

NSW Legislative Council

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

Response to Question on Notice¹

Professor Bob Perry

Question

Do you think there is a role for legislation in New South Wales to mandate individual transition plans for students with special needs?

Response

Transitions are a period of opportunity and vulnerability for students and families, particularly those with additional or complex needs². Individual transition planning is a collaborative process that prepares and supports individual students and their families to engage positively during educational transitions. In addition to bringing together the supports needed for a smooth transition, effective transition planning is empowering for students and families, affording them the opportunity to identify their aspirations and plans for the future³.

Whilst transition planning is commonly undertaken within the school setting, effective transition planning also recognises the role of health and community supports, with an interagency approach. There are a vast number of health, community and education programs targeting students with additional or complex needs and their families. The interaction of these programs is complex, fragmented, episodic and inconsistent. Transition planning in this context presents unique challenges to educators, and necessitates formal individual transition planning⁴.

Individual transition plans are only useful if they are accompanied by respectful relationships between all parties. Mandating educators to write formal individual transition plans may have unintended consequences⁵. For example, in Victoria, *Transition Learning and Development Statements*⁶ are required to be written to support all children starting school from preschool settings. However, little is known about the use made of the information in these plans and whether they indeed support children in the way they were intended. (Preliminary results from an ongoing PhD study⁷ suggest that these transition plans do not always work as intended.) Mandating transition plans assumes that the people responsible for implementing the plans share

¹ Many thanks to Tanya Sofra and Kathryn Hopps, Charles Sturt University, for their assistance in developing this response.

² Dockett, S. Perry, B. Kearney, E. Hampshire, A. Mason, J. Schmied, V. (2011). *Facilitating children's transition to school from families with complex support needs*. Albury: Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University.

³ Department of Education, Tasmania. (2010). *What is transition and transition planning?* Retrieved 23 September 2011 from www.education.tas.gov.au.

⁴ Rous, B., Hallam, R., Harbin, G., McKormick, K., and Jung, L.A. (2007) The transition process for young children with disabilities: A conceptual framework. *Infants & Young Children*. 20(2), 135-148.

⁵ Ward, L., Mallett, R., Heslop, P., & Simons, K. (2003). Transition planning: How well does it work for young people with disabilities and their families? *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(3), 132-137.

⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2009). *Transition: A positive start to school resource kit*. Melbourne: Author.

⁷ Hopps, K. *Inter-setting communication and the transition to school*. Charles Sturt University

understandings and value the expertise provided by the people who devise them. An over-emphasis on writing transition plans may detract from the need to build respectful relationships between students, educators, families and other agencies. These relationships are critical to the success of transition plans and they cannot be legislated. Better than legislation of transition plans, at all transition levels, would be the continuing development of the positive relationships that will make them work. The plans can then become the natural results of the relationships rather than the forced results of legislation.