



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

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## Early Childhood Transition: Frequently Asked Questions

This document is intended to provide guidance to District of Columbia local education agencies (LEAs) providing preschool special education services to children under the age of six. These FAQs address issues and LEA obligations related to children transitioning from Part C early intervention services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provided by DC Strong Start Early Intervention Program to IDEA Part B preschool special education and related services provided by LEAs.

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### General LEA Responsibilities

#### **1. What agencies are primarily responsible for early intervention or special education services?**

*DC Strong Start (OSSE)* - Strong Start is the District's Early Intervention Program for families with children under the age of three who are concerned about their child's development. Strong Start provides early intervention services to eligible children under the age of three through an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP). Strong Start also provides early intervention services to children who are eligible for IDEA Part B services but whose parents have elected to receive services under an Extended IFSP, from age three until the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday.

*District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Early Stages* - Early Stages is a DC Public Schools (DCPS) evaluation center for children between the ages of two years and eight months and five years and ten months who do not attend a DCPS school or DC public charter school. The organization conducts initial evaluations and determines eligibility for Part B services for children that are not enrolled in a DCPS school or DC public charter school and, if the child is eligible, develops an IEP. DCPS Early Stages does not provide special education services.

*Local Education Agencies* – LEAs are DCPS or DC public charter schools that provide educational services to District residents. LEAs evaluate and provide special education and related services to enrolled children ages three to 22 who have been determined eligible under IDEA Part B, including preschool special education and related services for children age three to five. Public charter school LEAs provide services to students within the ages and grades identified in charter agreements. Accordingly, not all public charter school LEAs serve pre-school aged children.

#### **2. How do enrollment requirements affect children transitioning from C to B?**

To be eligible for Pre-Kindergarten 3 (PK3), a child must turn age three by September 30. However, three-year-old children with active IEPs are entitled to enroll in DCPS or public charter LEAs with available seats that accept midyear transfer students at any time once the child is three years old, regardless of when in the year they turn three. Beginning with the release of lottery information for the following school year (usually in late April), a public charter school LEA may encounter enrolling children

with in-progress transitions from Part C early intervention services. Therefore, between April and September, public charter school LEAs should be prepared to participate in transition conferences and planning for incoming children transitioning from Part C early intervention services. Generally, DCPS Early Stages manages the transition process for all children transitioning from Part C early intervention services who are not enrolled in a public charter school with Stage 4 enrollment.

**3. What should a public charter school LEA do if a parent or stakeholder contacts the LEA with special education or developmental delay concerns about a child under the age of six who is not enrolled or enrolling in the LEA?**

If the child is two years and nine months old or older, the public charter school LEA should make a referral to DCPS Early Stages (contact information for DCPS Early Stages is provided at the end of this document). DCPS Early Stages will proceed with documenting the student's referral in the Special Education Data System (SEDS) and making reasonable efforts to obtain parental consent to conduct the initial evaluation. If the child is younger than two years and nine months, the LEA should assist the parent in contacting Strong Start at the contact information available at the close of this document.

**4. When will DCPS Early Stages contact a public charter school LEA about a child who is enrolling in the public charter school LEA?**

DCPS Early Stages will ask the parent for a letter, email, or other documentation from the parent or the public charter school LEA confirming that the child is registered in the public charter school LEA (stage four enrollment) or that the child is attending the public charter school LEA (stage five enrollment). Once DCPS Early Stages has received evidence of stage four or stage five enrollment, it will contact the public charter school LEA to effectuate the appropriate transfer of student records.

### Smooth and Effective Transition Process

**5. What is a smooth and effective transition from early intervention services to preschool special education services?**

As part of a child's eligibility for a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under IDEA, a child receiving IDEA Part C early intervention services is entitled to a smooth and effective transition from those services to IDEA Part B preschool special education services. A transition is considered "smooth and effective" if:

- The transition begins no less than 90 days prior to the child's third birthday, and at the discretion of the parties not more than 9 months before the child's third birthday;
- The child is provided with an IEP listing the services that are to be provided and both the type of placement and a specific location for services by the child's third birthday;
- There is no disruption in services between IDEA Part C and IDEA Part B services (that is, all special education and related services in the child's IEP must commence by the child's third birthday); and
- OSSE Strong Start, LEA IDEA Part B personnel, and the child's family are involved in the transition process.

**6. What are the responsibilities of a public charter school LEA related to children transitioning from IDEA Part C early intervention services who are enrolled in the public charter school LEA for the following school year as evidenced by stage 4 enrollment?**

All LEAs are responsible for participating in transition planning conferences, as appropriate. (5-E DCMR §3002.9(a)(1)) This means that, generally, DCPS will execute this responsibility because it receives the transition conference invitation from Strong Start, but public charter school LEAs must participate if a child is stage four or stage five enrolled.

For children who are not currently stage five enrolled, but who are stage four enrolled for the following school year (that is, the student has completed registration in the charter school's student information system upon the charter school's receipt of required enrollment forms), a public charter school LEA is expected to:

- Identify a point of contact to receive notification of and/or communication about children enrolling in the LEA who previously received Strong Start early intervention services. The point of contact must be designated by the LEA in eSchoolPlus as the LEA's "Preschool Special Education Point of Contact" (Preschool SPED POC);
- Attend transition conference meetings to provide information on the program offered by the public charter school LEA, and to discuss the public charter school LEA's role in the initial evaluation and IEP development for the child;
- Monitor OSSE databases and LEA student information systems to ensure the LEA is aware of enrolling children and is prepared to provide special education and related services in accordance with the child's IEP. LEAs may learn that a child enrolling in the LEA is transitioning from Strong Start early intervention services from:
  - Self-report by the child's parent;
  - Direct contact from DC EIP/ Strong Start or DCPS Early Stages; and/or
  - Information in OSSE databases, such as the Special Education Data System (SEDS) or the Early Access to Students with Disabilities Data application;
- Ensure the development of an IEP by the child's third birthday (this may be completed by DCPS Early Stages through the transition process); and
- Ensure the provision of special education and related services by the child's third birthday or, if the child turns three years old on a non-school day, within the timeframe described in question 21.

OSSE expects public charter school LEAs to engage in the transition process for students who are enrolling in the LEA. While public charter LEAs and DCPS Early Stages should collaborate to determine roles and responsibilities for completing the child's transition, it is to the public charter school LEA's benefit to learn about the student and their individualized needs by conducting the initial evaluation and developing the student's IEP within the context of the LEA's special education program. Public charter school LEAs that experience barriers or challenges in carrying out responsibilities for the transition of children enrolling in their LEA should contact OSSE to discuss available supports and resources.

## *Transition Conferences*

### **7. What is a transition conference?**

The transition conference is a transitional meeting convened by OSSE Strong Start (typically, the IDEA Part C service coordinator) for a child who will be exiting early intervention services to discuss the Part B initial evaluation process and special education services or other community resources as appropriate. Participants include the child's IFSP team, the child's family, and Early Stages and/or the LEA in which the child will enroll.

### **8. Is a public charter school LEA required to attend a transition conference for children who are not enrolled in the LEA?**

All LEAs are responsible for participating in transition planning conferences as described above. Generally, DCPS will execute this responsibility because Early Stages receives the transition conference invitation from Strong Start through an established, interagency notification process. However, if the parent notifies Strong Start or Early Stages that the child will attend a public charter school LEA, DC Strong Start or Early Stages will invite the public charter school LEA to attend the transition conference or participate in the initial evaluation and IEP development process. A public charter school LEA must attend a transition planning conference for a child who is stage four enrolled for the following school year, and should also attend a transition planning conference for any child for whom it receives a transition conference invitation (even if that child is not yet stage four enrolled, but expects to attend the LEA) to assist in determining appropriate roles and responsibilities for the agencies and LEAs involved.

### **9. How will an LEA be notified of a transition conference for a child enrolling in the LEA?**

As part of an established, interagency notification process, DCPS Early Stages receives transition conference invitations for each child receiving Part C services that is age two years and 6.5 months for whom the parent has not opted out of notifying the LEA. Additionally, as part of transition planning, the child's DC Strong Start service coordinator will ask the parent for enrollment information to determine if the child has secured a seat and registered in a public charter school LEA for the following school year (stage four enrollment). If the child's parent indicates that the child will attend a specific public charter school LEA, DC Strong Start will send a transition conference invitation to the identified LEA.

### **10. What are the roles and responsibilities of an LEA at a transition conference?**

The transition conference is an opportunity to introduce the child's family to IDEA Part B, initiate cooperative relationships, and share information. The LEA should attend the transition conference prepared to discuss the LEA's programming and services, and its role in the initial evaluation process and IEP development.

## *Initial Evaluation*

### **11. What constitutes referral for a child transitioning from IDEA Part C early intervention services?**

The invitation to a child's transition conference sent from DC Strong Start to an LEA will serve as each potentially transitioning child's referral date.

**12. Besides DC Strong Start, from what other sources must an LEA accept referrals for children under the age of six?**

For children under the age of six, LEAs may accept referrals from any source, but must treat a referral from the following individuals as a request for initial evaluation: pediatrician or other medical professional, including physicians, hospitals, and other health providers; child development facilities, including day care centers, child care centers, and early childhood programs; District agencies and programs, including IDEA Part C programs (DC Early Intervention Program (EIP), also known as Strong Start); community and civic organizations; and advocacy organizations. (5-E DCMR §3004.2) The LEA must notify the parent of receipt of any referral received under §3004.2. This notification must include information regarding the initial evaluation process, parental consent requirements, and resources the parent may contact for assistance. (5-E DCMR §3004.4)

**13. How should reasonable efforts to obtain parental consent for initial evaluation be conducted for children transitioning from Part C?**

Within 30 calendar days of the receipt of the referral, the LEA must make reasonable efforts to obtain parental consent for the initial evaluation. (5-E DCMR §3005.2(a)) The LEA must begin reasonable efforts no later than ten business days from the referral date. (5-E DCMR §3005.2(c)) For children transitioning from IDEA Part C services, receipt of the transition conference invitation constitutes referral. In consideration of the coordinated transition process, LEAs are expected to obtain parental consent at the transition conference meeting if it is scheduled to occur within 30 calendar days of receipt of the transition conference invitation. If the transition conference is not scheduled to occur within 30 calendar days of the receipt of the referral, the LEA should begin reasonable efforts to obtain parental consent in accordance with the regulatory requirements.

**14. What should an LEA do if a child who previously received IDEA Part C early intervention services enrolls in the LEA with an incomplete initial eligibility?**

The LEA should review the child's SEDS file to determine the necessary next steps, and complete the initial eligibility as soon as possible. The LEA should comply with the timeline for an eligibility determination applicable to the prior LEA; however, if the new LEA is making sufficient progress, the LEA and parent can agree to a specific time when the evaluation will be completed. (34 C.F.R. §300.301(d)) To ensure a prompt completion of the evaluation, OSSE recommends that such agreed upon evaluation timeline not exceed an additional 30 calendar days. If the child began the initial evaluation process with DCPS Early Stages, the miscellaneous documents section or communications log in SEDS may have helpful information. If a public charter school LEA needs more information to complete the initial eligibility, it should contact DCPS Early Stages at the contact information provided at the close of this document.

*IEP Development*

**15. Is a public charter school LEA responsible for developing an IEP for a student who is stage four enrolled for the following school year?**

Public charter school LEAs are responsible for developing an IEP by the third birthday for all children who are currently enrolled in the LEA or have completed the registration process for the next school

year (stage four enrollment). DCPS has this responsibility for any child who is a resident of the District of Columbia who is not stage four or stage five enrolled in a public charter school LEA.

For children who are stage four enrolled in a public charter school LEA for the following school year, the LEA must:

- Ensure the development of an IEP by the child's third birthday; and
- Ensure the provision of special education and related services by the child's third birthday or, if the child turns three on a non-school day, within the timeframe described in question 21.

Ensuring the development of an IEP may include collaborating with DCPS Early Stages to develop the IEP and monitor the child's progress through the transition process.

**16. If a child with an IEP developed by DCPS Early Stages transfers to a public charter school LEA, is the public charter school LEA required to implement the IEP?**

If a child with an existing IEP transfers to an LEA in the District of Columbia within the same school year, the new LEA, in consultation with the parents, must provide comparable services as soon as possible, and all comparable services must begin within 20 calendar days and continue until the LEA adopts the existing IEP or develops a new IEP. Comparable services are services that are similar or equivalent to those described in the child's IEP from the previous LEA. Within 30 calendar days of enrollment, the new LEA must decide to either adopt the child's IEP or develop a new IEP. A new LEA that determines that it is appropriate to develop a new IEP must finalize the IEP within 60 calendar days of enrollment.

**17. What should an LEA do if a child who previously received IDEA Part C early intervention services enrolls in the LEA with a current initial eligibility for IDEA Part B services but without an IEP, or if a parent provides a draft IEP?**

The LEA should review the child's SEDS file to determine the necessary next steps, and complete the child's IEP as soon as possible. If the child began the initial evaluation process with DCPS Early Stages, the miscellaneous documents section or communications log in SEDS may have helpful information. For children who received services under an Extended IFSP, it is standard practice not to obtain parental consent for the initial provision of Part B services (because the parent has elected to continue to receive Part C early intervention services). Because parental consent for the initial provision of Part B services is the final step for completing the IEP in SEDS, such a child may have a draft or non-finalized IEP in SEDS. If a public charter school LEA needs more information to complete or finalize the IEP, it should contact DCPS Early Stages at (202) 698-8037.

**18. How can an LEA access a child's records prior to the start of the following school year?**

Prior to receiving access to the child's records in SEDS, an LEA can use the Early Access to Students with Disabilities Data Application to preview child-level special education information for use in planning for the following school year, including information related to a child's weekly service hours, related services, dedicated aide, and assistive technology. If an LEA requires access to the child's SEDS file prior to the official switchover of their LEA student information system (SIS) to the following school year, the LEA should contact their OSSE data liaison for assistance in facilitating a manual transfer of the records.

## Provision of IEP Services for Children Transitioning from IDEA Part C

### **19. If a child is transitioning into a public charter school LEA, who is responsible for providing services on the child's IEP?**

If a child is stage four or stage five enrolled in a public charter school LEA for the current school year, the public charter school LEA is responsible for providing services on the child's IEP.

If a child is stage four enrolled in a public charter school LEA for the following school year and turns three years old during the current school year, DCPS is responsible for providing services on the child's IEP during the current school year.

If a child is stage four enrolled in a public charter school LEA for the following school year and turns age three during the summer or between school years, and the child is not eligible for extended school year (ESY) services, the public charter school LEA is responsible for providing services in accordance with the child's IEP upon the child's stage five enrollment (attendance) in the LEA.

### **20. When must special education and related services be provided to a child transitioning from early intervention services?**

The LEA in which the child is enrolled must provide special education (specialized instruction) and related services by the child's third birthday. Specialized instruction must be on the first day the child attends school (stage five enrollment), and all related services must be attempted at least once within 14 days of the child's third birthday.

### **21. If a child turns three on a non-school day, when must special education and related services be provided?**

If the child turns three on a non-school day (including weekends, holidays, between school years, and other school breaks), specialized instruction must be provided on the first school day after the child's third birthday. If the child is eligible for extended school year (ESY) services, and the child turns three before or during the ESY period specified in the IEP, specialized instruction must be provided by the child's third birthday. All related services must be provided at least once within 14 days of the first day of school following the child's third birthday. If the child turns three during the summer and the child does not qualify for related services as part of their ESY services, all related services must be provided at least once within 14 days of the first day of school after the summer. If the child is eligible for ESY services, all related services as indicated in the child's IEP must be provided during the ESY period.

## Special Considerations

### **22. Who is responsible for providing extended school year (ESY) services for a child turning age three over the summer/ between school years?**

For children who are transitioning from IDEA Part C early intervention services into an LEA and who have been found eligible for services under IDEA Part B, ESY services should be considered as a component of the IEP development process. If the child is determined to be eligible for ESY, the IEP team must determine what services will be delivered during the summer in order for the receiving LEA to meet its obligation to provide FAPE. The LEA in which the child is stage 4 enrolled for the upcoming school year is responsible for providing ESY services See question 21 for more information. The child's family may elect

to continue to receive early intervention services through an Extended IFSP over the summer, then elect to enroll in an LEA and begin receiving IEP services at the start of the school year. In such circumstances, the LEA would be responsible for implementing the child's IEP, including providing special education and related services, upon the first day the child attends the LEA.

### **23. Who is responsible for ensuring the transition of children exiting an Extended IFSP at age four?**

There are two circumstances in which a child with an Extended IFSP may transition into an LEA: at the parent's request prior to the fourth birthday, or upon the start of the school year following the child's fourth birthday.

*Elective (parent enrollment in LEA):* While receiving services on an Extended IFSP, the parent may revoke consent for the Extended IFSP and elect to receive IDEA Part B services through an IEP at any time. The parent must provide notice to DC Strong Start in writing, and enroll in an LEA to receive IDEA Part B services. If a public charter school LEA has a seat available, the child may enroll in the LEA at any point during the year and receive services in accordance with the child's previously-developed IEP. Within 30 days of receiving written notification from DC Strong Start that the parent chose to terminate early intervention services under an IFSP, the LEA must convene an IEP team meeting to review the IEP to prepare for implementation of services or amend the IEP if necessary. The LEA must provide specialized instruction on the first school day after the child becomes stage five enrolled (attendance) and providing each related service at least once within 14 days of the child's first day of school.

*Mandatory (student age out following fourth birthday):* If a child is turning age four and is registered in a public charter school LEA for the following school year (stage four enrolled), the public charter school LEA will be responsible for providing IEP services by the first day of the school year following the child's fourth birthday. Specifically, the LEA must provide specialized instruction by the first attended school day of the school year following the child's fourth birthday (stage five enrollment), and must provide each related service at least once no later than 14 days after the first day the student attends school. DC Strong Start is required to continue to provide IFSP services under the Extended IFSP Option until the date on which services through an IEP begin or the first day of the school year after the child's fourth birthday, whichever comes first. Within six months and no later than 30 days prior to the first school day of the school year after the child's fourth birthday, the LEA must convene an IEP team meeting to review the IEP to prepare for implementation of services or amend the IEP if necessary. Re-determining eligibility for a child transitioning at age four is not required. In April, Early Stages is notified of children who must exit from Extended IFSP services due to age, and begins reviewing and updating those children's IEPs. Between April and September, public charter school LEAs should monitor student stage four enrollments, be prepared to review and update IEPs (including contacting Early Stages regarding children for whom IEP revision may be underway), and ensure that each child has an IEP in effect on the first day of school.



## Resources and Points of Contact

### **What additional resources are available to assist LEAs in meeting their obligations for early childhood transition or provision of services to children under the age of six?**

- [OSSE Early Childhood Transition Policy](#): This policy establishes requirements in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) related to the smooth and effective transition of children with disabilities from Part C early intervention services to Part B special education services.
- [OSSE Early Childhood Transition Guidelines](#): This resource provides non-regulatory guidance to Early Intervention Programs and LEAs to support the smooth and effective transition of children from Part C early intervention services to Part B special education services.
- [OSSE Extended IFSP Option Policy](#): The Extended IFSP Option for Children Age 3 to Age 4 Policies and Procedures establishes procedures and responsibilities related to the state option to extend Part C early intervention services until the beginning of the school year following a child's fourth birthday for children determined eligible for Part B special education services.
- [OSSE IEP Implementation for Transfer Students Policy](#): The IEP Implementation for Transfer Students Policy establishes state-level procedures and timelines for the development and implementation of IEPs for students transferring into LEAs in the District of Columbia, including appropriate procedures for children who received early intervention services under IDEA Part C.

### **Who can I contact with questions regarding an LEA's obligations for early childhood transition or provision of services to children under the age of six?**

- For questions regarding early intervention services for children up to age three, please contact DC Strong Start at (202) 727-3665.
- For questions regarding special education services for children ages three to five, please contact Dawn Hilton at [Dawn.Hilton1@dc.gov](mailto:Dawn.Hilton1@dc.gov).
- For questions regarding IDEA Part B special education regulations and policies, please contact Christie Weaver-Harris at [Christie.Weaver-Harris@dc.gov](mailto:Christie.Weaver-Harris@dc.gov) or [OSSE.DSEPolicy@dc.gov](mailto:OSSE.DSEPolicy@dc.gov)
- For questions regarding initial evaluations or special education services available at DCPS Early Stages, please refer to the Early Stages website at [www.earlystagesdc.org/](http://www.earlystagesdc.org/), contact the Early Stages hotline at (202) 698-8037, or contact Elizabeth Rihani at [Elizabeth.Rihani@k12.dc.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Rihani@k12.dc.gov).
- For questions regarding initial evaluations or special education services available at a public charter school LEA, please contact the public charter school LEA directly.