

North Carolina Preschool Program Overview

State Lead Agency:

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children Division, Office of School Readiness

Local Lead Agency:

Local Education Agency (LEA); local school system

Ages Served:

Children, ages three through five years, with disabilities. Five-year-olds who are eligible for kindergarten are not served through the Preschool Program.

Eligibility:

Eligibility is based on observation, screening, and evaluation results. Results are presented to an IEP team. IEP stands for Individual Education Program. You are an important member of this team. Eligibility categories include:

- ◆ Developmental delay
- ◆ Autism spectrum disorder
- ◆ Deaf-blindness
- ◆ Deafness, hearing impairment
- ◆ Other health impairment
- ◆ Orthopedic impairment
- ◆ Speech or language impairment
- ◆ Visual impairment, including blindness
- ◆ Traumatic brain-injury
- ◆ DD (Developmental delay) / Atypical
- ◆ Multiple disabilities

Focus:

The North Carolina Preschool Program focuses on your child's educational needs. The North Carolina Preschool Program offers a variety of services to help young children ages three through five years. The Preschool Program strives to educate the child to enable him or her to participate in daily activities.

Available Services

Preschool Program services are available to children who are eligible for special education and related services as appropriate. Placement should be in the most natural and least restrictive environment (LRE).

Preschool Program services may include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Early identification and screening◆ Multidisciplinary evaluations◆ Special education (services in the home,	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Related services such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Audiology· Counseling· Interpreting· Medical services for evaluation· Occupational therapy· Orientation and mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Physical therapy· School nurse· Social work· Speech-language therapy· Transportation

Type of Plan Used:

The LEA will develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The Preschool IEP Team, with you as a member, will decide what educational goals will be on the IEP.

The IEP will:

- ◆ reflect your child’s educational, developmental and functional needs through annual goals;
- ◆ support your child through appropriate services or programs;
- ◆ provide services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which for preschoolers is the natural environment;
- ◆ generally be written for one year, and is reviewed at least annually and revised as appropriate

Service Delivery Model:

- ◆ Participation in the North Carolina Preschool Program is voluntary.
- ◆ Your main contact for services is your child’s teacher or therapist employed by your local school system.
- ◆ Planning is done at the IEP meeting, where you are considered a full team member. Special education and related services are coordinated through the LEA.
- ◆ During the IEP meeting, annual goals are developed based upon the child’s evaluation and present level of performance. After the goals are developed, the team determines services to be delivered. The team also identifies where and for how long services will be provided.
- ◆ The LEA may have a variety of service options available for the child. These options include school based or itinerant (traveling teachers) services. If your child is medically fragile or has significant medical issues preventing them from attending preschool, your child could qualify for home based services.
- ◆ The main contact for continued services or a change in services will be your child’s teacher.
- ◆ Continued special education services are available as your child grows older; however, eligibility requirements must be met.
- ◆ All decisions about services are made by the IEP team. You are a full member of the team.

Cost of Service:

Services included in the IEP are provided at no cost to the family. Under Federal law, this is called FAPE: **F**ree **A**ppropriate **P**ublic **E**ducation.

Meeting with the IEP Team (Preschool Program) to Determine Eligibility

- ◆ After all the evaluations have been completed, you will be contacted to meet with the IEP team (of which you are a member).
- ◆ Sometimes the service providers think your child might be eligible for Preschool Program services, but after all the evaluations have been completed, your child does not qualify for these services. The IEP team will then suggest other possible services for your child.
- ◆ If your child is eligible for the Preschool Program, an IEP and placement decision may be made at this time, or an additional meeting may be scheduled. An IEP will be written no more than 30 days before a child's third birthday. Services will begin on your child's third birthday, unless your child turns three when school is not in session.

Who Will Attend the IEP Meeting?

You are an important member of the IEP team and should attend the IEP meeting. Other members who must be invited to the IEP meeting are:

- ◆ With your permission, your EISC (Early Intervention Service Coordinator) or referring agency personnel or teacher or representative from the current service provider (for children with vision or hearing problems, a representative from the Office of Education Services);
- ◆ An LEA representative who may be the supervisor of special education, preschool coordinator, the principal, or another designee, who is able to provide or supervise the provision of special education and to commit financial resources;
- ◆ A teacher qualified to provide regular early childhood education (this may be the same person as the special education teacher if that teacher holds a birth-to-kindergarten license);
- ◆ A teacher or service provider qualified to provide special education;
- ◆ A person knowledgeable about evaluation results (may be the special education supervisor or teacher);
- ◆ Additional members that you or the school believe necessary may also be invited. This might include a teacher or therapist who is currently working with your child or who may be working with your child, a physician, a supportive friend, or other family members. The school must inform you about the other people who are invited to the meeting.

Tasks of the Meeting

- ◆ Before the IEP meeting, you should receive a copy of the *Handbook on Parents' Rights* that explains your rights under the Preschool Program (which becomes effective on your child's third birthday if your child qualifies);
- ◆ Determining eligibility, if this has not yet been completed (once your child becomes eligible for Preschool Program services, an IEP must be written within 30 days);
- ◆ Developing and signing the IEP to become effective on your child's third birthday;
- ◆ Making placement decisions;
- ◆ Completing paperwork.

Before the Meeting

Many parents find it helpful to keep a notebook of important records. Whatever you decide to keep in this notebook will help your child, you, and the preschool personnel at the IEP meeting. Such notebooks may include:

- ◆ Medical records that are important, including shot (immunization) record;
- ◆ Important documents like birth certificate, Medicaid card, Social Security number;
- ◆ Copies of previous evaluations and current IFSP under the Infant-Toddler Program

In addition to keeping a notebook for your child's records, you might consider doing the following before the IEP meeting:

- ◆ Review the education rights of your child and your rights as a parent or guardian;
- ◆ Write down what you see as your child's strengths and areas of difficulty;
- ◆ Make a short list of things you would like your child to be able to do now and throughout his or her life.

Writing the IEP

The IEP team will discuss and develop goals for your child. This team will decide what special education and related services are needed, based upon the goals written on the IEP.

An IEP must be developed before placement in special education and must contain the following:

- ◆ Your child's present level of performance – what your child is able to do and not able to do;
- ◆ Annual goals to address delays;
- ◆ The amount of special education and related services; (number of times per week, month or reporting period; amount of time in hours or minutes; and location of services);
- ◆ The extent to which your child will participate with non-disabled children in regular early childhood educational programs;
- ◆ Any supplementary aids, services, modifications and/or accommodations your child needs;
- ◆ Starting date and length of time the services will be offered;
- ◆ The method or procedures that will be used to measure (determine) if the annual goals have been met and how you will be regularly informed of your child's progress;
- ◆ Documentation of the IEP team members who attended.

During the IEP Meeting

As the parent or guardian, you are a member of the IEP team. You have valuable information and advice to give. During the IEP meeting, feel free to:

- ◆ Speak up about what you believe should be in your child's IEP;
- ◆ Ask questions about any part of the meeting or the IEP that is not clear to you;
- ◆ Discuss thoroughly the placement for your child and the special education and related services that will be provided;
- ◆ Request a copy of your child's IEP. (This will help you keep up with your child's progress as well as work with your child at home.)

After the IEP Meeting

It is important to continue the communication between you and the school after the IEP meeting.

- ◆ Ask what types of parent activities are available at your child's school;
- ◆ Talk with your child's teacher on a regular basis;
- ◆ Do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions you might have.

If you and the LEA cannot agree on what is needed for your child, then you should first ask for "mediation." If mediation does not settle the differences, you may proceed to a "due process" hearing. These procedures have been developed to protect the educational rights of your child. These procedures can help both you and the LEA work out a difference in opinion and come up with a solution. (See your copy of the *Handbook on Parents' Rights*.) Remember, a Due Process hearing is intended to be used as a last resort. Both you and the LEA can ask for a hearing when normal discussions and mediations cannot produce a solution.