



Illinois Early Learning Systems Fact Sheet Early Childhood Special Education

Program Overview

Early Childhood Special Education is a program that provides services to students with identified disabilities to improve and support their learning and educational performance. Special education and related services are provided through the student's school district and can also be provided in various settings outside of the school district.

What general information is needed to apply?

As part of the referral process, the child's basic information and general information about the developmental concerns should be provided in the referral.

What documents are needed?

Families may have to share the results of their child's most recent evaluation(s), including those conducted by professionals not employed by the school (such as a pediatric neurologist or other doctors). There may be additional documentation needed from Child Find or Early Intervention program (if child participated).

Enrollment Process

Screening for Services

Each school district must actively seek out and identify all children from birth through age 21 years old within the district that may be eligible for special education and related services through the following activities:

- Conduct an annual community-wide screening
- Conduct ongoing individual child screenings
- Provide ongoing review of each child's performance and progress by teachers and other professional personnel. Refer students for a special education evaluation that are showing concerns that may interfere with their educational progress.
- Conduct ongoing collaboration efforts with Early Intervention programs to identify children from birth through two years of age who have or are suspected of having disabilities.

Referrals for Services

Once a referral is made, the school district has 14 school days to gather data and determine whether an evaluation is necessary. If no evaluation is necessary, the school district must contact the parents/guardians and provide a written notice explaining their decision and give information on their parental rights.



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Evaluation for Services

If an evaluation is needed, the school district must secure written consent from the parents/guardians first. With their consent, the school district may put together a team to determine how to complete the evaluation. This meeting is generally called a 'domain meeting' – although it may vary in name.

Evaluations must be completed within 60 school days of receiving the written parental/guardian consent to conduct the evaluation. Once the evaluation is completed, the team reconvenes for an 'eligibility determination conference.' At this meeting, evaluation results will be reported and discussed with the family. The team will determine if the child qualifies for special education services under one or more of the 14 disabilities listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Once eligibility is found, the team develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that includes the goals, services and supports that will be provided. The IEP is a legally binding document, and a parental/guardian signature is required for initial placement for services.

Where can I find my local office for more support?

To find your local school district, you can search the Illinois State Board of Education website:

- Illinois State Board of Education
<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/PublicSchoolDistrictLookup.aspx>

Resources for Families and Providers For

Families:

- The **Family Resource Center on Disabilities** provides trainings for parents on how to maximize the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting: www.frcd.org
- The **STARNET system** provides training and technical assistance to staff in early childhood special education and for families of young children. Visit: www.starnet.org
- **Family Matters Parent Training and Information Center** assists parents of children with disabilities understand the special education process. Visit: <https://www.fmptc.org/>
- The **Illinois State Board of Education** provides resources and guides for parents interested in special education in both Spanish and English to support families:
 - Parent Resource Guide
 - In English: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Parent-Guide-Special-Ed-Aug20.pdf>
 - In Spanish: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Parent-Guide-Special-Ed-Aug20-Spanish.pdf>
 - "When I'm 3, Where Will I Be? A Family's Transition Workbook." This workbook offers families a way to plan for their child's transition from Early Intervention into special education in the school district:
 - In English: https://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27897/documents/CHP/EI_Workbook/Transitions.pdf



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For Providers:

- As part of IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), all school districts must identify, find, and evaluate all children with disabilities as part of **Child Find**.
 - In Illinois, the Child Find Project also provides free public awareness resources and activities. Visit: www.childfind-idea-il.us
- The **STARNET system** provides training and technical assistance to staff in early childhood special education and for families of young children. Visit: www.starnet.org
- **Early CHOICES** The Early CHOICES inclusion initiative promotes increasing high quality inclusive early care and education for each and every child birth to age 5. Visit: <http://www.eclre.org/>
- The **Illinois State Board of Education** provides basic information on special education, statewide training and technical assistance for program staff, and other resources. Visit: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Early-Childhood-Special-Education-Services.aspx>