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*
- 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
- Early Childhood Special Education Handbooks: http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/ecseries.asp
- 2015 update