

APPENDIX E:
PARENT SATISFACTION STUDY
FINAL REPORT



Parent Satisfaction Study Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education

One of the research goals of the Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education in New York State is to distinguish differences in satisfaction among parents of children who received preschool special education programs and services with or without their nondisabled peers from parents of children who did not receive preschool special education programs and services. To answer this question, the first task was to design and implement a study to understand parental perceptions of their child's preschool special education experience. MAGI Education Services, Inc., under subcontract to MGT of America, conducted the Parent Satisfaction Study from Summer 2001 through Summer 2002. Another study will be conducted in year five of the longitudinal study to examine parent satisfaction with school age special education programs and services.



Methodology

The primary methods used to gather data were a Parent Satisfaction Survey and Parent Focus Groups. The survey instrument, data collection and sampling procedures are described below.

Parent Satisfaction Survey

The Parent Satisfaction Survey was developed by the investigators and presented to Preschool Special Education Advisory Committee members for feedback and revision. The final instrument was acceptable to all stakeholders. The questions are based on the research literature and MAGI research staff's extensive experience investigating best practices in preschool special education. The items rate parent satisfaction with special education placement, services, staff, the CPSE experience, child progress, and the transition to school age programs. Qualitative comments were analyzed for thematic trends.

The survey asked questions about two cohorts of students: 1) children who were three years old between July 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001, and 2) children who were four years old during that time period who transitioned to kindergarten programs the following year. Mailings took place from October 2001 through April 2002. The parent letter included a contact person to call if the respondent had any questions or need for an interpreter.

Parent Focus Groups

Parent focus groups were implemented to augment the surveys and gain additional insight into each parent's experience. The focus groups were conducted as part of a two-day site visit to each district by MGT and MAGI research staff. District personnel collaborated with the

research staff; they were responsible for informing parents about the purpose of the focus groups and deciding the best time to schedule the meeting for maximum participation. Interpreters participated when the respondents' primary language was not English. Prior to the meetings, trainers were given instructions on how to conduct the parent focus groups, and they were directed to submit parent focus group summaries, participant worksheets, and audiotapes with parental consent.

The questions probed areas such as overall satisfaction with preschool special education, the impact on parent and child, satisfaction with child progress, and satisfaction with the transition process to school age programs.

Sample

Parent Satisfaction Survey

The sample size was calculated to include 25% of parents of the total sample of preschool special education children enrolled in the study in 2001-2002. In New York City the sample was restricted to preschool children from five districts selected for the longitudinal study.

A total of 1,418 surveys were mailed; there were 293 responses for an overall return rate of 20%. The range varied from no response in one small district after a second mailing, to 50% in a suburban district. See Appendix A for Preschool Special Education Parent Survey – Sample Districts.

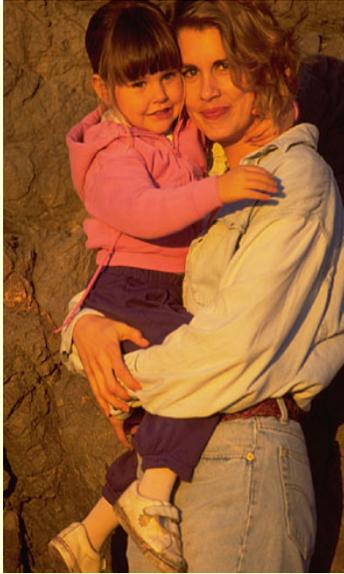
The final sample included parents (96%), legal guardians (3%) and other (2%). Descriptions of other included grandmother (n=3) and foster parent (n=1). Respondents were primarily female (90%). There were an average of 2.4 children living in the home.

The highest grade completed by respondents was college graduate (42%), some college (25%), high school or GED (25%) and less than high school (8%). See Appendix B for Description of Parent Sample.

Parent Focus Groups

Parent focus groups were conducted in 20 districts; this represents 74 percent of the total sample of 27 school districts that were selected for the longitudinal study. The parents represented 17 districts throughout New York State – including urban, suburban, and rural communities - and 3 districts in New York City. See Appendix C for District Focus Group Summary. Because the survey results indicated that the parent sample had a high level of educational attainment, the investigators felt strongly that there must be other opportunities for parents to comment so that the final report represented multiple parent perspectives.

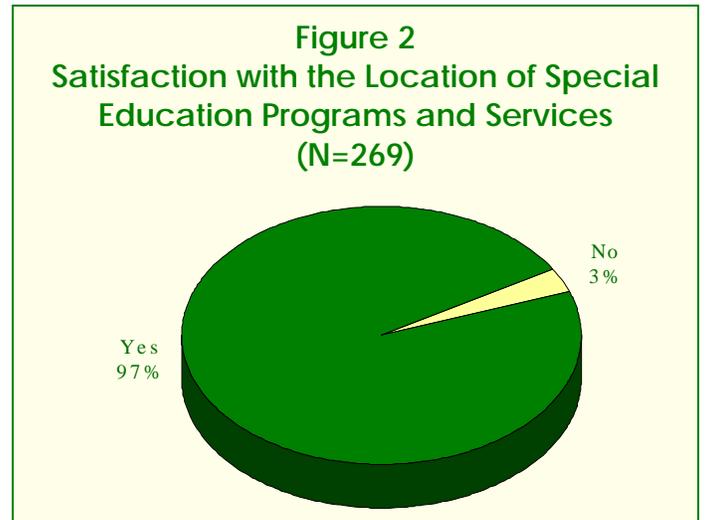
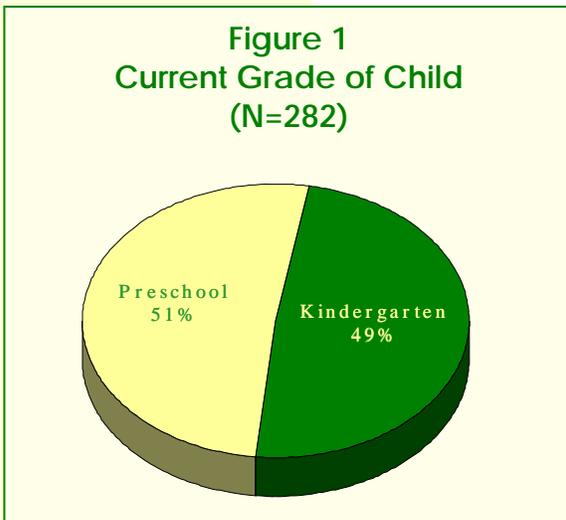
A total of 70 parents participated in the focus groups, the average group size was three participants, and the range was 1 to 9.



Findings: Parent Satisfaction Survey

Student Placement

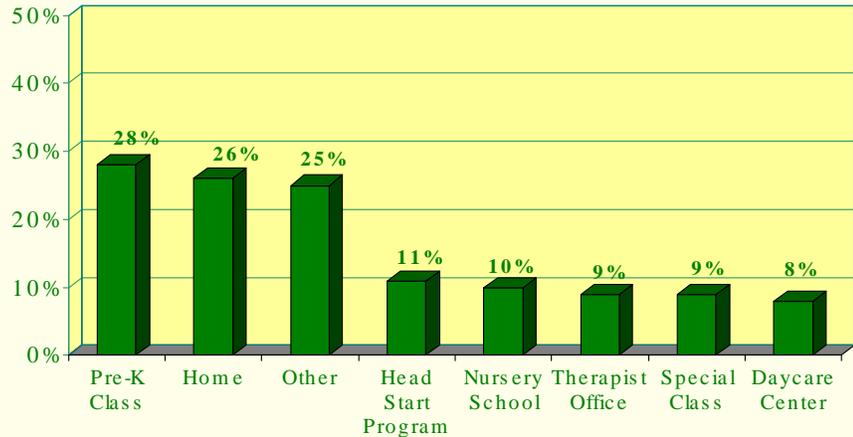
The sample was almost equally divided into parents of children who were still receiving preschool special education services (51%) and parents of children who had transitioned to kindergarten programs (49%). See **Figure 1**.



Almost all of the respondents (97%) were satisfied with the location of their child's preschool special education programs and services. See **Figure 2**.

During the previous year, the majority of children received services in pre-k classes (28%), home (26%), and other locations (25%). The category “Other” refers to 71 parents who did not select a forced choice response but they did write the name of a specific program or location on the survey form. Almost all of these responses are preschool special education center-based programs. Additional settings included Head Start (11%), nursery school (10%), therapist office (10%), special class (9%) and daycare center (8%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3
Setting Where Child Received Preschool Special Education Services Last Year
(N=388*)



*Some children received services at multiple sites

Satisfaction with Preschool Special Education

Overall the respondents were very satisfied with preschool special education services. Nearly all agreed that services were of high quality (95%), the right type (99%), of sufficient frequency (91%), their child received adequate individual attention (93%) and his or her skills improved (96%). In comparison, fewer parents agreed that their child had sufficient opportunity to learn and play with other children, particularly children without disabilities. It is

interesting to note that the percentage of parents who agreed (84%) that their child had enough time to play and learn from *children with disabilities* was slightly higher than the percentage of parents who agreed (76%) that their child had adequate time with *children without disabilities*. See **Table 1**.

Table 1
Parent Satisfaction with Preschool Special Education

Preschool Special Education Services	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
a. The preschool special education services my child received were of high quality. (N=290)	63%	32%	3%	1%	1%
b. My child received the right type of services. (N=290)	63%	33%	2%	1%	1%
c. My child received services often enough. (N=287)	55%	36%	6%	1%	2%
d. My child's skills improved because of the services. (N=288)	68%	28%	2%	1%	1%
e. My child received enough individual attention from school staff. (N=280)	62%	30%	3%	1%	4%
f. My child had enough time to play and learn with other children <i>with</i> disabilities. (N=255)	46%	38%	6%	3%	8%
g. My child had enough time to play and learn with other children who had <i>no</i> disabilities. (N=260)	45%	31%	10%	5%	9%

Satisfaction with the Committee on Preschool Special Education

Ninety-five percent of the parents agreed that CPSE meetings and decisions helped their child. They agreed that they were comfortable in meetings (91%) and they were satisfied (97%) and involved in decisions

regarding CPSE recommendations for their child (94%). There was slightly less agreement that they received useful information at meetings (89%) or that the CPSE understood their child's strengths and needs (88%). It should be noted that the respondents represented a fairly educated population (42% college graduate - Refer to Appendix B), and this may explain, in part, their level of comfort with CPSE proceedings. See **Table 2**

Table 2
Satisfaction with Committee on Preschool Special Education

Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Overall the CPSE meetings and decisions helped my child. (N=285)	61%	34%	4%	1%
b. I received useful information at CPSE meetings. (N=285)	43%	46%	9%	2%
c. I felt comfortable asking questions during CPSE meetings (N=283).	50%	41%	6%	3%
d. I understood my child's test results. (N=282)	45%	47%	7%	1%
e. I felt the CPSE understood my child's strengths and needs. (N=284)	50%	38%	9%	3%
f. I helped make decisions about my child. (N=285)	60%	34%	3%	2%
g. I was satisfied with the CPSE recommendations for my child. (N=283)	57%	36%	4%	3%

Satisfaction with Preschool Special Education Personnel

Respondents were **overwhelmingly satisfied** with their interactions with staff. At least 97% agreed that staff was friendly and respectful, staff understood their child's needs, worked well with their child, helped him or her learn, and listened to the parent's concerns. Staff explained the child's disability in understandable language (97%), and communicated in the parent's preferred language when possible (98%). There was slightly less agreement (93%) that staff talked regularly about their child's progress. See **Table 3**.

Table 3
Satisfaction with Special Education Staff

Special Education Staff (teachers, therapists, evaluators)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
h. Overall preschool special education staff helped my child learn. (N=285)	71%	26%	1%	1%
i. The staff was friendly. (N=289)	75%	24%	.3%	.3%
j. The staff understood my child's needs. (N=289)	71%	27%	1%	1%
k. The staff worked well with my child. (N=285)	71%	27%	1%	1%
l. The staff explained my child's disability in language I could understand. (N=288)	70%	27%	2%	1%
m. The staff talked to me regularly about my child's progress. (N=288)	61%	32%	7%	1%
n. The staff listened to my concerns. (N=287)	68%	29%	3%	1%
o. The staff considered my child's strengths and interests. (N=286)	68%	30%	2%	1%
p. The staff respected my family's cultural background. (N=278)	66%	33%	1%	.4%
q. The staff communicated in my preferred language when possible. (N=269)	70%	28%	1%	.4%

Experience as a Parent

Again, parents were very satisfied with their experience as a parent of a child who received preschool special education services. They agreed that their experience was positive (97%), they had a better understanding of their child's disability (97%), and were better prepared to help their child (97%). Parents had less agreement that they were given ideas on how to help their child at home (95%) and a better understanding of how to get the services their child needs (94%). See **Table 4**.

Table 4
Experience as A Parent

Your experiences as a parent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
r. Overall my experiences as a parent were positive. (N=289)	66%	31%	1%	1%
s. I have a better understanding of how to improve my child's skills. (N=289)	63%	34%	4%	0%
t. I have a better understanding of my child's disability. (N=280)	60%	37%	2%	1%
u. I feel better prepared to parent my child with a disability. (N=277)	60%	37%	3%	1%
v. I have a better understanding of how to get the services my child needs. (N=289)	61%	33%	5%	1%
w. I was given ideas on how to help my child at home. (N=289)	60%	35%	4%	1%

Impact on Child and Family Life

Just over two-thirds of the respondents felt that preschool special education programs and services made a great difference (67%) or a difference (26%) in their family's life. More importantly, over three-quarters of the respondents felt that preschool special education programs and services made a great difference (78%) or a difference (16%) in their child's life. See **Figures 4 & 5**.

Figure 4
Extent to Which Preschool Special Education Programs and Services Made a Difference in Their *Family's* Life
(N=293)

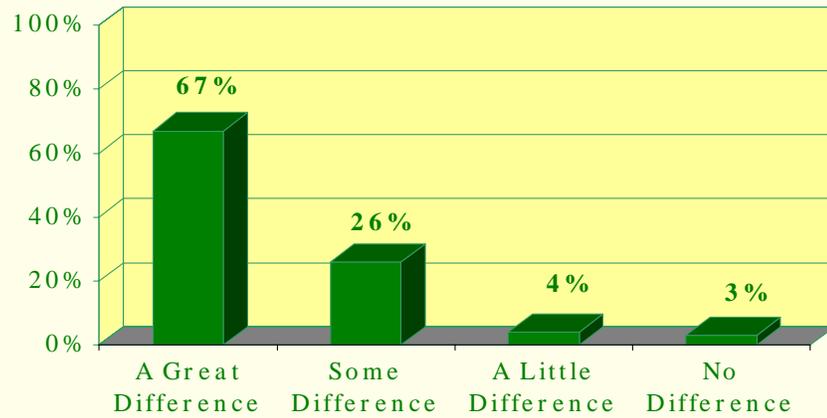
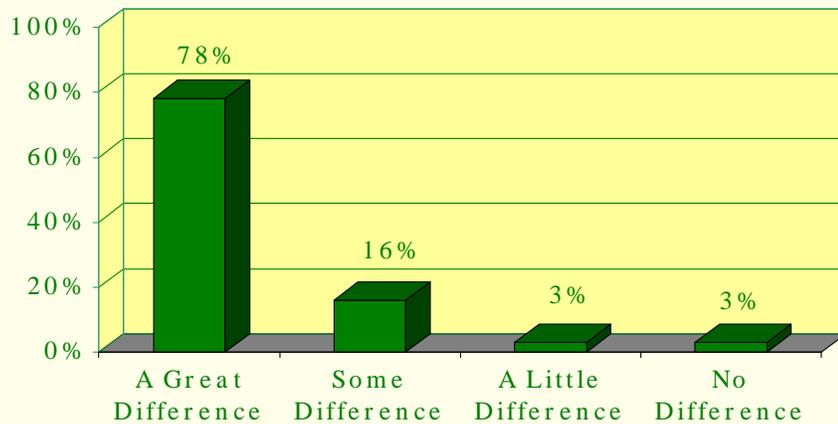


Figure 5
Extent to Which Preschool Special Education and Services Made a Difference in their *Child's* Life
(N=293)



A very high percentage of respondents felt that their child's needs were met a great deal (71%) or a moderate amount (23%). Only 17 people responded that their child's need were met just a little (5%) or not at all (1%). Almost two-thirds of the children were rated as having made a great deal of progress (64%) or some progress (29%). Eighteen respondents rated a little progress (6%) or no progress (2%). See **Figures 6 & 7**.

Figure 6
Child Progress Toward His or Her IEP Goals and Objectives
(N=290)

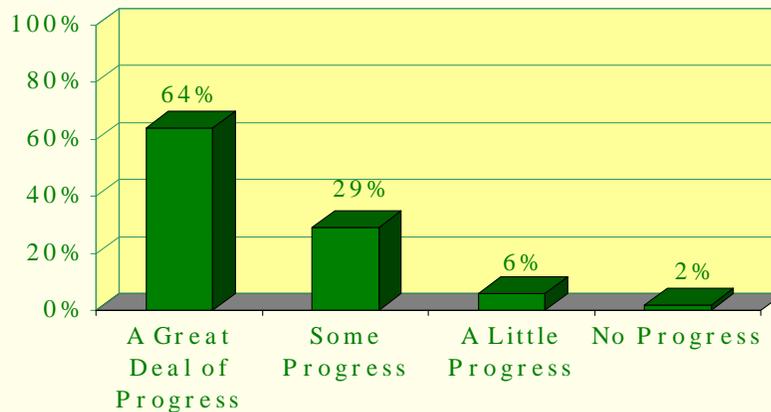
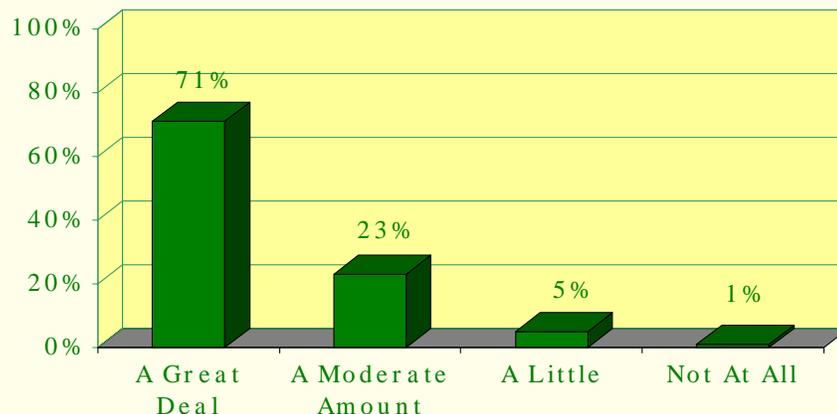


Figure 7
Extent to Which Special Education Services Meet His or Her Child's Needs
(N=289)



Satisfaction with Preschool Special Education and Related Services

Based on parent responses, the most frequently recommended services were speech and language (95%), occupational therapy (63%), SEIT (57%), physical therapy (49%), parent counseling, training and/or education (46%), and counseling (49%). Forty-seven percent of respondents recorded that their child was in a special class.

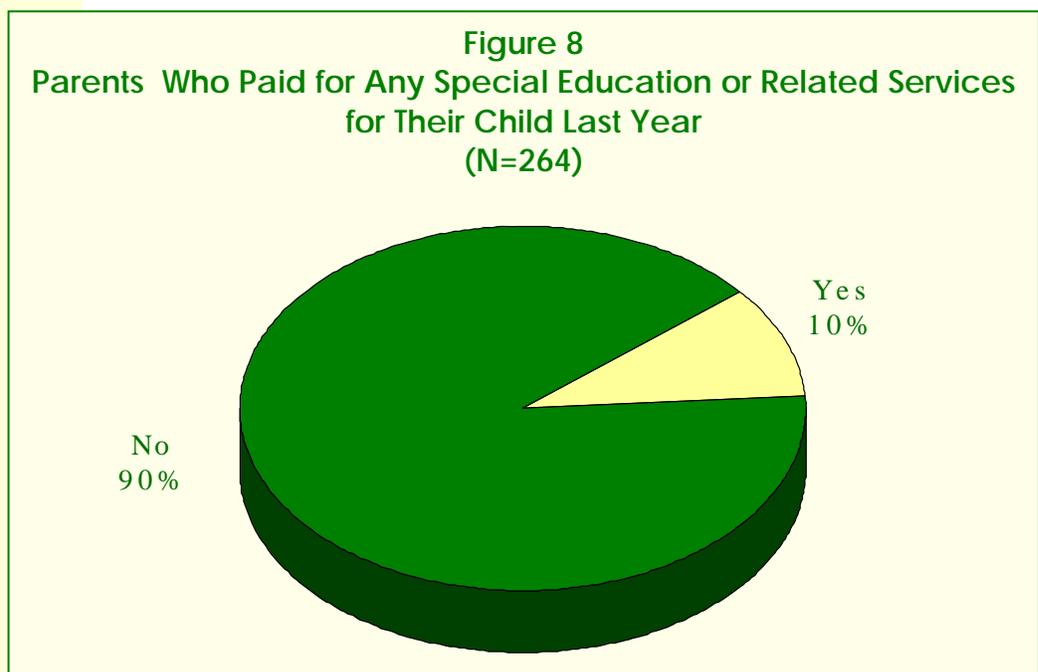
Satisfaction with these services was gauged by asking parents to assign a grade A-D. The average grade was B+. Over 75% of the parents gave an A grade to SEIT, speech and language, occupational therapy and physical therapy. There were slightly fewer A grades for counseling (60%), assistive technology (63%) and parent counseling (68%). Special class was given an A grade by 70% of respondents. Poor grades (C or D) were given by fewer than 10% of respondents. The lowest grades were for parent counseling, training and/or education (11%) and counseling (10%). See **Table 5**.

Table 5
Grades for Preschool Special Education and Related Services

Please grade the following preschool special education services	A	B	C	D	My Child Did Not Have This Service
a. Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) (N=148)	80%	16%	3%	2%	43%
b. Speech and Language Therapy (N=270)	77%	17%	4%	1%	5%
c. Occupational Therapy (N=166)	75%	17%	6%	2%	37%
d. Physical Therapy (N=126)	76%	18%	4%	2%	51%
e. Assistive Technology Services (N=60)	63%	32%	5%	0	76%
f. Parent Counseling, Training and/or Education (N=120)	68%	23%	8%	3%	54%
g. Counseling (N=100)	60%	30%	6%	4%	61%
h. Special Class (N=117)	79	23%	3%	3%	53%

Payment for Additional Special Education Services

Twenty-seven parents (10%) paid for additional special education or related services last year while their child was a preschool special education student. This may indicate that they were not satisfied with the intensity of services, e.g. number of services, frequency or duration. Open-ended comments also identified the delay in service implementation as one of the reasons for private payment. See **Figure 8**.



Transition to School Age Programs

The transition process was rated favorably with a high percentage of parents agreeing that they were satisfied (87%), their ideas were considered (84%), the school-age program was appropriate for their child (84%) and IEP goals addressed their child's needs (86%). Two areas with lower rates of agreement were the amount of time (76%) and information (77%) staff provided to help parents prepare for the transition to kindergarten. See **Table 6**.

Table 6
Transition From Preschool to School Age Special Education Programs

Transition from Preschool to School-Age Special Education Programs	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
a. Overall I was satisfied with the transition process from preschool to school-age programs.	52%	34%	4%	6%	5%
b. I received good information about school age programs.	40%	37%	12%	6%	5%
c. Staff spent enough time helping me get my child ready for school-age programs.	44%	32%	14%	7%	4%
d. My ideas were considered and respected.	49%	35%	5%	5%	5%
e. My child's school-age program is appropriate to his/her needs.	45%	40%	8%	2%	4%
f. The IEP goals and objectives addressed my child's needs.	48%	38%	7%	3%	4%

School Age Special Education

According to parent ratings, nearly 80% of the children who transitioned to kindergarten continued to receive special education services. Forty-four children (21%) were in regular kindergarten classes without special education services. Similarly, 76% of the respondents wanted their child to continue in special education; almost one out of four parents did not want their child in school age special education programs. See **Figures 9 & 10**.

Figure 9
Parents Indicating That Their Child is Receiving School Age Special Education Services this Year
(N=206)

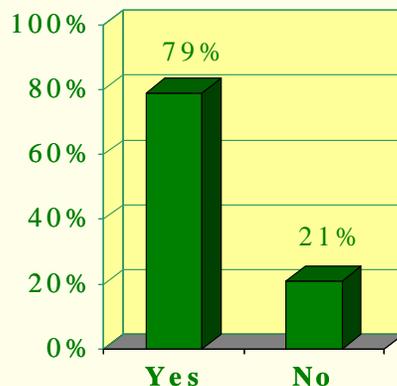
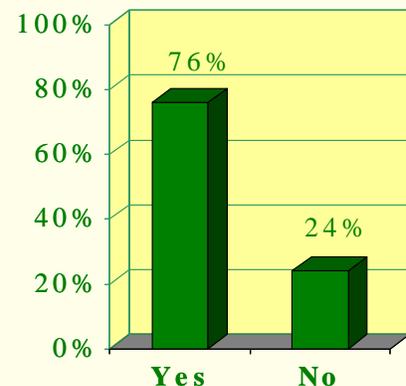


Figure 10
Parents Indicating They Wanted Their Child to Continue in Special Education
(N=194)



Summary Parent Satisfaction Survey

Based on an analysis of Parent Satisfaction Survey ratings, parents were very satisfied with preschool special education programs and services in New York State. The areas of greatest satisfaction, in decreasing order, were the location of programs and services, the special education staff, the quality of services, the CPSE process, and transition services from preschool to school age special education. Satisfaction/agreement ratings ranged from 97% to 90%. The only questions with agreement ratings below 85% were statements that children had adequate time to play with children with disabilities (84%) and without disabilities (76%) and parents received good information (77%) and staff spent enough time helping parents get ready for school age programs (76%). Parent ratings indicated that children made a great deal of progress (64%) toward IEP goals and objectives, and preschool special education programs made a great difference in the child's life (78%) and the family's life (67%).

The reader is reminded that the findings are not based on a representative sample of all parents with children in preschool special education programs in New York State. Generalizability is limited by the fact that the response rate was 20% and 2 out of 3 parents had some college or a college degree. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate that these parents were highly satisfied with different aspects of the preschool special education experience and its impact on their child and family.

Findings: Parent Satisfaction Survey Qualitative Comments

Forty-percent of the respondents wrote additional comments when asked if there was anything else they would like to share with the research team about their child's preschool special education program and services. Through constant comparative analysis, the open-ended comments were organized into themes. The findings were analyzed by district type and for the total sample of survey respondents.

"I was completely satisfied with every aspect of the system! A great experience, no problems at all."

There were 119 comments; two-thirds were positive and the other third described specific areas of disappointment or disapproval. Positive comments fall into two areas: special education staff and child progress. Areas of concern were the special education bureaucracy and dissatisfaction with the CPSE. Two additional themes were identified through qualitative data analysis: the need for advocacy and opportunities for special education students to interact with typically developing peers. There were an equal number of negative comments from New York City parents and parents from districts categorized as Average or Low Resource/Needs districts. New York City parents provided 25% of the open-ended comments; their responses were equally distributed into areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Areas of Satisfaction

- **The teachers therapists, and staff were excellent.** By far the most frequent comment was "thanks for the wonderful work." There were many personal references to teachers and therapists who "did a wonderful job" and "made a difference in my child's and our family's life." For example,

M. M. provided both my son and my daughter with such love and support (myself as well) and knowledge that my child made tremendous progress and words could never express my deep thanks to Ms. M. for giving my child the gift of speech.

V.C L.C. is a wonderful school. My son made significant progress. Everyone is helpful, warm, courteous and they teach in a loving caring manner.

All I can say is the teachers and staff are wonderful, caring, and show the professionalism in the utmost manner. The school has been a blessing to my child and our family.

The programs offered are fantastic and the teachers were patient and knowledgeable. They did a great job with my child.

- **Services were excellent and my child has made significant progress.** There were many comments that the services were excellent and they helped the child make progress and prepared him or her for school. For example,

My child completed services and objectives set and was declassified before starting kindergarten. We were very pleased with our experience and services received and we are appreciative of all staff we worked with.

JKLC... has been a wonderful experience in every way for my child. Her social skills, speech and overall performance has flourished since she has been attending this school! The teachers and staff are wonderful, patient and work miracles. Thank you so much for allowing this special education program to continue.

I finally believe special education played a very important part in [my child's] development and school readiness. I am grateful for all these services and her teacher was wonderful.

...the nursery school can see a big difference in my child as far as progress in speaking and socializing with other children.

Areas of Dissatisfaction

- **The special education bureaucracy is stressful.** Most of the concerns associated with bureaucracy were related to a delay in services and lack of providers. There were comments about waiting lists for therapists and service delays due to poor communication.

I am not able to get the services that I need at this time even though I have a right to services.

The only frustration has been getting OT and PT therapists, at times - they're in short supply.

It did take me over 60 phone calls to receive any therapist who had an opening.

- **THE CPSE is not helpful or responsive to parents.** This concern overlaps with bureaucratic constraints and the parents' frustration, and sometimes anger, at the lack of responsiveness of special education administrators. A few parents wrote about disagreements regarding services, placement, or 12-month programming. A few parents were

disappointed that the CPSE did not provide guidance and parents had to learn about services from other sources. Again, lack of communication was a source of complaint.

Although the therapist has been wonderful, I find dealing with the special education office stressful. They are often not friendly or informative and actually do nothing to put your mind at ease.

I had begged for 12 month services and was told no – A few days before the summer began I was told that she could receive summer services. It was too late to find appropriate providers.

Overall therapists and therapy sessions were very good. There was however miscommunication between district and provider agency that resulted in a delay of services. I felt the committee did a poor job of resolving the problem and were resistant to providing services initially.

Additional Themes

There were a few additional comments to suggest themes that may shed some insight into parent satisfaction with preschool special education. One theme emerges from parent comments regarding the need for advocacy to get the best for their child. The other theme emphasizes the parents' desire for their child to have more interaction with typically developing peers.

- **Parents need to advocate for services and “work the system.”** A number of parents commented on their need to advocate for their child in response to the special education bureaucracy. They described their persistence in working with the CPSE to get services or arrange for therapists to begin treatment. Parents also wish to be better informed. A few parents commented on the desire to understand their child's test results and have the committee “use everyday words to help parents understand what they [CPSE] are talking about.”

Most of the information I received came from sources other than CPSE. We received virtually no help or guidance from the CPSE and had to fight for what we learned was best for our child.... This had been bureaucracy at its worst. It is hard enough to have a child with special needs, our problem has become the system more than our child.

If I were uneducated and not proficient in English, it would have been impossible to 'work the system.'

After the initial evaluation on my daughter was completed and services were recommended, therapy was provided only after months of daily phone calls I had to make to the CPSE to ensure that all the necessary paperwork was completed. If I had not done this daily follow up with the CPSE, my child would not have received services.

Overall I found the service very helpful, however dealing with the 'committee' and 'test scores' were an overwhelming battle. I am confident that my son received his services only because of the preparation I sought out before going into each CPSE meeting...

- **There should be more opportunity for interaction with typical children.** Although parents were generally pleased with their child's placement, a few parents commented on the benefits of integrated settings and expressed concerns that their child's progress was compromised by placement in a setting with disabled children only. "I would love to see an opportunity for interaction with typical children" is a common statement that underscores this belief.

I feel that if my child had been exposed to regular education for a part of his learning experience he would have been further.

These programs should incorporate typically developing children for disabled children to model.

"The services my son received were priceless...they made all the difference in the world. Early intervention is the key to success in a young child."

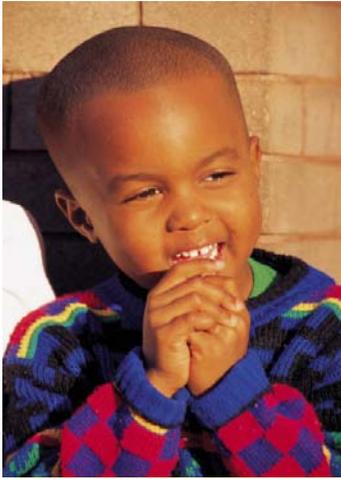
Summary: Qualitative Comments

This quote is fairly representative of the open-ended comments at the end of the Parent Satisfaction Survey. Overall, parents seemed anxious to share their gratitude and recognition of the wonderful work that teachers and therapists did with their children. Over two-thirds of the parents were very satisfied with services and most parents felt that their child made significant progress.

There were also areas of dissatisfaction that were quite consistent across districts. Parents expressed frustration, and sometimes anger, at the CPSE bureaucracy. The most frequent complaint was the delay in services due to lack of providers or lack of communication. One reaction to the perceived inefficiency was for parents to act as advocates for their child. It should be noted that there was much variability across districts in terms of parent satisfaction and areas of concern.

Some of the parent complaints such as lack of information about the CPSE process and test results are easily translated into strategies for change. Other concerns such as the perceived bureaucracy and lack of CPSE responsiveness demand more complex solutions.

In conclusion, at least two out of three respondents who completed open-ended comments on the Parent Satisfaction Survey are very pleased with preschool special education services, staff and child progress in New York State. Their comments are very positive and they support the quantitative findings that preschool special education programs and services have a significant impact on the lives of children and families.



Findings: Parent Focus Groups

Areas of Satisfaction

Child Placement

All parents were satisfied with placement whether their child was placed in a regular early childhood program or pre-K class with typical peers or a classroom with disabled students only. Based on available information from parent comments, **almost two out of three children were placed in integrated settings (n=37) compared to segregated settings n=21).** In New York City placement varies a great deal by district; some districts provide more integrated pre-kindergarten classes and others rely primarily on private preschool special education programs. Throughout the state, a common theme was the benefit of preschool programs that give children the opportunity to interact with typical peers. According to parents, **there is less tendency to label and more role models to learn appropriate behaviors** required in school. One parent was pleased with the integrated setting and upset when her child moved to a more restrictive setting (special class) after preschool.

Special Education Staff

Parents were very satisfied with teachers and related service providers. They were impressed by their knowledge, caring attitudes and behavior, and ability to work well with their child. Parents were very satisfied with the frequency and quality of staff communication regarding their child's progress. This included specific reference to the value of daily notebooks, journals, phone calls, and periodic meetings. The only negative comments came from parents in one district who were concerned with high staff turnover and lack of consistency.

Special Education Services

Parents were very satisfied with the type and frequency of services as well as the location of service delivery whether it was the home, classroom, or an alternative space. Nonetheless a few parents commented on delays in the initiation of services and wait lists for preschool programs. Parents also discussed their difficulty in choosing a therapist for their child from a list of recommended providers.

Child Progress

One area of **universal agreement and high** satisfaction was child progress. Parents specifically commented on improvements in language and behavior. A number of parents shared their experience that improvement in their child's behavior had a profound impact on family life. One focus group participant who was a former teacher was quite confident that preschool special education services helped children improve school readiness skills such as following directions, expressing oneself, gross motor and socialization skills, and self-confidence.

Areas of Dissatisfaction

CPSE Involvement

There were mixed reports about CPSE involvement; **in half** of the focus groups (**10/20**), **some** participants expressed moderate to strong dissatisfaction with preschool special education administration. Those parents who were dissatisfied were quite vocal and specific about their complaints. For example, CPSE communication was described as "adequate at best." Parents shared the desire to be more prepared for meetings and better informed about special education rules, regulations, and options for children. Asked about their experience during CPSE meetings, some of the personal remarks included feeling "overwhelmed," "intimidated," and "lost in the system."

Although New York City parents were pleased overall, a few parents commented that special education administrators did not listen to their concerns which typically involved requests for additional evaluations or change of placement.

The use of advocates was a recurring theme mentioned during nine focus groups. Some parents felt that they were given “the run around” and they had to be persistent and fight for services. Two parents mentioned that they had to initiate the request for services and/or pay out of pocket until services were approved. In one district where parents described an adversarial relationship with the special education administrator, some of the parents felt powerless without an advocate.

Several parents mentioned the value of an advocate to manage the eligibility and placement process, including one parent who was very pleased with the system but still felt that a third party advocate should be available to help parents understand policies and procedures. Three parents who were generally satisfied added that they were able to advocate for their child because of their background (special education teacher, social worker, grandparent who worked in district), and each wondered what happens to parents who lack such background.

Spanish speaking parents from one district were adamant about the value of an advocate to help negotiate the system. They expressed frustration with the lack of bilingual staff, translators, and special education documents in Spanish. They also recommended more effective work in the Hispanic community as parents are not aware of services and often do not seek help on their own.

Transition services

Seventy-nine percent of the focus group participants had children who transitioned to **school age special education programs and services, often in a less restrictive environment.** Almost all of these parents wanted their child to continue to receive special education services, **although some parents raised concerns about the reduction in related services. One parent commented that children were “expected to do more with less.”**

Parents who were adequately prepared felt more positive about the transition process; this was particularly true when children stayed in the same building. In one district where parents were very satisfied with the entire preschool special education experience, they remarked that the system provided a social worker who acted as a school/county liaison, similar to the role of the Early Intervention Service Coordinator, to help parents understand regulations and program options and obtain suitable services.

Parents from **ten** districts shared their dissatisfaction with the transition process. The most typical complaints were that they did not have sufficient information or feel adequately prepared. Other parents were more concerned about their child's gains and ability to handle a kindergarten curriculum, or the fear of labeling in school age programs. Yet another area of frustration was the lack of opportunity and need to initiate requests to visit programs options. Only **two children** went from an integrated setting to a more restrictive setting; **one parent requested the placement and the other parent was concerned** about the lack of typical peer role models. **In New York City two parents commented that the delay in paperwork and lack of communication led to unsatisfactory placements and frustration over the lack of alternative classes.**

A general theme, identified through constant comparative analysis of the data, was the view that transition points are stressful for families; this includes the transition from the Early Intervention Program, (EIP) to preschool (CPSE) to school age (CSE) special education. Parents reacted to learning new rules and getting acquainted with different systems. Again parents who "did their homework" and were well informed were more satisfied with the transition process.

Summary: Parents Focus Groups

Overall, parents are satisfied with preschool special education programs, services and staff. They are particularly pleased with their child's progress in language skills, behavior, and preparation for kindergarten

programs. In addition to the praise and support for preschool special education, there were recurring themes across some districts **regarding areas of dissatisfaction. Parents described conflict and frustration with CPSE procedures and meetings. Some parents felt intimidated; others used advocates to negotiate the system or worked hard to advocate for their own child's best interests. The lack of preparation for transition services was another area of dissatisfaction. In general parents expressed concerns about the demands of kindergarten programs and their desire to continue services to maintain their child's progress in academic and social skills.**

It must be noted that parents volunteered to attend the district focus groups, thus it is not a representative sample of parents with children in preschool special education. Even within districts parents shared significantly different experiences and feelings of satisfaction. Some parents came to share their anger at special education administrators; others came to praise the staff and speak positively about the value of early identification.

Nonetheless, if the focus is on outcome, it appears that from the parents' perspective preschool special education programs and services in New York State are effective. Parents are satisfied that their children are benefiting from quality programs and services and caring professional staff. The findings are less positive when we examine the parents' process as they interact with the special education system to obtain appropriate **placements and services** for their child.



Conclusion: Parent Satisfaction Study

In general, the qualitative comments and focus group discussions corroborate the findings from the parent satisfaction survey. The evidence demonstrates that parents are very pleased with preschool special education programs, services and staff in New York State. Parents are particularly impressed with the quality and responsiveness of staff and the progress their child has made towards his or her IEP goals and objectives. Although there were some complaints about delays and administrative procedures, special education programs and services were rated positively.

The CPSE process and transition services were two areas with slightly lower parent ratings; they were also identified as areas of dissatisfaction in one-third of the survey comments and 10 out of 20 focus group discussions. It is important to note that the qualitative findings may not be representative of the parent sample since less than half of the parents entered comments, and focus group participation was limited. Even so, there was enough consistency in the personal stories and written comments shared by parents to suggest themes that warrant consideration.

Some parents were intimidated and overwhelmed by the CPSE bureaucracy, others mentioned the value of an advocate to negotiate the system and get appropriate services. There were also comments that the district did not provide adequate preparation for the transition to school age programs. Although the *process* presents some challenges for parents, by far the strongest finding was that children do benefit from preschool special education programs and services and parents are thankful for the competent and caring professional staff.



Appendices

APPENDIX A Preschool Special Education Parent Surveys: Sample Districts

District Type	# of Surveys Mailed	# Returned	% Returned
New York City (High N/RC)	665	103	15%
Large Cities (High N/RC)	135	14	10%
High N/RC Smaller Urban or Suburban	155	34	22%
High N/RC Rural	69	15	22%
Average N/RC	302	86	28%
Low N/RC	110	40	36%
Missing District Label		1	

* 15 additional surveys - returned by Post Office - not entered in database and 12 additional surveys had no services or different service year - not entered in database

Appendix B Description of Parent Sample

Respondents Relationship to the Child N=271

Relationship	N	Percent
Parent	259	96%
Legal Guardian	8	3%
Other	4	2%

Gender of Respondents N=265

Gender	N	Percent
Female	239	90%
Male	26	10%

Number of Children Living at Home N=271

Number of Children	N	Percent
0	1	1%
1	50	19%
2	115	42%
3	63	23%
4	24	9%
5	14	5%
6	3	1%
10	1	1%

Number of Children Living at Home

Mean	2.4
Median	2

Highest Grade Completed by Respondents N=269

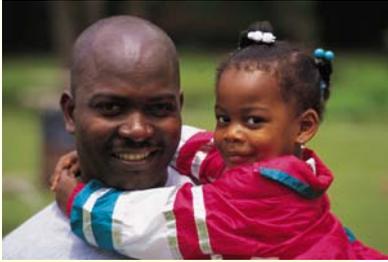
Education	N	Percent
College Graduate	22	42%
Some college	68	25%
High school or GED	67	25%
Less than high school	22	8%

Appendix C

Parent Focus Group Summary

District	Number of Participants
New York City (High N/RC)	13
Large City (High N/RC)	9
High N/RC Smaller Urban or Suburban	4
High N/RC Rural	3
Average N/RC	19
Low N/RC	22
Total	70

H:/msword/118.3/Final Report/1-TOC
H:/msword/118.3/Final Report/2-Report Highlights
H:/msword/118.3/Final Report/3-Report
H:/msword(powerpoint)/118.3/Final Report/Cover
H:/msword(powerpoint)/118.3/Final Report/Preschool Charts



Report Highlights

The Parent Satisfaction Study is one component of the Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education in New York State. Phase one of this study examines parent satisfaction with preschool special education programs and services. Phase two will distinguish differences in satisfaction between parents who have children who received preschool special education programs and services and parents of children who did not receive these services. It will be conducted in 2005.

Parent satisfaction was measured through a survey instrument and parent focus groups. The parent satisfaction survey included closed and open-ended questions regarding placement, services, staff, CPSE relations, child progress, and transition services. The sample included parents of 25% of the total sample of preschool special education children enrolled in the longitudinal study in 2001-2002. A total of 1,418 surveys were mailed; there were 293 responses for a return rate of 20%.

Parent focus groups were conducted in 20 districts. This includes 17 districts throughout New York State and 3 districts selected from different boroughs in New York City. Seventy-four percent of the sample districts participated in this activity. In total, comments from 70 parents were audio taped and analyzed for recurring themes.

Major Findings

The findings are a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative responses to the parent satisfaction survey and parent focus groups. The Parent Satisfaction Study provides convincing evidence that parents are very satisfied with preschool special education programs, services and staff in New York State. They are very pleased with the progress their child has made and the positive impact on school readiness and family life. The findings are less positive when we examine the parents' experience with the special education "system." This is particularly evident in open-ended comments and focus groups where, in just over half the sessions, parents expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with CPSE administrators, procedures, and general preparation for the transition to school age programs. Specific findings and areas of concern are highlighted below.

 **Placement** - Parents were very satisfied with child placement and the location of service delivery whether it was home, an early childhood setting, an integrated classroom, or a class with disabled students only. According to parent reports, less than one-third of the children were placed in segregated settings. Three out of four children had sufficient opportunity to interact with typically developing peers; nonetheless, parents shared comments about the need for more time for children to socialize with peer role models who had no disabilities.

 **Preschool Special Education** - Over 90% of the parents were satisfied with the type, quality and frequency of services. **When parents were asked to grade special education classes and services, 4 out of 5 respondents gave SEIT and special class an A grade.** The average grade for related services was B+. There was dissatisfaction, however, with delays in the initiation of services after they were approved. Ten percent of parents paid out of pocket for therapy while waiting for CPSE action.

 **Special Education Staff** - Parents were very satisfied with their interactions with teachers and related service providers; at least 97% agreed that staff was friendly, respectful, listened to parent concerns, and

they worked well with their child. In addition to high ratings, the parents' personal remarks were very complimentary as they expressed "thanks" for the wonderful work the staff did with their children.

Committee on Preschool Special Education –

Satisfaction ratings were slightly lower in the area of CPSE involvement. Although approximately 90% of the parents were satisfied with CPSE recommendations and felt that they were comfortable and active participants in CPSE meetings, the open-end comments and focus group remarks suggested a different experience. In some districts, parents were very dissatisfied with CPSE **collaboration**; they felt intimidated, overwhelmed, and not adequately informed. As a result, **in ten out of twenty focus groups**, parents expressed the need to be persistent and advocate for their child or work with an advocate who would help them negotiate the system to get appropriate services. Although parents had diverse experiences, there were some recurring complaints from parents in eleven districts that the special education bureaucracy seemed stressful and the CPSE was not helpful or responsive to parents.

 **Child Progress** – Child progress was an area of high satisfaction. The parents rated their child as having made a great deal of progress (64%) or some progress (29%); similarly parents felt their child's needs were met a great deal (71%) or a moderate amount (23%). In spite of real improvements in speech and behavior, parents were still concerned about preparation for a kindergarten curriculum.

 **Experience as a Parent** - Parents agreed that their experience was positive (97%) and they were better prepared to help their child (97%). They also felt special education programs and services made a great difference in their family's life (67%) and their child's life (78%). Their comments were positive when the topic focused on child gains; however, when parents commented on their personal experience working with special education administration, their comments were less positive.

 **Transition Services** - Transition services were rated favorably by 86% of the parents; at least one out of five parents did not feel prepared. This complaint

was much more frequent in focus group sessions. Of those children who transitioned to kindergarten programs, 79% continued to receive special education services; likewise 76% of the parents wanted their child to continue to receive services. Almost all the focus group participants with school age children were very pleased that their child transitioned to regular kindergarten programs with related services.

Conclusion

If child progress is the measure of success, the Parent Satisfaction Study provides convincing evidence that parents are satisfied with preschool special education programs and services in New York State. Parents are particularly impressed with the quality and responsiveness of staff and their ability to help each child learn and develop school readiness skills. In spite of delays and administrative constraints, programs and services are rated positively.

When the parents' experience is analyzed through open-ended comments and focus group remarks, two areas of dissatisfaction are identified: CPSE bureaucracy and lack of responsiveness to parents. District leadership and administrative procedures are some of the factors that lead to parental criticism and the belief that advocates are needed in order to get appropriate services for a child.

Parents wish to be better informed and prepared for CPSE meetings. They want adequate time to plan for the transition to kindergarten since the shift to school age special education (CSE) is viewed as a stressful transition point for families.

Overall, the results of the parent satisfaction survey and parent focus groups are very encouraging. Children and families benefit from preschool special education programs and services; **however the process presents some challenges. The findings suggest that the task ahead is to promote parent-school collaboration and more efficient administrative practices.**

Dear [CPSE Chairperson – MGT contact person in each district]

One of the activities of the Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education Programs that is being conducted for the New York State Education Department is parent focus groups. The purpose of these groups is to begin to examine parents' views concerning their children's experience in preschool special education and beyond. A parent satisfaction survey was recently mailed to all parents with a child enrolled in the study. We have learned from our prior studies of special education in New York State that parent focus groups provide valuable insights that are not possible to obtain through questionnaires. Furthermore, we have found that parents enjoy this opportunity to discuss their experience and their child's progress.

In each district, one parent focus group will be scheduled during the two-day site visit that is currently being arranged with MGT research staff. Since you know your constituents and have experience arranging parent meetings, we suggest that you work with the MGT research assistant to schedule the meeting at the best time for maximum parent participation, and you decide the best way to let parents know about the meeting. Parents should be told the purpose of the meeting and be assured that their comments are strictly confidential and will not be shared with program or CPSE staff. You may refer to the enclosed flyer as an example of a parent announcement.

The MGT research assistant will be contacting you to collaborate on this activity.

Instructions for planning and conducting parent focus groups

Planning

1. Collaborate with district personnel to invite parents to participate in the focus group. Ask district administrators if they think it is necessary to have an interpreter for parents who speak another language.
2. Parent Sample
 - Parents of 4-year-olds who received preschool special education services last year.
 - Parents of 5-year-olds who received preschool education services last year. It is important to get parents of children attending kindergarten to participate in order to find out about transition services and preparation for kindergarten.
 - We are interested in parent satisfaction that is representative of the study sample, but other parents should not be excluded if they see the announcement and want to attend (parents with a 3-year-old child currently receiving services).
3. The parent focus group should be scheduled at a time that maximizes attendance, for example after work hours. The district should decide the best time to schedule the meeting.
4. The meeting should be scheduled for 1 1/2 hours. District personnel may not attend.
5. Light refreshments should be available.

The Meeting

1. Have parents sign in (use sign in sheet).
2. Use a tape recorder to audiotape the meeting. Make sure volume is set so that it is easy to transcribe.
3. Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the meeting.

The purpose of the parent focus group is to learn about your child's experience in preschool special education programs and services. It is one of the activities of the New York State Preschool Special Education Study that is being conducted for

the State Education Department. Over the course of 7 years we will be exploring the experience of children and their families from 27 districts across the state. I work for an independent contractor that is conducting the study. Everything you say is confidential; no names will be used and your child will not be identified. Please feel free to share your opinions openly so that we can learn from you. The tape recorder is being used so that I can listen to it after the meeting and I do not have to take notes to remember everything that you say.

4. Parent introductions - I would like to start out by getting some information about your child's age and where he or she received services last year. Refer to worksheet #1 – child data.
5. Refer to worksheet #2 – questions.

WORKSHEET #2 – QUESTIONS FOR PARENT FOCUS GROUP

1. Were you satisfied with your child's placement - the setting where he or she received services? Probe to determine if the parent prefers an integrated or a segregated setting.
2. Overall, how satisfied were you with your child's preschool education program and services last year? Probe the following areas:
 - Relationship with staff – general education, special education, related services
 - Experience at CPSE meetings – the evaluation process, IEP development, changes in program
 - Type and number of services (speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, other)
3. How was the experience for you as a parent? Probe the following areas:
 - a. Amount of contact with staff and comfort in asking questions
 - b. Respect for family's background, priorities, and goals for child
 - c. Adequate communication regarding progress and change.
 - d. Availability of parent meetings or information sessions.
 - e. Participation in IEP recommendation for parent counseling, training or education.
4. Did your child make progress in preschool special education last year? Probe for specific changes in learning (letter and number recognition), skills (gross and fine motor), social and general behavior, attitude towards school.
5. This question is for parents who have a child in kindergarten. Tell me about the transition process to school age special education programs and services. Probe the following areas:
 - a. Sufficient information about program options
 - b. Sufficient preparation and satisfaction with CSE meeting
 - c. Did you want your child to continue to receive special education programs and services?
 - d. Was your child prepared for kindergarten? Give specific examples.
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience last year as a parent of a child who received preschool special education services? What were you most satisfied with? What were you least satisfied with? Are there any changes you would recommend?
7. Thank you very much for participating. If you would like to share some additional comments you can complete the comment sheet.

WORKSHEET #1 – CHILD DATA

How many of you have a child who...

Child who was 3-years old last year and who received preschool special education programs and services [child currently 4-years-old] _____

Child who was 4-years-old last year and who received preschool special education programs and services [child currently 5-years-old] _____

Number of children currently in kindergarten _____

Number of children in kindergarten who receive school-age special education programs and services _____

Child who is currently 3-years-old who did not receive preschool special education programs and services last year. _____

Number of 3-year-olds who received early intervention services last year [Birth to Three] _____

Where did you child receive services? _____ home
_____ daycare/nursery/Head Start/pre-K [integrated setting]
_____ special education program [segregated setting]

Number of children who were in a preschool special education program with disabled children only _____

Number of children who were in a preschool special education program with disabled and typically developing peers. _____

11. Overall, how satisfied were you with your relationships with special education staff?

(1) Very satisfied

(3) Dissatisfied

(2) Satisfied

(4) Very dissatisfied

The following questions are about your child's Preschool Special Education Program.

Skip this section if your child did not attend a half-day or full-day special education program last year.

12. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Special Class Program	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Not Sure (5)
a. There was ongoing formal or casual contact with my child's teacher					
b. There were many kinds of learning activities (e.g., story time, group projects, art, music, free play)					
c. The physical environment was safe, clean and attractive					
d. My child received individualized attention					
e. My child played with children without disabilities					
f. I participated in parent-teacher conferences					
g. I had the opportunity to visit or volunteer in my child's program					
h. I had the opportunity to participate in family workshops and group meetings					
i. I had the opportunity to participate in program decision-making and advisory committees					

13. Overall, how satisfied were you with your child’s special education program?

- (1) Very satisfied (3) Dissatisfied
 (2) Satisfied (4) Very dissatisfied

14. Overall how satisfied were you with opportunities for parent involvement?

- (1) Very satisfied (3) Dissatisfied
 (2) Satisfied (4) Very dissatisfied

The following questions are about your child’s special education services e.g., speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and special instruction.

15. How satisfied were you with the type of services your child received last year?

Check NA (not applicable) if your child did not receive the service.

Service	NA (0)	Very Satisfied (1)	Satisfied (2)	Dissatisfied (3)	Very Dissatisfied (4)
a. Speech/Language					
b. Occupational Therapy					
c. Physical Therapy					
d. Counseling					
e. Special Instruction					
f. Parent Counseling, Training or Education					
g. Other:					

16. Did your child receive more therapy in addition to the services provided by the school district?

- (1) Yes (2) No

17. How satisfied were you with each of the following?

Special Education Services	Very Satisfied (1)	Satisfied (2)	Dissatisfied (3)	Very Dissatisfied (4)	Not Sure (5)
a. The frequency of communication with therapist or teacher					
b. The ability to share concerns and ask questions					
c. The location where your child received services (e.g., classroom, special therapy room, home)					
d. The way your child received services (e.g., individual or group sessions)					
e. The frequency of services (once, twice, three times a week)					

18. Overall how satisfied were you with your child’s preschool special education services?

- (1) Very satisfied (3) Dissatisfied
 (2) Satisfied (4) Very dissatisfied

The following questions are about your experience as a parent of a child in preschool special education.

23. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

My Experience	Agree (1)	Strongly Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)
a. I have become more effective at getting the services my child needs				
b. I have a better understanding of how to help my child learn and develop				
c. I improved my parenting skills to help my child				
d. I have a better understanding of my child's condition				
e. I developed more confidence as a parent/guardian				

24. Overall, how satisfied have you been with your experience as a parent of a child who received preschool special education programs and services?

- (1) Very satisfied (3) Dissatisfied
 (2) Satisfied (4) Very dissatisfied

25. Have preschool special education programs & services made a difference in your child's life?

- (1) A great difference (3) A little difference
 (2) Some difference (4) No difference

26. Have preschool special education programs and services made a difference in your family's life?

- (1) A great difference (3) A little difference
 (2) Some difference (4) No difference

27. **OVERALL**, how satisfied have you been with your child's special education program and services?

- (1) Very satisfied (3) Dissatisfied
 (2) Satisfied (4) Very dissatisfied

The following questions are about your child's transition to kindergarten.

*Fill out this section **ONLY** if your child has transitioned to kindergarten (Child must be 5 years old).*

28. Did your child transition to a regular education program? (1) Yes (2) No

28a. *If yes*, was your child adequately prepared for kindergarten? (1) Yes (2) No

29. Did your child transition to school-age special education programs and services?

- (1) Yes (2) No

30. *If you answered yes*, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Transition to School-Age Special Education Programs	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)		Not Sure (5)
a. There was enough preparation for my child's transition to school-age programs					
b. I received adequate information about different placement options					
c. My preferences were considered and Respected					
d. I agreed with my child's placement and service recommendations					
e. The IEP goals and objectives addressed my child's needs					
f. There was a smooth transition with very little interruption in services					
g. My child was adequately prepared for kindergarten					

31. Did you want your child to continue in special education? (1) Yes (2) No
Please explain:

32. **What classification did your child receive from the Committee on Special Education (CSE)?**

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> autistic | <input type="checkbox"/> hard of hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> orthopedically impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> deaf | <input type="checkbox"/> learning disabled | <input type="checkbox"/> other health impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> deaf-blindness | <input type="checkbox"/> mentally retarded | <input type="checkbox"/> speech impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> emotionally disturbed | <input type="checkbox"/> multiply disabled | <input type="checkbox"/> traumatic brain injury |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> visually impaired |

33. Overall, how satisfied were you with the transition process from preschool to school-age special education?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> (1) Very satisfied | <input type="checkbox"/> (3) Dissatisfied |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (2) Satisfied | <input type="checkbox"/> (4) Very dissatisfied |

34. Please feel free to make any additional comments about preschool special education programs and services:

Background Information

34. If you are not the biological parent, please check your relationship to the child

- (1) Foster parent (3) Legal guardian
 (2) Adoptive parent (4) Other (*please specify*)_____

35. Race

- (1) White (not of Hispanic origin) (3) Hispanic
 (2) Black (not of Hispanic origin) (4) Asian
 (5) Native American

36. Family Size

36a. Number of adults living at home_____ 36b. Number of children living at home_____

37. Highest Grade Completed

- (1) Less than high school (3) Some college
 (2) High school or GED (4) College graduate

38. Dominant or preferred language of parent/guardian

- (1) English (3) Chinese
 (2) Spanish (4) French
 (5) Other (*please specify*)_____

39. Marital Status

- (1) Married (3) Single never married
 (2) Married but separated (4) Divorced or widowed

40. Employment Status

- (1) Full time (2) Part-time (3) Not employed

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!