

Overview

Early Intervention/Special Education Services for Children Ages 0 to 5

In this section of the Education Practice Kit you will find information about obtaining special education services in the District of Columbia and Maryland for children aged 0 to 5. Early intervention services for children ages 0 through 3 are covered under Part C of the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (“IDEIA”) (see 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1487). Under both DC and Maryland state laws, if a parent elects, a child may continue to receive services under Part C of the IDEIA past their third birthday. Special education services for children ages 3 to 5 are covered under Part B of the IDEIA.

In this section you will find information and links to referral forms for each of the administering agencies involved in early intervention in DC and in Maryland. You will also find the link to a developmental chart to assist in determining if a child may qualify for services under the IDEIA.

Services in DC

- ◆ In DC, the Strong Start program (for children being served under Part C of the IDEIA) is operated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).
- ◆ In DC, the Early Stages Office of DC Public Schools serves children ages 3 to 5 in need of special education services.
- ◆ In DC, there are several revised regulations which took effect in July 2014 and July 2018. Please refer to the CLC Information Sheet on Early Intervention Regulations for this updated information.

Services in Prince George’s County

- ◆ In PG County, the Infant and Toddler Program provides early intervention services from birth through age 2 for children with developmental delays or disabilities.
- ◆ In PG County, the Child Find Program provides early intervention services for children ages 3 to 5 in need of special education services.

CLC Information Sheet: Early Intervention

Eligibility for Services and Extended IFSP Option

Eligibility for Services

- A child is eligible for services under Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA) (*see* 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1482.) and pursuant to D.C. Mun. Regs. tit. 5-A § 3108, if:
 - If the child is between the ages of birth to three years old; **AND**
 - (New Law Effective July 1, 2018) The child demonstrates a **25%** or more delay in one of the following developmental areas:
 - Physical development, including vision or hearing;
 - Cognitive development;
 - Communication development;
 - Social or emotional development; or
 - Adaptive development.
 - **OR** the child has been diagnosed as having a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay (including but not limited to: chromosomal abnormalities, genetic disorders, severe attachment disorder, or disorders related to secondary exposure to toxic substances).
- A child must be evaluated and the initial Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting must be held within 45 days of the date the agency receives the referral (D.C. Mun. Regs. tit. 5-A § 3107.1).

Extended IFSP

- Pursuant to D.C. Mun. Regs. tit. 5-A § 3110, a child may continue to receive community-based services through the IFSP past the child's 3rd birthday if the child is eligible to receive services under Part B of the IDEIA and the parent so elects.
- If the parent chooses for the child to continue to receive early intervention services under Part C of the IDEIA, the child will continue to receive community-based services until the beginning of the school year following the child's 4th birthday.
- A child may not continue to receive Part C services past the date of which the child enters Kindergarten or is eligible to enter Kindergarten in the District of Columbia.
- If the parent so chooses, a child may transition to school-based services under Part B of the IDEIA at the age of 3 years or at any point between the child's third birthday and the date the child is eligible to start kindergarten. (For example, a parent may elect to do the Extended IFSP for the rest of the school year and summer after a child turns 3 and start special education school-based services with the beginning of the school year while the child is still 3.)

CLC Tip Sheet

CFSA Early Intervention Screening Process

Per the process outlined below, Child and Family Services (CFSA) conducts screenings for disabilities for all children between the ages of 0-5 who enter care.¹ If the screening suggests that the child may have a disability, CFSA automatically refers the child to the appropriate education agency. The education agency then determines if the child is eligible for services.

Children Birth - 2 years, 10 months:

Children up to 2 years, 10 months who enter foster care will automatically receive an initial screening (Ages and Stages Questionnaire) from CFSA staff within 30 days of their entry into care. If the screening suggests that the child is “at risk” of developmental delays, CFSA staff will send the results and a referral to DC’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s (OSSE) Strong Start, DC’s Early Intervention Program. Strong Start will seek consent to evaluate the child, and must complete the child’s evaluation within 45 days of receiving an assessment. After the evaluation is completed, the multidisciplinary team determines whether the child needs services; if so, the team will develop an IFSP (Individualized Family Services Plan).

Children in foster care can receive services through OSSE’s Strong Start program regardless of the location of their home placement. Strong Start will report back to OSSE concerning whether the child was found eligible for services, what services were provided, or if the child was referred to Maryland for services. This report is to be filed with CHSA and a copy should be forwarded to the social worker. GALs may request a copy. If necessary, a nurse care manager or PEDS nurse will monitor the implementation of services. GALs should be involved in all multi-disciplinary team meetings and decisions and should have access to all documents created by CFSA, Strong Start, and Maryland Infants and Toddlers.

Children 2 years, 11 months - 5 years

CHSA will also screen all children in this age group who come into foster care using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The results of screenings are sent to DC Public Schools’ Early Stages program or to the appropriate public charter school if the student is enrolled in a charter school. For children enrolled in charter schools, CHSA will only forward the ASQ report if the score is below a certain score cut-off. Depending on where the child is enrolled, either Early Stages or the charter school should conduct a full evaluation if needed to determine whether the child is eligible for special education services and supports.

¹ See CFSA Early Intervention Child Development Screening Process, Administrative Issuance CFSA-15-4, July 17, 2015.

If the child is found eligible, then an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed and a location of services must be assigned. Early Stages or the charter school will report back to CFSA on whether evaluations were recommended, whether the child was found eligible for special education, and what services and placement were provided. That report will be entered into CFSA's FACES database and a CFSA spreadsheet. GALs should be involved in all IEP team meetings and decisions, and should have access to all documents created by CFSA, Early Stages, and, if applicable, DCPS, the charter school, or Maryland School.

How GALs can assist in this process:

- ◆ Ensure that the initial screening has been completed by CFSA.
- ◆ Ask for copies of the written results of the initial Ages and Stages Questionnaire screening from CFSA.
- ◆ If the screening suggests the child may have a disability or you are concerned that the child may have a disability, advocate for the child to be referred for a full evaluation.
- ◆ Even if CFSA determines that it's not necessary to refer the child to an education agency for a full evaluation, you can refer the child directly if you believe it's in the child's best interests. Anyone can refer a child to Strong Start or Early Stages.
- ◆ Help to identify an educational decision-maker if the child's birth parent is unavailable or unwilling to serve in that role. The parent's or surrogate parent's consent will be needed before the education agency may conduct an evaluation.
- ◆ Consider whether there should be a special education attorney appointed to represent the educational decision-maker.
- ◆ Ask for copies of the reports that the education agencies will send to CFSA regarding a child's eligibility determination and any recommended services.

Early Intervention

Resources and Links

◆ OSSE Infant and Toddler Development Chart

- <https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/Developmental%20Milestones%20Chart.pdf>
- The above link is designed to help parents, caregivers, or other professionals identify target milestones for children from 1 to 36 months of age.

◆ OSSE Strong Start Referral Form

- <https://osse.dc.gov/publication/start-dc-early-intervention-program-dc-eip-referral-form-0>
- This website links to Strong Start's Early Intervention Program Referral Form for children ages 0-3. The form is available in both English and Spanish.

◆ OSSE Early Childhood Transition Guidelines

- <https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/Early%20Childhood%20Transition%20Guidelines.pdf>
- This guideline outlines OSSE's responsibility to provide access to early intervention services for all children transitioning between services under Parts C and B of the IDEIA.

◆ DCPS Early Stages

- <http://www.earlystagesdc.org/>
- DCPS's Early Stages is the assessment center for DC children between the ages of 2 years 8 months and 5 years 10 months. This website provides resources and links regarding Early Stages services.

◆ CFSA Administrative Issuance: Early Intervention Child Development Screening Process (July 2015)

- <https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/AI%20-%20Early%20Intervention%20Child%20Development%20Screening%20Process%20%28final%202015%29.pdf>
- This policy outlines the agency's approach for referring children for early intervention screening and evaluation through the OSSE Strong Start and DCPS Early Stages programs.

◆ Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

- <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/pages/special-education/index.aspx>
- This website includes links for the Maryland Infant and Toddler's program overviews, Family Support Services, Child Find Brochures, and relevant contact information for each county.

◆ Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program: A Family Guide to Early Intervention Services in Maryland

- <https://marylandlearninglinks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Blue-Birth-3-Guide18x11.pdf>
- This guide provides an overview of Maryland's early intervention services and contact information for the Local Infants and Toddlers Program for every Maryland county.