

As Your Child Starts Kindergarten

A Transition Manual for Parents



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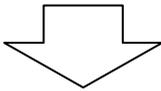
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The Typical Transition Sequence

As your child moves from a preschool special education setting to a kindergarten level class, your family will interact with people from both your current early childhood special education (ECSE) program and the school district where you live. Although each district varies somewhat in how it will prepare your child for kindergarten, most transitions from ECSE to school follow the general sequence described below.

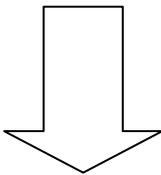
Transition is planned at the IFSP meeting.

The year before your child enters school, planning for transition to kindergarten will be added to your child's IFSP.



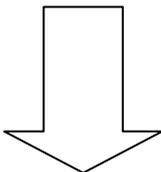
Districts are notified about children who are eligible for ECSE.

When your child was made eligible for ECSE services, your school district was notified. The year before your child enters kindergarten, the district is again notified about your child's special needs. District staff may be invited to observe your child in his/her ECSE placement to assist with the transition planning process.

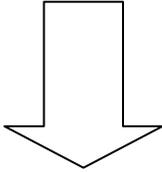


Districts request records from your child's ECSE program.

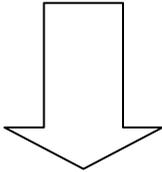
ECS provides the school district with a copy of your child's IFSP and eligibility paperwork in February. At the end of summer, the remainder of your child's educational records are transferred to the school district.



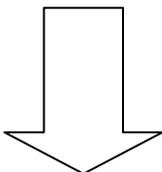
Districts review records and plan the next steps.



If eligibility is being reconsidered or changed, the district and ECS will meet with you to discuss it.



The IEP meeting with school district personnel takes place. You and your child's IFSP team are invited to participate in this meeting.



The IEP team meets to determine placement.

The district Special Education Director may consult with your child's ECSE provider. Observations of your child may be arranged to assist in planning. If any additional testing is needed, you will be contacted for your permission.

The district special education representatives will meet with you to review any new eligibility testing and to establish your child's eligibility for school-age services. This eligibility meeting typically takes place at the same time as the IEP transition meeting. ECS staff will be present during this meeting to share observations and assessment results.

At the IEP meeting your child's needs will be reviewed and any additional testing will be discussed. The IEP (Individualized Education Plan) will be developed to replace the IFSP when your child actually enters school. Once the IEP is written, the district may discuss placement options with you.

You may have visited some of the placement options prior to this meeting. Your child will be placed in a particular school program. This meeting typically occurs on the same day as your child's IEP transition meeting.

Early Childhood Special Education and Special Education in Public School

The laws and rules governing Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education (EI / ECSE) programs differ from the laws and rules for school age children receiving special education in a few significant ways. The main differences are explained below.

Eligibility Categories

In EI / ECSE, the category of Developmental Delay (DD) is frequently used for children who show delays in physical, communication, cognitive, adaptive, and / or social-emotional development. This category does not exist for school-age children. Children who have been considered developmentally delayed must be reclassified when they enter school. State and federal law requires that children be assigned to one of the following categories:

- autism spectrum disorder
- communication disorder
- deaf and blind
- hearing impairment
- mental retardation
- orthopedic impairment
- other health impairment
- emotional disturbance
- specific learning disability
- traumatic brain injury
- vision impairment

Sometimes it is difficult to have a categorical label placed on a child. The idea of a developmental delay can create the impression or expectation that the child will "catch up" from his or her delay. Categorical labels may sound more permanent.

IEP to IFSP

IFSP stands for Individualized Family Service Plan, and IEP stands for Individualized Education Plan. Both plans have measurable annual goals and short-term objectives. An IFSP also includes family goals if a family wishes. One form is used throughout the State of Oregon for the IFSP, while each school district has its own IEP form. In addition to the annual IFSP meeting, a six-month review is often held for IFSPs, whereas only an annual IEP meeting is required for IEPs

An IFSP is intended to be an integrated plan which identifies all relevant services for the child and family--educational, medical or social services--and designates what resources pay for each identified service. An IEP identifies the child's educational goals, objectives and services to be addressed in the school setting. IEP meetings are typically held at the child's school and may be shorter in length than IFSP meetings.

Family Focus to Child Focus

In Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education, families are involved as partners in all levels of the process. Family outcomes and other types of services are included in an IFSP. Parents are partners with the school district and are valuable members of the IEP team, but as children enter public school, the focus shifts away from the family to the child's educational needs at school. This shift is reflected in the IEP.

Service Delivery Options

The EI / ECSE system has many different service options and settings, including home visits, because there are no free public school programs for all children from birth to five years of age. Usually parents are given two or more choices about where services can be provided for their child.

All school-age children are provided with a free public school program through a variety of settings: individualized special education services are provided at school. The IEP team will examine a variety of placement options and determine which is appropriate to meet your needs.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a written description of the special education services your child will receive in public school. At least once a year, an IEP team, including parents, teachers and school district staff, will review and revise the plan as needed. The IEP must include:

- Statement of the present levels of performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum.
- Statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to meeting the child's needs that result from the disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum as well as meet the child's other educational needs.
- Statement of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services and any program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child to advance appropriately toward the annual goals, to be involved and progress in the general curriculum; to participate in extra-curricular and non-academic activities and to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children.
- An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and activities.
- The projected date for beginning of services and modifications and anticipated frequency, location and duration of services.
- Statement of how the child's progress toward the annual goals will be measured, and how the parents will be kept informed of progress toward both annual goals and the extent to which that progress is sufficient to meeting annual goals on a regular basis (at least as often as a parent of nondisabled children.)
- Statement of any individual modifications in the administration of the State or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate, and if the IEP team determines that a child will not participate in all or part of a particular state or district-wide assessment of student achievement, a statement of why it's not appropriate for the child and how the child will be assessed.

The IEP is important in determining your child's placement. By law, the placement must be one where all the IEP goals and objectives can be met. It is also important because it sets down in writing what the school district will provide to your child. The IEP meeting held in the spring before your child enters kindergarten gives you, your child's ECSE provider, and others who may have worked with your child, an opportunity to tell the school district about him or her. You can work together to write IEP goals.

What It All Means

Annual Goals describe what the child can be expected to learn in a year.

A goal is broad, but should be measurable. Example: Susan will read a 12 page reader at the first grade reading level, with fewer than 6 decoding errors by June 10, 2002

Short-term Objectives or Benchmarks are smaller tasks necessary to complete the annual goals. Objectives would be specific and measurable. Example: Susan will read ten words with a consonant-vowel-consonant form, such as bat, ram, ten, by October 10, 2003.

Special Education is specialized instruction designed to meet the unique needs of a child with disabilities. Some examples are adaptive physical education, behavior management, occupational therapy, life skills, study skills, and special programs in reading and math.

Related Services are those services that are necessary for the child to benefit from Special Education. Some examples are assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, speech and language therapy, vision therapy, counseling and transportation to and from school.

Supplementary Aids and Services are aids, services and other supports that are provided in the classroom to help your child participate in school activities and curriculum. There are many possibilities. Some examples are a picture exchange schedule, an augmentative communication system, a walker or large print books.

Special considerations are factors that must be discussed at an IEP to ensure that they are addressed if they are needed by the child. These include behavior needs, language needs for children with limited English proficiency, instruction in Braille, and assistive technology.

Steps to a Successful IEP Meeting

Review the Current IEP or IFSP. Has the IEP worked well? What goals and objectives have been met? What goals and objectives still need more work? What are the plusses and minuses of the child's current services and placement?

Write a 'strengths and needs' list for your child. What can your child do? What does he or she like to do? What does he or she need to be able to do?

Make a list of questions that will help you to contribute to the IEP. What programs have or have not been successful and why? Has your child had major changes such as surgery, changes in the family, new medications or treatments since the last IEP? What academic goals are realistic for your child? Does your child need some self-help, social or behavioral goals? Which related services (speech, physical therapy, etc.) do you feel are necessary for your child to benefit from the IEP? How much time does your child spend with children without disabilities at school?

Decide if you need more information. Do you know your child's present level of performance? Have you received progress reports? Are you aware of testing that might need to be done?

Get answers to your questions. If needed, observe your child in the present program and schedule visits to some of the classrooms that will be available next year. Meet with teachers and other staff to find out what they think about your child's needs and the types of programs they think would be appropriate. (Do not limit your options to programs currently available.) Read your child's records.

Write down the goals and objectives you want your child to achieve.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What skills would you like your child to learn?
- What can your child be taught at school that would help at home?
- What behaviors can be improved with help from the school?
- What are your main concerns about your child now?

Make a priority list. Organize your goals in order of importance to you. Decide which goals you feel are necessary for your child to receive an appropriate education. Organize other issues such as related services and least restrictive environment in order of importance to you.

Find out who will attend the IEP meeting. When you are notified of the IEP meeting, everyone invited by the school district will be listed on the notice. You may ask other people to come to the meeting to contribute information or to support you. Let the school district know about anyone you may invite.

Make sure enough time has been scheduled for the meeting. Ask how much time has been planned for the IEP meeting. If you feel this won't be long enough, ask to meet at another time. Make sure you have enough time to ask questions and to share your opinions.

Be ready to support your ideas and requests. Find information in the records, progress reports, evaluation results, and elsewhere to support your ideas and requests. Be clear about what is important to you and why it is important so you can help others understand your point of view at the meeting.

Plan for the meeting.

- ORGANIZE your materials (reports, letters, lists, etc.)
- WRITE DOWN your questions
- KNOW what you want to say
- REVIEW good communication skills
- PRACTICE communicating clearly and effectively

Be positive. Assume that you and school personnel can work together effectively to develop an appropriate program for your child.

Parent Observations to Share at IEP Meetings

Parents may wish to bring observations about their child to the IEP meeting in written form to share with school staff. Some ideas for notes include:

- Positive and negative behaviors your child has.
- Changes in your child's behavior.
- Changes in your family or home that might have an effect on your child's learning.
- How your child learns best: from listening, visually, hands-on, one-to-one, in a small group, etc.
- Activities your child likes.
- Positive behavioral strategies that work.
- How your child interacts with peers.
- The level of your child's self-help skills.

Areas to Consider for IEP Goals

Academic:

Reading: read traffic signs, read sight words, sound out words

Writing: print name and address, write legibly, use computer to write

Math: count to 20, recognize numbers, count objects

Communication:

Signing

Computer skills

Keyboarding

Greet peers

Augmentative communication devices

Initiate communication

Verbal problem solving

Listen to story

Print letters

Technology:

Operate electric wheelchair

Use computer

Operate Unicorn board

Use calculator

Use TDD

Motor Skills:

Ball skills

Ride bike

Cut with scissors

Play on playground at recess

Hold pencil correctly

Use cane to walk around school

Self-help:

Bring belongings home from school

Use telephone

Ride bus

Cross street safely

Tie own shoes

Open lunch containers

Social-Emotional:

Please and Thank You

Participate in group activities

Play with peers

Problem solve in social situations

Play cooperatively on playground

Share materials with classmates

Placement

Definitions and Options

"Placement" means different things to educators and to most parents of special needs children. Educators think in terms of the level of instruction a child will need in order to achieve his or her IEP goals: a regular classroom; a regular classroom with supplemental services; special education in a learning center or resource room, in addition to instruction in a regular classroom or a self-contained special education classroom. Parents instead are likely to think about finding a teacher, classroom and school to suit their child best.

One consequence is that parents can often imagine a greater number of possible placements for their children than educators can. Oregon law gives children the right to attend school as close to home as possible. Placement teams therefore try to place children in their neighborhood schools first. If a child needs more services than the neighborhood school can provide, the placement team considers other options.

For extensive services, the team may recommend placement in a developmental or specialized classroom (e.g., for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or for children who are deaf). These classrooms, for children with special needs only, have fewer students and more aides than regular classrooms and as a result can tailor instruction more specifically to a child's IEP goals. Since these classrooms serve a smaller specific population of children, or provide a highly specialized program, they are not available at every school. If your child needs this level of service, placement may be proposed at a school other than your child's neighborhood school. You will be able to contribute more toward the discussion/decision about placement if you have visited the different options being considered, or that you would like considered, for your child. Nearly all school personnel will welcome you to their schools, especially if you call in advance for an appointment.

Since a team usually agrees about a child's needs and potential, it seldom considers more than two placement options.

Emotions Parents Report Experiencing

Entering public school for the first time is an exciting time. It is an opportunity to make new friends, and meet new teachers and parents. You and your child should be proud of all your successes, and can look forward to exploring many new opportunities in kindergarten.

Certain feelings are common among parents who have a child starting school, whether or not he has special needs. All children make the transition to school and most parents have some of these feelings. They are the normal "growing pains" parents experience as their children grow up.

- Pride in your child's accomplishments
- Letting go
- Concern about losing control
- Excitement and anticipation
- Potentially being less involved in decisions and services
- Concern about having less contact with teachers
- Picturing a young and small child in school
- Worry about sending your child to school on the bus
- Looking forward to, yet concerned about, working with a new team who will provide the individualized, personalized and nurturing care your child needs.

Advice from Parents Who Have Been Through Transition

COMMUNICATION was stressed by parents on the parent panel:

- Let the teachers know what your child's needs are.
- Be sure teachers are informed face-to-face or by phone.
- Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk...
- Check in with the teacher frequently.
- Use a notebook to communicate between home and school.
- Hang in there; problem solve as a team. Things may not be just right or as you expected at first, but things can be worked out.

IEP goals and objectives are very important: spend time and think them through.
Take notes at meetings.

Bring someone with you: a friend or someone from Community Living Case Management.

Be realistic about what your child can accomplish when writing an IEP; separate yourself from your emotions.

District folks want to help and are your allies.

Teachers get to know your children almost as well as you do, and love them!

Be flexible; it's not always perfect. Choose your battles; it's okay to compromise.

Make meetings pleasant by bringing treats. Take time to celebrate successes--support what is working.

Have a positive attitude and work TOGETHER--the best approach is always to work things out and get the team to agree.

Be supportive of the people who work with your child; let them know you appreciate them.

Be informed about the law (IDEA). Find out who will be at the transition meetings.

Remember, you don't have to make a decision immediately; you can think things over.

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Inquire about the possibilities.

Humor is very helpful!

Spend time at the school--volunteer, help out.

Pace yourself for the long haul.

You are your child's case manager; be sure IEP goals and objectives are being met. Call an IEP meeting if it is needed.

Be prepared to serve as an advocate for your child and to help educators learn about him or her. Many regular classroom teachers may not know much about children with special needs.

If your child has special medical needs, be sure to let teachers, principals, and therapists know exactly what medical care you authorize.

To work better with the school district, think in terms of educational goals rather than the services you may want.

Be specific when writing IEP goals; include timelines, and who will do what.

Expect IEP meetings to become easier over the years as team members get to know each other and your child better.

Bring a picture of your child to meetings to help the team focus on your child as an individual.

Look at what your child can do and write the IEP in positive terms.

Consider asking a specialist to come to your child's classroom to talk to the other children about his or her disability, or offer to do it yourself, if you think this could help the other children better understand and accept your child.

Don't apologize for your child's disability.

Your child is entitled to the same attention from the teacher that other students receive.

Sign up for parent-teacher conferences, even if you've just had an IEP meeting!

Ask questions about administrative or educational decisions concerning your child.

Urge teachers to educate themselves about your child's disability.

Trust your instincts--go with your heart!

Transition to Kindergarten – Some Helpful Tips

When your child starts attending a new school, it can be a time of excitement and it also can be worrisome, both for children and for parents.

We spent the summer before my daughter entered Kindergarten preparing for her transition. We talked a lot about what to expect at school and the fun times she would have there. We spent time at the school playground throughout the summer so that she would know her way around and feel comfortable when school started.

We made a book about the first day of Kindergarten with a simple story outlining what we would do to get ready for school and what would happen once she got to school. We took pictures at home, on the playground, and in the classroom for the book.

We also practiced touching elbows and hooking our pinkies together to say good-bye. This always made my daughter giggle when we practiced it at home and it helped distract her from her worries when we said good-bye on that first day of school. This tip came from the Let's Explore Blog, which has a great post on Kindergarten prep at lets-explore.net/blog/?p=109.

We read many picture books to prepare for Kindergarten and favorites were *Countdown to Kindergarten* by Alison McGhee, *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn and *My Kindergarten* by Rosemary Wells.

I learned from our harried preschool mornings that it was best to allow plenty of time to get ready in the morning. We prepare some things the night before, like picking out clothes and packing lunch, which makes us feel less rushed in the morning and helps us continue to get off to a good start each day.

-Lisa Harman, MPAC Newsletter Editor

Advice from School District Administrators

Ask questions when you do not understand something or if you want to know something.

Do not be intimidated by the professionals.

Call back after a meeting or conversation if you have questions.

Visit sites to get a first-hand view of them.

Communication and dialogue with school personnel are **very** important.

Call your school district's special education director if you are having problems.

Remember that most of the transitions to kindergarten go very well.