

# Early childhood special education: transition ifsp to iep essay

[Education](#), [Special Education](#)



A family with an infant or toddler who seems to have delays or may be at risk for delays can be referred for early intervention services by a medical doctor, the family itself, or by other healthcare professionals. Families are first referred to a county office of education, a local school district, or a regional center to begin the process of receiving early intervention services. There are five steps in developing and finalizing an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): contacts and evaluation, assessment, program planning, implementation and monitoring and review and evaluation (Lynch & Jackson 32-33).

When children with special needs turn 3, they fall under the direction of Part B of IDEA. At this point in time, the local public school becomes responsible for the planning, coordination, and implementation of services for the child and family. The transition from community-based services to school based services can be difficult for the family who has come to know a particular set of professionals dealing with their child's services. These transitions are times of change that may create additional stress for children with a disability and their families. The transition services for infants and toddlers with a disability may include: discussing the new placement options with the parents; providing assistance to the child and family in preparing them for the change in services and helping them adjust to the new setting; and giving information about the child to the local educational agency (LEA) who will now be overseeing the child's special education program (Lynch and Jackson 34-37). In order to assist families in the transition from early start programs to preschool programs for children with disabilities, the IDEA has denoted specific guidelines for the IFSP meetings during the child's second

year of life (Department of Developmental Services). The service coordinator is to start the transition process when the child in question is two and a half years old. The beginning of the transition process begins with the IFSP meeting at two years, six months.

At that meeting, in addition to the parents, service coordinator, and others invited by the parents, a representative from the lead education agency, which will be taking over the coordination of the child's services, is required to attend. During this meeting, information is provided to parents about the child's transition to school based special education services. The transition steps discussed are to prepare the child for changes in service delivery, including a discussion on how to help the child adjust to, and function in, a new setting. The family is also to be provided with written information on their due process rights (North Los Angeles County Regional Center). The IFSP also needs to identify the assessments and evaluations necessary to determine eligibility for the child under IDEA.

In conducting the evaluation and assessment, the evaluator should use a variety of assessment tools to gather information about the child's functioning and development. This should include information provided by the parents. The tools utilized to determine a child's eligibility should be " technically sound," not biased, administered in the child's native language by " trained and knowledgeable" staff, and be validated for the specific purpose for which they are used (Wright and Wright 17). While Congress spells out the general evaluation and assessment procedures, the specifics of the process may vary depending on the professional conducting the

evaluation. For example, the staff that conducts the assessments and evaluation for special education services, while being qualified, may not have specific experience in testing very young children. Whether or not the child's parent was allowed to be present during the assessment procedures also varies depending on the professional conducting the evaluation.

Because the evaluation is often the first time the child and family have met the professional conducting the evaluation, the presence of the parent or lack of presence may influence the results. The child, alone with this "stranger" for the first time, may not perform in a way which accurately reflects his/her abilities.

Finally, the amount of time the professional conducting the evaluation spends with the child and family during and after the evaluation varies from professional to professional. Some parents may receive information during the assessment, and others may not. Parents are likely to feel that a lot is riding on this evaluation. They may hope that a child who has needed special services for the first three years of life will now be decreed "normal" by the professional. Conversely, parents who feel their child will continue to benefit from services may be concerned that their child will not qualify and wonder about their child's future.

At this point in transition, the families may again be confronted with new and unfamiliar vocabulary, laws, and procedures. The assessment and evaluation step is pivotal in the child and family's transition from an IFSP to an IEP (Walker and Roberts 555). After the eligibility evaluation, the LEA identifies program options for the child, and convenes a final IFSP meeting and the

initial IEP meeting. A child is considered eligible for Part B services if s/he has mental retardation, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, a significant health impairment, or a specific learning disability. An eligible child may also be experiencing a developmental delay in the area of physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional, or adaptive development. However, the existence of one of these difficulties alone is not in itself enough to qualify a child for services. As Wright and Wright (1999) point out, “disability does not mean eligibility for special education.” The specific law reads that a child is eligible for services if, by reason of their disability or delay, they need special education and related services.

For a child who may not be eligible for Part B services, information is provided to the family about community resources such as Head Start, Child Development Preschools, and private or public preschools (Department of Developmental Services). Like the recent assessment and evaluation, the initial IEP meeting may be an area of concern and uncertainty for the parents of the child in question. Their child’s diagnosis may be changed based on the recent evaluation, and this meeting may be the first time the parents are hearing it. The parents are now confronted with the reality of having to rely on a new set of professionals for meeting their child’s needs. An IEP, or Individualized Education Plan, is different from the IFSP. An Individual and Family Service Plan, in that the IEP concentrates on the individual needs of the child. The families, who have been of central concern in the IFSP and

receiving support services for themselves, now may find themselves without the support and focus on the family unit that they are used to.

Finally, the actual delivery of services for the child may change as a result of the IEP. Under the IFSP, the child and family are receiving community-based services, which take place at local agencies, or often in the family's own home. With an IEP, the services are delivered through the school district and take place at the school setting. In many cases, the amount of services also changes after an IEP, with the amount of service becoming less than what the child received under the IFSP (Paul et al.

350-51). Families may be surprised and upset at their child receiving fewer services than they have become accustomed to. While guidelines for transitioning a child and family from an IFSP to an IEP are discussed by Congress and state agencies, the feelings and actual experiences of the family during this time are unknown. How a family experiences this transition may have a significant effect on their child's well being and future. The family's experience will influence their future relationship with the professionals involved, their knowledge of the system and service delivery, their confidence level in continuing to play an active role in their child's educational plan, and how well their child adapts to the new settings and changes in service delivery.;;;; Works Cited; Department of Developmental Services. " Early Start Program Advising: Transition of Children from Early Start.

" Sacramento, CA: Department of Developmental Services, 1998. Lynch, E. W. and Jackson, J. A. " The merging of best practices and state policy in the IFSP process in California.

" Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 11, 1991, 32-54. North Los Angeles County Regional Center. " Checklist for Implementing the Early Start Transition Process." Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Regional Center, 1999. Paul, R., Johnson, S., Watson, P., Finn, R.

C. Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence: Assessment Intervention. Mosby, 2001. Walker, C. E. and Roberts, M. C.

Handbook of Clinical Child Psychology. Wiley, 2001. Wright, P. W.

D., and Wright, P. D. Wriahtslaw: Special Education Law.

Hartfield, Virginia: Harbor House Law Press, 1999.;;;;;