

IDEA Early Intervention and Preschool Programs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7 million eligible children and youth with disabilities across the country, including infants and toddlers. Programs for young children with disabilities play a significant role in early childhood education and development, which is particularly salient when it comes to promoting school readiness. The connections in a baby's brain are most adaptable in the first three years of life. These connections, which are the foundation for learning, behavior, and health, become harder to change over time. Ensuring that young children have access to inclusive early interventions during this critical period of development means that children will get the appropriate services and supports they need to be equipped for success in school and avoid costly interventions later in life.

◆ Background

Since 1975, the federal government has sought to uphold the fundamental principle of educational equality for children with disabilities through a permanent, broad-scale federal assistance program. IDEA grants provide federal funding for the education of children with disabilities and, as a condition of the funding, requires states to provide a free appropriate public education specifically

At a Glance

■ Early Intervention Programs Created:

1986

■ Who this Program Serves:

Children birth through age 5 with established physical or mental conditions.

◆ Number of Children Served in the 2020-2021 School Year :¹

Part C: 786,275 children

Part B, Sec. 619: 502,391 children

● Delivery Method:

Part C provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Part B, Sec. 619 provides special education and related services to children ages 3 through 5.

■ FY2022 Federal Funding:

Part C: \$496.3 million;

Part B, Sec. 619: \$409.5 million

¹ U.S. Department of Education ([Part C](#); [Part B, Sec. 619](#))



designed to meet the needs of children with disabilities at no cost to their parents. A 2011 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report found approximately one in six children in the United States had a developmental disability ranging from mild disabilities such as speech and language impairments to serious developmental disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, and autism.

Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education Programs

IDEA Part B covers special education for children and youth with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21. IDEA also contains two programs specifically designed to serve younger children with disabilities: IDEA Part C, which authorizes federal funding for early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities ages birth to three years; and IDEA Part B, Section 619, which authorizes supplementary grants to states for preschool programs serving children with disabilities ages three through five.

Part C aids states in creating and maintaining “a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system that provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.” Services focus on children experiencing, or who have a high probability of experiencing, “developmental delay” and are outlined for each child and his or her family in an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Early intervention services may include audiology, vision, speech-language pathology, and psychological services; physical therapy; provision of assistive technology devices; and social work, referral, and coordination services. To the maximum extent feasible, services are to be provided in “natural environments,” including the home, with other infants and toddlers who are not disabled. This element of inclusion helps children and their families feel like important and accepted members of their community and leads to positive social relationships and friendships, as well as development and learning to reach their full potential. If the developmental delay has not been resolved by age 3, a child may continue receiving services under Part B, Sec. 619.

