

# Preschool and K-12 Special Education Similarities and Differences

There are many ways an administrator can support both their preschool and K-12 special education programs. One way is to bring together preschool and K-12 systems while understanding and honoring the similarities and differences. This document is a starting place to examine the similarities and differences in preschool and K-12 special education in the following topics:

- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE);
- Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS);
- Curriculum;
- Assessment; and
- Family Engagement

## Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

“The US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHED) have a strong commitment to ensuring that preschool children with disabilities are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that children are educated in an Early Childhood Setting and removed to other settings only when the nature and severity of the child’s disability is such that, even with supplemental aids and services, their needs cannot be met in the Early Childhood Setting.”

- [Supporting Children with Disabilities: A Guide to Understanding Early Childhood Special Education Systems](#) developed by Race2K.

Providing children access to the regular education curriculum, inclusive environments, or learning alongside their typically developing peers are important results of this work.

### Connection to K-12 - Similarities and Differences:

Similarities	Differences
Both preschool special education and K-12 special education programs are required to provide services in the Least Restrictive Environment that meets the child’s needs, as required by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Preschool Special Education reports the early childhood settings where children are receiving special education in <a href="#">Indicator 6: Educational environments</a> . For ages 6 through 21, districts and states report these data through Indicator 5.	For children in preschool, some districts do not operate regular early childhood programs so they partner with community childcare/preschool programs and Head Start or where the IEP Team determines is the LRE to support preschool children with disabilities.

# Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)

Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a framework for providing universal, targeted, and intensive social and emotional services. MTSS uses a preventative and proactive approach to ensure all children, including children with disabilities, are given the supports they need.

## Connection to K-12 - Similarities and Differences:

Similarities	Differences
<p>Preschool Special Education and K-12 both use a multi-tiered system of support or MTSS to support all children including those with disabilities.</p> <p>The tiers for each are the same:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tier One - Universal Supports for all children/ students</li> <li>• Tier Two: Targeted Supports for some children/ students</li> <li>• Tier Three: Intensive, Individualized Supports for a few children/students</li> </ul> <p>The NHED Office of Student Wellness practices with MTSS-B and has well-developed resources to support a MTSS for behavior and wellness. See below for more information.</p>	<p>In K-12 the MTSS framework is a tool used for “overall school district improvement that is sustainable.” (<b>WestEd</b>)</p> <p>In Preschool Special Education the MTSS framework is often referred to as <b>Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)</b> or <b>The Pyramid Model</b>.</p> <p>Both focus on supporting social social-emotional competency of all children, including those with disabilities.</p>



# Curriculum

Curriculum is an instructional guide that promotes the access and participation of all children in learning and development. In preschool, the curriculum includes learning objectives, environmental considerations, as well as instructional approaches and methods. If a child is eligible for special education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that schools use programs, curricula, and practices based on “scientifically-based research” “to the extent practicable.”

## Connection to K-12 - Similarities and Differences:

Similarities	Differences
<p>K-12 schools and preschool special education focus on education in a wide range of subjects/domains to help prepare children and students for adulthood.</p> <p>Preschool, pre-K, and Kindergarten focus on the domains of early childhood development; i.e. social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. Learning is structured through playtime.</p> <p>Both preschool and K-12 curricula are sequential and scaffold learning based on specific objectives or standards.</p>	<p><b>Preschool</b></p> <p>Preschool standards are a resource about children’s development from birth to five years old that are research-based and aligned to Kindergarten readiness standards. These standards can be used to inform professionals and families in understanding the developmental progression and stages of growth based on a set of domains. For more information, review the <a href="#">NH Early Learning Standards</a>.</p> <p><b>K-12</b></p> <p>K-12 standards become increasingly focused on cognitive development, specifically knowledge acquisition, and academic skills.</p>



# Assessment

Assessment is the process or processes of gathering, analyzing, and monitoring data and information about a child’s learning or skill development. Strong assessment practices inform practitioners how a child is progressing through the curriculum and if there are any teaching practices that can better support the child.

## Connection to K-12 - Similarities and Differences:

Similarities	Differences
Both preschool special education and K-12 education, general education, and special education, have assessment requirements and use assessment information to inform instruction.	Assessment in preschool special education is about so much more than monitoring progress. Young children learn in different ways and at different rates than older children and our assessment approaches need to meet these differences. Assessments are conducted at every step of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process: Child Find, determining eligibility for services, designing the IEP goals, monitoring progress toward goals as well as measuring child outcomes. According to the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices (RPs) “assessment in the process of gathering information to make decisions.” The DEC RPs have eleven (11) best practices in the Assessment section to guide administrators and practitioners.

The New Hampshire Department of Education monitors districts’ performance on the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) child outcomes for preschool special education (**Indicator 7**) using the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System Interactive (AEPSi) or My Teaching Strategies assessment tools. To learn about the Preschool Outcomes Measurement System (POMS) visit the [Race2K website](#). Evaluation is to determine whether the child is eligible for special education and related services. Assessment is a part of monitoring the child’s progress and whether they are meeting their goals.



# Family Engagement

Family engagement is a practice that establishes a partnership and shared responsibility with families to promote their child’s development. Education staff, service providers, families, and community members develop a collaborative relationship that is responsive to and recognizes families’ unique needs and differences.

## Connection to K-12 - Similarities and Differences:

Similarities	Differences
Family engagement is a key component in both preschool special education and K-12 general education, and special education. The family is the child’s first and most important teacher. They are typically the individuals the child spends the most time with and learns from every day. Partnering with families provides opportunities to improve the learning, development, and health of every learner.	<p>A big difference is that many times families with children with disabilities come into Preschool Special Education with limited knowledge of school. They may have been in the Part C, or Family Centered Early Supports and Services (FCESS) program, or another home visiting program.</p> <p>The collaborative partnership with families begins with the transition from FCESS into preschool special education or with the initial referral to special education.</p>

The New Hampshire Department of Education monitors districts’ performance on the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) parent involvement (**Indicator 8**) using a survey distributed to all families of children with disabilities.

Strong family engagement is central to promoting the success of children. According to **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) policy statement on family engagement**, “When families and the programs where children learn work together and support each other in their respective roles, children have a positive attitude toward school, stay in school longer, have better attendance, and experience more school success.”

Special education can be challenging for families with children with and without disabilities to understand. Families play a number of supporting roles for their child with disabilities, such as advocates, and a resource with valuable insight into their child’s specific needs. When families and educators work together as partners it enhances the likelihood that children/students with disabilities will have a positive and successful learning experience.

