

Chapter 14:

Early Childhood Services

In this chapter you will -

- learn about early childhood services and the transition from early intervention
- learn the difference between an IFSP and an IEP

Early Childhood Special Education Services

The school district is required to provide a free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities who are ages 3 through 21. Parents of preschool children who need, or are thought to need, special education and related services have the same rights as other school-age children. Special education and related services must begin on the child's 3rd birthday for children served in an early intervention program or for those children referred for an evaluation 60 school days before their third birthday and found eligible. If the child's 3rd birthday occurs during the summer, the IEP team will determine when the school district's services to the child will begin, but they must begin no later than the first day of the school year.

There is no automatic eligibility for Early Childhood special education services. Parents, school personnel, and others should work together to determine if the child is eligible to receive special education services.

Transition from Early Intervention

All children in Early Intervention (EI) services are entitled to a smooth and effective transition by their 3rd birthday. The transition process begins when the child is 2 years, 6 months of age. Transition begins this early because it gives parents and early intervention, school, and other early childhood professionals time to meet, share information, and plan.

When the child is 2 years, 6 months of age, the EI service coordinator will ask the parent to sign consent so a referral packet can be sent to the local education agency (LEA). The service coordinator should be notified if the parents want the child's information sent to other pre-school programs in the community. The child's referral packet will be sent after the parents sign for consent. Without the consent, the service coordinator will not be able to send the packet, and the child's transition process will be delayed. If the parents have concerns or questions

about sharing information, they may want to discuss those concerns with a parent liaison or service coordinator.

Parents may want to start the transition process before the child is 2 years, 6 months if they have any of the following concerns:

- They feel they need for more time to plan.
- Their child will turn 3 during the summer.
- Their child has complex medical needs.

If parents would like to start transition earlier, they should speak with their service coordinator as soon as possible.

When the child is 2 years, 9 months of age, the service coordinator will hold a Transition Planning Conference that will include parents, the service coordinator, and a school district representative. Parents may want to invite other professionals, family members, or representatives from community programs. The Transition Planning Conference is an opportunity for the parents to learn about the school district and for the school district representative to learn about the child. It is not a meeting for making decisions about eligibility or services or for determining where the child might go to school.

The school district or special education cooperative representative will contact the parents about participating in a Domain Review after the Transition Planning Conference. The purpose of a Domain Review is to figure out if additional information is needed before the IEP team can determine if the child is eligible for early childhood special education services. The domain form is used to keep track of the Domain Review. This form can be filled out at a meeting the parents attend with other IEP team members. It may also be filled out by the child's IEP team, and one team member may then review the form with the parent. The domain form is also called the Identification of Needed Assessments form.

Even though the parents and the child may have received services through Early Intervention, there is no automatic

Important Reminder

If it is determined that a child is eligible for early childhood special education service, the IEP or IFSP for the child must be in place on or before the child's 3rd birthday. Consideration for early childhood services should typically begin by the time the child reaches age 2½.

Worth a Look

Please refer to Chapter 3 on “Referral and Evaluation” for a fuller discussion about evaluation procedures.

eligibility for early childhood special education services. Parents will be involved in helping the school district or special education cooperative gather needed information to help determine if the child is eligible through the evaluation process. It is very helpful for parents to share information about the child with other IEP team members. Parents know what their child has learned, what the child likes and dislikes, and how the child likes to play.

When parents sign consent, their child’s evaluation process will continue. The evaluation is individualized for the child. Evaluations can be conducted by one person or a team of professionals at the child’s home, preschool, or school district. The evaluation procedures for special education used for preschool-aged students are the same that would be used for elementary or high school students as part of the effort to determine if the child has a disability that would impact the child’s ability to learn and develop academically.

When the evaluation has been completed, the IEP team will meet to discuss the results of the evaluation which may show the child has a disability which would adversely affect educational performance. If the child is found to have such a disability, the IEP team will decide if the child needs special education and related services. If these services are needed, the IEP team will either prepare an IEP for the child at that meeting or schedule another time for everyone on the IEP team, including the parents, to meet to develop the IEP.

The IEP (or IFSP) must be developed and services must be in effect beginning on the child’s 3rd birthday. The type, amount and location of special education services provided must be based on the child’s needs. The law requires that preschoolers receive their services together with children without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate.

The child’s special education and related services can be delivered in a variety of different settings. Some of those settings could be community preschool or child care programs, park district preschools or programs, Head Start, state-funded pre-kindergarten or Preschool for All programs, or an early childhood special education

Worth a Look

For more information about early childhood special education, ISBE offers a booklet entitled, *When I’m 3, Where Will I Be?* A copy of this booklet can be found under Family Resources at <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Early-Intervention-to-Early-Childhood-Special-Education-Transition.aspx>

Worth a Look

To learn more about the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in preschool, go to the Early CHOICES website. <http://www.eclre.org/good-to-know/understanding-lre.aspx>

program provided by the school district.

Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and IEPs

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) may be used for a preschool child who is transitioning from early intervention and is found eligible to receive special education services. If an IFSP is used, it must meet all the content requirements of an IEP and must be developed during a meeting in which the required participants are in attendance. In using the IFSP, the local school district must provide a detailed explanation of the differences between an IFSP and an IEP and obtain informed, written consent from the parent for the use of the IFSP.