



Connecticut Birth to Three System
A Family Handbook

Guide 3: Transition to Early
Childhood Special Education

July 2013



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This handbook and others
are available at www.birth23.org



For more information, visit: www.sde.ct.gov/sde
Click on Special Education and then Early Childhood Special Education

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| How does a transition to school happen? | 2 |
| What is a transition Conference? | 4 |
| A comparison of Birth to Three and Early Childhood Special Education | 6 |
| What is a planning and placement team? | 10 |
| What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? | 10 |
| Enrollment in your school district | 11 |
| What happens if my child attends a private or parochial school? | 12 |
| What happens if my child attends nursery or preschool? | 12 |
| What if my child turns three over the summer? | 12 |
| Making the transition easier | 13 |
| Things I would like the school district to know about my child | 14 |
| Transition contact information | 16 |
| Names and dates to remember | 17 |

Centerfold:

- CT Early Childhood Health Assessment Record

Introduction

Eventually, all families end their partnership with a Birth to Three program and move to other community programs. Moving from one program to another is called transition. For some, this happens before their child turns three years old, but by law Birth to Three System services must end no later than the child's third birthday.

Your child may be eligible for early childhood special education, which is provided by your local public school district beginning at age three. If your child is eligible for early childhood special education those services would begin by your child's third birthday. This booklet has been developed to help prepare you for a smooth transition from the Birth to Three System into early childhood special education. These services, Like Birth to Three, are offered under the federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, they come under different sections of IDEA and therefore have different rules. See the comparison chart on pages 6 to 9 for more information.

Transition activities and supports are offered as a part of service coordination, which is provided to every enrolled family whether or not the child received direct services from the Birth to Three System. To insure that the transition process is smooth and that services are in place when you exit the Birth to Three System, it is important for families, Birth to Three System providers, and school district personnel to move through the process together, one step at a time.

How does a transition to school happen?

All families go through similar steps when their child is ready for transition to early childhood special education:

STEP 1: Notification

If your child is 2½ or older and enrolled in Birth to Three, there is a presumption that he or she is potentially eligible for early childhood special education at age three. Your school district and the State Department of Education will electronically receive your child's name and date of birth, along with your contact information. The district may contact you to ask if you would like an evaluation to determine if your child is eligible for early childhood special education if you have not already decided to invite them to a transition conference.

STEP 2: Invite the School District to Attend a Transition Conference

Even though your school district has already been notified that your child is enrolled in Birth to Three, a formal referral (which serves as your consent to invite the school district to a transition conference) must be made if you are interested in having your child receive early childhood special education services at age three. The Birth to Three System encourages families to make this decision about six months prior to age three, however, if everyone agrees, a transition conference could be held as early as nine months before the age of three. Families who make the decision at about 2½ report that the process is completed more easily.

STEP 3: Transition Conference

At least three months (90 days) before your child turns three or as early as 9 months prior to age 3, you will meet with your Birth to Three team to develop your child's transition plan. The plan outlines the steps that you and your family, the Birth to Three team, and your district will follow in the next few months. It will include a plan to determine your child's eligibility for special education services through your district if you request them.

STEP 4: Determining Eligibility for Early Childhood Special Education

The school district determines eligibility for early childhood special education. Using information available from Birth to Three or after conducting their own evaluation, the school district convenes a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting to decide whether your child is eligible for early childhood special education services. For a variety of reasons, not all children who were eligible for Birth to Three will be eligible for early childhood special education, but about 80% of the children who leave are eligible.

STEP 5: Developing an IEP

If your child will be enrolling in a special education program, you and your child's Planning and Placement Team (PPT) will develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan for providing special education to your child during the school year including annual goals and objectives, and the methods and people who will help your child achieve them in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A school district is required to provide special education services to eligible children by the first school day that is on or after their third birthday. If your child is not eligible for early childhood special education, your service coordinator will work with you to identify other appropriate services in the community.

What is a transition conference?

Families of all children leaving Birth to Three will take part in a transition conference to discuss possible future supports and services. When a child is referred to early childhood special education, the meeting will include your family, Birth to Three staff, and early childhood special education staff. By federal law this meeting can take place up to 9 months before, but no later than 90 days before, your child's third birthday.

The transition conference allows you to meet a member of your school district's early childhood special education team and lets them get to know your child. You may invite anyone you wish to the transition conference, including any providers from outside of the Birth to Three System that have been involved with your family. This is also a good time to review the IFSP and update the transition plan section. The plan will outline the steps that your family, your Birth to Three program staff and school district staff will take to address the end of Birth to Three services and the transition to new programs, services, and people.

Some questions to ask at the transition conference

- How will the school district decide if my child is eligible for special education?
- What kind of testing will be needed?
- Who can we call if we have questions?
- What are some of the similarities and differences between Birth to Three and early childhood special education?
- What other resources are in the community about which we may want to know?



At the Transition Conference with Your School District

Your Family can:

- share your hopes for your child
- participate in the transition process at the level that feels comfortable to you
- ask questions about anything that is unclear

Your Birth to Three Staff will:

- share written information about your child's progress while receiving Birth to Three services
- participate in transition planning
- help write a transition plan with specific steps
- help you identify a variety of community resources and supports

Your School District Staff will:

- participate in the transition planning process
- explain the rights given to you, the parent, and your child under special education
- discuss the special education process, including the steps from referral, to evaluation, determining eligibility, and if eligible, developing your child's plan

At the transition conference there may be a discussion about what information helps the school district plan or get to know your child. The formal decisions about what testing or additional information may be needed will occur at a planning and placement team (PPT) meeting that is convened by your local public school. That meeting will include you and your service coordinator, who will be invited unless you object. School district staff who attend the transition conference will help to explain the next steps that will be taken by the school district and school staff.

A comparison of Birth to Three and Early Childhood Special Education

The following “side-by-side comparison” is intended to assist families and others in understanding the similarities, as well as some of the differences, between the State’s Birth To Three System and early childhood special education.

| Birth to Three | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Governing Federal Laws | Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) |
| Ages Served | Children with disabilities or significant developmental delays, ages birth through 2 |
| Goal of the Program | The focus is on helping the family meet the developmental needs of their child with a delay or disability. |
| Evaluation | Two or more professionals from different disciplines complete a developmental evaluation of all 5 areas of development. |
| Eligibility | A child must have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay; OR the child demonstrates a delay of 2 standard deviations below average in one area of development or a 1.5 standard deviation below average in 2 or more areas of development. |
| Family Involvement | Families must be involved in the process to develop the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP – see below). |
| Service Coordination | Each eligible infant or toddler is assigned a service coordinator to work together with the family on the process of evaluation, IFSP development and implementation, and coordination of services, including access to other state and community resources. |
| Type of Plan | An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is used to document the desired outcomes for the family and child, as well as the services to be provided. IFSPs are reviewed at least every six months with the service coordinator and rewritten annually. |



Special Education

Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Children with disabilities or significant developmental delays, ages 3 through 21 or until graduation from high school, who require special education.

The focus is on the child with a delay or disability and his or her educational needs.

Uses a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather developmental and functional information in the area(s) of suspected delays or disability

A child must fall within one of the special education disability categories that include: intellectual disability, autism, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments or specific learning disabilities OR developmental delay AND because of the disability needs special education.

Parents are invited to a part of any group (e.g., planning and placement team) that makes decisions on the education of their child. Parents must sign consent for the initial placement in special education.

Under special education law, there is no requirement that a service coordinator be assigned to a child and their family.

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is used to document the child's educational goals, objectives, services, and to program and to measure progress.

IEPs are reviewed periodically; annual review is required.

Parents do not sign the IEP.

A comparison of Birth to Three and Early Childhood Special Education (continued)

| Birth to Three | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Services | <p>All services are termed “early intervention services,” which are developmental services provided to support the family’s ability to meet their child’s developmental needs and the family’s desired outcomes.</p> <p>Services are provided by any of the State’s approved Birth to Three programs.</p> <p>Parents must sign the IFSP to consent to any or all services.</p> |
| Service Delivery Model | <p>Enrollment in the Birth To Three System is voluntary.</p> <p>The type(s), frequency, location, and duration of services, including personnel providing services, are determined through the IFSP process.</p> |
| Location of Services | <p>Natural Environments.</p> <p>Early intervention services are provided in natural environments (such as the child’s home or in other sites in the community) where infants and toddlers without disabilities participate. The family’s and child’s normal routines of the day are used as natural learning opportunities.</p> |
| Cost of Services | <p>Parents are billed on a sliding scale and health insurance plans are billed for the services. Parents are entitled to the following services at no cost:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referral to the Birth to Three System • the evaluation and assessment of child to determine eligibility and needs • the development and review of child’s plan (IFSP) • the availability of a process to settle disagreements • service coordination |
| Transition | <p>The child’s service coordinator will hold a transition conference for each child as early as nine months before (with the agreement of all parties) and not later than ninety days before the third birthday.</p> <p>The school district is invited to attend this transition conference.</p> |

Special Education

Special education is an educational service or program that is instructional in nature. Related services (such as OT, PT, and Speech) are provided when they are required in order to help a child benefit from the special education program.

Services are provided by local and regional school districts.

Early childhood special education is voluntary for families.

School districts are required to offer special education to eligible children ages 3 to 21.

Services are determined by a planning and placement team and documented on an IEP.

Least Restrictive Environments.

Children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled. Special classes, schooling, or other removal of the child from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Free

The service coordinator will be invited to the PPT meeting with the parent's consent.

By the child's third birthday, an individualized education program (IEP) has been developed and is being implemented for the eligible child.



What is a Planning and Placement Team?

You, your spouse or partner, and local school district staff make up the Planning and Placement Team (PPT). The initial PPT will decide what information exists or is needed to determine if your child is eligible for special education. If your child is eligible (based on diagnosis or developmental delay and requires special education), you – as a team member – will participate in identifying your child's strengths and needs and writing your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

With your permission, the school district may combine the first PPT meeting with the transition meeting. Or they may hold the meeting(s) separately. Your service coordinator and other Birth to Three program staff will be invited to the PPT meeting with your permission. You may ask the school district to invite anyone who has special knowledge of your child and who can contribute to the development of the plan.

What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

An IEP is a written document similar to an IFSP that describes how your school district will meet your child's **educational** needs during the school year. It includes:

- your child's present skills and level of development based on information gathered from Birth to Three records, your description of your child's behavior at home and the results of any other tests that were completed
- goals that describe what you and the rest of the team would like to see your child achieve over the next school year
- activities and strategies for meeting your child's goals
- amount and type of early childhood special education and related services. While enrolled in Birth to Three, services provided, such as physical therapy, were provided to meet your child's developmental needs. Under special education the focus is on your child's educational needs. Additional services, such as PT, are considered related services and are offered only if it is necessary for the child to receive special education.
- starting date and length of time that services will be provided
- methods for measuring whether your child's goals have been met

- staff who will be providing services
- locations of services. The standard for school districts is called Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which means that, children with disabilities must be educated with children who do not have disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate. When a child requires only a particular service and not a whole program of services, arrangements can be made for a service to be provided outside of these other locations. Your school district is not obligated to use your current community-based providers.

Enrollment in your school district?

If a child is eligible for special education, the parent will need to enroll the child in school. Enrollment will require that you provide various forms of information including information from your child's doctor, information that identifies your child's legal name and birth date, and information that indicates that you live in the town in which you are enrolling your child. Some schools may ask for this information early in the special education referral process and, in some cases, additional information may be required by your local public school.

- **Updated health information:** You and your child's doctor should use the yellow form (in the center of this booklet) to tell the district about your child's health, immunizations, allergies, etc.
- **Proof of your child's age:** A government-issued legal document, such as a birth certificate or passport, to show how old your child is.
- **Proof of residency:** You may be asked to show a recent utility bill, rental agreement, or mortgage to give proof that you actually live in your town. If you have had to move out of your home and are living with a relative, friend, or in a shelter, there is a federal law called the McKinney-Vento Act that gives you certain protections. Talk with your service coordinator for more information.

What happens if my child attends a private or parochial school?

Special education laws have different rules about who is responsible for conducting your child's evaluation to determine if they are eligible for special education and about whether an IEP or services might be provided should your child be enrolled in a private or parochial school. So, if you have your child enrolled in a private or parochial school or plan to do so when they turn age 3, talk to your service coordinator or your local public school district. Your service coordinator or public school can provide you with the information needed to ensure that your child receives an evaluation to determine if special education is required and they can also discuss the appropriate steps.

What happens if my child attends nursery school or preschool?

As a part of transition, you and your service coordinator will be discussing what other community opportunities may be available for you and your child, including child care, preschool programs, and nursery schools. Finding these opportunities within the community in which you live is optimal for many reasons. Should your child's PPT find that your child is eligible for special education, it will be important for the school to know what community program your child attends and how often they attend it. This will help in the coordination of special education services if your child is eligible. Planning ahead is important if your child is eligible. School districts will not transport a child to or from a community program in another town.

What if my child turns three over the summer?

If your child will turn age three during the summer months, your school district will determine if your child is eligible for special education before their third birthday and whether your child requires extended school year services (ESY). If your child requires ESY services, your school district will start an IEP by your child's third birthday, even if that occurs during the summer months. If your child's PPT determines that your child does not require ESY services, then the IEP will be implemented on the first day of school following the third birthday.

Making the transition easier

After the IEP has been written and placement decisions made, it is time to put the program into action. This can be smoother when you know what to expect, so be sure to have close communication with your school personnel about:

- special equipment, diet, or medications for your child
- staff orientation or training specific to your child's needs
- when and how to communicate with program staff
- other unique needs and special factors

You may want to bring your child for a visit to the new classroom, take sample bus rides, if allowed, by the district's transportation company, or help your child pick a toy to bring from home to make the first few days more comfortable. Request time to meet or speak informally with other parents who have a child in the same program. As questions or issues arise, share your concerns with school district staff and work together to make decisions that are in the best interest of your child. All transitions are more successful when you and your child's service providers work through the process together, sharing your views of your child, your understandings of the law, and your creative ideas.



Things I want the school district to know about my child

Area of Development

PLAY: sharing, taking turns, playing alone and with others

LANGUAGE: sharing needs; following directions; listening;
Understanding concepts such as up, down, in, on

MEALS: eating with utensils, eating a variety of food, table manners

DRESSING: taking clothes off and putting them on, zipping, buttoning

THINKING: cause and effect, colors, sorting, solving problems, counting

MOVING: walking, running, coloring, building with blocks, playing ball

OTHER: please list

Some things I would like my child to learn:

Additional Space for Notes



Transition contact information

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND ITS PROCEDURES

CONNECTICUT PARENT ADVOCACY CENTER (CPAC)

PHONE: 1.860.739.3089 V/TD

338 Main Street, Niantic CT 06357

Email via: cpac@cpacinc.org

Family Liaison

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT BIRTH TO THREE SERVICES

CONNECTICUT BIRTH TO THREE SYSTEM

TOLL FREE PHONE: 1.866.888.4188

PHONE: 1.860.418.6136 FAX: 1.860.418.6003

460 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

Email via: aileen.mckenna@ct.gov

School District Contact Information

The Birth to Three website is a great source of information that is updated often. Go to **www.birth23.org** and look under town preschool contacts in the **Especially for Families** section.

Names and dates to remember

For Birth to Three contact information, see previous page.

My Birth to Three Service Coordinator:

NAME:

PROGRAM NAME:

PHONE:

My School District Contact Person:

NAME:

PROGRAM NAME:

PHONE:

Any Scheduled Evaluations:

90 day transition conference scheduled for:

(Can be 9 months before age 3 but must be at least 90 days before age 3)

PPT meeting scheduled for:

PPT 1:

PPT 2:

Other:



www.birth23.org

1-866-888-4188

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