

A Brief Overview of California's Early Start Program

Early Intervention Services in California

Developed by:

- California MAP to Inclusion and Belonging...Making Access Possible
- WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies in collaboration with the California Department of Education and the California Department of Developmental Services
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Intent of This Overview

To assist **early care and education providers** in understanding the Early Start early intervention system:

- when a child in their care, birth to age three years of age, has an identified disability
- when they have concerns that a child in their care, birth to age three years of age, might have a disability, developmental delay **or be at risk for a disability (2015 update)**

California's History of Serving Infants and Toddlers

- California law since 1980
- Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act in 1982

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Federal legislation mandates special education for all eligible children
- IDEA Part B: services for children with disabilities ages three through twenty-one
- IDEA Part C: services for children birth to three years of age

Early Start = Part C

Early Start is California's early intervention service system under Part C of IDEA

Early Start

Early Start seeks to promote and enhance a coordinated, family-focused service system for infants and toddlers from birth to age three years with a **significant** developmental delay, a disability, an established risk condition with a high probability of resulting in a delay or disability, **or be considered at high risk of having a substantial developmental delay due to a combination of biomedical risk factors**

2015 updates

Early Start is Designed to:

- Provide a system of referral and assessment that
 - results in individualized services
 - supports infants and toddlers and their families within their community
- Be family-focused by
 - keeping families informed about services for their child
 - supporting families and including them as collaborative decision makers

Early Start Administration

- The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is the lead agency for overall administration of Early Start
- DDS collaborates with the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, in the provision of services for some children

Eligibility Criteria

- The age at the time of the initial referral will be the age for consideration of eligibility.
- **Have developmental delay of at least 33% in one or more areas of either cognitive, communication, social or emotional, adaptive, or physical and motor development including vision and hearing; or**
- **Have an established risk condition of known etiology, with a high probability of resulting in delayed development; or**
- **Be considered at high risk of having a substantial developmental disability due to a combination of biomedical risk factors of which are diagnosed by qualified personnel**

2015 update

Early Start Services

- Are designed to meet the individual needs of each infant or toddler and needs of the family
- Are provided in “natural environments”
- Are provided to families by qualified personnel
- Include transition to appropriate services at three years of age

Natural Environment

- Any setting where typically developing children of a similar chronological age are found
- Includes home, neighborhood, child care, preschool, parks, birthday parties, informal gatherings of family and friends, etc.
- A “Natural Environment” is more than a location. It is a way of approaching service

A Natural Environment

- Is:
 - a location where this child would go if he did not have a disability
 - where other children go who do not have disabilities
 - in a part of the community where children and families without disabilities spend time when they are not being treated or tested for illness or health issues
- Is Not:
 - a location where people usually go because they have disabilities or medical issues
 - a location that was chosen because it had specialized equipment
 - a location that was chosen because it was convenient for specialists who work with the child

Early Start Services can Include:

- Assistive technology devices/services
- Audiology services
- Family training, counseling, home visits
- Some health services
- Medical services for diagnosis and evaluation
- Nursing services
- Nutrition services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Service coordination
- Special instruction
- Social work services
- Transportation services
- Speech and language services
- Vision services
- Others as determined by the IFSP Team

Family Involvement

- Families are an integral part of evaluation and assessment
- Families participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) development
- Early Start services support families and help them meet the special needs of their infants or toddlers

Early Start Family Resource Centers (FRCs)

- FRCs throughout California (~50) receive funding to provide parent-to-parent support to families
- FRCs are primarily staffed by parents who have children with special needs
- Services are provided in a nonclinical, family-centered atmosphere
- Child care providers can also access libraries at FRCs

Family Resource Centers

- Support the emotional and informational needs of families
- Provide referral information and outreach to underserved populations
- Support public awareness activities and family/professional collaborative activities
- Assist families with transition
- Provide support services and resources in many languages
- Are culturally responsive to the needs of families
- Provide resource, referral and outreach services

Parents' Rights

Parents have rights and protections to ensure that early intervention services are provided to their children:

- in a manner appropriate to their needs
- in consideration of family concerns
- in compliance with state and federal statutes

Mediation and Due Process

Parents have the right to request a mediation and due process hearing in Early Start if they have a disagreement with a regional center or LEA about:

- identification
- evaluation
- assessment
- placement of their child
- provision of appropriate early intervention services

Parents also may file a state complaint alleging a violation of federal or state statutes or regulations.

Early Start Looks Different in Each Community – Why?

- History
- Local decision-making
- Locally available resources

Transition at Three Years of Age

- Because Early Start (Part C) applies only to a child under three years of age, the law requires the family to be informed about the transition that will occur when the child turns three years of age
- Transition services are intended to support and prepare families and their child to exit Early Start and enter new services if needed at three years of age

Transition Options

- Special education preschool under Part B **and/or**
- Ongoing regional center services **and/or**
- Community options
 - Child care
 - Private preschool or Head Start
 - Remaining at home with the family
 - Other unique options in a community

Transitions

For more information, see the publication, **Effective Early Childhood Transitions**
<http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ResourceMaterials.cfm>

- 2015 update

For More Information

- Websites
 - Map to Inclusion and Belonging: www.CAInclusion.org
 - Early Start: www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/
 - DDS Birth to 36 Months: <http://www.dds.ca.gov/Birth36Months/Index.cfm>
 - Early Start Resources (materials at no cost)
<http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ResourceMaterials.cfm>
 - Other: <http://idea.ed.gov>, <http://www.ideapartnership.org/>
- Early Childhood Special Education Handbooks:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/ecseries.asp>
- Effective Early Childhood Transitions
<http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ResourceMaterials.cfm>
- 2015 update