TRANSITIONING FROM EARLY INTERVENTION TO THE PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

When children turn three years of age, they age out of the Infants and Toddlers Early Intervention (EI) system. The next educational services system is the Preschool Special Education system. Children who receive EI services are not automatically eligible for Preschool Special Education services. This is because different rules and regulations apply to the two systems. Children under the age of 3 receive services under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Once a child turns 3, service eligibility is determined according to Part B of IDEA. In many states, the same agency does not provide Part C and Part B services.

At least 90 days (but no more than nine months) before a child’s 3rd birthday, a face-to-face Transition Meeting will be held to begin planning for future Preschool Special Education services. Transition to preschool is a process, not a singular event, and should begin early to promote and ensure continuity of services and provide families with a seamless system of services. Required participants in the Transition Meeting include the parent, a representative from the EI system, a representative from the Preschool Special Education system, and a representative from the child’s home school district (this may be the same person who fills the role of Preschool representative). Other participants may be included in the meeting as needed.

At the Transition Meeting, the team will devise a Transition Plan, which sets goals and describes the child’s current levels of performance and how they impact the child, family, educator, daycare setting, etc. The Transition Plan is part of the child’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and is not a separate document. It contains a “to-do” list of activities and services needed to ensure a smooth transition to the next service system, along with the name of the person responsible for completion, the date the activity should be completed, and the actual completion date. Examples of activities to be completed include: (1)
gathering the child’s progress measurement information; (2) reviewing the child’s progress with the family; (3) preparing the child for changes in service delivery, including activities to help the child adjust to and function in a new setting; (4) with the parent’s consent, sending evaluation data, copies of IFSPs, and other information to the preschool agency; and (5) convening a meeting with the family and the preschool program which will continue services.

Many times, the services a child receives after age 3 are very different from the services the child receives through Early Intervention. One reason for this is that services after the child turns 3 do not usually occur in the “Natural Environment.” After the child turns 3, services become more related to the child, and there is less focus on supporting the family unit through training and support.

Sometimes, it is decided that a child does not qualify for services after the age of 3. This is because there are different eligibility requirements in the Part B system. If it is decided that your child is no longer in need of services after age 3, the transition team must make reasonable efforts to hold a meeting between the EI agency, the family, and the providers of other appropriate services for children outside of the Part B preschool providers. Examples of such service providers include Head Start Programs and private preschool providers.

If you do not agree with the transition plan that is developed for your child for the preschool years (after age 3), your child will continue to receive the EI services in the IFSP while you use dispute resolution procedures, such as mediation or a due process hearing, to resolve the disagreement. The right to continue these services is called “pendency.”

Related Articles:

- The Big I-D-E-A
- Differences Between the Infants & Toddlers and Preschool Systems
- Overview of Dispute Resolution for Families of Children Receiving Early Intervention Services
- What Happens to My Child’s Services during Dispute Resolution?

Additional Resources:

- Sample Pennsylvania Invitation to Participate in a Transition Meeting
- Sample Pennsylvania Transition Plan, Section X of Pennsylvania IFSP
Annotated Form

- Pennsylvania Child Outcome Summary Form
- Transition to Preschool in Pennsylvania
- Invitation to Participate in a Transition Meeting for Preschool

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