

University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service

# Students Who are Medically Fragile in New Mexico Public Schools: Developing Collaborative Partnerships to Manage Transitions and Ensure Access

Christy Barden, RN, BSN MFCMP Division Director Maggie Nechvatel, RN, BSN MFCMP Case Manager 505-272-2910



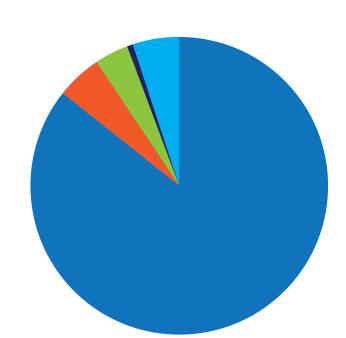
#### BACKGROUND

The Medically Fragile Case Management Program (MFCMP) has provided RN Case Management Services statewide to children since the program's inception in 1985. In New Mexico, children who have a high level of dependence on medical technology such as ventilators, tracheostomies, oxygen, feeding tubes, dialysis, intravenous medication and require total care for all their daily needs are identified as medically fragile. The MFCMP program provides community based inhome services utilizing a family centered approach. The family is included in every aspect of care; from planning their child's daily care to policy development at a State level. The Medically Fragile Case Management Family Advisory Board (FAB) is a group of parents, providers and nurse case managers who actively advocate for policies that ensure children have the support necessary for them to perform to the best of their ability and reach their potential.

#### DATA GATHERING

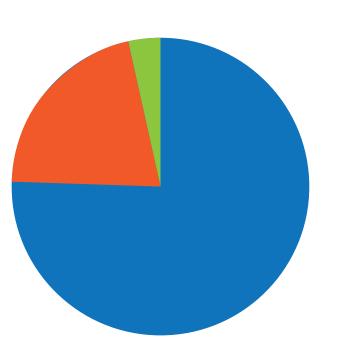
Families were surveyed to investigate accessibility of school services. RN Case Managers interviewed 268 of the 283 families (95%) receiving active case management services. Families described the services their child received as well as challenges they encountered. Although the children we serve have complex medical needs, the vast majority participate in center based education at a public school. For the families we serve, accessing appropriate educational services is a priority.

Type of School



■ Public School (85%) ■ Private School (5%) Charter School (4%) ■ Home School (1%)

How Participation in School Services Takes Place



- At a school center (75%) As a homebound student (21%)
- A mix of school and home (3%)





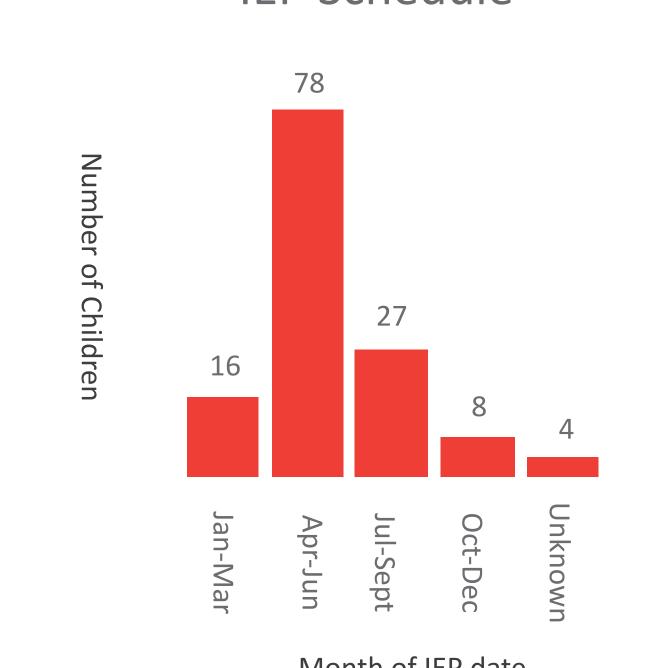












## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Families described the challenges their children face when accessing the educational system.

"School staff was fearful of G-Tube button and whole procedure involved with feeding."

"Would like to send her to school but I am fearful she will get sick and lead to her

"Lack of services"

"I love his current school and I'm worried about him receiving appropriate services through APS when he transitions there for first grade."

"We live in a rural area and the school district does not have the personnel to address her

"We met with the school personnel and they did not seem to understand her

"(She) is not in school due to safety and supervision issues with school staff."

"I would like to observe the school programs and find out about having a nurse with him if I let (him) go to school."

Discussions with school staff revealed that teachers worried about having the staffing and skills to provide the complex medical care these students require.

"I am a teacher, not a nurse. I don't feel comfortable performing these tasks."

"How can I be an effective teacher if I am providing nursing care?"

"Transition to regular school not done in a timely manner"

Many IEP's are scheduled in late spring or early fall. This does not allow enough time to identify and remediate issues regarding access to school, physical barriers within the learning environment, transportation, adequate staffing and training required to meet the needs of the student who is medically fragile.

## PARTNERS

Providing for the complex needs of the student requires a multi-disciplinary team approach that addresses both academic and medical needs. Partners develop a plan for staffing, training and building an environment that ensures students can safely access their education.

#### Our Partners Included:

The Family Advisory Board (FAB) Albuquerque Public Schools Nursing Department Albuquerque Public Schools Special Education Department University of New Mexico Pediatric Department New Mexico Medicaid New Mexico Department of Health RN Case Managers, MFCMP

#### TIMING

In order to have enough time to address areas of need, transition planning should begin 6-9 months before actual transition occurs. This may be well before the scheduled IEP is due. This extra time is necessary to accommodate the needs of the student who is medically fragile.

## TOOLS

The Transition Worksheet was developed by partners to open dialogue. The tool helps guide a discussion regarding the student and assists in identifying who should be brought on to the team to support the student, family and staff. The worksheet provides a framework for understanding barriers that need to be addressed by the team as well as a timeline for completion.

#### OUTCOMES

The medically fragile population continues to age and enter both public and private school systems. Family and case manager advocacy has resulted in transitioning many technology-assisted children into neighborhood schools. Smooth transitions begin with meaningful, child centered dialog between parents, school staff and providers. Nurse Case Managers from MFCMP help facilitate these discussions.



