for them to think about going out into the community
- Lack of funding for providing specialized equipment
- Often the issue is that placement is determined prior to the IEP
- Policy and legislative barriers – at the federal, state and community levels
- Lack of clarity in definitions - federal, state, what is LRE?
- Lack of appropriate medical care in school
- Differences in the philosophies of natural environments and LRE make transitions difficult

- Differences in state facility and licensing regulations regarding issues such as staff ratios and toilet training
- Changes in other federal programs such as Head Start

**Personnel/Training Issues included:**

- Concern that local directors don't know what to do with kids once in programs – need more technical assistance.
- Recruiting and preparing professional staff
- In some states early childhood personnel don't have to be credentialed in, don't have background or specialized training
- Use of paraprofessionals and aides - how to place and give roles, how to train

**Concerns about serving specialized populations included**

- Serving children with Autism and significant behavior issues create assumed need for more restrictive service - training and need for support
- The exclusions are usually unwritten but may be related specifically to behavior issues
- Native American or second language learners - disproportionality.

**Concerns around involving families included:**

- Lack of service coordination for preschool services
- Being sensitive to family needs and concerns
- Rifts in family/professional relationships
- Families being left out of decision-making

***II. Current Practices, and Suggestions from the States in Attendance-***

**Section 619 Coordinators and others representing the following states contributed information to this section:**

**MD, NC, VA, CT, DE, WV, KY, NJ, NH, FL, IL, KS,  
VI, OH, NM, DC, ME, OK, MO, MT, UT, NV,  
WI, HI, PR, WY, CA, NE, MN, WA, AZ, TX, GU, ID (34 states)**

***Practices Shared:***

“The state is using a drill down process and publishing local Preschool settings data. Publishing data brings more attention to local systems and that accuracy becomes more important.

We are using the OSEP/WESTAT early childhood settings codes. Begin with a focus on three year olds.”

“We have long history of data on program development now at 80% with students in inclusive programs.”

“We have a strong and positive relationship with our colleges and universities.”

“Have started a learning community with regional programs.”

“..going to start using the federal definition of settings to try to get a better idea of how kids are really being served right now; using SIG grant to support this work.”

“On local level - by combining collaboratively have been able to make big gains.”

“Have put a staff person in curriculum center that allows for curriculum alignment. The biggest challenge is transition from medical to education model.”

“Thirty districts are required to provide regular Preschool programs.  
...moving to a student level database and hope that will show more accuracy on where students are.”

“Going to make a concerted effort this year to clean data and ensure it is more real and more accurate.

People are eager to have better definitions; have been using school age descriptions of information currently is not as accurate as desired; schools see change to federal definition as something that will support them.”

“Just adopted a constitutional amendment for universal Preschool starting 2006.”

“Early childhood division was the only one to receive new money for four year old programs in regular ed; does not only go to districts but also Head Start or child care programs; will provide another opportunity for inclusive settings; for at risk students.”

“Preschool LRE was identified through our Self-a\Assessment as a needs area.  
We think our data may be worse than it appears so will be taking a close look at that data.  
The concern is that if we only use the data we collect to report to the “Feds”, we are not seeing the total picture.

We need to begin looking at results

“Partnership with Head Start to create regular setting;  
We are moving to using federal definitions.  
We have one self-contained setting but others are through out; majority are in regular setting.”

“Our data systems were originally as a flat file to collect only financial.  
We are shifting to a relational file and the transition is currently being rolled out.  
We have collapsed fields to better match federal system.”

“One of our Universities has had an inclusion certification program

...moving to a collaborative with public schools to have a totally inclusive Preschool program

University is providing the building.

State Department of Education is providing money to develop a model fully inclusive program.”

“Head Start works very closely with education.”

“Have 4-year-old programs

Have done collaborative training with Head Start and childcare programs on how to include children with disabilities

Have a lot of opportunities for placement in our state

Have an early childhood group at the state level that includes other departments and a variety of state players that meets quarterly to talk through issues

“A lot of interaction with local child care programs but no universal provision of Preschool

Have a large head start programs - especially on the reservations

...very confident that we do provide services in LRE and in accordance with best practices because we have a lot of energy and focus on CSPD plus individual teacher commitment to special education.

“Have a big project collaborating with Part C to develop LRE and natural environments. There are pockets with tuition-based programs or where Head Start is working with the LEA.

.....working with LEAs to identify and develop natural environments.”

“State has developed Preschool indicators (standards).

“Have a strong tradition of collaborative efforts.

Four year old Kindergarten is available to districts that want it although it is threatened because of budget short- falls.

“...in the process of developing standards with Head Start and others

Local control state with variation from large city to very rural.

Much of the discretionary projects is on Preschool options.”

“Major collaborator is Head Start

“Have 25 Head Start grantees and although it is different to work with every grantee have been strengthening relationships.”

“One plus is that we are so small and rural that everyone knows everyone.”

“Currently working closely with Child Development on defining Desired Results - a set of outcomes for all Preschool kids and are working on an appropriate way for assessing or measuring the outcomes that includes adaptations or modifications for students with disabilities.

.....also working on the concept of educational benefit;  
.....take LRE requirements very seriously due to some litigious incentives and spend a lot of time explaining that the LRE requirement does count and have both the carrot and the stick.”

“Also work with early childhood that has had some state funding to develop Preschools that would include children with special needs as models;  
DOE and Health and Human Services are co-leads so we are able to maximize resources through collaboration.

“An EEEP that is basically an IFSP that has been designed by the state and if a child is in need of services from health or other departments it is to be used.  
Collaboration that is occurring is occurring in the rural areas because there are no other options but to collaborate with Head Start.”

“On the pacific corridor you find more collaborative programs.  
Have a state project with the State Association for Young Children for inclusion grants to locals to develop collaborative planning teams.  
Have birth to 5 reading, writing frameworks that fit with K-12 essential learning; plan to revisit frameworks and also look at math and struggling with how to best assess.  
We have a responsibility to work with childcare to improve services.

“Training for families about the long range issues and options.  
[We have] the most success with teachers who have not had the experience of having their own classroom or with speech therapists who haven't had classroom either.”

### ***III. Suggested Purposes of 619 LRE Community of Practice***

Areas to explore in more depth and topics that could be used to define the Community of Practice and sub groups:

- To shift focus from setting to outcomes
- To assist with doing state work more effectively
- To facilitate local change
- To explore the most critical issues
- To address definitions of preschool lre
- To examine programs and collaboration
- To examine state infrastructure/administration
- To reorganize data systems –
- To examine personnel preparation
- To promote and support leadership
- To implement and promote research/evaluation

### ***IV Potential Collective Actions by the Community***

Community participants in Baltimore and Salt Lake City identified the following potential activities to support the identified purposes:

- Market the community
- Create blueprints - specific strategies for blending funds and increasing service delivery options. Pull together data from other states to impact policy and funding.
- Offer tools for quick sharing of strategies such as a listserv or bulletin board, a single source of information related to quality practices for Preschool. The listserv could detail the variety of ways Preschool LRE has been implemented. Any products should foster time saving. "A place where everything is so we can go find what we need". "Documents to download for our use"
- Advocate for a project similar to Title 1 Part B connection, - a COP that focuses on breaking the barriers at the preschool level by connecting preschool special education and regular early childhood programs.
- Encourage or influence development of something similar to state improvement grants for Preschool.
- Utilize current networks and existing resources. For communication with other groups utilize existing mechanisms.
- Work for policy changes at state/local levels to improve funding.
- Fund something similar to state improvement grants out of professional development for 619 for Preschool staff to acquire more skills to implement LRE.
- Create a Webography
- Create Q and A documents about implementing Preschool LRE.
- Offer access to the information to all Preschool LRE stakeholders in a state.
- Series of topic presentations, targeted issues briefs, conferences or web based discussion (Marsha Brauen - WESTAT might talk about the various aspects of organizing LRE data.)

## ***V Proposed Membership, Involving Others and Operating Issues***

### ***A. Possible Members***

- The Head Start Community
- NAEYC
- EC Specialists in State Education Agencies
- Health and Human Services
- Child Care Administrators ( state and local)
- Parent Centers
- State Directors of Special Education
- Early Childhood Associations
- Child Care Resource and Referrals
- Title I and all other federally funded programs - Even Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Native American Head Start

### ***B. Strategies and Issues discussed around involving others***

- Utilize family agencies, PTI, ICC, other family based advocacy groups
- Keep it defined as an LRE topic = let it evolve later to other issues - anyone who wishes to join needs to do that specifically for the topic of preschool LRE

- The” who” needs to be around the narrowness of the LRE topic
- What type of decision- making process will be used, who should be involved in getting this (the community) rolled out
- If we know what outcomes, then we can decide the who

### ***C. Discussion around operating and using the web site***

- Editors: who/how
- Who has access to which information?
- How to deal w/ fact checking for inaccuracies
- How is proprietary information to be accessed?
- Scientifically based
- How can we ensure that this is more than just a chat room or like other internet

### ***D. Sustaining the Community***

The Community will be sustained by:

- Regular communication about what is happening with Preschool LRE
- Multiple stakeholders engaging in rich conversation
- Its ability to help leaders help those in the states working on Preschool LRE
- Unique offerings – “Not be like all the other listservs I am on”
- Having a relevant subgroup to answer my needs and questions and to initiate sub groups as new topics emerge (Time limited specific focus sub-groups (over-representation)
- The provision of a clear map. Simple to use and participate in
- Providing opportunities to work with people I have a relationship with
- Creative technology balanced by opportunities for face to face contacts
- Assuring quality and accuracy of activities and information, i.e.developing a standard
- Utilizing identified resources to guide research
- Alignment with other topics - example: informing connecting to conference agendas

### ***VI. Resources, Networks, and Initiatives Already in Place to Build On –***

The Community will be able to have the support of and learn from the following:

- The NECTAC 619 listserv
- NASDSE PMP (Policy Maker Partnership) Early Childhood work group and Early Childhood Scanning Network
- EC SCASS (The Early Childhood Large Scale Assessment Work Group of Council of Chief State School Officers)
- The Education Commission of the States (Web site includes a data base of Pre-K programs in the states
- Information about Preschool LRE on State Education Agency Web sites
- The 619 Steering Committee and prospective 619 Coordinators’ organization within DEC.
- NECTAC Inclusion Website

## ***VII. Immediate Next Steps***

Participants identified steps to be taken immediately following the meetings:

- Consider who we need to invite in states and further refine projected Community outcomes.
- Continue the conversation with stakeholders in the states.
- Invite others to view the web site.
- Plan to market the Community at the 619 gathering at the NECTAC meeting in Washington in November.

### *VIII List of Initial Members*

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