

When a Child Turns Three Years Old: Transition from Early Start to Preschool

WHAT IS TRANSITION?

“Transition” refers to the move from Early Start services to special education preschool services when a child turns 3 years old. Early Start services for children birth to age 3 years and special education services for children older than 3 years are covered by two different parts of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In California, primary responsibility for providing Early Start services to a child under 3 years old may lie with either the Regional Center system or the child’s local school district (depending on the conditions that make a child eligible for Early Start services). Primary responsibility for providing special education services to a child over 3 years old lies with the child’s local school district.

HOW DOES TRANSITION OCCUR?

When a child is **30 months old** (age 2 years 6 months), the child’s Early Start service coordinator informs the parents that Early Start services will end when their child turns 3 and that their child may be eligible for special education preschool services. The service coordinator also informs the child’s local school district that the child will soon turn 3 and may be eligible for special education services.

Before a child is **33 months old** (age 2 years 9 months) the child’s Early Start service coordinator holds an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting that includes the child’s parents and a school district representative. The team determines the steps necessary to refer the child for evaluation for special education preschool services.

With parent consent the district will schedule assessments of the child to determine if the child is eligible for special education preschool services. *Note: If the child has been receiving Early Start services through the Regional Center of the East Bay, the Regional Center may also schedule assessments to determine if the child will remain eligible for Regional Center services after age 3. School district assessment and Regional Center assessment are separate processes.* Eligibility for special education services and eligibility for continuing Regional Center services are evaluated separately using different criteria.

If a child is determined to be eligible for special education preschool services, the school district will hold a meeting before a child is **36 months old** (age 3 years) to develop an educational service plan, called an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP team includes special education teachers, related service providers (for example, speech therapists, occupational therapists), district administrators and the child’s parents. If parents give consent to the IEP, special education preschool services will start when the child turns 3.

If a child has also been determined to be eligible for continuing Regional Center services, the child’s Regional Center service coordinator will hold a meeting with the child’s parents before the child turns 3 to develop an Individual Program Plan (IPP) that specifies non-educational services and supports that the Regional Center will provide.

SOME RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Preschool Transition Handbook, IEP worksheet, IEP Handbook and IEP workshops
CARE Parent Network; (925) 313-0999 or (800) 281-3023

“Special Education Rights and Responsibilities” by Disability Rights California and CASE

Disability Rights California, (800) 776-5746 www.disabilityrightsca.org/issues/specialeducation_pubs.html

Community Alliance for Special Education (CASE), (415) 431-2285 www.caseadvocacy.org/handbook.html



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A Summary of Some Parents' Rights under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004)

- Parents have the right to review and obtain copies of all of their child's school records, assessments and reports. You should request copies be given to you before the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting for you to review.
- Parents have the right to be notified in writing before the IEP meeting of the date and time of the meeting and who will attend. You may request an IEP meeting be rescheduled if you or someone who you want to have accompany you to the meeting are unable to attend on the date and time suggested by the school district.
- Parents have the right to invite anyone to attend the IEP meeting who has knowledge or expertise regarding their child (for example, an expert, friend, relative, advocate, lawyer). You must notify the school district in advance of who will be in attendance.
- In general, anyone who attends the IEP meeting must have knowledge of the child or the programs and services that may be recommended for the child. You should make sure that someone who represents and can act on behalf of the district administration in the IEP process will attend the meeting.
- Parents may tape record the IEP meeting as long as they notify the school district at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Parents are equal participants with the school district in developing the IEP. You may give input on your views of your child's strengths, weaknesses and educational needs. You may write goals and objectives for the IEP and/or suggest changes in goals and objectives written by the district.
- Parents may request that the IEP clearly specify types, amounts, duration and frequency of services. You may request that vague terms like "small group" be clearly defined (for example, you might request that "small group" be defined as 3 or fewer children).
- Parental consent is required before the district may implement the IEP. You do not have to give your consent to the IEP at the IEP meeting. You may sign that you are "in attendance" and request a complete copy of the IEP document to take home and review. You do not have to consent to the entire IEP. You can approve parts of the IEP and identify (in writing) items that are not resolved and will be followed up at another meeting.
- When the IEP is signed by the parents and the school district it is a legal document. The district must provide the programs and services as specified in the IEP, and the district may not change the services or your child's placement without an IEP meeting to modify the existing IEP.
- IEP meetings must be held at least once a year. You have the right to request an IEP meeting be held whenever you think it is necessary to discuss your child's progress, programs or services.



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Preparing for Preschool Transition: A Checklist for Parents

- Request copies of all reports of evaluations, teacher summaries, and medical reports on your child.
- Compile a notebook of all your child's records including doctors' reports, teachers' reports, diagnostic evaluations, immunization records (must be current to enroll in public school), and previous IFSPs. Contact CARE Parent Network at (800) 281-3023 or (925) 313-0999 for notebook resources and information on how to compile and organize a notebook.
- Ask questions about any reports you do not understand or agree with.
- Visit school programs available for your child.
- Provide the school with required records including physical examinations, immunizations, certification of specific disability from appropriate medical specialists, records of diagnostic evaluations.
- Inform school of all previous services your child has received.
- Attend an IEP training and learn about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Contact CARE Parent Network at (800) 281-3023 or (925) 313-0999 for training opportunities. Request a copy of our IEP worksheet and tip sheet about how to be an effective IEP team member.
- Learn how to work with the school to seek changes in your child's educational program when needed.
- Participate in meetings and be confident in your knowledge of your child.
- Make choices for your child's education based on information from evaluations, infant program performance, knowledge of your child, and professional advice.
- Get to know your child's new teacher as soon as possible.
- Contact CARE Parent Network for information, resources and to ask questions:
(800) 281-3023 or (925) 313-0999



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Evaluating Preschool Programs: A Checklist for Parents

Visiting preschool programs can give you ideas about what to include in your child's IEP and help you decide which programs and placements are most appropriate for your child. Be sure to call the school principal or special education administrator ahead of time to set up appointments for your visits. Don't be afraid to request to visit several programs and to request to visit any one program several times. CARE Parent Network's observation checklist for community-based preschool and childcare programs may be helpful to you in evaluating programs. Contact CARE at (800) 281-3023 or (925) 313-0999 to request a copy.

- Are classrooms, playground, bathrooms, stairs, and other facilities clean, safe and accessible and adapted for special needs?
- Are there opportunities for your child to interact with peers without special needs? What kind of opportunities? How many? For how long?
- Does the teacher seem responsive, comfortable, and warm with the children? Is he or she flexible and able to adapt the curriculum and schedule to meet individual needs?
- Are children encouraged to communicate their needs?
- Are there enough adults to provide proper supervision and individual attention?
- Do the children receive individualized instruction for their unique needs?
- Are the children's different learning styles recognized (visual, tactile, auditory)?
- Have activities been planned to teach specific skills?
- Are parents welcome to participate or observe in the classroom?
- How does the teacher keep in touch with the parents (notebooks, phone calls, parent/teacher conferences, home visits)?
- Does your child require medication during the school day and if so, who will dispense it?
- Does the teaching staff need training in how to handle your child's medical needs, such as seizures?
- How will your child get to school? Your car? School bus?
- If your child will go by bus, how long will he or she be on the bus?



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