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Early Learning Toolkit: Overview of Services for Families of Young Children

New parents have a lot to manage. Concern about whether a child's growth and development are on track can be confusing. This toolkit provides places to begin if caregivers suspect that a baby or young child may need services due to a developmental delay or disability.

How do I know if my child is developmentally delayed?

Washington families concerned about a child's development can call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 (TTY 1.800.833.6384) to connect with a Family Resource Coordinator (FRC). Support is provided in English, Spanish and other languages. Families can access developmental screening online for free at [Parent Help 123 developmental screening tool](#).

In addition, several state agencies collaborated to publish Early Learning and Development Guidelines. The booklet includes information about what children can do and learn at different stages of development, from birth through third grade. Families can purchase a hard copy of the guidelines from the state Department of Enterprise Services. Order at: [myprint.wa.gov](#). A free downloadable version is available in English and Spanish from the website of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): [Early Learning and Development Guidelines](#).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) manages a campaign to [Learn the Signs. Act Early](#). The website includes tools for tracking milestones and materials for families to learn more and plan home-based activities to promote skill development.

Birth-3 services are provided by ESIT

In Washington, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) administers services for eligible children from birth to age 3 through [Early Support for Infants and Toddlers](#) (ESIT). Families can contact ESIT directly, or they can reach out to their local school district to request an evaluation to determine eligibility and consider what support a child might need. ESIT provides information on a page



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called [Parent Rights and Leadership](#), with procedural safeguards described in a brochure that can be downloaded in multiple languages.

Evaluation determines eligibility

After a referral is accepted, a team of professionals uses standardized tools and observations to evaluate a young child's development in five areas:

- **Physical:** Reaching for and grasping toys, crawling, walking, jumping
- **Cognitive:** Watching activities, following simple directions, problem-solving
- **Social-emotional:** Making needs known, initiating games, starting to take turns
- **Communication:** Vocalizing, babbling, using two- to three-word phrases
- **Adaptive:** Holding a bottle, eating with fingers, getting dressed

Services are provided through an IFSP

Children who qualify receive services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Early learning programs are designed to enable success in the child's natural environment (home, daycare, etc.), which is where the child would be if disability was not a factor. PAVE provides more information in an article and a two-part video series:

(Article) [Early Intervention: How to Access Services for Children Birth to 3 in Washington](#).

(2-part Video Series) [Disability Rights for Littles: Key Information for Families of Babies, Preschoolers, and Primary-School Children](#).

IDEA includes three parts

The federal law that protects children with disabilities and creates a funding source for services to meet their individualized needs is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

[Part A](#) includes general guidance about the rights of children 0-21 with disabilities.

[Part B](#) protects eligible students ages 3-21 with the right to school-based services delivered through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

[Part C](#) guarantees the right to early intervention services for children Birth-3 who meet eligibility criteria.

PAVE provides an overview article about the federal law and its primary features: [IDEA: The Foundation of Special Education](#).

Child Find protects the right to evaluation

Under IDEA, school districts have the affirmative duty to seek out and evaluate children with known or suspected disabilities who live within their boundaries. That affirmative duty is protected through IDEA's Child Find Mandate.



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Child Find Mandate protects:

Children Birth-3 with known or suspected disability conditions that may significantly impact the way they learn and engage within their natural environment

Students 3-21 who may be significantly impacted in their ability to access grade-level learning at school because of a known or suspected disability condition

If these criteria are met, the school district in which the child lives has the duty to evaluate to determine eligibility for services. For more information, PAVE provides an article: [Child Find: Schools Have a Legal Duty to Evaluate Children Impacted by Disability](#).

Information for children 3-5 or older

Children with early intervention services are evaluated to determine whether they are eligible for school-based services when they turn 3.

PAVE provides an article with more information about the early learning transition process: [What's Next when Early Childhood Services End at Age 3?](#)

PAVE also provides a short summary of key information and a checklist to help track transition steps: [Early Learning Transition: When Birth-3 Services End](#).

Part 2 of PAVE's video series for parents of young children includes detail about the transitions into preschool and primary school: [Disability Rights for Littles: Key Information for Families of Babies, Preschoolers, and Primary-School Children](#).

If a child did not receive early intervention services but disability is suspected or shown to impact learning, a family caregiver or anyone with knowledge of a child's circumstances can request that the school district evaluate a child 3 years or older to determine eligibility for school-based services. PAVE provides information about how to make a formal written request for an educational evaluation: [Sample Letter to Request Evaluation](#).

Preschool children have a right to be included

If eligible, students 3-21 can receive free services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) served by the local school district. PAVE provides guidance for families new to the process: [Steps to Read, Understand, and Develop an Initial IEP](#).

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), provides guidance specific to [Early Childhood Special Education](#). Districts must consider how to include preschool students with non-disabled peers. General education classrooms are considered the [Least Restrictive Environment](#), and LRE is a primary guiding principle of the IDEA.



There are 14 IEP eligibility categories

Students 3-21 may be eligible for IEP services if they meet criteria in a category defined by federal and state regulations. A PAVE article provides more detail about each of these categories and describes the evaluation process: [Evaluations Part 1: Where to Start When a Student Needs Special Help at School](#).

Below is a list of IEP eligibility categories. The Washington Administrative Code ([WAC 392-172A-01035](#)) lists state criteria for each category.

Developmental Delay is an eligibility category for Washington students through age 9. At that point, an evaluation would need to show eligibility in one of the other 13 categories for the student to continue receiving IEP services.

Please note that a medical diagnosis is not required for a school district to determine eligibility, which is based on three criteria:

1. a disability is present
2. a student's learning is significantly impacted, and
3. services are necessary to help the child access appropriate learning.

All three prongs must be present for a student to be eligible for an IEP in one or more of these disability categories:

- Autism
- Emotional Disturbance (In Wash., Emotional Behavioral Disability)
- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech/Language Impairment
- Multiple Disabilities
- Intellectual Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Deafness
- Deaf blindness
- Visual Impairment/Blindness
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Developmental Delay (ages 0-9 in Wash.)



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[PAVE is here to help!](#)

Parent Training and Information (PTI) is federally funded to provide assistance for family caregivers, youth, and professionals. We know educational systems use a lot of complicated words and follow regulated procedures that can feel confusing. We do our best to help school-and-family teams work together so students with disabilities can access their right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Learn more about [PTI](#) and click [Get Help](#) to receive individualized assistance.