



Preparing for Transitions: What You Need to Know Before Your Child's Third Birthday

Your child's third birthday is an important day. Aside from being a time to celebrate, it also marks the transition from Part C early childhood services to Part B preschool services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). This transition has a big impact on you and your child. The following information can help you plan for this change before you light those three candles.



Under IDEA, all children who qualify may receive special education services. Up to age 3, children are covered by Part C of IDEA. Part C focuses on helping the family meet the developmental needs of their child, such as learning to sit up, walk, or talk. These services are called early intervention services. Typically provided in natural environments, such as the child's home or child-care setting, these services and outcomes for the child and family are defined in an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

At age 3, supports and services change as eligible children move from Part C to Part B of IDEA. Preschool services are covered in Section 619 of Part B; services that your child is eligible for from kindergarten until high school graduation or age 21 are addressed in the rest of Part B. The IFSP is replaced by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This important document contains goals and objectives to address the child's unique needs as he or she learns the skills needed to prepare for kindergarten.

As much as possible, Part B services are to be provided in the least restrictive environment. That means that your child should be alongside typically developing peers in settings such as preschool, child care, or Head Start programs.

At this stage, IEP goals typically include social interaction and communication. Being included in programs with typically developing peers helps children with disabilities to interact, learn new social and communication skills, and form friendships. It also allows them to learn new adaptive skills or practice existing skills.

As your child moves from Part C to Part B, services and supports also change. Members of the team who helped you develop the outcomes specified in the IFSP may be different than those who will help to develop your child's IEP. Instead of working with a service coordinator, you will work with an IEP case manager.

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Minnesota to Change Part C Eligibility Criteria

At press time, Minnesota was expected to change its eligibility criteria for early intervention services affecting children from birth through age 2. The new criteria will include those children who meet the federal definition of an infant or toddler with a disability under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). The rules regarding the new criteria will go into effect on July 1, 2007. Visit PACER's Early Childhood Project Web site at www.PACER.org/parent/childhood/index.htm for the latest information.

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Know What to Expect at a Transition Meeting

Prior to your child's third birthday, your education team will call one or more transition meetings to discuss your child's needs and early childhood special education program options. You and the team will address a variety of topics, such as goals, timelines, and team members' responsibilities; your concerns; the need for any further evaluations; and your special education legal rights. In addition, you may want to discuss:

- Differences between early intervention and preschool services
- Options for where your child may receive early childhood special education services, such as community preschool, child care, Head Start, or pre-kindergarten
- Issues such as student-to-adult ratio, length of day, and family involvement
- How special education services will be provided in the preschool program you select
- Development of a new IEP for special education services or an Individual Interagency Intervention Plan (IIIP) if your child also receives county or health services in Minnesota
- Ways to help professionals understand the unique strengths and needs of your child
- Transportation to the new program

Many decisions are made during the transition meetings. Feel free to ask questions then or anytime during the year. You might, for example, want to know:

- When will my child make the transition to a new program?
- Who will arrange for me to visit the proposed program?
- Who is my contact person if I have other questions?

If the team determines that your child does not qualify for special education services, the team members can provide you with information regarding other community-based services that may be available for you and your child.

Prepare Your Family and Child for the Changes

Making transition decisions with your team is just the first step. The next step is to prepare your family and

child for the new teachers, children, schedules, routines, classroom activities, and expectations. To help make the transition easier, try these tips:

- Plan ahead. Allow enough time to make decisions.
- Talk with other families about what the process was like for them.
- Learn how to advocate for your child.
- Make sure your child's medical, educational, and assessment records are up to date.

Be sure to include your child in the preparations. Knowing what to expect can help any child feel more confident going into a new situation. You might want to:

- Talk to your child about going to a new program and visit that setting.
- Read books about going to preschool.
- Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children.
- Encourage your child to communicate with others and ask for help when needed.

Celebrate Change

Transition planning can bring great rewards for you, your child, and the professionals who work with you. You can learn new skills and strategies that may help with future transitions; your child can learn to adjust to new people, programs, or settings; and professionals can gain insight into your child and the materials, equipment, and techniques that will help your child most. With all those benefits, you'll have much to celebrate when your child's third birthday arrives.

Did You Know...

Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), each state must have policies and procedures in place that describe the transition process for young children with disabilities as they move from Part C to Part B services on their third birthday. The transition steps are written in your child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

You have the right to disagree with what the school district proposes. If you cannot come to an agreement with the district, the law provides procedures that include conciliation, mediation, or due process. Details are available through your school district. You also may call PACER Center at 952-838-9000 (voice) or 952-838-0190 (TTY). In Greater Minnesota, call 800-537-2237 (toll free) or log on to www.PACER.org.

Of Bears, Bytes, and Babies

Move over, teddy bears. There's a new activity on the block for babies and toddlers: computer games. While admittedly not as cuddly as Teddy, computers are a new trend in early childhood learning and development.

"Parents and professionals used to have the misconception that a baby or toddler is too young to use a computer, but they are finding that's not the case," says Tenley McDonald, assistive technology specialist at PACER Center.

While reading to young children and enjoying activities with them remain highly important ways to encourage development, computer programs and other assistive technology can provide an educational boost for very young children—including those with disabilities. "All babies and young children thrive on stimulation," McDonald explains. "Many early childhood software programs provide visual, auditory, and tactile components to help children learn while they have fun. Those programs can be especially helpful to children with autism and other sensory integration disabilities."

A little screen time has other benefits as well. It can help young children gain motor skills; learn sounds, letters, colors, and shapes; enhance listening skills; and develop reasoning and comprehension.

PACER's Simon Technology Center Library has software that parents can check out before they buy. First Steps, for example, is a computer game created especially for children as young as 12 months. It offers three interactive levels, and children can progress at their own pace. A customized keyboard lets little hands explore color keys, musical instruments, shapes and sounds, and more.

Even teddy bears might approve. The software includes a cast of friendly critters—including a bear named Buddy.

For more information about how software and other technology can help very young children with disabilities learn and communicate, contact Tenley McDonald at PACER's Simon Technology Center, 952-838-9000 or tenley.mcdonald@PACER.org.



Help Your Baby Gain Early Literacy Skills

From the moment babies are born, they start developing literacy skills through their relationship with their parents. By talking, reading, singing, and playing with your infant or toddler, you provide the foundation your child will need to develop language and reading skills.

Early literacy skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For children with disabilities or developmental delays, those skills may mature more slowly than they do in typically developing children. Whatever your child's level of ability, here are some things you can do every day to help your baby develop those important skills. Some activities encourage more than one skill.

Encourage Listening:

- Respond to your infant's cooing
- Talk to infants and toddlers
- Increase vocabulary by naming things in the child's environment (i.e., body parts, colors, clothing, food, toys)
- Sing songs and recite rhymes daily
- Make sounds of the animals you see in books
- Give simple directions to your child
- Listen to music, and move or clap to the beat
- Read stories and talk about illustrations

Encourage Speaking:

- Respond to your infant's cooing
- Encourage young children to ask for what they want, not to point to it
- Ask children questions about their day and about stories you read to them
- Teach children to use manners and greetings (i.e., please, thank you, hi, goodbye)
- Sing together and say rhymes
- Explain new vocabulary encountered in books or conversation
- Show interest in what children have to say
- Share storytelling time with your child
- Use communication boards or other technology with children who cannot speak
- Increase vocabulary by reading to your child daily

Encourage Reading:

- Teach your child about book concepts (i.e., right-side-up, front to back, turn one page at a time, read left to right, beginning to end)
- Read daily to your children from the time they're born
- Have your child "read" a story to you
- Read, then reread, the story as often as your child requests
- Put your children's names on their belongings so they learn to "read" their names and understand that squiggles (letters) say something important
- Teach children to read symbols and signs (i.e., McDonald's arches)
- Read predictable books so children can join in
- Have print materials visible throughout the house (i.e., books, magazines, recipes)
- Keep a variety of children's books accessible
- Expose your children to the many books at your local library or bookstore
- Be sure your children see you read and realize that reading is important and enjoyable
- Support the importance of reading through positive attitudes and actions
- Use Braille or talking books with children who have vision impairments
- Talk about illustrations in books

Learn More about Early Literacy

Parents and professionals have a new resource for learning about early literacy. The Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) promotes evidence-based literacy learning practices for early intervention practitioners, parents, and others who care for children up to age 5 who have disabilities, developmental delays, or are at risk for poor outcomes. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, CELL is a research-to-practice technical assistance center and a major initiative of the Center for Evidence-Based Practices at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute. Learn more at www.earlyliteracylearning.org.

Encourage Writing:

- Encourage play with toys that develop grasp and fine motor development, (i.e., puzzles, clay, beads)
- Provide daily opportunities for young children to draw or write with different instruments, (i.e., crayons, pencils, markers, pens, paintbrushes)
- Recognize the importance of drawing, coloring, and scribble writing
- Help children learn colors, shapes, sizes, names of letters
- Have children help you make grocery lists, sign birthday cards, enter events on the family calendar, send greeting cards
- Display children’s scribbling, writing, and art work at the child’s viewing level
- Provide adaptive writing instruments, computers, or other accommodations for children who have fine-motor disabilities

You can incorporate these activities naturally into things you do with your young child every day. Here are some ideas to make daily routines a great time to promote literacy:

- **Dressing/undressing:** Name body parts, clothing, colors, numbers, concepts such as soft/scratchy or big/little
- **Meal times:** Name foods, talk about how food grows, the colors of food, numbers of vegetables on the plate, concepts such as hot/cold or sweet/sour
- **Diapering:** Tell your child what you are doing, name items you are using, such as diaper, ointment, wipes
- **Bath time:** Tell stories, sing songs, say rhymes, and have some bath toys related to literacy—vinyl books, tub letters, shapes, numbers
- **Bedtime:** Tell or read stories every night, talk about illustrations, ask older children what they think will happen next in the story
- **Playtime:** Talk and listen to your child, read and provide opportunities for your child to do fine-motor activities and writing, sing songs
- **Car time:** Identify what the child is seeing (rain, snow, sunshine, trees, truck, bus, colors, signs, symbols), talk about where you are going, sing songs, say rhymes, play word games with older children
- Support the importance of reading through positive attitudes and actions



A child reads with his mother using “page fluffers,” small felt discs that separate the pages of a board book making it easier to turn the pages.

- Involve children in selecting programs from the TV listings (with parent guidance)
- Sit down with your children to look at and read their work from school

Depending on your child’s needs, you may want to check out assistive devices that can help build literacy skills. PACER’s Simon Technology Center offers free consultations by appointment to explore devices, hardware, and software that can open the world of reading and writing to your child. For example, you and your child may benefit from:

- “Page fluffers,” small felt discs that separate the pages of a board book for easier turning
- Multimedia software that allows you to create digital books specific to your child’s interests or needs
- Hardware tools such as alternative keyboards that allow a child with limited motor skills to more easily use the computer
- Voice output devices to help a nonverbal child communicate with others
- Workshops to explore various technologies

Remember, you are your child’s best teacher. Opportunities for learning early literacy skills are everywhere you and your baby go!

Some of the information in this article was adapted from “Home Literacy Activities: Important for Children with and without Disabilities,” Early Childhood Connection, Spring 2004, by Joan Blaska, Ph.D., professor emeritus, St. Cloud State University.

Who Is Responsible for Transporting My Child?

“When it comes to transporting preschoolers age 3 years and older to early childhood special education services, many parents have questions,” says Judy Swett, PACER’s early childhood coordinator. “State law lays out the basic rules, but other arrangements may be made through the child’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 (of the Rehabilitation Act) plan,” she says.

She offers the following answers to common questions about early childhood transportation.

Q. Who is responsible for delivering students from their home to the school bus?

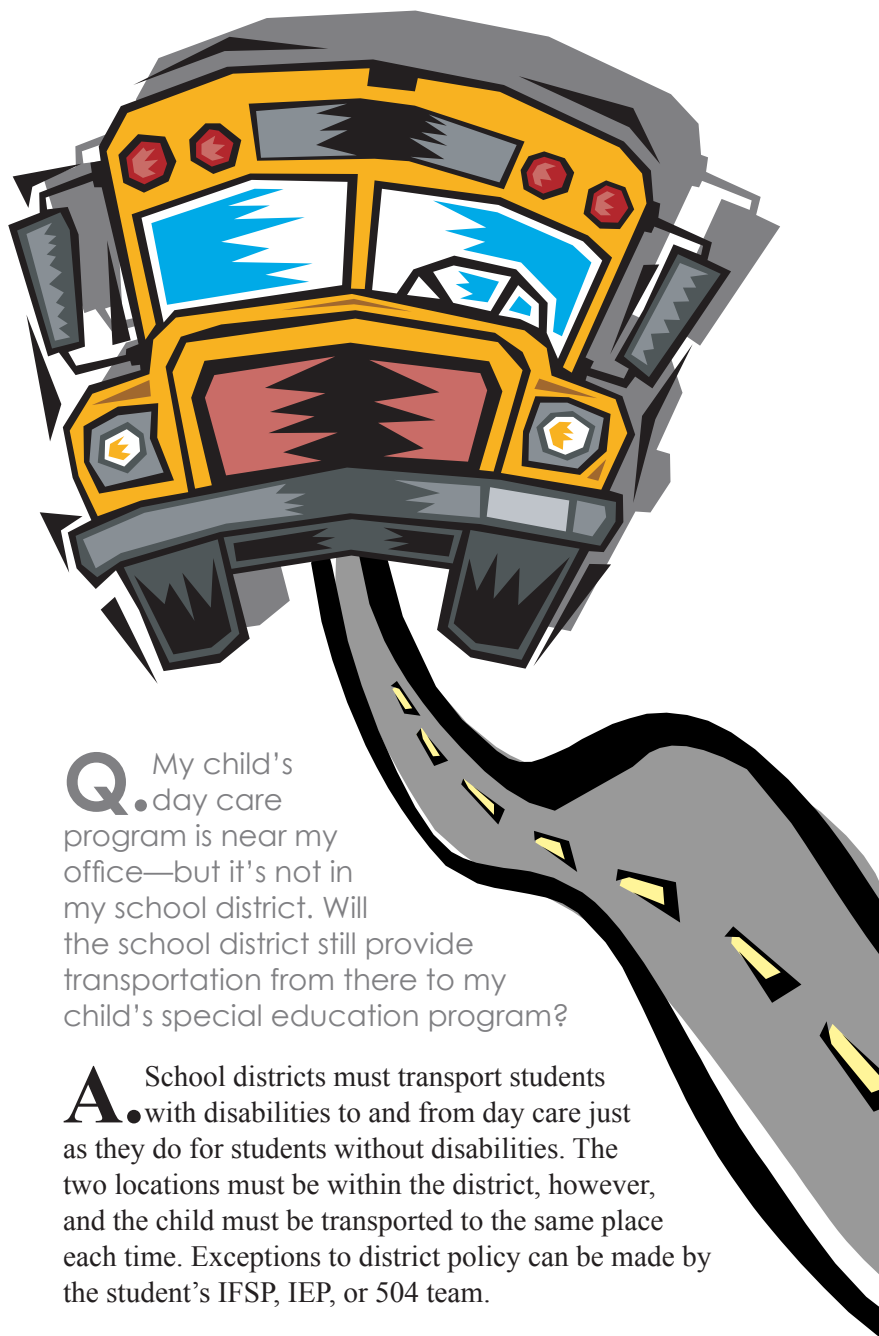
A. It’s up to the parents to have their child meet the school bus at the street, curb, or driveway. Sometimes, however, other arrangements may be agreed to through the IFSP, IEP, or Section 504 process. School districts must follow such arrangements.

Q. How much help should a school bus driver or bus assistant give a student who is boarding or leaving the bus?

A. It depends on the needs of the child. If help is required, it should be specified in the child’s IFSP, IEP, or Section 504 plan. State law requires drivers and aides to help pupils with disabilities on and off the bus when necessary for safety or if written into their plan.

Q. Is there a limit to how much time a student with a disability can spend on a school bus?

A. No. State law says the transportation time should be appropriate to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the child. In general, a child with a disability should not spend more time in transit than a child without a disability.



Q. My child's day care program is near my office—but it's not in my school district. Will the school district still provide transportation from there to my child's special education program?

A. School districts must transport students with disabilities to and from day care just as they do for students without disabilities. The two locations must be within the district, however, and the child must be transported to the same place each time. Exceptions to district policy can be made by the student’s IFSP, IEP, or 504 team.

Q. Can the school district make parents provide transportation?

A. No. The school district is responsible for transporting students with disabilities. If the school district offers reasonable transportation and the parents decline the offer, the district is not obligated to reimburse the parents for transportation. Sometimes, however, the district and parents may agree in writing to alternative arrangements. For instance, parents may be willing or even prefer to transport their child themselves and the district may agree to reimburse them for mileage.

Q. What training is required for school bus drivers?

A. Every year, school bus drivers receive training and must prove that they are competent in six areas. All drivers must show that they can safely operate the bus; understand student behavior (including issues relating to students with disabilities); ensure orderly conduct and handle any misconduct appropriately; understand relevant laws and safety policies; handle emergencies; and safely load and unload students.

Q. Is a bus aide required when transporting a student with disabilities?

A. The student's IFSP, IEP, or Section 504 team makes this decision, based on such factors as the severity of the student's disability, distance traveled, density of population, terrain, and the need to assist or control the behavior of the student.

Q. Are emergency health cards required in vehicles used to transport students with disabilities?

A. Yes. State law says that drivers or aides transporting students with disabilities on special school bus routes must have a typewritten card in the vehicle that includes the pupil's name and address; the nature of his or her disabilities; emergency health care information; the names and telephone numbers of the child's physician, parents, guardians, or custodians, and an alternate emergency contact person. It is also recommended that the card include information on an alternate site where the student can be dropped off if nobody is at home. The law also recommends that an emergency card be on all buses where there is a student with a potential emergency health need.

Q. When an infant or very young child rides a school bus, is a car seat required?

A. Although all Minnesota vehicles transporting children under the age of 4 are required to have a child passenger restraint system such as a car seat, exceptions can be made. If a licensed physician deems that a child cannot be transported safely in such restraints due to a medical condition, body size, or physical disability, the requirement can be waived. The bus driver must carry a current written statement from the physician, and the accommodation must be noted in the student's IFSP, IEP, or Section 504 plan. Because large school buses are usually not equipped with factory-installed seat belts, school district personnel should work with the parents to determine whether a car seat is safe and appropriate for transporting their child in a school bus.



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TECHNOLOGY

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