

A Family Guide To Early Childhood Transitions In Maryland

Birth to Kindergarten



MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services
Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program/Preschool Special Education Services

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Maryland's
*Birth
to
K*
Early
Childhood
Intervention
& Education
System of Services
For Young Children
With Disabilities
and Their Families



About This Guide

A Family Guide To Early Childhood Transitions in Maryland is part of Maryland's Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, a collection of publications designed to support families in the statewide early intervention and education system of services in Maryland.

With this guide, we wish to welcome you into a community dedicated to the enrichment of child development, and to guide you through a process created by parents and professionals to enhance the potential of your child and support your family.

To receive copies of this guide, or others in the series, contact your Local School System. See last page for a list of Local School System Child Find offices.

Early Childhood Transitions in Maryland, Birth To Kindergarten

Maryland has established a statewide system of early intervention and preschool special education services for children with developmental delays and disabilities, ages birth through five, and their families. Infants and toddlers, **from birth to age three**, identified with developmental delays or disabilities, are eligible to receive early intervention services from the local Infants and Toddlers Program (LITP) through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Preschool children, **ages three through five**, identified as having a disability, are eligible to receive special education and related services through the local school system (LSS) under an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

In addition, and unique to Maryland's system of services, for children participating in early intervention and who are found eligible by the local school system for special education, families have a choice for their child to continue receiving services through an IFSP after age three up until the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday, or to transition to services under an IEP provided by the local school system.

For additional information about family choice at age 3, refer to ***A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns 3***, part of Maryland's Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, available on the Maryland State Department of Education website: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>.

Transitions are a natural part of life. Within Maryland's birth to kindergarten system of services, transition can be defined as points of change in programs and in the people who provide services to children and their families. Successful transitions begin as people think about the future, plan ahead, and work together. Your family's unique background brings a set of values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors that are likely to influence transition planning and activities. This publication, *A Family Guide to Early Childhood Transition in Maryland: Birth to Kindergarten*, offers information, recommendations, and resources to assist you in making decisions that apply to your child and family circumstances.

Maryland provides additional resources that may be helpful to your family as you navigate different transition points, including: ***A Family Guide to Preschool Special Education Services in Maryland***, part of Maryland's Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, and ***Building IEPs With Maryland Families: What a Great IDEA***. Additionally, Maryland has developed a technical assistance document that you and your family may find helpful. ***Effective Transition Practices: Supporting Family Choice at Age Three***. All of these resources can be found on the Maryland State Department of Education website: <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>.



Early Childhood Transitions in Maryland

An Overview

There are several transition points within Maryland's birth to kindergarten system of services that your family may experience based on the age at which your child began receiving early intervention services through an IFSP or special education and related services through an IEP. These may involve moving from one set of services to another or one program to another, as well as determining the location in which your child's services will be provided. Your active participation as an informed member of your child's team is an essential part of each step in the transition planning process.

Points of Transition In Maryland's Birth to Kindergarten System of Services



Recommended Practices in Transition

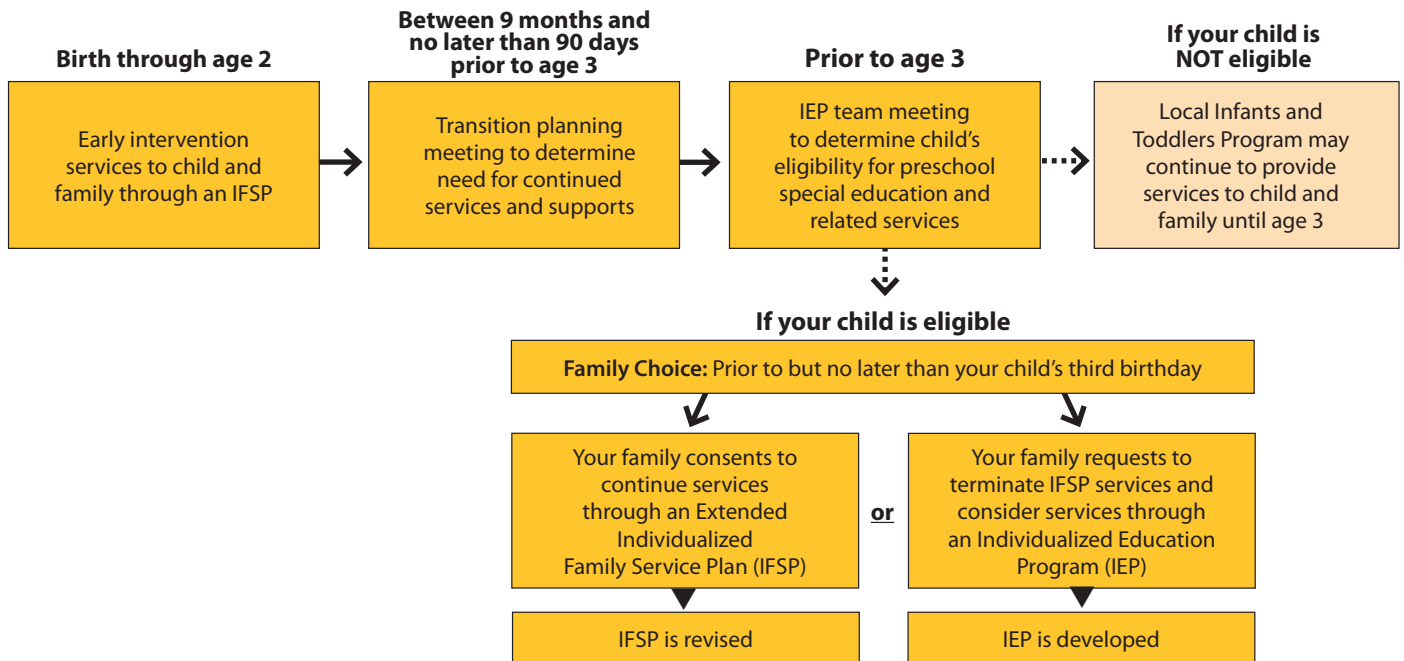
The **Division of Early Childhood** of the Council for Exceptional Children identifies *Recommended Practices* in eight different topic areas, including Transition at: <http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-transition.asp>. Practice Guides for families are available in print format for hard copies and in mobile formats for reading on mobile devices and linking to videos and other resources. The Practice Guides:

- Explain the importance of the practices
- Illustrate practices with vignettes and videos
- Describe how to do the practice
- Include indicators to know a practice is working
- Provide links to related resources.



Preparing for Next Steps

In Early Childhood Intervention and Education



Things to Consider

- What programs and services are available for our child in our community?
- Are there other advocacy or support groups I should know about?
- Does the date of my child's third birthday influence the transition process?
- What transition activities are available for our family?
- How can my local Family Support Services help me?

You'll know the transition is successful, if...

- *Your child interacts with adults, peers, and activities in the new setting*
- *Your child adjusts to the schedule and expectations of the new setting*
- *Your child learns new things as part of participation in the new setting*



Transition As Your Child Turns 3

Families Have a Choice

Although it may seem early, it is important to start thinking about and preparing for your child's transition at age 3 about the time your child turns two. Families of children currently enrolled in a local Infants and Toddlers Program and who are found eligible for special education and related services will have the opportunity to choose to continue services through an IFSP or move to an IEP through the local school system at age three. The following considerations are offered as "**think-about**s" as you, your child, and family approach the age three transition point. Imagine what kinds of things you would like to see your child doing (e.g., playing with another child).

- Think about what programs your child would participate in if he or she did not have a developmental delay or disability.
- Imagine an "ideal" day for your child, and consider what steps should be taken to make it happen.
- Talk with your local Infants and Toddlers Program service coordinator and services provider(s) about what you want for your child.
- Discuss what resources are available and what types of programs or services you want to learn about.
- Visit any programs and/or community activities in which you think you might want your child to participate.
- Attend transition activities provided by your local Family Support Services.

Positive Relationships are Key

As with other life transitions or changes, positive relationships are associated with greater satisfaction, better adjustment, and better child outcomes. Relationships that impact transitions include:

- Service provider - family relationships
- Classroom teacher - child relationships

Successful transitions support the adjustment of the *child and family* to the new setting.

Additional Resources

- Refer to *A Family Guide to Next Steps* as an additional resource to support your decision making about what choice will be best for your child and family.
- Refer to *DEC Recommended Practices in Transition, Family Practice Guides* to understand what effective transition practices look like: <http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-transition.asp>





The Transition Planning Meeting

An important step in anticipation of your child turning three is the transition planning meeting (TPM). This meeting can be held as early as nine months, but no later than 90 days, before your child's third birthday. Included in this meeting, in addition to local Infants and Toddlers Program staff, will be a representative from the local school system if you wish to consider eligibility for special education, along with other community program representatives, as appropriate. *Eligibility for special education will need to be determined in order for your family to make the choice to continue early intervention services under an IFSP after your child turns three, or to move to preschool special education and related services through the local school system under an IEP.* Other individuals that you feel have knowledge or special expertise about your child can also be invited to this meeting, such as a child care provider or teacher at a community early childhood program your child attends.

Important Discussions

The transition planning meeting serves as an opportunity for you to share information with the team about your family's priorities related to what services are most appropriate for your child as he/she approaches age three. To allow teams to consider all options and for families to make informed decisions about their choices, the specific activities below should also take place.

- A review of your child's current development, including how he/she is interacting and relating to others, how he/she is learning and using skills to participate in activities, and how he/she uses appropriate behaviors to meet his/her needs
- A review of your Individualized Family Service Plan, in particular a review of your child and family outcomes
- Discussion of community-based early childhood options for your child, such as child care, Head Start, local school system preschool special education services, and private preschool programs
- Discussion of community supports and resources available to your family to guide you through the transition process, such as Preschool Partners, parent and family support groups, parent workshops, sibling support groups
- Activities to prepare your child and family for changes in service delivery, including steps to help your child adjust to a new environment and meaningfully participate
- A review of the preschool special education eligibility process, should your family want to consider continuing to receive early intervention services after age 3 or to transition to services through the local school system under an IEP
- Procedures to safeguard your parental rights and outline your responsibilities

Planning Next Steps

When the transition planning meeting ends, everyone should have a clear understanding of what happens next and who is responsible for each step. If your family is interested in considering preschool special education services, an additional meeting is scheduled to determine eligibility. If your child is then determined eligible for preschool special education services, your family then has the choice to continue with early intervention services through an extended IFSP or transition to preschool special education services through an IEP. In some cases, an IEP eligibility meeting may be held immediately following the transition planning meeting. The scheduling of meetings is determined by family preference and how near the child's third birthday is.



The IEP Team Meeting

The first step in preparing for the IEP team meeting is to gather all available information about your child. You are a very important source of this information. Another important source is your child's Early Intervention Record, which may contain copies of medical history, developmental evaluations and assessments, IFSP progress notes, and your family's current IFSP. In some instances, this information will be sufficient to determine eligibility for special education and related services. In other cases, the IEP team may determine that additional information is needed. Your written consent will be needed before any further assessments are conducted.

Tips for Parents

- Be prepared to describe your child. You know your child best. Let the team know what you think your child is capable of doing and what you see your child doing in the future. Use the tool "A Look At My Child's Development" located in *A Family Guide to Understanding the IFSP* and *A Family Guide to Preschool Special Education Services in Maryland*.
- Write down your questions and comments. It may be hard to remember everything you want to talk about.
- Request the presence of others you feel have knowledge about your child and their unique needs.
- Ask questions if you do not understand the vocabulary or information being discussed.

The IEP team will use all existing information to determine whether your child has a disability that requires special education and related services. If your child is found eligible for special education and related services, then your family can decide if you want to continue early intervention services under an IFSP after age three or to transition to an IEP through the local school system on your child's third birthday. If your child is not found eligible or if you decide not to pursue preschool special education services, your local Infants and Toddlers Program staff will continue to assist your family to transition to community programs and settings other than preschool special education.

Family Choice

- **Continuing Early Intervention Services After Age 3:** If your child has been found eligible for special education and related services, and your family has made the choice to continue to receive early intervention services through an IFSP after age three, what will happen next? Your current IFSP will need to be revised to include an educational component to focus on your child's development of school readiness skills. Based on your child's needs, services may continue to be provided in the home. However, you and the IFSP team may also want to consider community-based early childhood settings which would provide your now preschool-age child with opportunities to participate in a group setting to develop important social skills and make friends, learn pre-literacy and pre-numeracy concepts, and develop more independence.
- **Transitioning to Preschool Special Education and Related Services At Age 3:** Your child's IEP may be developed immediately after the eligibility determination portion of the IEP team meeting or may occur at a separate meeting at a later date. The number of meetings is determined by taking into account the needs of your child and family. However, an IEP must be developed and in effect on your child's third birthday. The IEP document puts into writing:
 - Your child's present levels of educational and functional performance, including strengths and needs in social-emotional skills and relationships, acquiring and using knowledge and skills, and using appropriate behaviors to meet needs
 - Goals for your child's development and school readiness
 - The services that your child will receive related to the goals, and their frequency and duration
 - The environment or setting in which these services will be provided

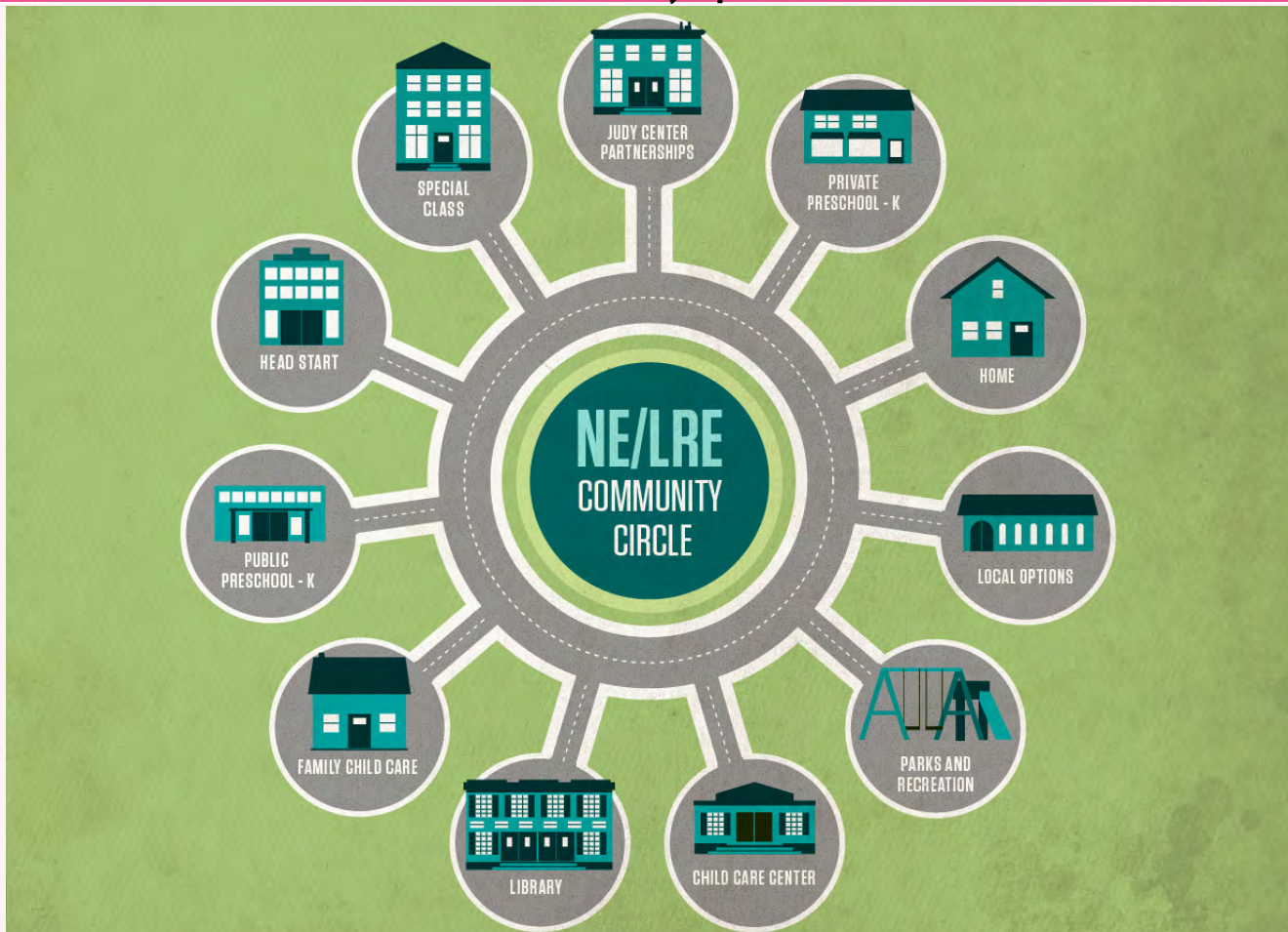


Transition to *Community Programs*

Transition is an ongoing process that has many steps along the way. The final outcomes of the process will be different for every child, as there are various directions each child and family's path may take. Your family may be interested in participating in more than one program in your community. Many programs welcome visits from prospective families so that they can see firsthand if the particular program would be a good fit for their child. Additionally, local programs often have a website that includes program information, such as registration timelines and eligibility requirements, along with videos of program classrooms and activities, which can help your family make a decision about which programs you want to consider pursuing for your child.

The Community Circle graphic below offers a snapshot of the early childhood settings and programs available in most jurisdictions, including programs offered through the local school system. You may want to ask about other programs or settings that may be unique to your local community so that you can keep all options in mind as you think about what would be best for your child and family.

Community Options





Transition *After Age 3 or 4*

Children being served under an extended IFSP are eligible to continue to receive early intervention services until the beginning of the school year following their fourth birthday. As a family, you may opt at any time to terminate extended early intervention services prior to the start of the 4 year-old school year and begin special education services under an IEP. Depending on your family circumstances and your child's continued need for services, your child may begin to receive special education services through an IEP while continuing in the program that he or she is enrolled in currently, or may need to transition to other programs or settings available in your community for 4 year-old children. Regardless of when your child transitions out of extended early intervention services, an IFSP Transition Planning Meeting must be held not more than nine months but not less than 90 days prior to the beginning of the school year following your child's 4th birthday. Additionally, if you wish to transition to preschool special education services, the local school system will convene an IEP team meeting to develop the IEP.

Other programs may include:

- Private preschool
- Head Start
- Child care center
- Preschool special education class
- Public prekindergarten program
- Other programs that are unique to your community

Some of these programs have special eligibility requirements which will guide the actions that must be taken.

Although it may seem early, it is important to start thinking about and preparing for your child's transition to special education services before your child turns four. A place to start is to consider your child's strengths and needs, as well as your resources, priorities, and concerns. It will also be helpful to begin visiting a variety of programs that four-year-old children attend. Your Local Infants and Toddlers Program Service Coordinator can provide you with information regarding a variety of programs in your area.

Talking to others may be helpful as you begin to think about transition after age four, including:

- Friends who have young children
- Families of children slightly older than yours who have experienced similar transitions
- Local parent organizations
- Local Family Support Services

Additional resources your family may wish to consider:

- The Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services Family Support can provide assistance, as well as give you the contact information for your local Family Support: 1-800-535-0182
- Maryland Family Network LOCATE Child Care: 410-752-7588
- Project ACT of Abilities Network: 1-800-492-2523
- Your local library



Transition *From Preschool Special Education Services to Kindergarten*

The kindergarten environment brings with it new challenges.

Leaving the world of preschool special education services to enter the more formal education setting of kindergarten represents a major time of transition for all children and families. It can be especially so for a child with a disability and their family. It may be a time of great excitement, but also one of apprehension with new questions about what to expect and prepare for as a family. Using a collaborative team approach that includes all important partners – parents, family members, teacher(s) and related services providers, and other important individuals in the child’s life – coupled with an established system of clear communication will help to make the transition from preschool services to kindergarten a smooth one.

The kindergarten environment brings with it new challenges, such as a longer school day, and the use of a standards-based curriculum that emphasizes instruction in traditional content areas, such as reading, mathematics, and science. Transition to kindergarten also offers opportunities for developing friendships with other children and their families and forming new relationships with teachers and related service providers, as well as developing greater independence. Personnel from early care and education programs, preschool special education, family resource and support programs, and elementary schools can plan together and coordinate transition activities for families before and after a child’s entry into kindergarten. Planning ahead will help to make the transition to kindergarten for you and your child a positive, less stressful experience.



The ride on the school bus often yields feelings of high anxiety for many parents. Whereas for the child, it may be experienced as a sense of growing independence and delight.

What can parents do to prepare for the transition to kindergarten?

- Become familiar with expectations for the kindergarten year by requesting an enrollment packet from your neighborhood school and register. You can also ask members of your child’s IEP team to help you gather this information.
- Provide consent, as appropriate, for team members to share information to coordinate the transition of supports and services.
- Participate with teachers and providers in an IEP meeting.
- Discuss with your IEP team your child’s unique learning strengths and needs and how these will be important considerations in determining the setting in which your child will receive services during the kindergarten year.
- Develop a transition plan that informs your child’s transition from their preschool program into kindergarten.
- Talk to your Local Family Support Services specialist and attend family support activities.



What can the preschool IEP team do to help support a child's transition to kindergarten?

- Encourage families to share knowledge about their child's abilities, strengths, interests, and challenges, as well as the different kinds of supports that will be needed to succeed in kindergarten.
- Work in partnership with families to design special education services and supports for their child in the future kindergarten setting.
- Provide opportunities for families to learn about kindergarten policies, visit the new classroom, and meet kindergarten and administrative staff.
- Inform families of kindergarten open houses, informational meetings, and other kindergarten activities.
- Support families with identifying goals for their child's participation in kindergarten.
- Ensure kindergarten and preschool program staff are knowledgeable about their respective program policies and procedures, so that families receive clear and accurate information about the requirements for kindergarten enrollment.

What can families do to help their child get ready for kindergarten?

- Read books about starting kindergarten
- Plan for your child to visit his or her new school
- Talk with your child about the kinds of work they will be doing in kindergarten
- Talk about and practice new routines

Suggested Books About Kindergarten

- *Mrs. Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*, Joseph State & Ashley Wolff
- *The Night Before Kindergarten*, Natasha Wing & Julie Durrell
- *Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!*, Nancy Carlson

Additional Resources

- *DEC Recommended Practices in Transition*, <http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-transition.asp>
- *Getting to Know My Child: A Guide for My Child's Kindergarten Teacher*, http://www.getreadytoread.org/images/content/downloads/Kindergarten_Readiness_Toolkit/getting_to_know_my_child-english.pdf
- *A Parent's Guide to a Successful Kindergarten Transition*, <http://www.collabforchildren.org/sites/default/files/downloads/A%20Parent%27s%20Guide%20to%20a%20Successful%20Kindergarten%20Transition2.pdf>
- *Moving from Preschool to Kindergarten*, https://www.autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Transition-Preschool_to_Kindergarten.pdf

More Resources for Families

For additional information, contact your:

Local Infants and Toddlers Programs

Allegany County	301-759-2415
Anne Arundel County	410-222-6911
Baltimore City	410-396-1666
Baltimore County	410-809-2169
Calvert County	410-414-7034
Caroline County	410-479-3246
Carroll County	410-876-4437, ext. 2277
Cecil County	410-996-5444
Charles County	301-609-6808
Dorchester County	410-221-1111, ext. 1024
Frederick County	301-600-1612
Garrett County	301-533-0240
Harford County	410-638-3823
Howard County	410-313-7017
Kent County	410-778-7164
Montgomery County	240-777-3997
Prince George's County	301-925-6627
Queen Anne's County	443-758-0720, ext. 4458
Somerset County	410-651-1616, ext. 239
St. Mary's County	301-475-5511, ext. 32223
Talbot County	410-820-0319
Washington County	301-766-8217
Wicomico County	410-677-5250
Worcester County	410-632-5033
Maryland School for the Blind	410-444-5000
Maryland School for the Deaf	410-480-4545

Online Resources from the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

Maryland Learning Links offers information and resources related to Early Intervention and Special Education in Maryland. Whether you are a parent, teacher or provider, you are sure to benefit from the site's comprehensive and user-friendly blend of knowledge and real-world practice, all of it built on the belief that every child can learn and achieve both inside and outside the classroom. *Maryland Learning Links* was developed and produced by the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education (<https://marylandlearninglinks.org/birth-to-kindergarten/>).

Maryland Public Schools. The Maryland State Department of Education, *Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services* provides leadership, support, and accountability for results to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/index.aspx>).

A Spanish translation of this guide is available online at **Maryland Public Schools** (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>).

Additional Information

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services
200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-767-7770 phone | 410-333-8165 fax | 1-800-535-0182 toll free

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Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

Justin M. Hartings, Ph.D.
President
Maryland State Board of Education

Larry Hogan
Governor

Marcella E. Franczkowski, M.S.
Assistant State Superintendent
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

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