

Executive Summary

The Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is examining the characteristics of children receiving preschool special education, the services they receive, their transitions across educational levels, and their performance over time on assessments of academic and adaptive skills. PEELS includes a nationally representative sample of 3,104 children with disabilities who were 3 through 5 years of age when the study began in 2003-04. The children will be followed through 2009.

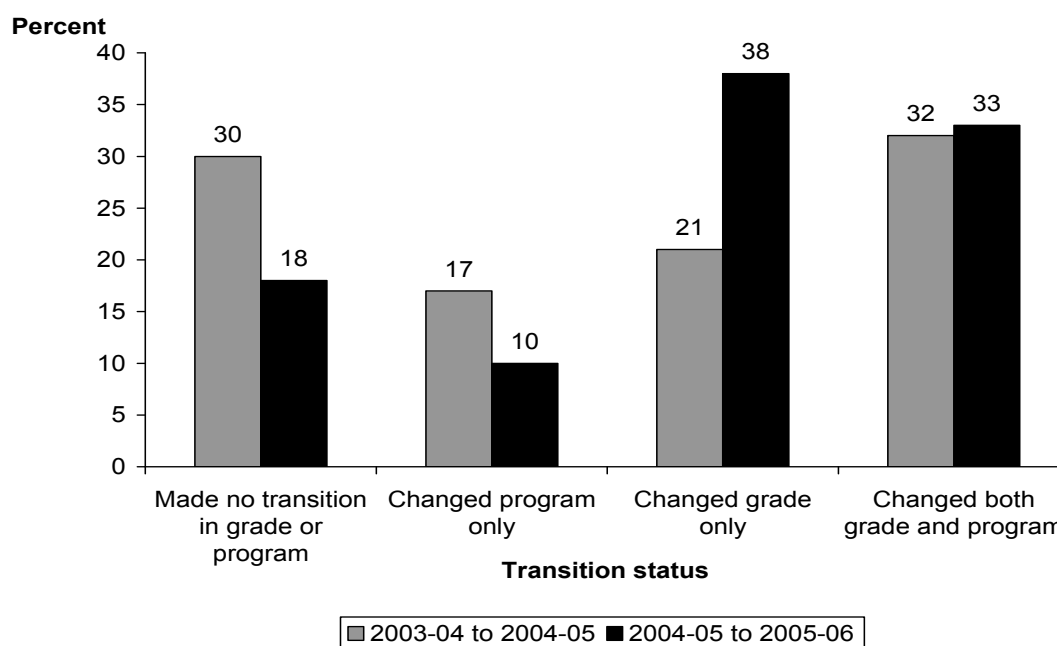
This report provides selected findings from the first three waves of data collection—school year 2003-04, school year 2004-05, and school year 2005-06. Any reported differences have been tested for statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level. These data were collected through several different instruments and activities, including a direct¹ one-on-one assessment of the children, a telephone interview with the children's parents/guardians, and mail questionnaires to the teacher or service provider of each child.

Transitions Among Young Children With Disabilities

- Between 2003-04 and 2004-05, 70 percent of children made a transition to a new program, grade, or school. Between 2004-05 and 2005-06, a total of 82 percent of children made a transition to a new program, grade, or school. Thirty-three percent underwent a change in both program (such as moving from one school to another) and grade (such as moving from preschool to kindergarten or kindergarten to first grade) between 2004-05 and 2005-06 (see figure A).
- Seven percent of children who made no grade transition, 12 percent of children who transitioned from preschool to kindergarten, and 31 percent of children who transitioned from kindergarten to first grade had not received tutoring in 2003-04, but did receive tutoring in 2004-05.
- Transitions are a time when changes in eligibility for services can occur. Twenty percent of children who transitioned from preschool to kindergarten were declassified (i.e., children who were receiving special education services but were no longer eligible) between 2003-04 and 2004-05, and 21 percent were declassified between 2004-05 and 2005-06. In contrast, of children who did not undergo a transition, 5 percent of children were declassified between 2003-04 and 2004-05; between 2004-05 and 2005-06, that figure was 9 percent (see table A).
- Data from children's transitions to kindergarten were combined across the 3 years of the PEELS study in order to explore this transition period. Based on teacher report, there were no statistically significant differences in the ease with which children transitioned to kindergarten by gender, race/ethnicity, household income, or primary disability. There were some statistically significant differences based on parent report of the ease of children's transition to kindergarten by demographics, however. For example, parents of Hispanic children were more likely than parents of Black or White children to report a *somewhat hard* or *very hard* transition to kindergarten (26%, 16%, and 13%, respectively).

¹ In Wave 3, the direct assessment included the following subtests: preLAS Simon Says, and Art Show; Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT); Woodcock-Johnson III: Letter-Word Identification, Applied Problems, and Quantitative Concepts; Leiter-R Attention Sustained; IGDI Picture Naming, Alliteration, Rhyming, and Segment Blending; and PIAT-R Reading Comprehension.

Figure A. Percentage of young children who received preschool special education services during the 2003-04 school year: Transition status by year



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Special Education Research, Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), “Elementary School Teacher Questionnaire,” “Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire,” “Early Childhood Teacher Questionnaire,” and “Parent interview,” previously unpublished tabulation (February 2007).

- The support and involvement of schools in the process of transitioning to kindergarten was significantly associated with how easy the transition was perceived to be by parents and teachers. For example, 87 percent of parents and 86 percent of teachers reported that the transition was *somewhat* or *very easy* when the school initiated support to facilitate the transition across the 3 years of the PEELS study.
- Teachers were asked to indicate which of 11 specified strategies were used to help facilitate the child’s transition to kindergarten. Across the 3 years of the PEELS study, strategies that were used by over 80 percent of teachers included receiving the child’s records from his or her previous program (87%), encouraging parents and guardians to meet the child’s new staff (86%), and receiving information about the child from his/her previous program (83%).
- For the combined kindergarten data, children who attended kindergarten in the same location as they had attended preschool had teachers who reported significantly higher use of multiple transition strategies than children who had attended some other program or had been at home: receiving children’s previous records (91% compared to 85%), the previous program providing information about the child (90% compared to 79%), someone from the current program meeting with staff of the sending program (68% compared to 50%), and someone from the program visiting the child’s previous setting (62% compared to 31%). Teachers were significantly more likely to use more strategies when children transitioned from a preschool program within the same school compared to those who came from a different

school (see table A). When children transitioned from a preschool program within the same school, on average, teachers reported using six strategies, whereas teachers reported using five strategies when children came from a different school.

Table A. Percentage of young children who received preschool special education services whose kindergarten teachers used various strategies to help them transition into kindergarten, by characteristics of the setting

	Total	Preschool class in same school	Some other program or at home
Received children's previous records	87.1	91.0	85.0*
Parents/guardians encouraged to meet new staff	86.3	88.2	82.8
Sending programs provided information about children	82.8	89.6	78.5*
Children's families visited the classroom or school	78.6	80.7	77.5
Provided parents with written information	75.0	76.8	73.7
Participated in children's IEP development	63.3	65.7	59.6
Met with staff of sending programs	58.8	67.5	49.7*
Called the children's parents	54.8	51.8	54.0
Developed child-specific preparatory strategies	53.7	53.4	52.3
Visited children's previous settings	43.1	62.4	31.0*
Visited children's home	10.3	16.6	7.6

*The result of the chi-square analysis was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Special Education Research, Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), "Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire," previously unpublished tabulation (February 2007).

- Previous research indicated a positive correlation between the number of strategies that teachers use and transition outcomes (Schulting, Malone, and Dodge 2005). Across the 3 years, kindergarten teachers used, on average, five strategies to facilitate the child's transition to kindergarten. However, the number of strategies used by kindergarten teachers varied significantly by district size, metropolitan status, and district wealth. Forty percent of teachers who worked in very large districts, compared to 58 percent of teachers who worked in medium districts, used six or more strategies to facilitate transitions. Thirty-two percent of teachers who worked in very low wealth districts used six or more strategies compared to 52 percent of teachers who worked in high wealth districts (see table B).
- Across the 3 years of the study, PEELS kindergarten teachers who were special educators used, on average, significantly more transition strategies than regular education classroom teachers. Special educators, on average, reported using six strategies, whereas regular education teachers, on average, reported using five strategies.

Table B. Percentage of young children who received preschool special education services and the number of supports used by their kindergarten teachers during the transition to kindergarten, by district factors

	0 or 1 support	2 or 3 supports	4 or 5 supports	6 or more supports
Total	7.3	21.6	22.7	48.4
District size*				
Very large	10.5	29.3	20.6	39.7
Large	10.5	24.2	20.1	45.2
Medium	4.3	18.4	19.7	57.6
Small	5.4	16.9	28.8	49.0
Metropolitan status*				
Urban	10.8	26.2	18.8	44.1
Suburban	6.7	20.7	22.5	50.2
Rural	3.9	17.1	28.4	50.6
District wealth*				
High	4.5	16.9	26.4	52.2
Medium	4.0	16.8	21.7	57.4
Low	8.6	25.4	19.8	46.3
Very low	14.8	30.4	22.4	32.4

*The result of the chi-square analysis was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Special Education Research, Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS), "Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire," previously unpublished tabulation (February 2007).

Social Behavior of Young Children With Disabilities

- The Social Skills and Problem Behaviors Scales from the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham and Elliott 1990) were included in the PEELS teacher questionnaires in school year 2005-06. The SSRS is a standardized measure with a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15 and has separate norms for males and females. The SSRS was standardized by age and gender. High scores on the Social Skills Scale indicate enhanced social skills, whereas high scores on the Problem Behaviors Scale indicate more problem behaviors. The mean scores on the Social Skills Scale were 94.1 for males and 93.1 for females. On the Problem Behaviors Scale, mean scores were 102.9 for males and 103.5 for females. The mean ratings did not differ significantly by gender.
- For all three years of data collection, parents were asked a number of questions about their children's social skills and behavior. Parents' reports changed significantly for some of their children's social skills and behaviors, generally in the direction of improved social skills and fewer behavior problems. The percentage of parents who reported that their children were not at all aggressive increased significantly, from 43 percent in 2003-04 to 52 percent in 2005-06, and the percentage of parents who reported that their children's behavior was age appropriate increased significantly, from 58 percent in 2003-04 to 61 percent in 2005-06.

- The correlation between parents' perceptions and teachers' ratings of their children's social skills was statistically significant for males ($r = 0.12$) but not for females ($r = 0.06$). The correlation between parents' perceptions and teachers' ratings on problem behaviors was statistically significant for both males ($r = -0.39$) and females ($r = -0.52$).
- Declassification status was significantly related to children's SSRS scores. The mean scores for males who had an IEP for all 3 years of the study ($M = 92.8$) were significantly lower on the Social Skills Scale than scores for males who were declassified between 2003-04 and 2004-05 ($M = 100.1$) and males who were declassified between 2004-05 and 2005-06 ($M = 99.6$). The mean scores for females who had an IEP all 3 years ($M = 91.0$) were significantly lower compared to females who were declassified between 2003-04 and 2004-05 ($M = 101.5$) and females declassified between 2004-05 and 2005-06 ($M = 99.9$). Males with IEPs for all three years of the study ($M = 103.8$) had higher scores on the Problem Behaviors Scale (i.e., more problem behaviors) than males who were declassified between 2003-04 and 2004-05 ($M = 99.3$) and males who were declassified between 2004-05 and 2005-06 ($M = 98.8$). There were no statistically detectable differences on the Problem Behaviors Scale by declassification status for females.