

# Preschool Development Grant-Renewal

## Navigating the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

### INTRODUCTION

The Preschool Development Grant – Renewal (PDG-R) supports states in their efforts to analyze and streamline the early learning and care (ELC) mixed delivery system resulting in improved quality of care. Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) leads California’s efforts to engage families in feedback sessions that help inform policymakers on ways to improve the ELC system.

CCRC hosted a feedback session in November 2021 with five parent-caregivers of children with special needs to discuss their experience with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is a federal law that ensures children with special needs have access to free, appropriate public education and related services.



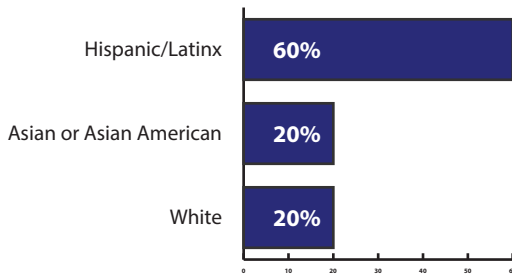
*“The process is a full-time job- a nightmare- especially if you’re doing this by yourself with limited or no support.”*  
– Caregiver, Alameda County

*“I felt supported until the regional center handed off services to the school district, when the process became more confusing and impersonal.”*  
– Caregiver, Sonoma County



### CAREGIVER DIVERSITY

**Figure 1. RACE**



**Figure 2. GEOGRAPHY**



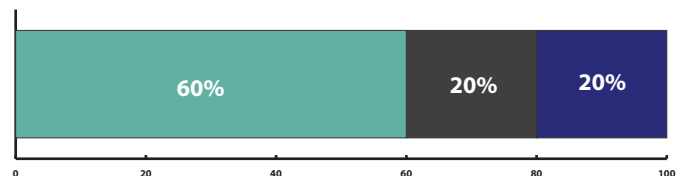
### FAMILIES FEEL ISOLATED AND FRUSTRATED

According to IDEA, parent-caregivers transitioning from an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), for children 0-3, to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), for children 3-5, are supposed to receive a warm handoff to their school district. Once children are assessed or reassessed after turning three and are determined to be eligible for special needs services, families meet with their school district to develop an IEP for their child. These processes are anything but efficient, effective, and clear- leaving families feeling isolated, confused, and frustrated. Session feedback includes:

- Many families only have a surface level knowledge of IDEA. They described a lack of awareness of their rights under IDEA, including their right to have an advocate or other individual present in meetings to take notes and address questions
- Many families have to learn about the IFSP and IEP processes and their rights on their own through internet searches or previous experience
- The lack of warm hand-off in the IFSP to the IEP transition results in families having to push to request screenings and services
- IDEA-related language (written and spoken) is technical and confusing, and school districts often do not facilitate understanding
- Paperwork is technical and overwhelming
- Parent-caregivers feel isolated and frustrated, adding to their stress
- These barriers may delay or prevent early identification and intervention (EII) services for children, setting the stage for more intensive and expensive interventions in the future

<sup>1</sup> Nine were scheduled, but due to a conflict with another PDG-R event, five were able to attend.

**A majority of parent-caregivers did not feel supported** or have the resources they needed when trying to access services through IDEA

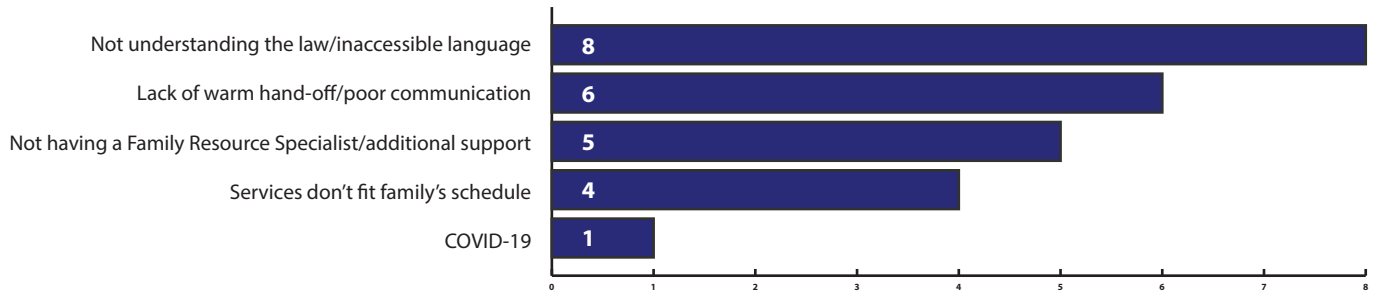


*"My granddaughter's Infant Development Specialist attended the IEP transition meeting, and that was wonderful because otherwise I would have felt lost."*

- Caregiver, Alameda County



**The lack of support in understanding IDEA language (including parental rights) and navigating the complex system alone were the most frequently cited barriers**



**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FAMILIES**

**1. Ensure Equitable Access to Services for All Families:**

- a. Reduce technical language and ensure clarity of rights in written and spoken language
- b. Translate accessible information into multiple languages
- c. Ensure that families understand their basic rights through IDEA, including the right to have an advocate present in IFSP and IEP meetings
- d. Develop an easily accessible repository of information and resources in plain and multiple languages (paper and electronic)
- e. Train staff along the EII pathway

**2. Ensure Equitable Systems and Processes:**

- a. Establish and/or strengthen the communication among community-based organizations, regional centers, pediatricians, and school districts to ensure continuity of care
- b. Establish a multi-disciplinary team to help families seamlessly move through the IFSP, assessment, and IEP processes to alleviate the burden on families
- c. Expand investments in programs that improve the EII system such as Help Me Grow

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