

Navigating Transitions For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Indiana

*An Informational Guide
for Families of children
exiting
First Steps and
considering preschool
services*



Updated February 2026



Dear Family,

On or before your child's third birthday, your child will transition out of First Steps and move into the next stage of services or supports. This change is called a transition. A transition means moving from one program to another, such as from First Steps into early childhood special education or other community-based services.

While this transition may feel overwhelming, there is a clear plan in place to support you and your child. Some rules, services, and agencies will change when your child turns three, but you are not expected to navigate this process alone.

The Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education (The Center) provides information, resources, and services to support children who are deaf or hard of hearing* and their families during this transition. Our goal is to ensure that every child in Indiana has access to language, learning, and meaningful educational opportunities.

This guide explains the transition process step by step:

Laws & Policies: Understanding You and Your Child's Rights

Step 1: Planning Ahead

Step 2: Transition Meeting

Step 3: Evaluation

Step 4: Case Conference Committee meeting

Step 5: Putting the IEP (or service plan) into action

Take this journey step by step knowing the available supports along the way.

*This guide primarily uses person-first language, such as "children who are deaf or hard of hearing." We recognize that some individuals and families prefer identity-first language, such as "Deaf child." Families are encouraged to use the language that best reflects their child and their community.



Laws and Policies That Support Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Several federal laws work together to protect the rights of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and to ensure they have equal access to education.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

IDEA is a federal law that gives children with disabilities the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

- In Indiana, IDEA Part C serves children from birth through age three and is called First Steps.
- IDEA Part B serves children ages three and older. In Indiana, this law is implemented through Article 7, Indiana's special education law.
- IDEA ensures that eligible children receive special education services and supports that are based on their individual needs.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 is a civil rights law that protects individuals from discrimination based on disability.

- It applies to public schools and to private schools that receive federal funding.
- Schools must provide reasonable accommodations so students can fully access education.

*Some children who do not qualify for special education services under IDEA may still receive supports through a **Section 504 plan**.*

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

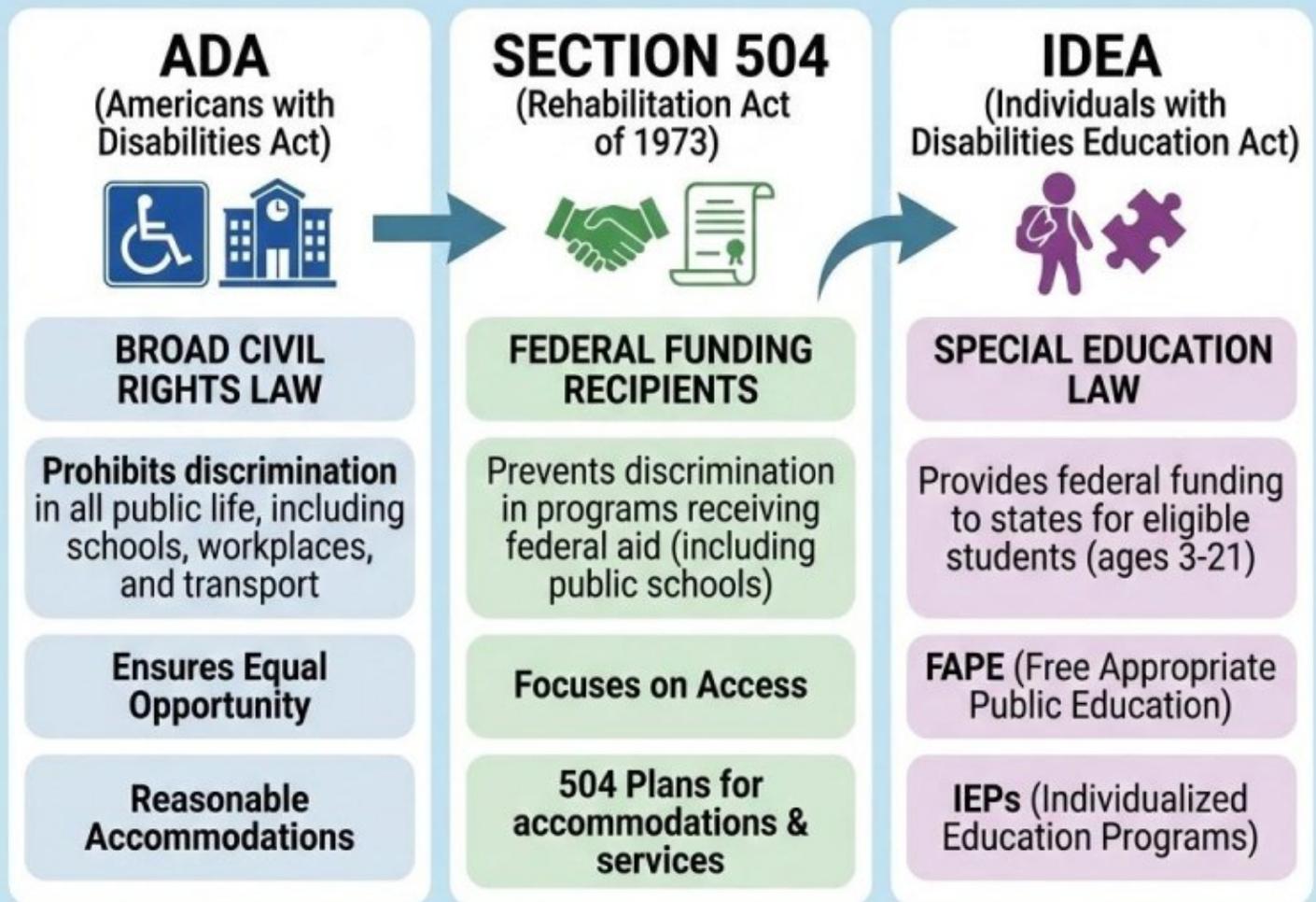
The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination in public and private places. It applies to public schools and to private schools that receive federal funding. For schools, this means communication with students who have hearing, vision, or speech differences must be as effective as communication with other students.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Schools may not share a child's educational records with others without parent or guardian permission, except in limited situations allowed by law.



DISABILITY RIGHTS & EDUCATION: ADA, SECTION 504, & IDEA FRAMEWORK



PROTECTING RIGHTS & ENSURING EQUITY IN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS



Scan here to read about the law section in the *IDEAL Parent Document* for additional information on these federal statutes.





HEA 1484
Indiana Deaf Education and
Assessments of Language
(IDEAL)



General
Language
Development



Scan me

Supports for
Language
Acquisition



Law

SCAN ME



Language
Milestones



Technical Assistance



Tools and Assessments

Understanding Indiana Law: IDEAL

In July 2019, Indiana passed HEA 1484 (Indiana Code 20-25-12). This law is known as IDEAL: Indiana Deaf Education and Assessments of Language.

IDEAL focuses on:

- Supporting language development for children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Ensuring regular language assessments
- Providing families with clear information and resources

A parent resource document was created as part of this law and is an important tool as you navigate your child's transition.



Step 1: Planning Ahead

Planning ahead helps ensure a smooth transition from First Steps to preschool services or other supports.

What Families Can Do

Families play an important role in the transition process. You can:

- Participate in scheduled meetings and evaluations
- Prepare questions using the resources provided
- Share your goals, hopes and concerns for your child
- Talk about your child's strengths, interests, and needs
- Identify people in your support network who you would like to invite to meetings

Role of the Service Coordinator

Your First Steps Service Coordinator will:

- Share information with your local school district, with your written permission
- Schedule the transition meeting
- Document the transition plan in your child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

Role of the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education

The CDHHE Early Intervention Network will:

- Provide information about available service
- Share resources with families and service coordinators
- Offer guidance and support throughout the transition process

Role of the Local School District

Early Childhood Special Education staff from your local school district will:

- Receive information about your child by 30 months of age, with parent permission
- Attend the transition meeting
- Explain evaluation procedures and preschool program options
- Coordinate visits to preschool programs
- Complete evaluations or collaborate with the Center as needed
- Schedule a Case Conference Committee (CCC) meeting before your child's third birthday

Knowing which school district you live in is important.

Families can find this information at: <http://schooldistrictfinder.com>



Step 2: Transition Meeting

The transition meeting is an important planning meeting that helps prepare for your child's move out of First Steps and into preschool services or other supports.

What Happens at the Transition Meeting

With parent or guardian permission, the following may occur:

- The First Steps Service Coordinator and representatives from your local school district work together to develop a transition plan.
- The transition plan is included in your child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Information is shared about possible programs, services, and next steps.

Other people may attend the meeting upon your request may include:

- Family members, caregivers, or other members of your support system
- Your child's First Steps provider(s)
- Representatives from preschool programs you are considering
- Staff from the Indiana School for the Deaf or St. Joseph Hearing + Speech (if applicable)

You will be asked to give written permission if you want your child to be evaluated for special education services.

- See step three on the next page for more information regarding Educational Evaluations
- You may also chose to connect with parent support groups for help if desired. *See page 13

After the Transition Meeting

After the transition meeting and before the Case Conference Committee meeting, families are encouraged to:

- Visit preschool programs discussed at the meeting
- Observe classroom environments, communication methods, and peer interactions
- Ask how each program would meet your child's language, communication, and learning needs
- Learn about enrollment requirements and timelines
- Bring a checklist of your questions to help you compare programs and make informed decisions.

If a parent does not give permission to share information with the school district, the First Steps Service Coordinator will provide information about community resources you may choose to pursue for your child prior to exiting First Steps. It is important to note that if permission is not granted, this stops the transition process regarding possible special education placement or services that are available through the public school system at age 3.



Step 3: Evaluation

Eligibility for special education services is determined through an evaluation process.

Eligibility requirements for special education are different from eligibility requirements for First Steps.

Click or Scan Here
to review the
comprehensive
Guidance Document



What Happens after the Transition Meeting

IDEA requires an educational evaluation to determine whether a child is eligible for special education services.

- In Indiana, IDEAL promotes regular language assessments for children who are deaf or hard of hearing to support ongoing language development.
- Evaluation results help the Case Conference Committee decide whether services are needed and what supports are appropriate.

Educational evaluations will look at multiple areas. Determination for DHH eligibility requires academic achievement, adaptive behavior, audiology, communication and social/developmental history.

Parents and guardians have the right to decline an evaluation. If you later decide to request an evaluation, the school has up to 50 instructional school days to complete the evaluation and hold a Case Conference Committee meeting.

Potential Next Steps Regarding Evaluation

The Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education may be able to assist and work closely with your Local Educational Agency (LEA) to support school planning with our Assessment Team.

Evaluations at the Center focus on DHH eligibility with our team of subject matter experts who are licensed, certified, and specially trained in working with deaf and hard of hearing children.

Every evaluation includes:

- Social/Developmental History
- Academic achievement (learning readiness)
- A review of audiological records
- Communication assessments, including
 - Language
 - Access to language and education

Based on your child's needs, the team may also recommend assessing additional areas, such as:

- Thinking and learning skills
- Daily living skills
- Motor skills

Our team-based approach with your child's support system (e.g. you, other family members, EI providers, management audiologist) helps us understand your child's unique needs and abilities.

Our Commitment to Families

We are committed to working with families and schools to provide clear, helpful information that supports your child's learning journey.

For more information connect with our assessment team:

<https://www.in.gov/health/cdhhe/programsservices/assessment/>



Center for Deaf
and Hard of Hearing
Education



Step 4: Case Conference (CCC) Meeting

The Case Conference Committee meeting is where decisions are made about eligibility, services, and supports.

Before each CCC meeting, families must be offered procedural safeguards, also known as parent rights. These safeguards explain your rights throughout the special education process. To read more about and review the Indiana Educational Laws visit: <https://www.in.gov/doe/students/special-education/laws-and-resources/>

Purpose of the CCC Meeting

The Case Conference Committee works together to:

1. Review evaluation results
2. Determine eligibility for special education services
3. Develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP), if appropriate
4. Decide on services and educational placement based on your child's individual needs

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

If your child is eligible, the IEP outlines goals, services, and supports.

- IEP goals are written to meet your child's needs, not to fit a specific program.
- Special considerations for children who are deaf or hard of hearing must be included, such as:
 - Language and communication needs
 - Opportunities for direct communication with peers and staff
 - Academic level and learning needs
 - Access to instruction in the child's preferred language and communication mode

Step 5: Putting the IEP or Service Plan into Action

Once the IEP or service plan is finalized, services begin.

Families can help support a smooth start by:

- Visiting the program with your child before the first day
- Preparing your child for routines such as riding the school bus, if applicable
- Following program guidance about comfort items from home
- Communicating regularly with teachers and service providers

Schools will also provide training and support to staff to ensure they are prepared to meet your child's needs.

This is an important milestone—take time to recognize and celebrate your child's transition into school.



Transition Checklist

Timeframe	What	Who	Date	Notes
Ongoing as child receives services in First Steps	Participate in Early Childhood Assessment (ECA) and other assessments to monitor growth and progress	Family and First Steps providers (CDHHE Network)		
27-30 months	Transition meeting will be scheduled	First Steps Service Coordinator (SC)		
30-33 months	Transition Meeting	SC, school representatives, family, providers & parent requested attendees		
33-35 months	Evaluation takes place and report is shared with family five days prior to the case conference committee meeting	Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) team and/or the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Assessment Team		
Before 36 months	Case Conference (CC) meeting takes place	ECSE administrator leads the meeting. Family, Providers, assessors participate.		
36 months	IEP or Service Plan is in place	School, program or service as determined at the Case Conference Committee (CCC) Meeting.		
Annual and As-Needed Conferences	Annual Case Review (ACR) Or Parent/LEA Request of CC	CCC members and any additional guests with parental permission. Parents may invite their external support teams with notification prior to CC.		

Common Terms

Early Childhood Assessment (ECA): A process used to gather information about a young child's development, strengths, and needs across areas such as communication, language, learning, and functional skills. Early Childhood Assessments help teams understand how a child is accessing their environment and support informed decision-making related to services, supports, or next steps. Assessments are conducted by Family Navigators and include parent or guardian input.

Case Conference (CC): The meeting held to discuss evaluation results, determine a need for special services, a team approach to develop the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Case Conference Committee (CCC): The group responsible for making special education decisions for a student. The Case Conference Committee includes the parent or guardian, school administrators, educators, and other required team members. At the parent's request, additional individuals such as service providers or an advocate may attend. The committee reviews evaluation information and, when appropriate, develops, reviews, or revises the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan): A plan developed with families for First Steps services.

IEP (Individualized Education Program): A plan developed by the Case Conference Committee that outlines special education services and supports.

FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education): The right of children with disabilities to receive appropriate education at no cost to families.

First Steps Service Coordinator (SC): A professional who supports families in First Steps by coordinating services, scheduling meetings, and assisting with the development and implementation of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

LRE (Least Restrictive Environment): The setting where a child can learn alongside peers to the greatest extent appropriate.

Teacher of Record (TOR): For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, the TOR must be a licensed teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing when this is the primary eligibility.



Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	IREAD	Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder	IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation
BIP	Behavioral Intervention Plan	IEP	Individualized Education Program
BLV	Blind or Low Vision	IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
CCC	Case Conference Committee	IHO	Independent Hearing Officer
CHIP	Children’s Health Insurance Program	LEA	Local Education Agency
CLEP	College Level Examination Program	LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
CSEP	Choice Scholarship Education Plan	LSI	Language or Speech Impairment
DB	Deaf-Blind	MDC	Manifestation Determination Conference
DCS	Department of Child Services	MD	Multiple Disabilities
DD	Developmental Delay	M-TEAM	Multidisciplinary Team
DHH	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	NOPS	Notice of Procedural Safeguards
ED	Emotional Disability	OCR	Office of Civil Rights
EI	Educational Interpreter	OHI	Other Health Impairment
ESA	Educational Scholarship Account	OI	Orthopedic Impairment
ESA-SP	ESA Service Plan	OSE	Office of Special Education
ESP	Educational Surrogate Parent	OSEP	Office of Special Programs, US DOE
ESY	Extended School Year	OT	Occupational Therapy
INF2F	Indiana Family to Family	PAR	Public Agency Representative
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education	PLOPs	Present Levels of Performance
FBA	Functional Behavioral Assessment	PT	Physical Therapy
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act	SBOE	State Board of Education
FIEP	Facilitated IEP	SCOLS	School Corporation of Legal Settlement
FSSA	Family and Social Services Administration	SDI	Specially Designed Instruction
GCE	Good Cause Exemption	SLD	Specific Learning Disability
GQE	Graduation Qualifying Exam	SOP	Summary of Performance
HSE	High School Equivalency Exam	SP	Service Plan
IAC	Indiana Administrative Code	SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
IAES	Interim Alternative Educational Setting	SSI	Supplemental Security Income
ID	Intellectual Disability	TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
IDD	Intellectual and Developmental Disability	TIEP	Transitional IEP
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	TOD	Teacher of the Deaf
IDOE	Indiana Department of Education	TOR	Teacher of Record
IPAS	Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services	TOS	Teacher of Service



Resources For Families

Parent Organizations:

About Special Kids (ASK): <https://earlylearningin.org/about-special-kids/>

American Society for Deaf Children: www.deafchildren.org

Hear Indiana: www.hearindiana.org

Indiana Hands & Voices: www.inhandsandvoices.org

IN*SOURCE for children with disabilities: www.insource.org

Parent to Parent Resource Guide: <https://insource.org/get-help/resources/>

State Resources:

Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education: www.in.gov/health/cdhhe

Indiana Department of Education, Exceptional Learners:

www.in.gov/doe/students/special-education/

First Steps: www.firststeps.in.gov

State Laws and Related Resources for Special Education:

<https://www.in.gov/doe/students/special-education/laws-and-resources/>

Specialized Programs and Services for Children who are DHH

Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education: www.in.gov/health/cdhhe

Indiana Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program:

www.in.gov/health/mch/families/ehdi-early-hearing-detection-and-intervention/

Indiana School for the Deaf: www.deafhoosiers.com

St. Joseph Hearing + Speech: www.sjhearingspeech.org

National Resources

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: www.agbell.org

American Society for Deaf Children: www.deafchildren.org

Hands & Voices: www.handsandvoices.org

Hearing First: www.hearingfirst.org

Lauren Clerc National Deaf Education Center: www.clerccenter.gallaudet.edu

U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities

Office for Civil Rights (OCR): <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/index.html>

Optimizing Outcomes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children: <https://www.nasde.org>

Section 504 information:

www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/section-504

