

A Guide to
Early Transitions
in Texas



Introduction

The Student-Centered Transitions Network (SCTN), a technical assistance network of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), developed this guidance document for early childhood transitions. This guide is intended for use by educators and other school professionals in Texas, to support implementation of services for students with, or suspected of having, disabilities. Our hope is that this guide will provide access to reliable information that contributes to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Included in this guide are requirements, links to resources, and tips for best practices.

While you can read the guide from beginning to end, you can also easily find information on certain topics. The table of contents contains links to each section, so you can click on a topic to skip directly to that area. In addition, various resources are linked within each section.

For a glossary of special education terms, please see [The Legal Framework Glossary](#). If you ever have a question, concern, comment, or suggestion, or find a broken link within these documents, please email the Student-Centered Transitions Network at sctn@shsu.edu

Again, thank you for all you do, and we hope this document helps you in your journey of serving our students with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

The Student-Centered Transitions Network

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Early Transitions Overview

Transition from Part C to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

This guide is intended to provide an outline of the early transition activities, timelines, and recommended practices to facilitate a child's transition from Part C (Early Childhood Intervention) to Part B (Early Childhood Special Education) of the IDEA.

It is important for professionals from both programs to understand the requirements of Part C and Part B of IDEA in order to ensure collaboration, compliance, and effective transitions for children and families. The law requires a smooth and effective transition from one system to the next for children who receive services in Part C and are potentially eligible for Part B services. Both programs must work together in order to meet the IDEA requirement for public schools to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each child that is eligible by his or her third birthday.

Part C: Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)

Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) is the designated lead agency for implementation and maintenance of Part C of IDEA, also known in Texas as the ECI program. The ECI program requires a statewide, coordinated system that provides early intervention services to children less than three years of age with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. HHS contracts with local agencies and organizations, such as community centers, school districts, regional Education Service Centers (ESCs), and nonprofit organizations, to provide services to children and families.

It is important for families to know that a medical diagnosis or a doctor's referral is not needed to access ECI services. Anyone involved with the child – family members, caregivers, teachers, doctors, or friends – may initiate a referral.

Part B: Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the designated lead agency for implementation and maintenance of Part B of IDEA, which requires that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) be available to all children with disabilities ages 3 through 21. ECSE is a federal and state mandated program for young children with disabilities. It refers to the range of special education services that apply specifically to children ages 3 through 5, prior to kindergarten. Eligible children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, are entitled to receive a FAPE under IDEA in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in accordance with their individual needs. In Texas, services for eligible children with disabilities ages 3 through 5 are provided free of charge through the public school system. Eligible children may receive ECSE services in a variety of settings such as prekindergarten, resource and self-contained classrooms, or in community settings, such as Head Start and preschool.

[To view the Part C \(ECI\) to Part B \(ECSE\) flowchart from TEA, click here.](#)

Early Childhood Transition Timeline

Transition Planning

○ 27 months to 33 months

During this time, the transition meeting is scheduled and an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is updated to reflect transition planning. The ECI provider sends information to the local education agency (LEA).

Transition Conference

○ No later than 90 days before third birthday

The transition conference is a meeting between parents, ECI programs, and LEAs to lay the groundwork and begin the process of moving from ECI to ECSE. It usually occurs three to nine months before the student's third birthday.

Evaluation Process

○ Begins following transition meeting and concludes by third birthday

Full and Individual Initial Evaluation (FIE) is conducted and the report is written and shared with parents.

Eligibility Determination and the ARD Committee Meeting

○ By third birthday

The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee determines eligibility for special education and related services. If the student is eligible, the ARD committee determines what services are needed, how they will be provided, and develops the IEP.

ECSE Services

○ Starting at age 3

Student enrolls in the LEA and begins receiving special education and related services determined by the ARD committee. The LEA will provide a FAPE.

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)

ECI Eligibility

To be eligible for ECI services, a child must:

1. Have a medically diagnosed condition that is likely to cause a developmental delay; or
2. Be deaf or hard of hearing or have a visual impairment; or
3. Have a developmental delay of at least 25 percent in one or more of the following areas of development: social-emotional, self-help, communication, motor functions, or cognitive skills. A delay in expressive language must be 33 percent or more.

Individual Family Services Plan

ECI program staff develop an IFSP for children who qualify for their programming. The IFSP addresses the unique needs of both the child and the family.

ECI Services

The initial services to identify a child's strengths and weaknesses are provided by ECI at no cost to families. These services include: child find, evaluation and assessment, development of the IFSP for children with auditory or visual impairments (including children with deaf-blindness), case management, translation and interpreting services, and administrative and coordination activities. If a child qualifies for services through ECI, families are asked to share a portion of the cost. This is called Family Cost Share, and the amount that families pay is based on a sliding scale.

Sensory Impairments

In Texas, children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), have a visual impairment (VI), or are deafblind (DB) are entitled to a FAPE from birth. Therefore, services for a child identified as DHH, VI, or DB from birth to 36 months must be coordinated between the local ECI program and the LEA in the area where the child resides.

When a child receiving ECI services turns three, that child ages out and must exit ECI services. This change in supports and services is one of the first of many transitions that children and parents encounter throughout the school years. As with any transition, the key to success is thorough planning and preparation.

Early Childhood Special Education

ECSE Eligibility

To be eligible for ECSE services, a child must meet eligibility criteria for one or more of the 13 areas identified in the IDEA, and the disability must indicate an educational need for school-based services. Upon completion of the evaluation, the ARD committee will determine whether the child is a child with a disability and will determine the educational needs of the child. The 13 disability categories are:

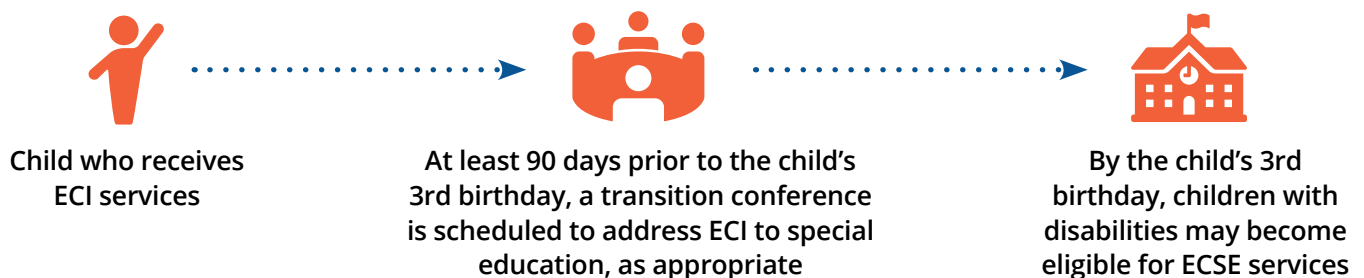
- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Noncategorical Early Childhood
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment Including Deafness
- Intellectual Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Multiple Disabilities
- Visual Impairment Including Blindness

Individualized Education Program

LEAs develop an IEP for each eligible student. The IEP addresses the unique needs of the student as he or she enters the school system. The IEP is different from an IFSP because it is designed to address disability-related needs of the student, instead of the needs of the entire family.

ECSE Services

At least 90 calendar days before a child receiving ECI services turns three years old, a transition conference will be scheduled to help the family transition from ECI services to special education services at their LEA. At this conference, parents will learn more about eligibility for special education services and the transition process. The entire transition process, including the evaluation and the ARD committee's eligibility determination, must be completed, and if eligible, implemented by the child's third birthday.



Early Childhood Transition Conference

Transition Conference Purpose

The transition conference is a meeting between parents, ECI programs, and LEAs to lay the groundwork and begin the process of moving from ECI to ECSE.

Who attends the transition conference?

- Parents of the child
- Family members, advocates, or others as requested by the family
- ECI service coordinator
- Evaluation personnel
- Person providing services, as appropriate
- LEA representative

When is the transition conference scheduled?

- If a child has received ECI services for more than 90 days prior to his or her third birthday, then a transition conference must be held at least 90 days but not more than nine months before a child turns three.
- ECI programs must invite the LEA to the transition conference 14 days in advance of the meeting.

Where can the conference be held?

- Family's home
- ECI provider's location
- Location within the LEA
- Other mutually agreed upon location

What happens at the conference?

- Discuss eligibility requirement for ECSE services.
- Explain the referral process and timelines for a school-based evaluation.
- Discuss the rights of the parent/family.
- Discuss information the LEA may need from the parents or ECI provider.
- Answer any questions the parents/family may have.
- Explain how the LEA provides extended school year (ESY) services.
- Discuss potential placement options should the child be determined eligible for ECSE services.

Potential Eligibility

Parental Notification of Potential Eligibility

At least 10 days before notifying the appropriate LEA that a child is potentially eligible for Part B services, the ECI program staff provide written notification to the child's parent advising the parent of:

- The information that will be disclosed
- The scheduled LEA notification date; and
- The right to opt out of the disclosure in writing at any time up until the time of the scheduled LEA notification date

LEA Notification of Potential Eligibility

If the parent does not opt out, the ECI program staff notify the LEA at least 90 days before, but not more than nine months before, the child's third birthday that the child is potentially eligible for Part B services.

Delay of Notification

When the ECI program staff provide notification of a potentially eligible child fewer than 90 days before the child's third birthday, they must provide a written explanation to the LEA stating the reason for the delay.



When the ECI program staff determine that a child is eligible for Part C services fewer than 90 days but more than 45 days before the child's third birthday, the ECI program staff must determine as soon as possible whether the child is potentially eligible for Part B services. If the child is potentially eligible, ECI provides notification to the LEA as soon as possible, unless the parent opts out of the disclosure in writing.



If a child is referred to an ECI program fewer than 45 days before the child's third birthday and the child may be potentially eligible for Part B services, the ECI program staff, with parental consent, shall refer the child to the LEA for a Part B eligibility determination.



Not all children who are referred by an ECI program will qualify for services with the LEA. The criteria to qualify for services are different for ECI programs and school-based services. When a child does not qualify, ECI program staff and LEA staff should consider providing families with activities and resources as support to both the child and the family. [Beyond ECI](#) is a publication that contains information for parents about next steps beyond ECI.

Navigating the Evaluation Process

Consent

IDEA regulations require that the LEA must obtain signed consent from the parents prior to proceeding with the evaluation. In addition, parents are provided with procedural safeguards that explain the rights afforded to the parents and the child throughout the evaluation process.



Evaluation

The first evaluation that takes place as a result of referral to special education is the FIE. This evaluation assesses a child in all areas of suspected disability and lays the groundwork for the ARD committee to determine the child's eligibility for services. The initial evaluation also sets the first baseline for goals and monitoring of progress moving forward. When the child has received ECI services for more than 90 days prior to his or her third birthday, the ECI program staff notify the LEA. Then the FIE must be completed and, if the child is eligible, services must be implemented by the child's third birthday.



Eligibility

The ARD committee will meet to determine eligibility based on the results of the FIE. If the child is determined to be eligible for special education, the ARD committee will develop an IEP. The IEP describes the special education services and supports a student needs. It is a written plan that guides all the specialized aspects of the student's instructional day and school experience. This plan includes ensuring the student is educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.



ARD Committee

Each student who receives special education services has an IEP. [The ARD committee develops and adopts an IEP at least annually.](#) Parents, the student when appropriate, school professionals, and others, as appropriate, serve on the committee. The ARD committee determines the start date of the IEP if the child's birthday occurs during the summer. Services will begin by the first day of school, or earlier, as determined and stated on the IEP.



Program Roles and Responsibilities (Part C to Part B)

ECI Responsibility



- **ECI program staff discuss** potential future placements, transition services, and plans with parents.
- **IFSP team identifies** transition needs, services, and activities necessary to support the transition process.
- **IFSP team determines** procedures to support the transition process.
- **ECI program staff will convene** a transition conference as part of overall transition planning with families for children exiting from the ECI program.
- **Transition planning must address** the child's program options, child and family preparation, the transfer of assessment information, and referrals that should be made for future services.
- **ECI program provides confirmation** that the referral to the LEA was made and shares, with parental consent, information regarding the IFSP and services the child was receiving.

LEA Responsibility



- **LEA staff are required to** participate in the transition planning conference when they have been invited (with parental consent) by the ECI program staff for a child who may be eligible for special education services. LEAs document the date of the conference, participants, and steps to determine a child's Part B eligibility.
- **The participation of LEA staff begins** prior to the actual transition and should support ongoing planning activities.
- **The LEA should support** ongoing planning and transition activities to assure the transition is a smooth and effective process for the child and the family.
- **LEAs invite the ECI service coordinator** to the initial ARD committee meeting at the request of the parent.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Early Transition MOU

The Early Transition MOU establishes that the ECI program and the LEA are responsible for ensuring a smooth and effective transition between programs.

Purpose

The purpose of the MOU is to:

- Define roles and responsibilities between the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and TEA within the respective federal and state mandates;
- Enhance interagency collaboration and relationships; and
- Coordinate an effective system of activities, policies, and procedures between TEA and ECI that guide and support the development and implementation of transition services for families of children with disabilities who are approaching age three.

MOU Responsibilities and Activities:

- Child Find
- Transition Notification
- Transition Process
- Transition Conference
- Summer Referrals
- Referrals Less Than 90 Days

A copy of the [Early Transition Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) may be found on the Texas Education Agency's website.

Planning for the Transition to Kindergarten

Why is Kindergarten Transition Critical?

Kindergarten is another big step in a child’s educational career. Ensuring children get off to a good start in kindergarten is vital. Kindergarten provides students with opportunities to develop language skills, improve physical development, and grow academically and socially. Early transition can be overwhelming when leaving the comfort and security of a small preschool setting and venturing into the larger school environment, so all stakeholders will have to work together to help make transitions as smooth as possible.

Steps for the Transition to Kindergarten

1. Establish an environment that is supportive for staff, students, and parents. A supportive classroom encourages collaboration between all parties involved to ensure the needs of all students are met. Meet periodically with staff and parents to ensure that they know expectations and how to achieve the best outcomes for each student.
2. Create a vertically aligned program structure that ensures school staff are knowledgeable about curriculum and expectations for grade levels both before and after their assigned classroom. For example, a kindergarten teacher should be knowledgeable of the Pre-K guidelines as well as 1st-grade TEKS and how they align.
3. Promote communication and collaborative relationships between current classroom environments, future environments, and parents to support the transition process. For example, teachers from many grade levels could participate in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to increase knowledge of vertically aligned curriculum.
4. Generate standard procedures for your LEA to support the transition process. These procedures may include who should attend ARD meetings for incoming students, sharing student data and progress reports, completing needed assessments before or after transition, processes for classroom visits and observations, or other steps needed to support transitions.
5. Ensure that parents and current and incoming school staff work together to develop a cohesive plan for students to ease the transition process between classroom environments. For example, a plan could include suggestions to facilitate a smooth transition. This could also include having students visit the future classroom environment or for an incoming teacher to observe the student in their current classroom environment to promote student success.

Think Long-Term

The ARD committee should begin to think about what skills a student will need for future success. Looking at [self-determination skills](#) early can also help to pave the way to a more successful transition when the student is ready to graduate from high school. Skills such as choice-making, decision-making, problem-solving, self-regulation, and self-awareness should be viewed as critical components to a student’s well-rounded educational program even as early as kindergarten.

COVID-19 Impact on Early Childhood Transitions

How Does COVID-19 Impact Early Childhood Transitions?

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we may all be experiencing transitions and life events that are not typical. While the transition between early childhood programs is expected, the impact of the pandemic may transform this transition into something that is different and unexpected. For this reason, it is imperative that all transitions are carefully planned to ensure a seamless, successful, and coordinated transition as children move from ECI to the school setting, kindergarten, and beyond.

Transition Conferences

The format of transition conferences may change from the traditional face-to-face meetings. Transition conferences may be held with the ECI provider, family, and LEA [through teleconference or video conference](#), consistent with privacy interests.

Obtaining Consent for Evaluation

The format of obtaining consent to complete a FIE may also change. When both parents and the LEA agree, paperwork may be shared through secured email communication, including the Notice of Procedural Safeguards, prior written notice, and consent for evaluation. Parents may opt to receive paperwork by email when the LEA offers that option. IDEA requires that the parent must understand and agree in writing. Therefore, schools that wish to utilize electronic or digital signatures for consent may do so if they choose and when the LEA can ensure parents understand how to use an electronic signature.

Evaluations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, gathering data for an evaluation may look different. It may be challenging to complete the FIE within established timelines. The determination must be made whether it is safe to complete the evaluation face-to-face and if portions of the [evaluation can be completed remotely](#). The FIE needs to be comprehensive to allow the ARD committee to obtain a true and complete picture of a child's strengths and needs. It is not recommended to hold an initial ARD committee meeting for eligibility determinations based on an incomplete FIE.

ARD Committee

The way LEAs conduct ARD committee meetings will also be impacted. LEAs must be prepared to [conduct these meetings virtually](#). These meetings may be held with the parent through a teleconference or other alternative methods, consistent with privacy interests. As LEAs change the method of conducting these meetings, it is recommended to provide support so that the same level of involvement and collaboration among committee members can be achieved.

What may school services look like during COVID-19?

LEAs may use different models to provide instruction for the 2020-2021 school year such as:

1. On-campus – School systems must offer on-campus instruction for those parents who choose on-campus instruction in order to be eligible for funding of their remote instruction models (with limited exceptions)
2. Remote Instruction – When curriculum is taught through other means that are not face-to-face. Remote instruction can take a variety of forms that can include online or virtual instruction, or packets and book work at home for students.
 - a. Asynchronous Instruction – Does not require real-time participation (self-paced online courses with intermittent teacher instruction videos, pre-assigned work, etc.)
 - b. Synchronous Instruction – Requires teacher(s) and students to be present at the same time, remotely (real-time, teacher-supported work on video conference calls, etc.)

Quick Reference List for Early Transitions

[Legal Framework – Ages 0-5](#)

[Early Transition Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) \(TEA\)](#)

[2017 Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards \(TSBVI\)](#)

[Transition from Part C to Preschool \(ECTA Center\)](#)

[OSEP Early Childhood Transition FAQs: SPP/APR Indicators C-8 and B-12 \(Final 12-01-09\) \(NECTAC\)](#)

[The Importance and Outcomes of Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and their Families \(Fact Sheet\) \(2011\) \(ECTAC\)](#)

[OSERS Questions and Answers on Response to Intervention \(RTI\) and Early Intervening Services \(EIS\) \(January 2007\)](#)

Health and Human Services (HHS) ECI Resources

[Texas Health and Human Services \(HHS\) – Early Childhood Intervention Services](#)

[Beyond ECI: Next Steps for Your Child](#)

[Early Childhood Intervention Parent Handbook](#)

[ECI Information for Families](#)

[211 Texas Infoline for Community Resources](#)

[Autism Program](#)

[Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program](#)

[Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment Program](#)

[Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services](#)

TEA Early Transition Resources

[ECI Transition Flowchart](#)

[Child Find and Evaluation Technical Assistance Guide](#)

[Early Transition Memorandum of Understanding](#)

[TEA Early Childhood Special Education Information](#)

Early Transition During COVID-19 Resources

[Equitably Serving Children with Disabilities and their Families during Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Re-Imagining Inclusion: High-Quality Inclusion for Young Children with Disabilities When Our World is Turned Upside Down](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Delivery of IDEA Early Childhood Services During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#)

[Remote Service Delivery and Distance Learning](#)

[Telepractice in ECI](#)