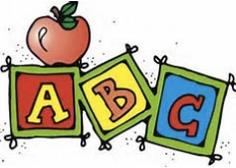


The ABC's of Preschool
What you need to know!!!

By Amy Neal, MsED ECSE





Amy Neal, ECSE MsED

- Over 20 Years of experience in the field of education
- Many different roles: general education preschool teacher, Montessori preschool director, general education teacher – both public and private schools (Kindergarten), teacher trainer for the Kansas City Center for Montessori Education (University of St. Mary's), and currently an early childhood special education teacher in the Kansas City, KS public school system.
- Scholarship to attend the National Down Syndrome Congress Conference in Phoenix, AZ – July 2015
- Parent!





How do you feel about preschool?

- Demographic
- Experience
- Feelings!

Video



The big secret!

- Keep the secret! If you treat your child like they are capable of anything, they will be! Holding high expectations is key to every child's success. Assume they can do anything and everything!
- The most powerful influence on the developmental progress of a child with Down syndrome is their family.
- The second greatest impact comes from being included into the everyday life of the community. So like all children, children with Down syndrome are influenced by the key areas of family life, inclusion with peers (siblings, neighbors, play groups, religious groups, respite, extracurricular activities and classmates) and the quality of education they receive – in this case –

Preschool



Transition from Infant/Toddler Services to Preschool

- Step 1- Planning for transition
- Step 2- Transition meeting
- Step 3- Evaluation
- Step 4- Eligibility meeting
- Step 5- IEP team meeting
- Step 6- Putting the plan into action





Step 1- Planning for Transition

- Four to six months before your child's 3rd birthday, a transition meeting will begin to be planned.
- Infant/toddler provider will be preparing the family for this transition by planning goals on their IFSP.
- Early Childhood Special Education providers will be contacted to set up meeting.
- Meeting scheduled.
- Family starts looking for preschools- tour, observe, etc. (more to come!)

Step 2- Transition Meeting



- Parent rights are reviewed.
- Infant/Toddler provider shares information with the receiving team.
- Parent inquires about preschools. Options are discussed.
- Consent for the evaluation is given.
- In this meeting a plan for a comprehensive evaluation will be planned. This evaluation determines in what areas, if any, your child is eligible to receive specialized services. This evaluation includes: hearing and vision, health and medical history, developmental history, cognitive skills (thinking and problem solving), communication (talking, listening, and understanding), motor skills (fine and gross motor), adaptive skills (self-care), and social/emotional skills (getting along with others). Other services may be evaluated at this time if needed, for example: feeding supports, music therapy, and more.
- The evaluation must be completed and an IEP (Individualized education program) in place by the child's third birthday.



Parent Rights

- Written consent- you must agree in writing before the school can evaluate, serve, and before any significant changes to the IEP.
- Parent Participation- you are asked questions and included in the decision making.
- Educational evaluation- no cost to you to have your child evaluated.
- Records- You may examine any of your child's records. You must receive copies of the evaluation report and IEP's.
- Confidentiality of information- your child's information must be kept confidential.
- Due Process- if you disagree with the evaluation, identification, and/or the placement, you have the right to dispute and a hearing.

Making a difference Information Network 1-800-332-6262
 Disability Rights Center of Kansas 1-877-776-1541
 Kansas State Department of Education 1-800-203-9462
 Missouri Department of Education 1-573-751-0699



Step 3- Evaluation

- Child may attend preschool for the teachers and services providers to get a better understanding of the child's present levels of performance.
- Child may just be tested on several occasions by the providers.
- The usual time frame for an accurate and comprehensive evaluation is at least 30-60 days.
- There are required standardized tests for determining eligibility for special education. In Kansas, the AEPS (Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System) is used most often to determine eligibility. This tool allows the teacher to evaluate the child's present level, monitor progress, and plan ideas to help the child meet their goals.



Steps 4 and 5-Eligibility Meeting and IEP team Meeting

- Parent rights will be reviewed and documents signed that these rights are understood. Please ask questions if you do not understand these rights.
- Evaluation results reviewed. Each team member will share the results from their evaluation.
- Eligibility is determined based upon results and parents sign for understanding of eligilibty.
- It is common place to save time, that the IEP team meeting is usually then held immediately after eligibility determined.
- Parents are asked to provide input in the IEP meeting. Each service provider will discuss the child's present levels of performance, make plan for goals if needed, and hopefully ask for your input in each area.
- Where and when will the services be provided

Step - Putting the plan into action!

- When the child turns 3, the services outlined in the IEP will begin.
- The team has determined where and when these services will occur.
- Goals begin to be implemented



What preschool is right for your child?

- What type of preschool are you looking for?
- Public school? Private? Montessori?
- Family provider?
- Location- close to home or close to work?



NAEYC- National Association for the Education of Young Children

1. Relationships- Providing positive relationships between child and teacher.
2. Curriculum- Implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development.
3. Teaching- The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches.
4. Assessment of Child's Progress- Utilizes ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches of learning and development.
5. Health- Promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.
6. Teachers- Employs and supports a teaching staff that has educational qualification, knowledge, and professional commitment.

NAEYC cont.

7. Families- Establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family.
8. Community relationships- Establishes relationships with and uses resources of the children's communities.
9. Physical Environment- Safe environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained equipment.
10. Leadership and management- Effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable experiences.



Public school

Pro's

- Specialized training of teachers and staff
- Resources
- Peer interactions/friendships that lead to Kindergarten and beyond
- Schools and staff are assessed often on their performance. These schools are subject to federal and state funding and are quick to ensure standards are met.
- Tend to have lower staff to child ratios
- Transportation provided

Con's

- Based upon your address, choices limited
- Teacher choice is limited
- Usually only 1/2 day programs

Private School



Pro's

- Lots of choices available, lots of locations
- Full day programs
- Family
- Licensed by the state

Con's

- Most teachers who work here have little specialized education
- Little resources for specialized care
- Some service providers are not allowed to provide services here
- Usually higher staff to child ratios
- Expensive
- Self transport

Types of Private

- Specialized programs- Montessori, Reggio, Head Start, etc.

Maria Montessori developed her philosophy for children with special needs. Back then, children with special needs, including Down Syndrome, were placed in institutions. Montessori realized that these children were capable of so much more. She developed her program, implemented it, and these children began to show great progress. Even scoring like a typical children on all state testing.



Family Home Providers



Pro's

- Small program
- More like a family environment
- Staff are often able to provide more individualized care

Con's

- Only one person, no care when providers are ill
- Safety concerns for children who are not able to communicate
- Not always state regulated
- Staff not trained
- Little resources

Ask the right questions!

- Is the school accredited? If so by whom? Are they involved in any quality improvement programs. NAEYC accreditation? Montessori accreditation? KQRS? How do they monitor their own progress? Is the school assessed?
- What is the educational philosophy? Montessori? Reggio? How does it approach learning- play based, individualized, teacher directed?
- Class size? Child to teacher ratio?
- Educational background of the staff. Are they trained to work with children of special needs? Do they have any experience in working with children of varying abilities? Do they receive yearly training?
- Is there a policy about children and potty training? Most children with developmental delays are not potty trained.





Questions continued

- What support do they have for feeding? What accommodations are made for feeding issues? Feeding tubes, special diet restrictions, etc.
- Are special providers (Speech Therapists, OT, PT) allowed to support children at the school?
- How is discipline handled?
- Will the school provide references? Can I contact current and/or past parents to ask them questions about the school?
- Staff turnover? Do staff leave often? Low staff turnover ensures that the children have consistency.

Observe the school!

Observation is key!!! Trust your instincts!! What to look for when observing:

- Overall feel- do you feel comfortable there? Can you see your child thriving there?
- Make an appointment for the tour. However, ask if it is ok to pop in unannounced. Schools with an 'open door' policy for parents demonstrates that there is nothing to hide.
- Classrooms large enough to meet the needs of the students?
- Ratios seem appropriate
- Climate fun, loving? Warm and inviting? Work on the walls?



Observe continued



- Learning evident? Do you see examples of learning- reading? Math? How is this evaluated?
- Children work together? Independently?
- Staff interactions- loving? kind? Are they happy to be there?
- Play- where do they play? Observe recess. Teachers engaged in play? Or standing around talking, not watching children.

A successful preschool:



- Follows the pace of the child. Do what interests them. Follow their lead. Remember that not all children are doing the same thing at the same time and not all children learn at the same pace.
- Builds skills, one small step at a time. You would not start teaching a child to read by giving them War and Peace. Approach every situation in the same way.
- Focuses on the Whole child, not just their education. Which is most important- academic skills, social skills, or adaptive skills?



Decision made! What next?

- All preschools require paperwork to enroll in the program.
- You will need to have your child current on all immunizations and have a doctor complete a physical.
- If your child has any special medical or dietary needs, you will want to get the doctor to write these specific needs down for the school.
- Enrollment forms usually ask for emergency contacts, please speak to all people and let them know that you are putting them on the form. It is also a good idea to give them the number of the school. Today, most people do not answer phone calls from unknown numbers.
- Take your child to visit the school, before their official start date. It allows your child to become familiar with the school, but it is also good for all staff to get to know your child.



Preparing for your first day!

- Make sure you have everything that you need- extra change of clothes, diapers and wipes, etc.
- Try to remain calm your child can sense your nervousness.
- Make sure you know the schools drop off procedure. You may have to sign the child in and out in the classroom.
- Quick drop offs are the best, do not hover around. It is often more difficult, when the parents stay around. If the child cries, the teacher should be comforting, making them feel safe. I often tell the parent that if they cry for more than 10 minutes, that I will call them. Just remember that separations are usually harder on the parent than the child.



Communication is key!!!

- Daily communication is so important with working with children with special needs, especially with those who cannot communicate verbally. I use a simple spiral notebook to keep in the child's backpack. This allows me to write daily notes to the parent about the child's day.
- Teachers appreciate your communication about your child's day- did they stay up late, did they not eat breakfast, etc. These messages may help us understand why your child is having a rough day.
- Most teachers have very busy day, emails or even text messages make communication easier.



How will I know my child is progressing?

- Your child's goals will be monitored regularly. You should expect quarterly progress notes.
- The teacher will also write notes regarding their progress- i.e. Today, Johnny practiced working on counting to 3. He was able to touch each object and count.
- Hopefully, you will see positive changes at home to know that your child is progressing.



Be Involved!!

- Teachers want you to be involved in the classroom.
- Volunteer to read books, eat lunch with your child, bring your skills to the classroom (example: show and tell, etc), help with school parties.
- Being involved and present in the classroom, allows you to build relationships with the teachers and staff. It also allows you to meet your child's playmates and see how they get along with their peers.

Enjoy a successful Preschool experience!