

Early Childhood Special Education: Referrals



Preschool special education services are provided by local school districts (also called local education agencies or LEAs) to students ages 3 through 5. LEAs are responsible for providing services to all children (ages 3 through 21) with special education needs who have been determined eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

How can a young child be referred for Early Childhood Special Education?

Referrals for Early Childhood Special Education can come from a variety of sources. In general, young children begin this process in one of two ways:

- **SoonerStart:** SoonerStart is Oklahoma’s early intervention program for infants and toddlers. All Oklahoma children birth through two years old are eligible for a free developmental assessment through [SoonerStart](#).
 - Children eligible for SoonerStart are assisted with transitioning from SoonerStart to the LEA prior to the child’s 3rd birthday. If a child from SoonerStart is potentially eligible for Part B services (school age services for students from ages 3 through 21), the school district is notified.
 - SoonerStart sends a notice to the school district and (with family consent) holds a transition planning conference (TPC) before the child’s third birthday. If the child is determined eligible for Special Education Services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed and implemented by the child’s third birthday.
- **Child Find:** Parents/caregivers and community providers (Head Starts, private daycare providers, and others) are able to refer a child for special education eligibility at any time. When a young child has not participated in SoonerStart, the child will be considered under Child Find and the school district will proceed with the eligibility determination process.
 - Once a parent or community referral is made, a Review of Existing Data (RED) **must** be completed by the team in a reasonable amount of time. This review may or may not include the parent.
 - The LEA team may determine the child does not require an evaluation if they do not suspect a disability. This decision and explanation must be



given to the parents **in writing** (called a Written Notice to Parents) and include a copy of procedural safeguards. Families may also want to consider other services available for their child through local community and state programs, as well as other available resources.

- A parent must provide written consent in order for an evaluation to occur. Once consent is provided, eligibility must be determined within 45 school days.

What happens when a child qualifies for special education services?

If a child is eligible for special education services, a team will meet to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the child.

- The IEP team, which must include at least one parent/guardian, will develop measurable annual goals for the child to address the identified needs and enable the child to progress in age-appropriate educational activities.
- The IEP team will determine the services that are needed, the place in which the student will receive services, and the duration of services.

What services and resources may be available for children ages three through five?

- Public preschool, Head Start, or community placement with varying levels of accommodations/supports.
- Related services (Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Assistive Technology, Transportation, etc.).
- Other services as determined by the IEP team.

Who should parents contact to begin the process?

- A parent/guardian should contact their local school district and ask for a special education evaluation when they suspect their child has a disability. It is helpful to ask to talk to the school's special education staff.
- For further information or questions, please contact the Special Education department at OSDE at: [405-521-3351](tel:405-521-3351).