



From First Steps to Next Steps:

*Transition from Early Intervention to Early Childhood
Special Education and/or Community Supports*



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

As parents of a young child receiving early intervention services, you play a key role in planning your child's move into a new educational setting. You want your child's transition to be successful and knowing what to do and who can help is important to you. Getting information, guidance and support can help you better understand the transition process and your role in it. *From First Steps to Next Steps* was designed to do just that.

Whether your son or daughter is heading to a public school or Head Start, or continuing at a childcare center or at home, you will want to know what lies ahead and what you can do to help make this process work smoothly. We hope this booklet will serve as a guide in answering your questions and addressing your concerns. To identify information that might be most helpful, we asked parents what worked for them in planning their child's transition and what questions they had.

The first part of *From First Steps to Next Steps* focuses on how the transition from First Steps Early Intervention services to special education services may work. We describe the people who will help plan your child's transition and look at some steps your child's team may recommend. In the second part, we talk about the process to develop your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). At the end, we include a transition checklist and a list of resources to contact for more information.

There are times that families are either not interested in their child participating in special education services or the child doesn't qualify for special education services as identified in the eligibility process. When this happens, the Service Coordinator, child's family and invited community partner as identified by the family, develop a transition plan of support to assist child and family with getting needed supports within the community.



DEAR FAMILIES,

As you begin the process of transitioning, you no doubt feel some anxiety. We all feel anxious when our children begin new stages, and as parents of children with special needs you may be feeling this even more intensely. Know that you are not alone in your feelings.

This does not mean that the changes ahead are bound to be difficult. Our family found that the best way to ensure this was to be well prepared. Think about what lies ahead. Ask questions about the things that you fear most. Explore issues prior to the IEP meeting. Talk to your child’s therapists, to their preschool teachers, and to the people who will be at the IEP meeting. Contact an advocate for support if you need help. Ask and listen - and ask again if need be. The team really does want things to go smoothly and involved families will help that come about.

It also helped us to keep things in perspective. Transition is an ongoing event. We are always in transition. School years ahead will signal new concerns as we address new situations. Teams are in place to address needs as they arise. This particular time is a stepping-stone in the road ahead.

It is a time when your child is moving on, and we found that we as a family were moving on as well. This was a time for us to grow and learn. Seek help when needed but resolve to move on confidently. Life is about change. And “moving on” can bring unexpected moments worth celebrating.

Best wishes,

A parent



YOUR CHILD'S NEXT STEP

When your son or daughter turns three, he or she may move from First Steps Early Intervention services to special education services. Making the move from early intervention services to a new educational setting is referred to as **transition**. One of the first questions you may have as you begin this process is about the difference between First Steps Early Intervention services and special education services.

Typically, First Steps provides a broad array of services to children (birth to three) with special needs and their families. Some examples of services include physical therapy, family support and training, and nutrition. Through the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), each family sets goals based on their priorities and concerns and helps to identify the supports they will need to reach those goals.

When your child moves to special education services, the focus of the program is to address your child's educational needs. Special education services include educational and related services, such as speech or physical therapy, for children with special needs, beginning at age three and continuing throughout the child's school career, ending when your child receives a diploma, or at age 21 if needed. You and other members of the IEP team develop goals for your child and decide on the type and frequency of his or her services.

Although your family's needs may not change at this time, the school's responsibility is to provide your child with an appropriate education as described in the IEP. During the transition process, it will be important to identify individuals and agencies that may assist your family in obtaining and paying for other services and supports, such as those you may have received as part of your IFSP.

TRANSITIONING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

To determine if your child qualifies for special education services, your local school district will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of your child's abilities, strengths and needs. A Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET), which includes you as a member, will develop a plan for evaluation. Based on the results of the evaluation, the team will make a decision regarding your child's eligibility for special education services following the criteria set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and State Board Policy 74.19. The evaluation process will be discussed at your transition planning meeting.

A Plan for Transition

Between nine and three months before your child's third birthday, the early intervention service coordinator will inform your local school district that your child will be turning three. With your permission, he or she will set up one or more



transition planning meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to develop a written plan describing steps that will enable your child to move from First Steps to special education services, if eligible, and/or community support.

Writing a plan for your child's transition is an important part of the process. The plan you develop with others should describe activities designed to help your child make a smooth transition to special education services (if your child qualifies) or community. The plan should also contain information regarding the individuals who will carry out activities, other services your child may require and possible funding sources.

With your written consent, your early intervention service coordinator will send copies of your child's records to your local school district and/or other identified community partner. Information sent could include copies of your child's

- evaluations and other information used to determine eligibility,
- Individualized Family Service Plans,
- the consent form giving your written permission to release records, and
- pertinent contact notes.

The transition planning meeting should take place at least 90 days before your child's third birthday. Meetings can happen sooner, however, if you believe more time is needed to get things in place. You can ask your early intervention service coordinator to set up a meeting as early as six months before your child turns three.

With your permission, the early intervention service coordinator will schedule one or more meetings that include

- your family,
- school and district personnel,
- a representative from First Steps,
- other IFSP team members or service providers, and/or
- other individuals such as a friend or family member that you request.

Making the Most of Meetings

Parents have valuable information about their child that no one else has. During the transition planning process, you will have a chance to share what you know about your son or daughter with other team members. Transition planning meetings will give you an opportunity to learn what lies ahead for your child and to share your hopes and dreams. Because the process you have become familiar with will change, these meetings can serve as a bridge from what you already know to new information. Take the time you need to ask questions, share concerns, and discuss the goals you have for your child's education.

GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION

Listed below is some information parents can share at a transition planning meeting.

- Your child’s strengths and abilities and medical, safety, and learning needs
- A photograph of your child
- Why your child’s current program works and the progress he or she has made during the past year
- Services you believe your child will continue to need and new services to help your child develop and learn, including educational, therapeutic, medical or other supports
- Settings where your child might receive his or her special education services
- Your family’s long-term hopes and concerns for your child
- Special equipment/accommodations your child uses or may need
- How you want to be involved in your child’s program
- Ways to communicate with school district staff who work with your child

The following suggestions are for professionals in helping parents plan successfully for their child’s move to a new educational setting.

- Share information about rights and roles in the special education process.
- Explain the similarities and differences between First Steps and special education services.
- Help connect the family to other resources and supports.
- Answer questions about service options within the community.
- Identify new individuals who may be working with the child.
- Acknowledge the parents’ unique knowledge about their child.

Developed by a parent, here is a list of questions to ask, if needed, during transition planning meetings.

- How does the transition process work?
- Where will my child receive his or her special education services?
- Will my child lose some of the services s/he now receives?
- Is it possible for the current speech therapist to continue working with my child?
- Will my child have a support person?
- How can I get additional evaluations of my child’s needs?
- If special education services are not working for my child, can I terminate them?
- Who will be our new service coordinator?

- Will my child still be eligible for other services s/he is currently getting, like childcare funding and respite?
- What is my role in the special education process, and will I be treated as the expert on my child?

EVALUATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Once you give written consent for your child to be evaluated to determine eligibility for special education services, the process can take up to 60 (sixty) calendar days. If your child attends a childcare center, district personnel may visit the center to observe your child, do assessments, and gather relevant information from your child's care giver. If your child receives care at home, district staff may come to your home for the evaluation or may ask that you bring your child to the school district for the evaluation. District staff will gather and consider a variety of information, which may include:

- What your child is able to do at home and/or a child care setting, both independently and with help
- Your child's physical condition, including hearing, vision and motor skills
- Your child's social, behavioral and emotional skills
- Your child's ability to communicate, including what language your family uses at home
- Any other evaluations you may have had conducted for your child
- Experiences your child has had, such as family functions or play groups

All of this information, as well as any observations and assessments conducted by district personnel, will be compiled and presented at a meeting of the MET, of which you are a member. This team will use the criteria required by Federal and State law and determine if your child is eligible for special education services. If your child is determined eligible, the next step will be to develop an IEP within thirty (30) days of eligibility determination.

It is important to note that an evaluation is not required if the family chooses to develop a community support plan and not participate in the special education eligibility process.

When Children are NOT Eligible for Special Education Services

If your child is not eligible for special education services, the team can look at other options that may be available in your community. Your IFSP service coordinator can help you become familiar with preschool programs in your area, which may include:

- Community preschool,
- Head Start program,
- Childcare center, or
- Community play group.

A NEW EDUCATION PLAN

An IEP is developed for children who transition to special education services. It is a written plan based on your child's individual needs. When moving to special education services, your child's IEP will be completed by his or her third birthday.

Your Child's Special Education Services

At a meeting, you and other IEP committee members will identify the special education and related services your child needs. The team will also decide on the place in which your child will receive these services, such as a community-based preschool or school-based special education program. Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to you, to meet your child's individual educational needs. Related services help your child benefit from special education and may include occupational therapy, physical therapy, transportation, speech therapy as well as other services.

Before an IEP meeting takes place, you will be notified by the school about the purpose of the meeting and who will attend. The meeting will be scheduled at a time and place that is mutually convenient for you and school personnel. Your child's Early Intervention service providers play an important role in helping to create the first IEP.

Members who attend the IEP meeting may be different from IFSP team participants. IEP team members should include:

- Parent(s)
- Member of the IFSP team
- Child's current teacher (if applicable)
- School district personnel, including a general education teacher, special education teacher, and agency representative (usually a principal or special education director or his/her designee)
- Other IFSP team members or service providers
- Other special education service providers
- Other individuals the parent wishes to include.

As a team, you will identify annual goals, kinds of services, supports and accommodations needed to help your son or daughter develop and retain skills and the individuals who will teach your child.



Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

Here are some suggestions to help you prepare for an IEP meeting:

- Review and share information that you gathered for transition planning.
- Identify other information you believe will help the team get to know your child.
- Review the special education rights you and your child have (Procedural Safeguards) and ask questions if you need help understanding them.
- Identify goals and services you would like included on the IEP.
- Make a list of questions you have about the IEP process and programs for preschoolers offered by the school district.
- Visit educational settings in which your child may receive services.
- Ask a friend, support person or advocate to go to the meeting with you.
- Think about other supports your child may need in addition to education and how services will be coordinated.

Questions About Services

Parents have many questions about their child’s new education program. One question they often ask is about the kind and amount of services their child will receive. Making decisions about services is the role of an IEP committee. If the committee agrees, it is possible that your son or daughter will continue to receive the same or similar services that were part of the IFSP. Some committee members may believe, however, that your child’s services should be changed based on evaluation information.

If you believe your child needs a specific service, you have the right to ask that it be included in the IEP. Put your request in writing, explaining your reasons for the request and sharing any information you may have to support your request and present this information to the IEP committee. If team members cannot agree, the local education agency representative will make the final decision. If the school district refuses the request, they must provide you with a written justification. You have the right to disagree with the decision made by the IEP committee about your child’s services through the dispute resolution process. For more information about parental rights and your dispute resolution options, see the resource section of this booklet and Procedural Safeguards, which can be found at www.mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution under Procedural Safeguards. These safeguards are provided in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Punjabi, and Chinese (Simplified and Traditional).

Another question that families ask is whether their child will receive services over the summer. While your child participated in First Steps, he or she received services year-round. Special education services are provided only during the school year, unless the IEP team decides your child requires extended school year (ESY) services. ESY services may be provided over the summer. If you think your child needs year-round help, the IEP meeting is the place to have this discussion. In deciding whether your child may need ESY services, the team will consider the type and severity of your child's disability and evidence that he or she experiences a significant loss of skills that are not relearned in a reasonable length of time. Other areas the team should consider include:

- Whether continued services are needed in order for your child to maintain the amount of time he or she spends in general education,
- Whether continued services are needed in order for your child to progress toward mastery of critical skills, and
- Areas of your child's program that may need ongoing attention.

Your Child's Educational Placement

When services have been worked out, the team will discuss your child's educational placement. Educational placement refers to the setting in which your child will receive special education services. In deciding about placement, your child's team must look at a full range of settings, including community-based programs for preschool children. Some of the places in which children typically receive special education services are community-based preschool programs, childcare centers, Head Start programs, and in school-based programs.

Because each school district is different, one district may use community-based childcare and preschool settings while another district may choose school-based programs for providing special education services. If you disagree with the IEP Committee's decision about your child's educational placement, there are steps you can take as part of your parental rights. Once the committee agrees on your child's educational placement, you will be asked to give written consent to have your child begin receiving special education services.

Now that your child has successfully moved to school district special education services, you may still have questions about services or the IEP process. It will take time to become familiar with your child's new program and service providers. Setting up regular times to talk to your child's teachers can help you learn more about his or

her program. You can also talk to other parents and professionals who work with your child.

MOVING ON

We hope this booklet has helped you gain a better understanding of what to expect when your child moves from First Steps Early Intervention Services to school-based special education services. Your child's transition is a team effort, and the information you share with and receive from professionals plays a critical part in helping your child to learn and grow. Parents become full partners with professionals when they feel knowledgeable and as they contribute to the decisions being made about their child's special education services.

CHECKLIST OF STEPS IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS

- My child's early intervention service coordinator began to talk to me about the transition process by the time my child was 2 ½ years old.
- My child's early intervention service coordinator notified my school district that my child would be turning three at least six months prior to his/her third birthday.
- With my written permission, we held a transition planning meeting and began to develop my child's transition plan at least 90 days before my child's third birthday.
- I shared ideas about what works well for my child.
- The transition plan included activities, timelines and people responsible for carrying out the plan.
- I have learned about my special education parental rights and special education services.
- My child's records have been given to my local school district, with my permission.
- I have visited special education placement options for my child and talked to teachers and service providers.
- Before my child turned three, we held a meeting to develop an IEP and to decide my child's educational placement.
- I have met my child's new teacher and service providers and had a chance to ask questions about my child's new program.

RESOURCES

If you would like more information, please contact the following agencies:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Email/Website</u>
The ARC – Association for the Rights of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities	704 North President St., Jackson, MS 39202	601-355-0220	https://www.arcms.org/
Brain Injury Association of MS	P. O. Box 55912 Jackson, MS 39296-5912	601-981-1021 Toll Free: 1- 800-444-6443	info@msbraininjury.org
Catholic Charities, Inc.	731 S. Pear Orchard Rd., Suite 51 Ridgeland, MS 39157	601-355-8634	www.catholiccharitiesjackson.org help@ccjackson.org
Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs MS Department of Health	P. O. Box 1700 Jackson, MS 39215-1700	601-576-7281 Toll Free: 1- 800-844-0898	https://msdh.ms.gov/page/41,0,163.html
Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities Pam Dollar, Executive Director	2 Old River Place, Suite M Jackson, MS 39202	601-969-0601	pam@mcccd.org
Department of Mental Health	1101 Robert E. Lee Building 239 N. Lamar St. Jackson, MS 39201	DMH Helpline: 1- 877-210-8513	www.dmh.ms.gov
Disability Rights Mississippi Polly Tribble, Executive Director	5 Old River Place #101 Jackson, MS 39202	601-968-0600 Toll Free: 1- 800-772-4057	ptribble@drms.ms
Families as Allies Mississippi Joy Hogge, Executive Director	840 E. River Place, Suite 500	601-355-0915 Toll Free: 1- 800-833-9671	info@faams.org

	Jackson, MS 39202		
First Steps Early Intervention MS Department of Health	570 E. Woodrow Wilson Dr. Jackson, MS 39215	601-576-7427 Toll Free: 1-800-451-3903	https://msdh.ms.gov/page/41,0,74.html
Food Allergic Children’s Education in Tupelo (FACEIT) Amelia Smith Murphree, Founder	499 Gloster Creek Village Suite F9 Tupelo, MS 38801	662-891-1116 Cell: 662-322-7434	
Institute for Disability Studies USM – Gulf Coast Campus	730 E. Beach Blvd. Long Beach, MS 39560	228-214-3400	https://www.usm.edu/ids/index.php
LIFE of MS (Living Independence for Everyone)	1304 Vine St. Jackson, MS 39202	601-969-4009 1-800-748-9398 (V/TDD)	https://www.lifeofms.com/info@lifeofms.com
MS Council for Exceptional Children	P. O. Box 300 Clinton, MS 39060		www.cec.sped.org
MS Department of Education Office of Special Education	P. O. Box 771 Jackson, MS 39205	601-359-3498	https://www.mdek12.org/OSE
MS Hearing-Vision Project USM Toni Hollingsworth, Project Director	118 College Drive #5115 Hattiesburg, MS 39406	228-249-9668 Toll Free: 1-800-264-5135	www.usm.edu/msdb
MS Parents of Blind Children			www.nfbofmississippi.org
Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center (MSPTI) Leslie Junkin, Project Director	2 Old River Place, Suite M Jackson, MS 39202	601-969-0601	www.mspti.org
Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Inc.	25 Glendale St. Durant, MS 39063	662-653-0122 662-653-0124	ellen@nolliejenkinsfamilycenter.org



	P. O. Box 276 Lexington, MS 39095		
Project START (Assistive Technology)	1281 Highway 51 N Madison, MS 39110	601-853-5249 Toll Free: 1- 800-852-8328	https://www.msprojectstart.org/ projectstart@mdrs.ms.gov
Sunflower County Parents and Students United Betty L. Petty, Executive Director	P. O. Box 2124 Indianola, MS 38751	601-278-2149	
Together Enhancing Autism Awareness in Mississippi (TEAAM)	P. O. Box 1 Taylorsville, MS 39168	601-782-9005 Toll Free: 1- 800-993-2437	takeaction@TEAAM.org www.TEAAM.org

