

Navigating Transitions for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Indiana

Information for families
of children exiting
First Steps and considering
preschool services

Updated November 2025



Dear Families of deaf and hard of hearing children,

On or before your child's third birthday, your child may be discharged from First Steps and start a new program or service. Moving from program to program is called transition. Transition at the age of 3 may include early childhood special education services and/or other community services. Rules and regulations as well as agencies working with you will change when your child turns 3 years old, however, there will be a plan for that process.

The Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education provides information, resources and services that can support you and your child as he or she transitions to another program. The Center is available to ensure all deaf and hard of hearing children in Indiana learn, grow and progress to the best of their abilities. Information in this booklet will explain the steps in the transition process:

- 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**

Enjoy the journey by knowing the supports along the way!



HEA1484 was put into law (IC 20-25-12) in July 2019. This statute is known as IDEAL: Indiana Deaf Education and Assessments of Language. A parent document was created as part of this legislation and is of great value to you as you navigate this transition with your child.





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



General
Language
Development



Scan me

Supports for
Language
Acquisition



Law



Language
Milestones



Technical Assistance



Tools and Assessments



Reporting Portal



Center for Deaf
and Hard of Hearing
Education



Step 1: Planning Ahead

- The school district in which your child lives is responsible for special education services if your child is determined eligible.
- Know what school district you live in: <https://www.findmyschool.us/>
- Know the process for determining if your child is eligible and what supports are available through a 504 plan if there is no need for special education services.
- Discuss the process with your provider if you are receiving services from the CDHHE Network, such as a Parent Advisor, Spoken Language provider and /or visual language provider

Family will:

- Participate in scheduled meetings and evaluations
- Develop a list of questions, from resources provided
- Share your vision and desires for your child, ask for tools to help organize your thoughts
- Share your child's unique strengths, preferences and needs
- Develop a list of people in your support network to invite

First Steps Service Coordinator will:

- Share your child's information with your school district and schedule the transition meeting that includes people you would like to attend and will take notes during the meeting for your Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

CDHHE Early Intervention Network will:

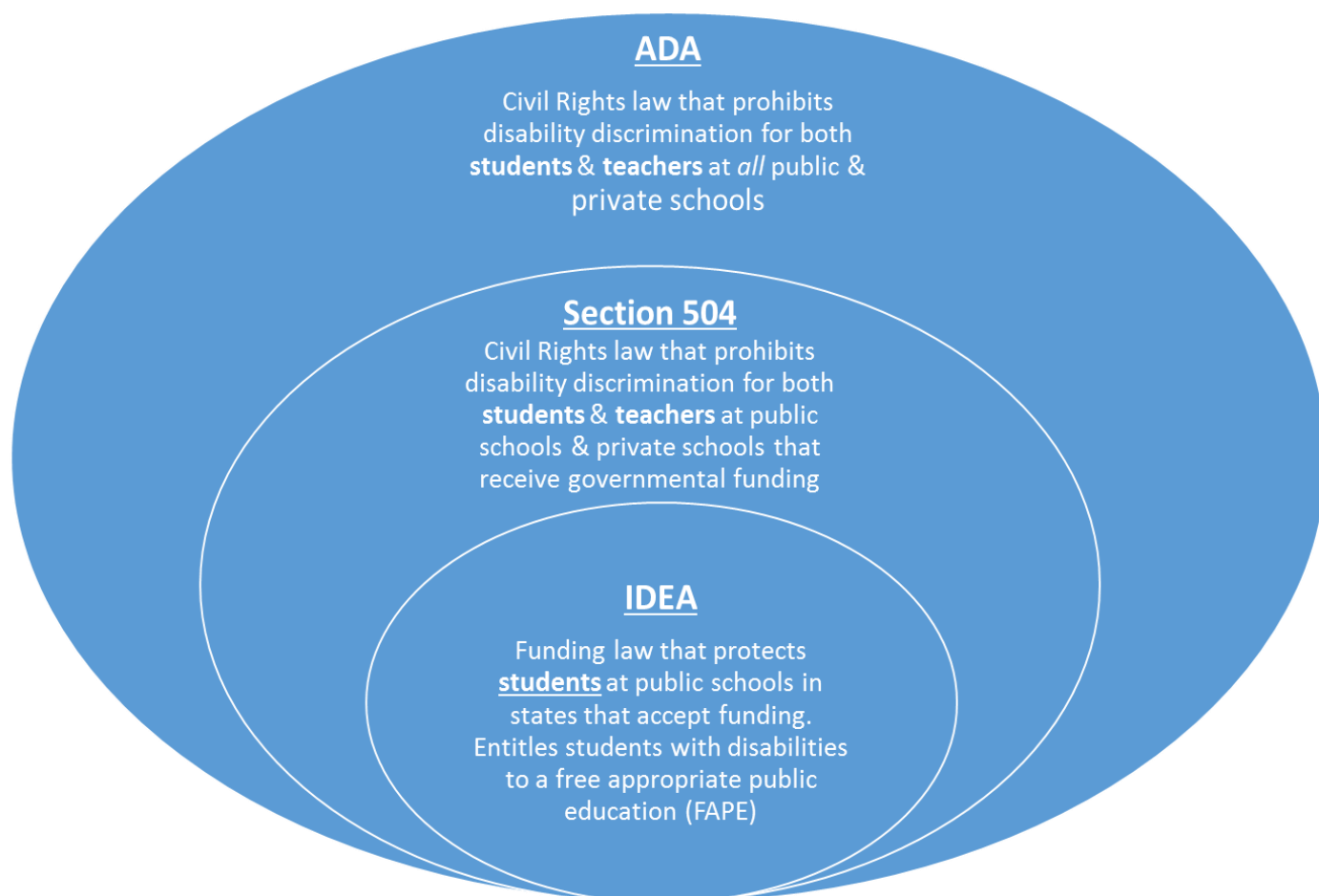
- Send letters to service coordinators and families to explain their services
- Offer resources and support throughout your journey

Early Childhood Special Education Staff from your school district will:

- Receive detailed information about your child by his or her 30-month birthday from First Steps with your permission through written consent
- Attend the transition meeting and explain the evaluation process and education program options
- Plan and coordinate a school visit to their preschool programs
- May evaluate your child and/or collaborate with the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education to ensure all required evaluation components are completed
- Schedule the case conference prior to your child's third birthday to discuss eligibility and need for special education services



Federal Statutes for Students with Disabilities



Check out the LAW section of the IDEAL Parent Document for more information on these federal statutes.



Laws and policies applicable to DHH children

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

Federal funding law that entitles every child with a disability to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The Part C program for children ages birth through 3 years in Indiana is called First Steps. The Part B section for children 3 years older over in Indiana is called Article 7, Indiana's Special Education Law.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

Civil Rights law that prohibits disability discrimination for both students and teachers at public schools, and private schools that receive governmental funding

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) :

Civil Rights law that prohibits disability discrimination for any individual in public and private places

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

Confidentiality law prohibits all students' educational records from being shared with third parties

All of the federal and state laws work together to ensure your deaf or hard of hearing child is fully able to participate in public schools. Public schools, (including the Indiana School for the Deaf) must ensure that communication with students "with hearing, vision or speech disabilities is as effective as communication with all other students."

–As stated in a Dear Colleague letter sent to all states Department of Education from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education, Nov. 12, 2014.



Step 2: Transition Meeting

With parent/guardian permission:

- The First Steps Service Coordinator and Early Childhood Special Education staff representing your local school district, will develop the transition plan to be included in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), outlining next steps and share **possible** resources and programs.
- Other attendees may include, at parent/guardian request
 - Other family members
 - Your child's First Steps providers
 - Representatives from other programs you may be considering such as a local pre-school program, the Indiana School for the Deaf, and/or St. Joseph Institute for the Deaf
 - The Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education representative
- You, as parent/guardian, will be asked to give permission for an evaluation of your child.

After the transition meeting and before a case conference meeting:

- Visit your program options as shared at the transition meeting – consider scheduling that visit during the transition meeting
- Visit other programs that serve deaf and hard of hearing children and observe the environment, staff interaction with students, peer interactions, and learn about their program and philosophy, as well as their enrollment criteria and procedures. Ask how they would meet your child's unique needs
- Use a checklist to help you think of questions to ask and what to look for in each program (http://handsandvoices.org/pdf/preschool_eval.pdf)

If parental/guardian permission is not given to share information with your school district:

The First Steps Service Coordinator will provide you with information regarding local resources you may wish to pursue upon your First Steps exit.



Step 3: Evaluation

- Eligibility criteria for special education is different than eligibility criteria for First Steps.
- IDEA requires children to be evaluated to find out if they are eligible for special education services.
- IDEAL, in Indiana further requires annual language assessments to make sure your child continues to progress
- The evaluation will help the case conference committee (CCC) to determine what if any services are needed for your child.
- See Guidelines for the Assessment and Educational Evaluation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Indiana for evaluation components:

www.in.gov/health/cdhhe/files/Guidelines-for-Assessment.pdf

If you, as parent/guardian, do not want your child evaluated for special education services:

You may decline the evaluation, and if you see the need for an evaluation at a later date, you can make a request and the school will have up to 50 school days to complete the evaluation and convene the case conference.



Guidelines for the Assessment and Educational Evaluation of Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Indiana

Scan for the IDEAL list of Tools & Assessments

Based on 511 IAC Article 7, 2024



Step 4: Case conference committee meeting

Procedural safeguards (Parent Rights) are required to be offered before every case conference committee (CCC) meeting, so make sure you understand your parent rights.

It is your right as a parent to bring other family members, supporters or professionals. Let the school administrators know if you invite other people to attend.

The purpose of the CCC is to:

- 1) Determine eligibility based on assessment data
- 2) Develop an IEP if your child is eligible and in need of services
- 3) Determine appropriate services and placement based on your child's individual goals

Individual Education Program (IEP) goals are written to address identified needs, see resource page for further details about what is included in every IEP. The IEP is written for your child's needs, not written to fit a program.

Special considerations for children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing must be included (see worksheet in the Guidelines for Assessment document).

- Language and communication needs
- Opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the student's language and communication mode
- Academic level
- Full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the student's language and communication mode.

Following the CCC you may take up to 10 school days to review the draft IEP document and sign consent to proceed.



Terminology

DHH:

Deaf or hard of hearing

IFSP:

Individualized Family Service Plan developed for First Steps services with the family making the decisions

IEP:

Individualized Education Program developed by the case conference committee, including local school administrators and staff; specialists, such as staff from the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education; and parents

FAPE:

Free Appropriate Public Education federal mandated for children with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing children

LRE:

Least Restrictive Environment means the student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in the education setting equally to that of all students

TOR:

Teacher of Record, for DHH children must be a licensed teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing (TOD) for children with DHH as their primary eligibility



Step 5: Putting the IEP into action

- Plan for your child's first day: Visit program with your child.
- Plan for a bus ride, or show pictures and point out school buses if your child will be riding the bus.
- Let your child bring a comfort item from home following the preschool's guidance.
- Communicate with your child's teachers consistently to ensure good communication among all who provide service for your child. Staff training will take place at your child's school to prepare teachers, too.
- Celebrate this exciting time for your child's entry into school!



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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

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

Specialized programs and services for deaf and hard of hearing children

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 Institute for the Deaf: 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



Transition Checklist

Time Child's age	What	Who	Date	Comments
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 and others as requested		
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 committee meeting takes place	ECSE administrator leads the meeting, family, providers, assessment team participate		
36 months	IEP or plan is implemented	School, program or service as determined at the case conference committee (CCC) meeting		
Annually	Annual case review	CCC and others you wish to invite		