

## Countdown to Transition: 10 more tips for parents by parents

The Parent Leadership Project asked parents and EI programs to contribute helpful suggestions for families on the process of transition from EI to the special education system. The response was so great that we decided to present the tips in two parts. Part one was featured in the March/April edition of the *Parent Perspective* Newsletter. This issue will feature 10 more helpful tips on transition from parents who have gone through the process.

So here goes... in no particular order.

**Tip #1.** Learn the language and eligibility requirements of the Special Education system — how is the IEP (Individualized Education Program) used in Special Education different from an IFSP (Individualized Service Plan)? What are the eligibility requirements, what procedural safeguards are in place, and what is a “504” Plan. To learn the basics, read “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education,” a joint publication of the Federation for Children with Special Needs and the Massachusetts Department of Education. The Guide is available to download in several formats, in English, Spanish and Portuguese from the Federation website at [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org), or call toll-free (800) 331-0688. It is also available on the Department of Education website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).

**Tip #2.** Think about the following question--what is your vision for your child’s future? This question is frequently posed to parents during the transition process and in preparation for drafting the IEP. Parents need to articulate this vision as partners of the TEAM who will create the IEP.

**Tip #3.** Be aware of the timeline for evaluation and implementation of services. The timeline is one of the procedural safeguards in place to assure timeliness of the process. Transition planning should begin at least six months before a child’s third birthday. The IFSP contains a page specifically for the purpose of outlining the transition plan to be determined by families and service providers.

\*\*A special note about summer birthdays -- the school system operates on the school calendar, September to June. The referral to the school district should be made early enough to allow for time to complete evaluations before the end of the school year, so that the IEP will be in place when school resumes in September.

**Tip #4.** Download and read a copy of the “Guide to IEPs,” available from the Department of Education website, [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).

**Tip #5.** Network. Talk to other parents with children in your local special education (SPED) program. Talk to parents in other communities. Know what is available and what is specifically appropriate for your child’s needs.

**Tip #6.** Get a specialist’s assessment of your child and include it as part of the team documents. An expert outside evaluation can corroborate the school’s findings or refute them and help to define goals.

**Tip #7.** Keep a binder with copies of all evaluations, school correspondence, progress notes, IEPs, etc. and a keep a record of all Team meetings and items discussed.

**Tip #8.** Attend a meeting of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SPED PAC)—a great way to meet experienced parents and to hear about school issues and activities

**Tip #9.** Meet your SPED director. Many Early Intervention programs offer transition workshops where parents have the opportunity to meet the SPED director in an informal setting. This gives parents the chance to ask questions that are specific to the school district. Ask your service provider if this type of workshop will be offered at your Early Intervention program.

**Tip #10.** If your child has any special health care needs, make an appointment to talk with the school nurse. Draft an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) for your child, which clearly states medication requirements, physician contact information and plans in the event of a medical emergency. A sample form is available on the Emergency Medical Services for Children website at [www.ems\\_c.org/rehab/framerehab.htm](http://www.ems_c.org/rehab/framerehab.htm). Click on the link for Emergency Care Plans for Children with Special Health Care Needs. Laminate a copy with your child's photo and keep it in your child's backpack. An article on the Individualized Health Care Plan is also available at the Massachusetts Family Voices website at [www.massfamilyvoices.org/MFVIR/IHCP.html](http://www.massfamilyvoices.org/MFVIR/IHCP.html) or call (800) 331-0688.

For children who have “medically-complex” conditions, contact MASSTART, a free program of the Department of Public Health providing services for children with special health needs who are assisted by medical technology in the school setting. They can assist in the development of the child's Individual Health Care Plan and emergency plan for school. Call (617) 624-5070 or email [division.shn@state.ma.us](mailto:division.shn@state.ma.us).

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health School Health Unit also provides information and support for families who have children with special health needs. They can be reached at (617) 624-5070 or on the web at [www.mass.gov/bfch/mcfh/shu.htm](http://www.mass.gov/bfch/mcfh/shu.htm).