

# FIRST STEPS

## Transition



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## A Parent Handbook







## Names and Contact Information

Contact Name	Address	Phone/Email
First Steps Service Coordinator		
First Steps Provider		
School Principal		
Other School District Contact Person		
Teacher		
Teacher's Aide		
School Psychologist		
School Nurse		
Bus Contact		
Community Programs		

## Section I. What is Transition?

Transition means change. It happens in everyone's life in different ways. It is an ongoing process that can be exciting and challenging. Transitions may be considered new learning opportunities for children and families.

### Types of Transition

Families may experience different types of transitions:

- Birth of a child
- Child hospitalization
- Employment changes
- Moving to a new home

Children and families in First Steps experience transition when they begin services, when services change and when they leave the First Steps program.

### Transition from First Steps

Transition from First Steps means going from early intervention to another program such as the following:

- The local Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) program
- A local preschool program
- Other options

The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team will meet to talk about the transition process before a child in First Steps turns 3 years old.



## Feelings About Transition

Transition from First Steps brings new experiences and new challenges. Families report that during the transition from early intervention services to another program, they experience emotions such as excitement, anxiety, lack of confidence and fear of being unprepared.

Some families are ready for their child to move on to the next step of preschool while others report concern that their child will be away from them and in a new place. The good news is, families adjust to the changes in their own way and over time.



## One Family's Story

This family's story describes the feelings experienced during their transition out of First Steps.

*From the initial visit, our First Steps coordinator helped prepare me for a smooth transition when my twin boys turned 3 years old. However, I did not realize the mix of emotions that would encompass the transitional process. I had numerous questions at each meeting. I received unconditional support from my First Steps providers. They took the time to develop a plan that supported my family through the transition.*

*I encourage all families to ask questions and discuss all possible options and resources. Take this opportunity to celebrate your child's transition to a new program.*

*Written by Sherri of Farmington, MO*

Important Health Information

## Things to Consider for My Child After First Steps

Where do I want my child to play and learn?

How does my child learn best?

What does my child need to grow, now and in the future?

What does an ideal day look like for my child?

What do I want for my child after age 3?

## Section IX. My Child's Page

### Things I Want You to Know About My Child

Strengths

Likes/Interests

Dislikes

Potential Challenges

## Section II. Preparing for Transition

As you begin planning your child's next steps, there are several options for young children you might want to consider. A good place to start is to explore preschools available in your community.

Preschool options may include the following:

- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
- Early childhood program in your local school district
- Community preschools
- Head Start
- Faith-based preschools

Other options in your area may include the following:

- In-home child care
- Child care centers
- Cooperative play groups
- Library groups

Here are some questions\* to consider when deciding which early childhood program best fits your family:

- What are the hours?
- Can parents visit at any time of the day?
- What are the costs?
- Is the program open year round, including holidays?
- Does the program include children with and without disabilities?

It may be helpful to visit some preschool programs. Here are some questions\* to consider when making a visit.

- Are the rooms clean, well-lit and cheerful?
- Are the children happy and involved?
- Does the teacher talk to the children and encourage them to express themselves?
- Does the schedule include a mix of times for play, activities, stories and rest?
- Is this a place I would be comfortable leaving my child?

\*Source: *A Guide to Child Care Services, Child Care Aware® of Missouri*

## Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

Children who participated in First Steps may be eligible for ECSE, which is a program for children with disabilities at your local school district. The following chart compares First Steps and ECSE services.

Comparison of First Steps and ECSE Services		
Components	First Steps	Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
<b>Ages Served</b>	Birth to age 3	3 to 5 year olds
<b>Program Goals</b>	Support the family to meet the developmental needs of their child with a delay or disability as identified in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)	Support the child with a disability to meet his/her educational goals as identified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)
<b>Eligibility</b>	Infants and toddlers who have a newborn condition, diagnosed medical condition or a developmental delay	Preschool-age children who have a disability that meets one of the 13 categorical disabilities (see glossary) and in need of special education and related services
<b>Services</b>	Services are provided to support the family's ability to meet their child's developmental needs.	Services are specially designed instruction to support the child's educational needs.
<b>Location</b>	Services are provided in natural environments, such as a child's home or other places in the community.	Services are provided in the "least restrictive environment" or alongside children who are not disabled. Removal of the child from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
<b>Plans</b>	An IFSP is developed by the team, including the parents, and includes outcomes based on the family's concerns and priorities. The plan is reviewed every six months.	An IEP is developed by the team, including the parents, and includes the child's educational goals, services and placement, including how progress will be measured. The plan is reviewed at least once per school year.
<b>Cost</b>	Parents may pay a monthly family cost participation fee.	Services listed in the IEP are the responsibility of the school district and are provided at no cost to the parent.



### ParentLink

**Phone:** (800) 552-8522 • **Online:** <http://parentlink.missouri.edu/>  
ParentLink provides information on parenting and access to parenting books and videos. Contact this resource for help with your parenting questions.

### Missouri Assistive Technology

**Voice:** (816) 655-6700 **TTY:** (816) 655-6711 • **Online:** <http://at.mo.gov/>  
Missouri Assistive Technology provides individuals with disabilities with access to assistive technology. Contact this resource to recycle, reuse or borrow various devices.

### Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

**Phone:** (573) 751-4212 • **Online:** <http://dese.mo.gov>  
DESE oversees the First Steps program and the school district's ECSE programs. Contact this resource for more information about federal and state requirements.

### Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)

**Phone:** (800) 451-0699 • **Online:** <http://www.dhss.mo.gov>  
DHSS provides services for children and adults with special health care needs. Contact this resource for more information about eligibility requirements for services.

### Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH)

**Phone:** (800) 364-9687 • **Online:** <http://www.dmh.mo.gov>  
DMH provides services to individuals with developmental disabilities or substance abuse disorders. Contact this resource for more information about eligibility requirements for services.

## Section VIII. Resources

This section can help you find other resources for more information and support on early childhood programs.

### Child Care Aware® of Missouri

**Phone:** 1-866-892-3228 • **Online:** <http://mo.childcareaware.org>

Child Care Aware® of Missouri coordinates child care services in all 115 counties. Contact this resource to locate child care programs in your community.

### Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

**Online:** <https://ogi.oa.mo.gov/DESE/schoolSearch/index.html>

ECSE provides special education and related services to children age 3 to 5 years. Contact this resource to locate your local school district.

### Head Start

**Online:** <http://www.moheadstart.org>

Head Start centers provide services for low-income families with children age birth to 5 years. Contact this resource to locate a center in your area.

### Parents as Teachers

**Online:** <https://ogi.oa.mo.gov/DESE/schoolSearch/index.html>

Parents as Teachers provides screenings, parenting information and home visits for families with children age birth to 5 years. Contact this resource to locate a program through your local school district.

### Missouri Family to Family Resource Center

**Phone:** (800) 444-0821 • **Online:** <http://mofamilytofamily.org>

The Resource Center helps connect parents of children with disabilities to mentors for support. Contact this resource to locate a support mentor in your area.

### MPACT

**Phone:** (800) 743-7634 • **Online:** <http://www.missouriparentsact.org>

MPACT provides training, information and access to mentors for parents of children with disabilities. Contact this resource to locate trainings or parent mentors in your area.

### Notification Requirements

First Steps is required by law to notify the state education agency (i.e., DESE) and the local educational agency (i.e., the school district) that a child participating in First Steps is approaching age 3. This notification occurs when directory information is shared with DESE staff and an ECSE representative at the local school district.

### What is Directory Information?

Directory information includes the following five items:

1. Child's name
2. Child's birth date
3. Parent's name
4. Parent's address
5. Parent's phone number

When ECSE receives this directory information, your child has been referred to ECSE to determine eligibility for special education services. First Steps service coordinators share directory information with the ECSE representative for all children eligible for First Steps, unless the parent opts out.

### What is Opt Out?

First Steps has an opt out policy, which means parents have a specified time period to request that the directory information not be shared with ECSE. To opt out, parents must sign the opt out form and return the form to the service coordinator no later than the transition meeting. If the form is not returned by the transition meeting, then directory information is shared with ECSE.

It is important that parents do not delay their decision to send directory information to the school district. If the school district does not receive a child's directory information 90 days or more prior to the child's third birthday, a gap in services may occur. If you have questions or concerns about sharing information with the school district, you should contact your service coordinator.



## Section III. Transition Meetings

With help from your service coordinator and providers, your family will create a transition plan to ensure a smooth and successful transition from First Steps. This meeting occurs before your child's third birthday. The following steps outline the transition process for your family.



**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A written educational plan designed to meet the individual special education and related service needs of a student age 3-21 years of age.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Providing the special education and related services in the most typical educational setting possible while still being able to meet the special education needs of a child.

**Related Services:** Supportive services required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. Some examples of related services include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, recreation, counseling services, psychological services, school health services, social work services, assistive technology services, assistive technology devices, rehabilitation counseling services, parent counseling and training, audiology, and special transportation.

**Screening:** The process of briefly reviewing the child's health and development to identify areas of development where delays may exist and where further evaluation may be needed.



## Section VII. Glossary

This section includes words or phrases you may hear during your transition from First Steps and throughout your child's time in an early childhood program.

**Assessment:** Individual evaluation of a student's performance and/or development. Assessment includes both formal and informal testing and observations. The information gained about the child through assessment is used in determining eligibility and in educational planning. The evaluation process may or may not result in eligibility for your child.

**Categorical Disability:** Part B of IDEA allows for 13 disability categories including autism, deaf/blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment and deafness, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment/blindness, and young child with a developmental disability.

**Dispute Resolution:** The legal procedures or steps available to protect the educational rights of a student. These include requesting mediation, filing a child complaint with DESE, or filing for due process when you disagree with the educational program that the school district is offering your child, or you believe the school is not complying with the requirements of the IDEA.

**Evaluation:** The process used to determine if a child is eligible for special education services. This process can include parent reports, teacher reports, observations of the child, reviewing records, as well as formal and informal testing.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):**

The federal law that provides guidelines for special education services for children from birth to the age of 21.

- Part B describes services for children ages 3 to 21.
- Part C describes services for children from birth to age 3.

### **How to Prepare for a Transition Plan**

The transition plan meeting is held to discuss the program options available in your community and develop a plan for your child and family after your child turns 3.

Your family can do a few things to prepare for the transition plan meeting:

- Review your child's most recent IFSP.
- Talk with your First Steps providers about your child's progress.
- Think about your plans for your child after age 3.
- Decide if you want to share additional information such as medical reports or information from services your child received outside of First Steps.
- Write down your questions and bring them with you to the meeting.
- Decide if you want to invite an ECSE representative to the meeting.

### **The Transition Conference with ECSE**

If you are interested in pursuing ECSE, a meeting with your local school district must also occur before your child's third birthday. If you give permission for your service coordinator to invite a representative from ECSE to your transition plan meeting, then you will have one combined meeting: the transition plan and conference with ECSE.

This meeting is an opportunity for the school district to learn about your child and for you to also learn about your local school district. Your child's eligibility for ECSE is not determined at this meeting.

### **Who Should Attend Transition Meetings?**

As the child's parent or guardian, you will attend a transition meeting along with your service coordinator. Individuals who are important to your family should also attend this meeting to discuss the next steps for your child. These individuals might include the following:

- Your First Steps providers
- A representative from ECSE
- A representative from any early childhood programs that you are considering (i.e., child care provider, preschool)
- Other individuals or providers who might be helpful in developing the transition plan (i.e., Parents as Teachers educator)

## What Happens at Transition Meetings?

Several activities occur at a transition meeting. Your First Steps providers will share existing information about your child's abilities, strengths, needs and progress toward outcomes. You may add additional information about your child's development.

The transition plan is included in the IFSP. If you are pursuing ECSE services, then the plan includes steps to determine if your child is eligible and alternate plans if your child is not eligible. If you are not pursuing ECSE services, then the plan includes information on other programs you are pursuing. The purpose of this transition plan is to help make a smooth transition for you and your child.

Your consent is obtained before copies of existing information about your child are shared with the local school district or other community programs. Information may include IFSPs, recent evaluations, assessments and progress notes. Your service coordinator also reminds you of your parental rights in First Steps.

## Record Retention

First Steps keeps a paper record and an electronic record for each child that includes IFSP and service information. Your child's paper record is retained at the First Steps office for at least three years from the date your child leaves First Steps. However, an electronic record is retained without time limits. If you want a copy of your child's paper record or access to your child's electronic record, contact your service coordinator.



## Summer Third Birthdays

If your child has a third birthday of April 1 through August 15 and is eligible for ECSE, or in the process of eligibility determination for ECSE, then your service coordinator will explain the options for summer third birthday services at the transition plan and/or conference with ECSE.

## Section VI. Acronyms

This section includes common acronyms used during your transition from First Steps.

**DD** Developmental Disability, Developmental Delay

**DESE** Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**DHSS** Department of Health and Senior Services

**DMH** Department of Mental Health

**DSS** Department of Social Services

**ECSE** Early Childhood Special Education

**FAPE** Free Appropriate Public Education

**FERPA** Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

**HIPAA** Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

**IDEA** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

**IEP** Individualized Education Program

**IFSP** Individualized Family Service Plan

**LEA** Local Educational Agency

**LRE** Least Restrictive Environment

**MPACT** Missouri Parents Act

**NOA** Notice of Action

**PAT** Parents as Teachers

**SSI** Supplemental Security Income

**YCDD** Young Child with a Developmental Delay

## One Family's Story

This family's story describes their experiences with the transition process.

*To prepare for the transition meeting, I made sure to take paper and pencil with me to the meeting. I used a planner to take notes, to list things I needed to do and write down any information that would be vital for me to remember. I asked for business cards of people involved so that I had their contact information for the future and put them into a rolodex. If you prefer, you could scan them in your computer to have on your phone.*

*Even though it can be a lot, I encourage you to have confidence in yourself and if you don't understand something, ask! Learn, grow and get involved and enjoy this very challenging but beautiful journey you're on.*

*Written by Kayla of Springfield, MO; Kayla's son, Jaxson, pictured below*



## Section IV. Navigating Early Childhood Special Education

If you are interested in pursuing ECSE services for your child, then the service coordinator refers your child to the local school district, and staff members from the school district are invited to participate in the transition process. The following outlines the ECSE evaluation process for your family:

### The first 30 days

- Referral and determination of suspected disability
- If disability is suspected, conduct a Review of Existing Data
- Provide parent with Notice of Action proposing or refusing to conduct a special education evaluation

*There are acceptable extensions to this timeline, such as school breaks.*

### The next 60 days

- Parent gives written consent for an initial evaluation
- Complete any additional assessments
- Hold meeting to review the evaluation and determine eligibility for one of the categories of disability in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

*There are acceptable extensions to this timeline, such as school breaks.*

### The last 30 days

- Hold a meeting to develop an IEP for the child, including the goals for the child, the special education and related services required for the child to achieve those goals, and the educational placement where the services will be provided
- Provide parent with Notice of Action proposing or refusing the special education services for the child

*There are no acceptable extensions to this timeline. Children in First Steps who are eligible for ECSE must have an IEP in place by the child's third birthday.*

### Step 1: The First 30 Days (Referral)

Children who have received First Steps services are not automatically eligible for ECSE services. ECSE staff review information about your child and identify reasons to consider whether a disability is suspected under (IDEA). If a disability is suspected, a review of existing data is conducted which

## Section V. Making a Seamless Transition

Going to preschool or another early childhood program is a new experience for any family with a young child.

Here are some strategies\* to prepare your child for a new program:

- Meet your child's teacher. Ask the teacher if your child can bring a favorite item to preschool for the first month to help transition to the program.
- Visit your child's classroom.
- Update your child's immunizations.
- Read books to your child about going to preschool and riding a school bus.
- Talk about what children do in preschool. Make a picture book with your child.
- Talk about what teachers do in preschool. Make a box of items your child may see in a classroom.

*\*Source: Preparing Kids for School, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*



includes gathering additional information from you and determining if additional assessments are necessary. As a parent, you are always provided with a Notice of Action by the end of the first 30 days, either proposing or refusing to conduct an evaluation. You must provide written consent before ECSE staff can evaluate your child for special education eligibility.

### Step 2: The Next 60 Days (Evaluation and Eligibility Determination)

Any necessary tests and assessments for your child are completed by trained and knowledgeable personnel. Information you provide about your child's development is included in the evaluation. After the tests and assessments are complete, you will meet with ECSE staff to review the evaluation results and determine if your child meets the eligibility criteria to be identified as a student with a disability. An evaluation report will be written containing all of the assessment results and the disability determination. You will receive a copy of the evaluation report.

### Step 3: The Final 30 Days (Individualized Education Program)

If your child is eligible, a meeting is held to develop the IEP. The IEP team, which includes the person who tested your child, other ECSE staff and you as the parent, discusses the present level of academic and functional performance and develops the annual goals. Then, the IEP team decides what special education and related services are needed to assist the student to achieve the annual goals. Finally, the IEP team determines the best placement to provide these services to your child.

ECSE staff will provide you with a written Notice of Action describing the proposed special education program for your child. You must sign consent before your child can receive any special education and related services from the school district.

**A term you may hear during the IEP meeting is "least restrictive environment" (LRE). When the IEP team talks about LRE, they mean an educational setting where children with and without disabilities can learn and play.**

For more information on special education, review the *Parent's Guide to Special Education in Missouri* at: <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/ParentGuide.pdf>.