

# *Next Steps*



# *To Success*

## *Transition from Early Intervention Services To Early Childhood Education and Beyond...*

Prepared in cooperation with:

New Mexico Department of Health-Long Term Services Division  
Family Infant Toddler Program  
New Mexico State Department of Education-Special Education Office

## A Message to Parents

Dear Friend,

You and I and thousands of other parents throughout New Mexico share a challenge. We are parents of children with special needs. We have sons and daughters, who require a little or a lot more assistance, understanding, and guidance at home, in the classroom, on the playground, and in the community.

Like all parents of all children, we want the best education possible for our sons and daughters. We want to guide their progress and ensure their success during their school years. In order to do so, we need to know as much as possible about the education system that serves our students. And we need to know how to form partnerships and teams with the many educators and other professionals who will come in and out of our children's classrooms and lives.

Over the years, we will learn about the laws, rules, and regulations that govern our schools and our education programs, just as we have become experts in health and other systems that serve our youngsters. The information that we glean from books, other parents, and the professionals who work with our children is critical. But so are the partnerships that we form— with teachers, therapists, classroom aides, and friends. We need each other in order to do what is best for our sons and daughters.

Being a parent is serious business. Being the parent of a child with special needs seems even more serious and complicated. That is why you and I need a handbook like this. But let's also remember that all kids need parents who find them fun and funny, who love them for who they are, who just like to be with them. Finding the balance between becoming the education expert on a child with learning disabilities and the father who sings her to sleep at night or the mother who takes him to a ball game—is the most important challenge of all.

With best wishes,

*Nick's Mom*



A child is like a butterfly in the wind;  
some can fly higher than others;  
but each one flies the best it can.

Why compare one  
against the other?  
Each one is special.  
Each one is beautiful.

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## **Dare to Dream**

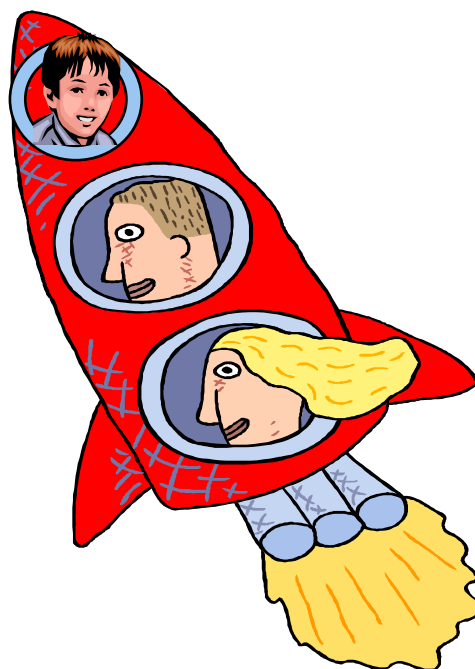
### **Remember...**

The goal of special services is to help  
our children reach their potential.

As we look to the future,  
we should think about higher education,  
gainful employment and  
living independently.

Keep the future in mind.

We must always strive  
to integrate our children  
into the mainstream of society.



**Let Your Dreams Take Flight!**

## Introduction

As a parent, you want what is best for your child. Young children grow in so many ways--physically, socially, intellectually and spiritually. Children bring their own set of gifts as members of a family and develop at different rates. When children experience delays in one or more areas they benefit from therapies, support services and special education to help them overcome or work around these lags in their development.



Your family may already be receiving Early Intervention services through the Family Infant Toddler Program (FIT) or you may have just connected with these services for your child. New Mexico provides a range of services and program options for children through age six, who are experiencing developmental delays, disabling conditions, or who are “at risk” for developing them. Family centered services are provided by the Department of Health for children birth to three through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). For children, ages three to six, services and supports for the child are provided using the IFSP or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a combination of an IFSP/ IEP.

In this booklet, we will focus on transition and the choices available to families as they plan the next steps they will take when Early Intervention services end. Yes, parents do have choices! Our goal is to let you know what is available and give you an idea of the timelines and processes to follow so that you can make the best use of services for your child. It is important for parents to make informed decisions. This booklet contains resources and tips to help you be successful in your quest for the best! *It is important to remember that transition planning helps to insure that there are no gaps in the services for your child.*

### Three Keys to Positive Outcomes for Children



One key to a path for success is **highly involved parents** and other family members. Families must be equal participants in the Individual Family Service Plan/Individual Educational Plan process for their child.



The second key is a **well thought out plan for the future that is developed early and is followed by all**. The information and tools in this book will help families develop a sound transition plan for their young child.



The third key to positive outcomes is **inclusive settings and communities**. When children with disabilities learn in environments with their non-disabled peers, good things happen. High expectations bring better outcomes.

A parent's thoughts on transition...

"The most important gift we parents have to give our children is our talent for dreaming...for envisioning a better life, a better way. Allow other people to share that vision and share that dream, and you will be closer than ever to making it real."



*Your child will soon be turning three.  
Be ready for your journey.  
Plan each step that you will take.  
You have a few decisions to make.  
Transition means change and that's okay.  
If you know where you're going, you'll find your way!*

## **Early Childhood Services**

### ***Choices for young children and their families***

The law IDEA '97 contains two important early childhood efforts designed to help states to provide services to young children. Part B, Section 619 is the Preschool Program which requires states to provide services to children age three and four who have been identified as having a developmental delay. Part C, the Handicapped Infants and Toddlers Program of IDEA '97 requires that states provide services to children from birth to age three who have a developmental delay. It also allows states to decide if they would provide services to infants and young children who are identified as "at risk" for developmental delay. In New Mexico there is a definition for "at risk" that includes both medical and environmental risk factors. In our state, the Part B services are provided through the State Department of Education and the Part C services are provided through the State Department of Health.

## **Natural Environments**

### ***Least Restrictive Environment for 3-4 year old services***

Since there are no regular education programs for three and four year olds, providing services in the least restrictive environment is more difficult. Some school districts have developed employee day care programs and others have developed agreements with local Head-Start programs to provide similar kinds of environments. It is important for children with developmental delays to receive services in settings that are normal or natural for the child's age peers who have no disabilities. Think of where your child would be if they didn't have a developmental delay (home, daycare, babysitter's house, grandma's home) and talk to the school about providing needed services in that setting. These arrangements may take more planning but your child will benefit in many ways.

Note: New Mexico has some unique regulations to help serve students transitioning from Early Intervention services. References to New Mexico regulations are shown as 6.31.2\_\_NMAC.

## Communication and Relationships



**The time and energy you spend to create good relationships will pay off.** Many new doors will open when you know the service providers, educators and others in your child's life. Taking the time to talk helps to establish good communication and helps to build friendly relationships. Children succeed when the adults in their life work as a team to solve problems and create opportunities.

Relationships are two-way and can benefit families as well as schools and agencies. We as parents and families are the true experts on our children. Educators and other professionals are beginning to understand that they can be valuable consultants for parents because they have a great deal of information and expertise to offer our family and children. Knowing the people in our children's educational environments and community can make a difference. It helps us become more influential and respected members of the teams that make decisions about our children's education (IEP/IFSP teams, for example). It helps us become more effective advocates for our children.

### Tips for Building Successful Partnerships for Your Child

- Attend all meetings regarding your child's educational program. Remember, that you are an equal member of the team. You have important information to share.
- Talk about and validate your child's strengths, interests and abilities.
- Share your dreams for your child and share some of the strategies that you are using at home that work well for your child.
- Start meetings and interactions on a positive note, not negative. Contact your child's teachers frequently by phone, in writing or in person.
- Get to know the people who work at your child's school. Volunteer in your child's school. Join the PTA! Don't be seen only when there is a problem. Encourage school staff to contact you regularly to discuss your child's progress. They can be a great source of information.
- Keep in mind your child's needs and try to work out disagreements through discussion and compromise. Be flexible. If you become too rigid, it is harder to build partnerships.
- Help your child develop a positive attitude toward school.
- Practice positive communication skills. When you are speaking with someone, remember to look directly at him or her and listen carefully to what is said. Make comments in a clear and positive manner. Give facts to support your point of view.
- When you don't understand what someone says, ask for an explanation. If you don't agree with something, speak up and say so.
- Understand your rights. Be proactive instead of reactive.

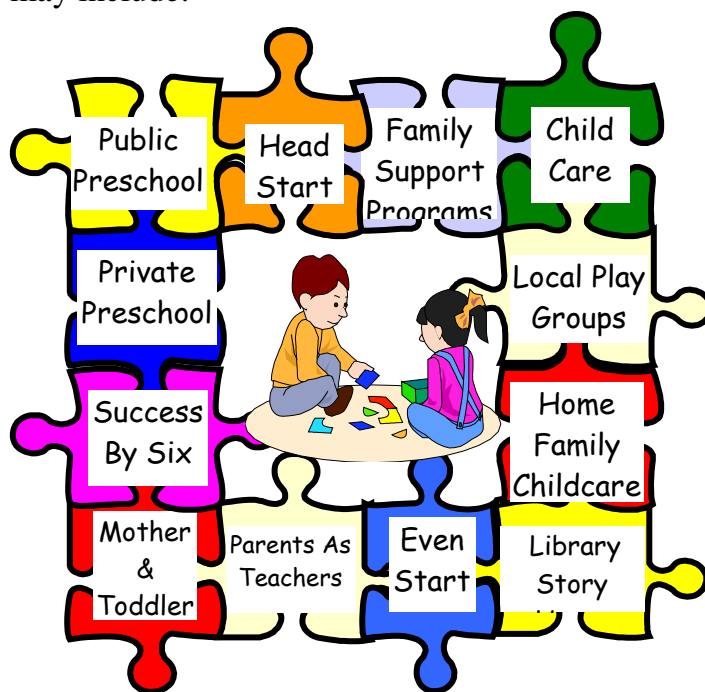


## Transition Choices to Fit Your Child's Needs

**Make informed decisions about your child's next steps.** As you begin to think about leaving the Early Intervention program, there may be several options to consider. Educate yourself on what is available in your community. Ask questions. Think about what is best for your child and for your family? Your choices may include:

### Childcare Centers

Childcare centers care for larger groups of children. Children are usually separated by age groups and usually only play with children of their own age. As children grow older, they may be moved to a different age group. In most cases this also means they will have a different caregiver every year. Because young children develop very strong attachments to their caregivers, this practice can be unsettling for some children. Childcare centers are state licensed and required certain basic standards for health and safety.



### Childcare Cooperatives

Offer childcare to suit one group of parents. The parents usually come from a corporation and hire a director. The parents set the policies and procedures, pay fees, and volunteer their services in return for quality childcare. Rural communities find that cooperatives work well.

### Drop-In Care

Some family providers and center programs allow drop-care. You will usually need to visit with the provider and sign your child up beforehand. When you need childcare, you can call to see if the provider or center has an opening that day. This type of childcare works well as a back up for times when your regular care won't work.

### Even Start

This is a program for 3, 4 and 5 year olds that is taught by certified teachers and a trained staff. To qualify, there must be an educational or literacy need among the adults in the family.

### Head Start

Head Start is a full day or half-day program that offers care for children and provides educational learning activities. These programs can be located in centers, schools, or family childcare homes. Services are usually free. Families who are low income or who have a child with special needs may be eligible. Children may receive therapy in a Head Start program in accordance with their IEP/IFSP through a joint powers agreement with the district.

## Home Family Childcare

The caregiver, who is often a parent, provides care in his or her home. Family childcare homes voluntarily choose to register with the state and agree to meet certain minimum standards. Registered family childcare homes usually care for a small group of children (usually six or less) and offer a cozy, home-like setting and the opportunity for siblings to stay together.

## In-Home Care

The caregiver comes to or lives in your home. In-home care works well if you need care for an infant or toddler, after-school care, or evening and weekend care. In-home care is convenient, but can be costly. You also may be responsible for paying social security and worker's compensation for your in-home provider. In-home caregivers are not regulated by the state.

## Nursery Schools and Mother's Day Out

Programs may enroll any children under the age of five. These programs usually operate mornings or early afternoons, two to five days a week.



## Public Schools

Preschool Programs for Children Aged 3 and 4 (6.31.2.11.A NMAC)

A center based program for 3-4 year olds that usually does not include non-disabled peers. If your child qualifies, this program is free through the public schools. Therapy is provided either as a pull out model or group therapy with teacher and staff helping with the process. Using an IFSP, therapy can be delivered at home without it being a medical necessity. It is based on the families needs.

Research has shown greater value for therapy when family, caregivers and educational staff are trained to carry-over therapy every day in their natural routines. Therapy models ranging from greatest to least value include:

- Interactive group or individual therapy in family or teacher's routines
- Group therapy without teachers or family involved using some non disabled peers
- Group therapy without staff, only disabled students involved
- Individual pull-out therapy

In addition to services provided by the district, families have the option to choose private therapy at an outpatient center at the expense of using their insurance/Medicaid. Private options have limitations as they may only last a short period of time and use up benefits.

Note: In many communities, the public schools offer programs for pre-kindergarten children. Some also offer before and after school programs for school age-children. If available, you will want to find out how children with disabilities can be served in these programs.

## Success by Six

Success by Six serves children from birth to 6 years old. Parents can drop-in one of the parenting centers (for about 2 hours); learn about parenting, knitting, etc. while their children play and learn in the child development room. This is open to all parents. Parents can drop in once or as many times as they are able to each month. It provides support for parents and their children.

## Your Child's Records

Record keeping is one of the most important and empowering ways you can help your child. As you begin to collect records, you will better understand your child's needs and history, how that history might influence the future services and programming, and how the system works.

All decisions in special education are based on records—very little will be done without good documentation.



### The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act

(FERPA or the Buckley Amendment)

- Guarantees you the right to inspect and review your child's file. You may also receive copies of the information contained in the files.
- States that only people who need to see the file can actually see it.
- Allows you to challenge information in the file if you feel it is inaccurate or misleading.
- If you disagree with something in the file you can ask that it be removed. If the request is denied, you have three options:
  1. You may attach a letter to the page telling why you disagree, (OR)
  2. You may request mediation, (OR)
  3. You may request a due process hearing.
- Agencies must have your written permission to release records to any other entity.

*If you have more questions about **FERPA**, contact:*

**U.S. Department of Education**  
600 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202-4605  
1(202) 260-3887/TDD (202) 260-8956  
[www.ed.gov/offices/OM/ferpa.htm](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OM/ferpa.htm)

*"We mourn the loss of what we are leaving,  
we are uncertain about the future,  
and we need support in making the move forward."*

## Getting Started with Record Keeping

**IEP/IFSP:** Be sure to keep a copy of each IFSP and IEP that is developed for your child. Arranging them in order by date with the most current one on top will build a chronological record of services planned for your family (IFSP) and your child's individualized education programs (IEP). These documents should include the team's recommendations, an indication of progress towards goals, how objectives/benchmarks will be measured (plus any reports that address this progress) and a record of reports between home and school.

**Evaluations:** Keep copies of all evaluations and recommendations. Evaluations describe your child's needs and should include recommendations for meeting those needs. Evaluations are the first place the team will look to determine educational programming.

**Doctor's Reports:** These reports add yet another piece to the puzzle. You and the IFSP/IEP team will certainly want to look at any doctor's reports that might have a bearing on your child's success at school. Doctor's reports may provide important information on diagnosis, suggested interventions, processing and supports. Schools do not have to provide medically related therapy as part of the IFSP/IEP.

**Correspondence:** Keep copies of all correspondence sent and received.

**Phone Calls:** Keep a log of phone calls. It is very important to note the date and time of the call, who you spoke with, the subject of the call, and the call's outcome.

**Notices:** The agency or school district should notify you at different times while your child is in the program or service setting. They will send you notice of meetings, evaluations, proposed changes in services and other communications. Keep all correspondence.

**Child's Work:** Keep both good and 'not so good' samples of your child's work. Portfolio assessments (collections of student's work and recommendations) are being used more often and are more accurate than a formal assessment.

**Shot Records:** Keep copies of all shot records.

★ Good record keeping should provide a complete picture of your child. ★

There are many ways to keep records. To begin getting your child's records in order, we suggest that you keep records in chronological order. Begin with the most current records.

*To get started*, you can use a 3" ring binder, a package of dividers and sheet protectors or a three-hole punch (cost about \$12.00).

Label the dividers. Here are some suggestions:

- IEP/IFSP
- Evaluations
- Doctor's Reports
- Correspondence
- Phone Calls,
- Notices,
- Samples of child's work

"My biggest concern is transition day! What are we going to do if he doesn't qualify to go on with his little buddies to the public school program?"

## Between Two Worlds



Your family is getting ready to leave the world of early intervention and transition to a new world of programs, including school. Think about the people who are part of your child's life:

- Family
- Teachers
- Aides
- Classmates
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Related Service Providers
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Speech/Language Specialists
- Nurses
- Others

**Tap every resource!** With every transition a new group of people often starts over from scratch in learning how to provide the most appropriate supports for your child. Searching for what works by trial and error takes precious time away from addressing new goals. Schools and agency programs keep formal records, but sometimes the most essential information that previous teams have learned does not pass along easily in documents.

**Good communication is a key to a smooth transition!** Early intervention programs, schools and agencies have a process for sharing transition information. There are strategies for “sending” teams who are currently working with your child as well as the “receiving” teams who will be involved. Each team develops a plan of what needs to be accomplished and when these things will be accomplished. Documenting strategies that worked is critical for both teams. Planning must be initiated before the school year ends and resumed before the following school year begins.

**Create a Transition Booklet or Parent Report!** Families can be instrumental in developing a record of successful strategies for the new team. One way to do this is to create a transition booklet. This is like creating a resume or portfolio based on strengths that others could use to learn information about your child and the supports that work best in meeting his/her needs. It can also show the progress your child has made over time. It can be a great training tool. Sometimes the Early Intervention staff work with parents on this project as they prepare for the Transition meeting. Sometimes these portfolios are created like scrapbooks with photos of the student and friends doing the activities that they enjoy. The transition booklet or parent report should reflect the personality of the student.



The time that you take to tell or show others about what works best for your child will give a new team a good place to begin their plan. Being deliberate about transition goes a long way toward ensuring the success of the student, the teams and the family. “Not tapping the knowledge, experience, and expertise of people who know the student well is a significant waste of resources.” (Buswell, 1999).

*“Like everything else in life, good planning is essential. Transition doesn't need to be a rocky road, but can be a smooth path if we all work together as a team.”*

## What's the Difference?

### IFSP

#### *Individualized Family Service Plan*

Children, birth to five years of age

### IEP

#### *Individualized Education Plan*

Children, three to twenty two years of age

Family Centered Goals - In Family Terms	Child-Centered - Educational Goals
Includes a summary of your child's present abilities, strengths and needs. <u>With your agreement</u> , it may also include your family's concerns, priorities and resources. Includes outcomes that you choose for your child and your family.	Includes information about the child's present levels of educational performance and participation in developmentally appropriate activities. Includes information about the parents' concerns for enhancing the child's education.
As a family, you determine the outcomes.	The IEP team determines the goals. The team includes the parents or guardians, teacher, and related service providers who may work with the child.
Includes details of the early intervention services that can help you meet your child's needs and family outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what kinds of services will be provided</li> <li>• where the services will be provided</li> <li>• when these services will be provided</li> <li>• who will provide these services</li> </ul>	Identifies measurable annual goals and short-term objectives to allow the child to be involved in/progress in the general curriculum to the greatest extent possible. (For pre-school children: to participate in appropriate activities.) It includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where the service will be delivered</li> <li>• related services- time, frequency, duration</li> <li>• procedures for evaluating progress toward goals and informing parents of this progress on a regular basis.</li> </ul>
Fees allowable for some services	Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
Includes the natural environment where services will be provided. Must meet the requirements of an IEP when a preschool child participates in a District program.	Includes an explanation of the extent, if any, that the child will not participate with nondisabled children in regular activities or classes (Least Restrictive Environment -LRE).
Includes specific early intervention services necessary to meet the unique needs of the child and family to achieve identified outcomes, stating type(s) of services, how often and how long they will be delivered.	Includes special education, related services, supplemental aids, modifications, and supports to help the child to participate in developmentally appropriate activities.
Family participates in meeting	Family participates in meeting



## The Transition Process

### Make Each Step Count!

**TRANSITION to new services and settings.** Service coordinator follow-up for up 3 months after transition.

**At least 15 days prior to transition:**

- Attend and participate in your child's IEP/IFSP
- Decide on goals and services

**At least 3 months prior to transition:** (no later than 90 days before your child's third birthday)

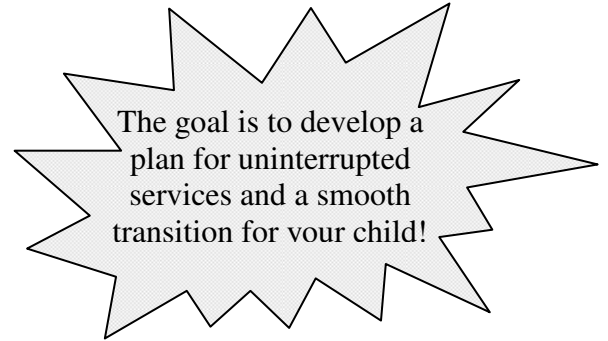
- Attend (90-Day Conference)
- Decide on what needs to occur before transition
- Discuss Family Support services needed

**At least 6 months prior to transition:**

- Begin planning with your Service Coordinator
- Visit programs
- Attend orientation and information meetings

**By Age 2:**

- Talk to your Service Coordinator about transition
- Talk to others in your child's world about settings and services
- Consider transition options



**Your child's 2nd birthday...ask questions:**

Ask your Early Intervention Service Coordinator for information about which preschool options will be available to your child once they transition. If your child turns three during the school year, you are eligible for school services at the beginning of that school year or you may remain in the early intervention program until the beginning of the next school year. It is your choice. Ask to visit the programs in your community. Talk to the teachers and other parents about services or programs. Always remember that you have the right to make the final decision on placement of your child. Be informed about all of the options available to you!

**Six months before transition date ...begin your child's transition planning.**

Your Early Intervention Service Coordinator should initiate the planning process. Together you will develop progressive steps that will lead to a successful transition. These steps will be documented in the IFSP. Visits to programs, information sessions and orientation meetings will be included in these steps. Family schedules are always busy. Keep in close contact with your Service Coordinator so that activities will be arranged to fit your schedule.

"I don't think I'll ever forget the day Ariel graduated from her early intervention program. I was a wreck. These people had been our "family" and now we had to leave them. Who would ever care for us- or care about us- the way they did?"

**At least 90 days before transition** (but no later than 90 days prior to your child's third birthday)...**meet with transition team.** 6.31.2.11.A. (3)(e) NMAC



The members of your child's transition team (parents, your Early Intervention Service Coordinator, school representative(s) and other relevant service providers) will meet to review the child's service options and transition plan. This meeting is called the **90-Day Conference** and will also include a review of the evaluation information to determine the need for any additional evaluations. If additional evaluations are needed, they must be completed a minimum of 15 days prior to your child's transition.

Parents will be asked to give informed written consent for any evaluations and will also be asked for their consent to transfer records. **The purpose of this meeting is to ensure coordination of all transition matters so there are no gaps in services for your child.** During this meeting, all parties will plan the time, place, agenda, and participants for the combined IFSP/IEP meeting for your child.

- Parents should bring any questions they have for discussion. They may want to ask about registration procedures for the new setting or services. Up to date immunizations may be required and families may need to schedule appointments.
- If your child will be transitioning to a public school pre-school program, it is important to consider the school district's calendar so that your child will begin services in a natural flow similar to other children in the community.
- If transportation is being considered as a related service for your child, it is important for parents and others to discuss the options for this service.
- The Early Intervention staff should be prepared to discuss your child's progress.
- The school personnel (School District, Head Start, Preschool) should explain eligibility requirements, procedural safeguards, program options and the process for determining eligibility.

**At least 15 days prior to the child's transition date...the IFSP/IEP meeting.**

6.31.2.11.A. (3)(g) NMAC

To insure uninterrupted services, an IFSP/IEP meeting shall be held at least 15 days prior to the date of your child's transition. The local school district is responsible for inviting the appropriate people to the meeting. Remember, you are the EXPERT on your child and a part of the team. The team determines your child's need for special education and related services and discusses program goals and objectives in the IFSP/IEP. If your child is found not eligible for preschool special education services, the team will discuss other options. **Take your dreams for your child's future to the meeting!**

**Following transition...**

Your Early Intervention Service Coordinator will follow up with you and your child to evaluate the success and satisfaction of the new services and supports.

"Every transition in life is hard, but the more knowledgeable we are,  
the easier it is going to be for our family."

## Helping Your Child With Transition

Parents play an important role in helping their child adjust to change. Here are a few things that parents can do at home to help ease transition:

1. Read books about moving to a new school or new place. Your community library staff might have ideas for great books to help your child get ready for transition.
2. Discuss going to the new setting (school, Head Start, child care)
3. Arrange for visits to the new setting.
4. Let your child select items needed at the new setting (such as backpack, lunchbox).
5. Take your child's picture in the new setting. Display the picture and talk about things your child enjoyed doing during their visit(s).
6. Discuss your child's new schedule.
7. If your child will be riding a bus to the new setting, take the child for a bus ride and/or discuss the process involved in riding the bus to school.
8. Allow your child to bring a transitional object with them to the new setting (e.g. nap rug, snuggly toy, family picture). **Note:** You may want to check with staff in the new setting to see if they have suggestions and to make them aware that your child will be bringing a transitional object.
9. If your child does not have much experience in social settings, join a playgroup, attend reading circles at the local library or engage in similar activities to provide your child more experiences with group settings.
10. Practice routines your child will need in the new setting (e.g., changing from shoes to slippers upon arrival or putting backpacks in a special place). Develop strategies to help your child be successful in the routines from the very start (e.g., buy Velcro shoes that your child can take off/put on by themselves and make a special place for your child's backpack at home).



Source: Facilitating Smooth and Effective Transitions for Children and Families in New Mexico—  
A Guidance Document for Transition from Early Intervention to Other Services and Supports  
New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico State Department of Education

**"Transition is a link between two worlds.  
The one world is safe, secure, familiar...  
the other is a world of unknowns."**

## Transition IFSP/IEP Meeting

An IFSP is **family centered** and is focused around helping the family support their child in **natural environments**. The IFSP is available to children that are provided services through the preschool.



An IEP is **child centered** and generally provided at the preschool. Family needs are not generally considered as a primary factor in providing services. As long as a family is making an informed decision, the child is eligible to receive an IEP, IFSP or a combination IEP/IFSP. 6.31.2.11 NMAC

**Remember...When your child is transitioned; they should start receiving the services that were written in the plan on the very first day.**

- Parents should be invited to the IEP/IFSP meeting. In addition, representatives from the Early Intervention program and from the school, including the teacher, should participate.
- Parents should bring a parent report to the meeting. Parents should plan ahead to be an active participant in the discussion. (A sample parent report is included in the Tools & Tips section of this booklet.)
- Early Intervention personnel should bring a prepared report on the child's progress. They should be prepared to assist the parents in making an informed decision about their child's transition. They should be prepared to identify resources and supports available for the family.
- School staff should discuss and explain eligibility requirements and procedural safeguards. They should have necessary school information available and the necessary personnel present at the meeting. Prior to the meeting, the school should meet with parents to discuss the results of any additional evaluations.
- **The schools are required to use the Early Intervention evaluations and should only conduct additional evaluations as necessary to provide appropriate services. Using the Early Intervention evaluations promotes timely services for your child and conserves precious resources for schools.**

**Remember:** A child can have an IFSP while he/she attends preschool. Children who are 3 or 4 years old are eligible for either an IFSP or an IEP or a combination IFSP/IEP. School districts are required to abide by all the requirements of an IEP, even if an IFSP is used. The main criterion used for a child to receive an IFSP is that the family understands the difference between an IEP and an IFSP. Again, you need to ask questions about the differences between these programs. Programs need to be explained clearly and in the family's native language in order for the family to make an informed decision.

## Setting Your Sights on School

For several reasons, it is good for parents to visit a school before their child attends. These visits help parents see the culture, structures, and routines of the school. This knowledge can assist families in planning for meetings. It also helps them discover ways that their family and their child might become active members of the school community.

All parents want to send their child to a school where they will get a good education, where they know their son or daughter will be safe, and where their student will be accepted and valued. According to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), the place to start is the school the child would attend if they did not have a developmental delay, i.e., the child's neighborhood school. In addition, families who have students with disabilities would be free to consider the same options that other families have to choose, such as charter schools, magnet schools, or other schools of choice.

### Get off to a good start! Tips for School Visits



Teachers and administrators are professionals, just like doctors, lawyers, and electricians. Schools have guidelines for visitors to assure a safe environment and minimize interruptions to learning activities. Parents and other family members who want to visit schools should keep in mind a few guidelines to get the most out of their visit.

Planning ahead will make your school visit successful. Pre-arrange the visit well in advance so that you can meet with school personnel and visit classrooms when they are in session. On-site visits to schools are most productive when you can see the daily routine in classrooms and observe programs in action. **Don't wait until the last few weeks of**

**school or summertime for your visit.**

When you visit during the school day, keep these suggestions in mind.

- Before the visit, become thoroughly familiar with the questions you have decided to explore. You may even want to write your questions in a notebook that you'll bring on your visit.
- Schedule meetings with administrators, teachers, students and staff throughout the day at times convenient to them. Be respectful of everyone's time during these meetings.
- Note taking can be a distraction to some students and teachers. While in the classroom, it is sometimes easier to observe and then jot down notes after the class has been dismissed.
- Remember that you are a guest. Be a gracious, appreciative observer. If you have questions for the staff, try not to interrupt an activity. Ask the questions during an activity break so that your question can be answered without distractions.
- Become familiar with the schools policies regarding visitors. Ask for a copy of the school handbook and a school map before your visit.

## What Should I Look For When I Visit School?

The day has arrived for your visit to school. You've planned ahead and the school staff has planned for your visit. You have some questions ready. Now you need to think about what makes a good school setting for your child.

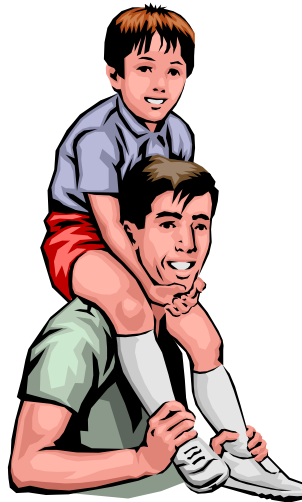
**Picture your child as part of the group when deciding on program options. As you observe classrooms and activities, look for answers to these questions:**

- How is communication encouraged?
- Does the program appear to match the way my child learns?
- Does the program appear to complement our family's values and cultural traditions?
- Do program staff appear open to suggestions from families and others?
- How are families involved in program or school activities and decision-making?
- Would my child be in this program if he or she did not have a developmental delay or disability?
- What is the ratio of adults to children in this program?
- What is the ratio of children with delays or disabilities to children who are typically developing?
- Does the arrangement of the room allow my child to move freely? Is there room for any equipment my child may need?
- For group activities, do the children sit in chairs or on the floor? Can my child join the group easily?
- Are therapy services my child might need incorporated into program activities?
- What are the program hours? Are these reasonable for the child and family?
- Is the travel time from our family's home to the program reasonable for our child?
- Does the program include lunchtime or snacks? If yes, is food provided? Can meals and eating area be modified as needed for my child?
- Does the staff need training in how to handle the medical or educational needs of my child? (Examples: seizures, feeding, etc.)





# The Journey Begins



“Parents have to be recognized as the special educators, the true experts on their children; and professional people – teachers, pediatricians, psychologists, and others – have to learn to be consultants to parents.”

~Nicholas Hobbs, Vanderbilt University

Grown ups and children go through many changes in a lifetime. Each change brings something new. When we know where we are going and plan for change, the transition will be smooth. This section of our book is designed for families of children who will be entering Early Childhood programs within the public schools or moving from the 3-4 year old program to kindergarten. Early Childhood 3-4 year old programs fall under the heading of Special Education in the public schools. This transition may seem like a big step. The next few pages will provide a basic understanding of the process and some useful tips to help you get off on the right foot as you and your child begin your journey.

## What's So Special About Special Education?

Sometimes what has happened in the past creates a barrier for the future. For many families, the two little words *special education* may bring fear to their hearts because they have heard stories of failure or knew of these failures from their own experiences. We invite families to look past these barriers. There are many success stories about children who receive special education services.

Each success seems to have common themes:

- Highly Involved Informed Parents
- High Expectations
- Parents Who Ask Questions and Get Answers
- Dedicated Teachers
- Accountability
- Informed Decisions
- A Partnership Between Home and School

**It is our hope that the information in this booklet  
will help open doors  
so that families can create their own success story!**



Special education is only a tool for a short time. The goal is always to be educated in the least restrictive environment. This means that the beginning point for every child is the regular classroom with typically developing peers. The focus should be aimed at services, accommodations and modifications that can be brought to the child in the regular education classroom. The goal of special education is not a separate education that creates dependency. The goal is an inclusive education for each child that provides opportunities for independence, responsibility and productivity during their school years and beyond.

### **Special Education**

Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Special education is not a place; special education is a service brought to the child through the IEP. Special education provides supports, services, modifications and accommodations to help the child benefit from their education in the Least Restrictive Environment.

## Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

### Special education is a service ~ not a place!

Even though special education provides many safeguards, supports, services, modifications and accommodations for our children, these alone are not enough. The *place* where children are educated is very important. In fact, where they are educated may have more to do with who they become as adults, than anything else.

Our state is rich in culture and diversity. How do we learn to maintain our rich heritages? We learn from each other! Children with disabilities are no different. Research has shown that academics alone do not produce better outcomes for children.

In the 70's, children with special needs were first allowed to begin to participate in school. We all thought that special schools, special places and special teachers were what our children needed. Research has shown that even though we provided everything special, outcomes for children with disabilities were still poor. However, research has shown that when children are educated with their non-disabled peers in the general education classroom they have better outcomes and a greater chance of becoming a contributing community member. The federal IDEA '97 regulations even refer to children being educated in natural environments.

Following the IEP process step-by-step should lead to an appropriate program for your child in the **Least Restrictive Environment**. Only after supports and services have been provided in the regular classroom without success, should an alternate placement be considered. Placement refers to a continuum of supports and services to help the child succeed. This decision is made at the IEP meeting by the IEP team. The placement decision is made after the team has shared all available information about your child, his present levels of performance, education needs and appropriate goals and objectives. This is one of the last decisions made by the IEP team at the IEP meeting. **The goal of this decision is to provide a learning setting that will meet your child's individual needs.**

**With appropriate support and services,  
a child can succeed in a regular classroom!**



# Mapping the Future – The IEP Process

## Child Find

Public schools are required to have activities to insure that they will identify all children ages 3-21 who may have disabilities. These can include regular screenings of young children, children's health fairs that include early identification activities or training opportunities for teachers on basic skills for identifying early warning signs of disabilities. Contact the Child Find office of your school district office to get more information.



## Student Assistance Teams

The classroom is first place to begin interventions to help a child succeed. It's important to have on-going discuss conversations with your child's teacher to discuss progress and plan interventions to improve learning outcomes for your child. Parents or teachers who question whether a student is making satisfactory progress in a general education classroom may a referral to the Student Assistance Team (SAT) at the school level. This team may also be called a building intervention committee and includes several educators and support personnel who work at the school. The parents are generally invited to attend the meetings. SAT provides the teacher with ideas for interventions in the classroom. Generally, the classroom teacher uses these interventions and documents their effectiveness for a period of time (4 to 6 weeks). A follow-up meeting is scheduled to discuss how the interventions have worked and decide if there is a need to refer the child for a comprehensive evaluation at the district level.

## Evaluation/Assessment

Evaluation is a process of gathering as much information as possible about a child using a variety of sources. These sources include parent and teacher information, classroom observation, other sources and a formal assessment of your child's educational abilities. The objective of evaluation is to provide a picture of your child to be used in determining needed programs. Families can provide important information about their child.

- Parents must understand and give **informed consent** before the evaluation begins.
- If the parent feels the evaluation was inaccurate or the student is still in need of services, the parent may request an independent educational evaluation at public expense. The parent should make a written request for an IEE to the special education director which must be considered by the school district. Districts are required to maintain a list of independent evaluators.
- All areas of suspected disability (need) should be evaluated.

## Identification

Students (ages of 3 through 21) are eligible for special education services when they have been identified in one or more of the following categories and require specialized instruction to benefit from their education.

Autism	Hearing Impairment	Specific Learning Disability
Deafness	Mental Retardation	Speech/Language Impairment
Deaf-Blindness	Multiple Disabilities	Traumatic Brain Injury
Developmental Delay (until age 9)	Neurological Impairment	Visual Impairment
Emotional Disturbance	Orthopedic Impairment	
Gifted (in New Mexico)	Other Health Impaired	

## The Individualized Education Plan

The heart of a Free Appropriate Public Education is the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

The **IDEA '97** mandates that a continuum of placement choices be made available for children with disabilities.

The IEP is developed at a meeting with school personnel, parents and when appropriate, the student. Writing a strong, effective IEP is hard work and requires a team effort. The term **IEP** is used for both the written plan and for a meeting designed to set goals, identify services/supports and measure individual student progress.

Think of the IEP as a map to the future. How many of us would leave for vacation without a map to guide our trip? We would plan for tours, visits, sites, gas and food. Each passing mile marker would mean we were getting closer to our goal. The IEP is much the same. Parents have an extremely important role to play as equal members of the IEP team. Parents are the navigators and consistent ones who are always there while other team members may come and go. The IEP is designed to ensure that your child's unique needs are met.



If a service or accommodation is included in the IEP, your child must receive it. An **accommodation** is a change made to the teaching or testing procedures in order to provide a student with access to information and to create an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills. Test accommodations must meet state guidelines and be clearly documented in the IEP. A **modification** is a change in what a student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate while the subject area remains the same as for the rest of the class.

Every child who receives special education services must have an IEP. After all evaluations have been completed, a meeting is held at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The team writes the IEP during this meeting. **Parents must sign the very first IEP in order for services to begin.** Remember when you sign an IEP, it means that you understand all of the IEP and agree with it.

The following are **best practice** timelines:

- Initial evaluations must be completed within a reasonable amount of time, usually within 45 calendar days. An IEP meeting should be held in a reasonable amount of time after the evaluation is completed, generally within 15 school days.
- You should receive the invitation to the IEP meeting at least five school days before the meeting.
- If your child is already receiving special education services, evaluations should be completed within 30 school days. It is best practice for the IEP meeting to be held within ten school days following the completion of these evaluations.
- Although an IEP Review must be held once a year, an IEP meeting can be called anytime there is a need.
- Re-evaluations must be conducted every three years.
- Unless other arrangements are documented in the IEP, the plan should be implemented upon approval.

## Preparing for the IEP Meeting

The importance of preparing for the IEP meeting cannot be overstated. Here are a few very important tips. (Some states recommend a pre-IEP meeting to allow for some brainstorming time among team members.)

- Begin your preparation for the IEP meeting one to two weeks prior to the meeting. The sample **parent report** included in the Tips section provides a good way to get started.
- Talk to your child about school and be sure to represent his/her concerns and feelings.
- Make a list of strengths and weaknesses you see in your child.
- Visit with the teacher and other team members prior to the meeting to find out about their recommendations. Share any concerns or ideas you might have.
- Obtain copies of evaluation reports and recommendations prior to the meeting.
- If your child is not present at their IEP, you may want to bring their picture to keep the meeting focused on your child.
- Make a list of the questions you have about the school program or services.
- Review your records.
- Know your rights.
- Allow plenty of time for the meeting.

Remember to ask lots of questions  
and get lots of answers!

Some parents find it valuable to bring their own report to the IEP meeting and ask that it be added to the IEP record of meeting as supporting documentation. In addition to your Parent Report, you may want to make a separate list of questions about the supports your child needs in order to be successful in school and later in life. We recommend that you start your list of questions one to two weeks prior to the meeting. A few days before the meeting, look at your list and prioritize your questions.

**Open-ended questions** require more explanation. These questions allow opportunities for exchanging ideas and problem solving for successful outcomes.

**Close-ended questions** require only a “yes” or “no” answer and should be used carefully. If you are trying to get the IEP team to think about options, a close-ended question may shut the door on possible solutions or ideas.

### The following must be addressed or identified in the IEP:

- Special education and related services
- Amount of specialized instruction
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Reasons for special education setting
- Accommodations and modifications
- A start date
- A reintegration plan
- Person(s) responsible for implementation of each goal and each objective of the IEP



## The IEP Meeting

It is important that families attend all IEP meetings and participate fully in the IEP process. Parents are encouraged not to attend the meeting alone. They will be hearing a lot of new information and a note taker/supporter is invaluable. It is a good idea to bring someone along who knows the student well – a neighbor, relative, friend, an advocate, etc.

### Who should attend my child's IEP?

- You, the parents (or guardians or surrogate parents)
- Your child (Yes, that's right. Students should be a part of team, when appropriate.)
- A general education teacher
- A special education teacher
- A school district representative who can commit district resources
- Someone who is qualified to explain assessments and evaluation reports
- Other individuals at the request of the parents or the school

If needed, the school is required to provide a qualified spoken language or sign language interpreter for families. Note that IDEA 97' states that a general education teacher is a required member of the team. Think about this. How will the team consider supports and modifications to the general curriculum if a general education teacher does not take part in developing the plan?

Each IEP is developed through consensus. The entire team should be committed to the plan. Although the IEP is based on your child's individual needs, every IEP must include certain specific information. The answers to these five questions should be documented in the IEP:

**Where are we now?** Present level of educational performance (PLP) statements describes a student's needs, strengths and unique learning characteristics that the remainder of the IEP must then address.

**Where are we going?** Annual or long-term goals are target areas that the team expects the student can accomplish in one year.

**How are we going to get there?** Short-term objectives or benchmarks are intermediate teaching steps to help your child reach the annual goals.

**What does success look like?** Methods for determining progress, describe how the school will measure your child's progress toward goals, objectives and benchmarks.

**How will progress be reported to the parents?** Progress must be reported to the parents at least as often as the general education student. The team must consider the frequency and method for reporting progress to parents.



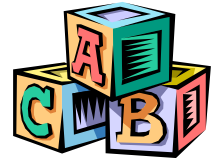
## Present Level of Educational Performance

At the beginning of the meeting, the school personnel and family members discuss the student's strengths, interests, leaning styles, and how the child is presently performing. It is important to keep this first step of the IEP positive. In order to effectively assist the student in his or her areas of need, focus on what the student is doing well and what strengths and interests can be built upon. This will be the starting point to measure future progress.



## Needs

Needs are building blocks for the remainder of the Individualized Education Plan. The purpose of the IEP is to meet the unique and individual needs of the student. This section should address what the individual student needs in order to participate successfully and meaningfully in school. It describes both academic and social skills the child will need to become a contributing community member.



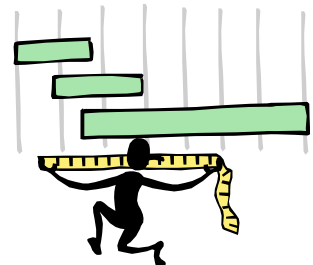
### Special Factors to Consider from the US Department of Education

Depending on the needs of the child, the IEP team needs to consider what the law calls special factors. These include:

- If the child's behavior interferes with his or her leaning or the learning of others, the IEP team will consider strategies and supports to address the child's behavior.
- If the child has limited proficiency in English, the IEP team will consider the child's language needs as these needs relate to his or her IEP.
- If the child is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team must provide for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille, unless it determines after an appropriate evaluation that the child does not need this instruction.
- If the child has communication needs, the IEP team must consider those needs.
- If the child is deaf or hard of hearing, the IEP team will consider his or her language and communication needs. This includes the child's opportunities to communicate directly with classmates and school staff in his or her usual method of communication.
- The IEP team must always consider the child's needs for assistive technology devices or services.

## Annual Measurable Goals

After listing the student's needs, the team prioritizes and clusters these needs to develop the goals. **The annual goals must be observable and measurable.** They must be student-centered and should be able to be reached in one year. These target areas must address the needs of the whole student – not just academics. The team should focus on hopes and dreams for the student as they develop long-term goals.



## Short-Term Objectives

Short-term objectives are the smaller steps that need to be taken to reach the measurable goals that were developed. Objectives must also be stated in measurable terms. How will you show progress, if you cannot observe and measure the results? An example of a short-term objective would be, “James will use correct picture symbols to communicate food choices during morning lunch count four times per week, measurable by documenting progress weekly in a teacher journal.”

### Special Education and Related Services

A child may require any of the following related services in order to benefit from special education. Related services as listed under IDEA, include, but are not limited to:

- Audiology/interpreter services
- Braille
- Counseling services
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
- Medical services (to determine eligibility and/or need for services)
- Occupational therapy
- Orientation and mobility services
- Parent counseling and training
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Recreation
- Rehabilitation counseling services
- School health services
- Social work services in schools
- Speech/language pathology services
- Transportation

If a child needs a particular related service in order to benefit from special education, the related service professional should be involved in developing the IEP. He or she may be invited to join the IEP team.

US Department of Education

## Informed Decisions

One of the more important highlights under IDEA '97 (section 300.505) is that parents must make *informed decisions* about their child's education.

Making an informed decision means that you:

- Understand ALL of the options before you make your final decision, and
- Understand why that particular option was chosen.

The description of each proposal and why proposals were accepted or rejected should be written in the IEP and/or the Prior Written Notice of Proposal document. Asking questions is a good way to get the information you need or clarify terms so that you can make the best decisions for you child's education.



## After the IEP Meeting

After the IEP is written, parents often think that their job is over. They may want to breathe a sigh of relief and put the IEP away for safekeeping. Stop and think!

**Just holding the road map does not always guarantee a successful journey.** You need to look for road signs along the way and sometimes you need to stop to ask directions. The same thing is true for the IEP journey with your child. A well-written IEP does not automatically translate into an effective school year for the student. **Parents need to stay involved with the IEP process.**



Parents need to stay in contact with the classroom teacher(s) and make sure that teachers and other staff have a current copy of their child's IEP. This will insure that they are using the approaches that help that student learn successfully. If parents realize the IEP is not working, they need to let the school know immediately and ask that the IEP be used as it was intended. Sometimes it requires that another IEP meeting be called with the entire team present. If the situation cannot be resolved, parents may use the complaint process, mediation, or due process.

### Throughout the year, parents should:

- ◆ Continue to stay involved and visible at your child's school.
- ◆ Communicate frequently with your child's teachers and team members. Schedule regular meetings either in person or by telephone or use a daily notebook.
- ◆ Give positive feedback throughout the year to the teachers, administrators, team members, and others involved when they do things that work well for your child.
- ◆ Choose your battles wisely. There are most certainly times when parents need to speak up and take action. Use your strongest advocacy for the issues that are the most important for your child's success!

## Welcome to the world of the IEP!



As you can see, there are specific procedures in place to ensure that all students, with and without disabilities, can be educated together and this is beneficial to everyone. Following these established procedures will provide the student, his or her family and teachers with a map for their journey through the school system. This map will provide guidance. However, the map does not do any good if it is left behind, lost, forgotten, or does not include accurate directions.

*As you navigate this journey,  
Stay on a steady, consistent course!*



# Tools & Tips

- Transition Checklist
- Sample Parent Report
- Frequently Asked Questions
- The Laws and Children with Disabilities
- Glossary
- Acronyms
- Web Sites
- Resource Directory



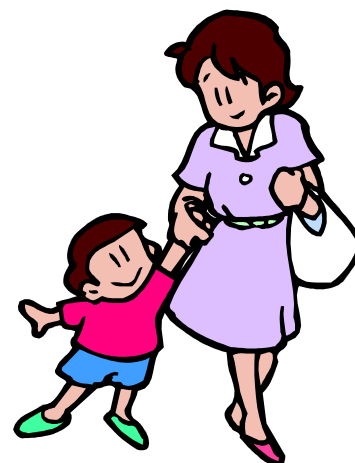
## Transition Checklist

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The transition meeting has been held and the transition plan is part of our child's current IFSP.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ We have met and talked with our child's new teacher(s).
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Our child has met with his or her new teacher(s).
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Our child has been referred to our local school district.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The following records and information have been provided to our local school district: (Parents must sign a consent form for records to be transferred.)

- Birth certificate
- Current picture of my child
- Shot (immunization) record
- Social Security number
- Medicaid number (if your child has one)
- Emergency contacts
- Child's records from the early intervention agency, including IFSPs identifying child-focused services provided
- Other preschool or child care program records
- Hospital, clinic, or other medical records.



6. \_\_\_\_\_ Screenings and evaluations have been completed.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ We have prepared our Parent Report.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ The Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting has been held and eligibility for special education has been determined.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ If our child is not eligible for special education services from our local school district, other options have been discussed with our Service Coordinator.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ We have visited our local school districts' preschool.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ We have received notice for our child's IEP meeting.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ We made copies of our Parent Report and shared the report during the IFSP/IEP meeting.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ We helped write our child's IEP.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ We helped determine our child's school placement.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation needs have been identified and met.



# Sample Parent Report

*Keep your parent report positive.*

Child's Name: Monica Lujan Age: 2 ½

**1. Share your hopes, dreams and goals for your child as an adult!**

- We see Monica walking independently, eating independently and communicating fluently.
- Our hope is that Monica will successfully complete college.
- Our dream is that Monica will be gainfully employed in a job that she loves.

**2. List your child's strengths or positive points:**

- Monica is very outgoing. Her smile lights up the room.
- Monica is very determined. She wants to do things on her own. She says "me do" to let us know.
- Monica's vocabulary has increased from 20 words to 72 words during the past six months with the help of picture cards.
- Monica likes to play and pretend.

**3. Share any concerns you have about your child, such as:**

- Monica is not potty-trained yet and progress is slow.
- Monica is very possessive of the people in her life. She has a hard time sharing her "space" and sometimes is hurtful to others who want to play with her toys.
- Monica's muscle tightness often limits her activities. She cannot sit independently.
- Monica does not do well when routines are changed.

**4. Share your suggestions or ideas to address your concerns, such as:**

- We would like the staff to work with us to help get Monica on a trip schedule so she can be potty trained by the end of this year.
- Monica needs physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy services. She needs no less than 1 ½ hours per week per therapy. (Therapist reports are provided.)
- The communication pictures have really helped Monica. She needs new pictures and activities for school and home to increase her communication abilities.
- We request that Monica ride the bus to and from school with proper safety accommodations including a "groin strap" to be purchased by the district to make it safe to transport Monica on the bus in her Panda Stroller. The purchase should be made before school starts so that Monica will be able to ride safely on the bus.

**5. Share some of your child's likes and dislikes? Share what works at home!**

- Monica likes to help with kitchen chores. She uses her walker to help set the table.
- She loves music and likes to draw with bright colors.
- She doesn't like to use the potty chair.
- We try to be consistent when we discipline Monica. If she is angry or upset during an activity, we remove her from the activity for a short amount of time.
- We use calm voices even when we say "No". We explain what is not acceptable.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Can you explain the category of Developmentally Delayed?**

IDEA '97 includes provisions allowing states to provide early detection and services to young children up to age 9 who are experiencing learning problems under a general category called Developmentally Delayed. In New Mexico, this classification may only be used for children who do not qualify for special education under any other available disability category. This category is an important part of the "early intervention" process.

### **How does "professional judgment" work and why it is important?**

Professional judgment is a process that follows specific guidelines by which a team collects, organizes and weighs information about a child. The process is guided by specific criteria for decision-making if a child does not meet criteria in available disability categories when a team is considering the category of developmentally delayed. In addition to traditional testing information, team members contribute and review information that includes: impressions regarding skills, abilities, weaknesses, developmental processes, emotional and temperamental patterns. Parents are an important part of this process and take part in the decision-making process. *No single person can use "professional judgment" to determine eligibility. It is an IEP team decision.*



### **Who is eligible for Early Childhood Education services?**

To be considered eligible for D-D pre-school services in New Mexico, your child must show a measurable and observable developmental delay in one or more fundamental skill areas or have a medical condition that may interfere with learning and future success at home, in school, or in the community. Fundamental skill areas include speech, language, motor, self-help, and social skills.

### **Who conducts my child's evaluation and when must it be done?**

The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) is a team of professionals who will arrange for your child's evaluation. The team will include, parents, educators, your child (if appropriate) and others as needed. One person on the team must have knowledge about your child's suspected disability. **As a member of this team, you must be provided an opportunity to share information about your child before an evaluation plan is written.** The MDT must have your written permission to evaluate your child. The school then has a reasonable amount of time (approximately 45 days) to complete your child's evaluation. If the school must delay the evaluation for any reason, they should notify you in writing before the 45 days expire.

If your toddler or preschooler has been evaluated by a pediatrician or by the *CAREarly Program*, the school will (with your permission) include this information as part of the evaluation. When the evaluation is finished, the MDT will write a report summarizing the results. This report will indicate whether your child is eligible to receive D-D services. The school must give you a copy of the report and they are required to explain its contents and recommendations.

## The Laws and Children With Disabilities



As a parent of a child with a disability or suspected disability, it is not only best practice but required by law that you be given the opportunity to participate in all meetings concerning your child. Meetings should be held at a mutually agreed upon time and place. Several laws support your child's right to a Free Appropriate Public Education and support your role as an advocate for your child. The spirit throughout all the laws is truly that parents should be equal partners and team members with professionals. In this section of the book, we will provide information about laws and regulations concerning the rights of parents and children with disabilities.

### The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004)

Public law 94-142 was passed by Congress in 1975 and was originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. On its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990, the Act was re-authorized by congress and at that time, it received a new name under P.L. 101-476: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the IDEA. In 1997, congress reauthorized IDEA and the law became P.L. 105-17 IDEA '97. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law December 3, 2004. The final regulations were published on August 14, 2006. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education prepared a series of documents to support implementation of the new requirements. You ownload these topical papers by visiting their website:

**Building the Legacy IDEA 2004**      <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>

IDEA requires that a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** be made available to all children with disabilities regardless of the type or severity of the disability. No child may be excluded from the public schools on the grounds that the child is too severely disabled to benefit from an education. Every child is able to learn, and it is required by law that educational opportunities be provided for all. IDEA assures specific rights and safeguards to children with disabilities and their parents. In New Mexico, these rights are also assured to students who are gifted. IDEA contains six principles that provide the framework around which special education services are designed and provided to students with disabilities. These six principles are:

- **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE),**
- **Appropriate Evaluation,**
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP),**
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE),**
- **Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making, and**
- **Procedural Safeguards.**

Alone, and together, these six principles work to guarantee that children with disabilities can go to school every day, learn what other children learn, except perhaps in different ways, and have their individual educational needs determined and addressed.

## Six Principles of IDEA

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** IDEA requires that agencies provide special education and related services at no cost to the parent. It requires that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed for each child with a disability. The IEP is based on the child's needs and specifies the child's present levels of performance (PLP), program goals, objectives or benchmarks and specific services to be delivered to the child.

**Appropriate Evaluation:** Evaluation is a process, which involves obtaining and compiling as much information as possible from a variety of sources. These sources include: parent and teacher information, classroom observation and a formal assessment of your child's educational abilities. The objective of evaluation is to provide a picture of your child that can be used to determine what programs, supports, services, modifications and accommodations are needed. **Always remember: no single person, no single test makes the decision for your child. All decisions are team decisions.**

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** The IEP is both a *meeting* at which parents and school personnel jointly make decisions about an educational program and a *document* that serves as a written record of the issues discussed and the decisions reached at these meetings. The IEP meeting serves as a communication vehicle between parents and school personnel. It enables them, as equal participants, to decide jointly what the student needs, to determine what services will be provided to meet those needs, and to anticipate the outcomes for success. An IEP is a work in progress, a product in need of constant revision. It is created, implemented, monitored, assessed, and modified until students have reached all of their goals. Creating an IEP is an art, not a science.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** LRE is the presumption that children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with their non-disabled peers. LRE means that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

**Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making:** IDEA, from its earliest days has required schools to involve each child's parents in developing the child's IEP. Parents must be notified, parents must give consent, and parent input must be solicited and considered. Parents must be given the opportunity to participate in all meetings concerning their child. Parents must be allowed to make informed decisions, which means that they understand all decisions and options as well as why proposals that were made were accepted or rejected.

**Procedural Safeguards:** Procedural safeguards are the guidelines that schools are required to follow. Schools are required to give parents a statement of parental rights and safeguards at various times and at any time parents request a copy. Safeguards are in place to ensure:

- that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected,
- that students with disabilities and their parents are provided with the information they need to make decisions about the provision of FAPE, and
- that procedures and mechanisms are in place to resolve disagreements between parties.

## Transition Timing – The New Mexico Law

“The parents of an eligible child participating in EI services who turns three years of age during the public school year shall have the option of having the child complete the remainder of the school year in either EI services or the public school’s preschool special education services covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); or, they may elect to enroll the eligible child in the public school’s preschool special education services from the beginning of that public school year.”

Senate bill 865, passed during the 1995 legislative session and incorporated into law, Chapter 69



### *Guidance*

The New Mexico state law providing parents the option to transition their child anytime during the school year the child turns three is intended to provide family choice. A child is age-eligible to receive services at a New Mexico School for the Deaf preschool program on their second birthday. A child is age-eligible to receive services at a NM School for the Deaf preschool program under Part B through an NM School for the Deaf and LEA Joint Powers agreement during the school year in which the child turns three.



Children are age-eligible to transition any time during the school year in which they turn three, but they are not required to transition; if the family prefers, the child may remain in the early intervention program during the school year in which they turn three. If a child will turn three during the school year, the child is age-eligible to transition to the LEA’s preschool special education services as early as the start of that school year or as late as the next school year. Therefore, a child may transition as early as two years, three months of age. This means that transition planning may begin, at the legal minimum, when the child is one year, nine months of age, and should begin earlier. It is important that service coordinators understand that the transition process ideally should begin at the child’s entry into the early intervention program.

Families and service coordinators must begin discussing when the child may transition well in advance, so that the family has time to understand their rights and consider the possible options. Families make the decision to remain in the early intervention program or to transition to the LEA for a variety of reasons. Service coordinators need to become familiar with the most common factors involved in transition decisions and be prepared to assist families in working through this decision. In addition to age eligibility, children must be determined eligible for LEA preschool special education services by a team and according to regulatory requirements.

Source: Facilitating Smooth and Effective Transitions for Children and Families in New Mexico—  
A Guidance Document for Transition from Early Intervention to Other Services and Supports  
New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico State Department of Education

## Glossary

**Assessment** means the gathering of information by qualified personnel on a child's development, and on the needs and priorities of the family. This information about the child and family is used in planning the Individual Family Service Plan.

**Assistive Technology Device** means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Public schools are required to consider the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities.

**Comprehensive Educational Evaluation** means the tests and observations done by public school staff to find out if the child has a disability and requires special education and related services. The school district's multi-disciplinary team is required to do this evaluation and hold a meeting with the parent to discuss the results. A parent may choose to share any evaluation and assessment information done by the child and family agency or by other qualified persons.

**Developmentally Delayed** means having a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay, even though the delay may not exist at the time of diagnosis or experiencing developmental delays as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments in one or more of the following areas: cognitive development, physical development including vision and hearing, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development.

**Due Process** refers to a process for resolving a dispute between the family and the child and family service agency related to the delivery of early intervention services. In special education, Due Process refers to a process for resolving a dispute between the family and the public school related to the identification, evaluation, or placement of a child with disabilities.

**Extended School Year (ESY)** refers to the delivery of special education and related services during the summer vacation when the child needs those services in order to prevent significant loss of previously learned skills. The IEP team must consider the need for Extended School Year at each meeting and must describe those services specifically with goals and objectives. Not all special education students, nor all special education services in the IEP, require an extended school year. Extended school year services must be individually crafted. Contact Parents Reaching Out for more information about ESY services.

**Head Start** refers to a program, funded under Title V of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, as amended, and carried out by a Head Start agency or delegate agency, that provides ongoing comprehensive child development services.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is the federal law that provides the legal authority for early intervention and special educational services for children birth to age 21. Part B outlines services for children ages 3-21. Part C outlines services for children birth to age 3.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** means the written document which defines the special education and related services that make up a free, appropriate public education for a child with disabilities. The program is designed to meet the individual special education and related services needs of an eligible child.

**Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)** means the written document which defines the early intervention services provided to the child and family. The program is designed to meet the needs of the child and the family, and is based on family-identified priorities.

**Interagency Agreement** refers to a document signed by authorized representatives of at least two agencies outlining mutually agreed upon responsibilities to perform certain duties under specified conditions.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** means the placement that is as close as possible to the regular education environment.

**Local Education Agency (LEA)** means the public schools operating as independent districts in accordance with statutes, regulations, and policies of the State Department of Education.

**Natural Environment** means a place where typical infants and toddlers without disabilities are usually found, like a family home or a pediatrician's office.

**Preschool Special Education** means an educational program that is designed to meet the unique developmental needs of an individual child with a disability who is three, four, or five years of age. It is a child-focused educational effort.

**Screening** is the process of quickly looking at a child's development to find out if there are any areas of concern. It is used to recommend children for more in-depth evaluation.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** refers to the law that provides that a percentage of federal funds that are spent on vocational education must be spent on the cost of special programs, services and activities for individuals with disabilities. This law is closely intertwined with P.L. 105-17 IDEA. Children with disabilities who are not eligible for special education may qualify for accommodations under Section 504.

**Service Coordinator** is the person responsible for the coordination of all services and supports listed on the IFSP and ensuring the delivery of services in a timely manner. The service coordinator facilitates IFSP reviews, ensures that a transition plan is developed at the appropriate time and facilitates the process to ensure a smooth and effective transition.

**Therapy** is a treatment for certain physical or psychological conditions. The most common forms of therapy provided through early intervention and special education includes: occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech/language therapy.

**Transition** is the movement from one service, location, or program to another. Young children with disabilities transition at age three from early intervention to preschool special education services or to other community settings and services (early intervention and special education).

**Transportation** is a related service. If it is determined that the child needs this service, the school district must provide the transportation, contract with another agency or contract with the parents to bring their child to school. Transportation means round trip, home to school and school to home services. If a parent has been offered a transportation contract but does not want to transport the child, the school district is still responsible for providing transportation and cannot force the parent to provide transportation.

## Acronyms

As you enter into the world of special education you will find a new language—ACRONYMS! Acronyms are usually formed by using the first letters of a series of words to stand for that term or description or organization. Here are a few you may need to know.

<b>ADD</b>	Attention Deficit Disorder	<b>IFSP</b>	Individualized Family Service Plan
<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	<b>ISP</b>	Individualized Service Plan
<b>APE</b>	Adaptive Physical Education	<b>LEA</b>	Local Education Agency
<b>AT</b>	Assistive Technology	<b>LRE</b>	Least Restrictive Environment
<b>BMS</b>	Behavior Management Specialist	<b>MDT</b>	Multi-Disciplinary Team
<b>BIA</b>	Bureau of Indian Affairs	<b>OCR</b>	Office for Civil Rights
<b>BIP</b>	Behavior Intervention Plan	<b>OHI</b>	Other Health Impaired
<b>CEC</b>	Council of Exceptional Children	<b>OSEP</b>	Office of Special Education Programs
<b>CMS</b>	Children's Medical Services	<b>OT</b>	Occupational Therapist
<b>COTA</b>	Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant	<b>P &amp; A</b>	Protection and Advocacy
<b>CP</b>	Cerebral Palsy	<b>PBDC</b>	Parents of Behaviorally Different Children
<b>CYFD</b>	Children Youth & Families Department	<b>PLP</b>	Present Levels of Performance
<b>DD</b>	Developmental Disability or Developmental Delay	<b>PRO</b>	Parents Reaching Out
<b>DOH</b>	Department of Health	<b>PT</b>	Physical Therapist
<b>EA</b>	Educational Assistant	<b>PWN</b>	Prior Written Notice
<b>EI</b>	Early Intervention Services	<b>SAT</b>	Student Assistance Team
<b>ESY</b>	Extended School Year	<b>SBE</b>	State Board of Education
<b>FIT</b>	Family Infant Toddler Program	<b>SDE</b>	State Department of Education
<b>FAPE</b>	Free Appropriate Public Education	<b>SEA</b>	State Education Agency
<b>FERPA</b>	Family Education Rights & Privacy Act	<b>SLD</b>	Specific Learning Disability
<b>HS</b>	Head Start	<b>SLP</b>	Speech Language Pathologist
<b>IDEA</b>	Individual with Disabilities Education Act	<b>TBI</b>	Traumatic Brain Injury
<b>IEE</b>	Independent Educational Evaluation	<b>USDE</b>	United States Department of Education
<b>IEP</b>	Individualized Educational Program		

## Websites

IDEA 2004 Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, <http://idea.ed.gov>

New Mexico State Department of Education, <http://sde.state.nm.us/>

New Mexico Department of Health, <http://www.health.state.nm.us/>

Office for Civil Rights, <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR>

Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/reach.htm>

US Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/>

**Government  
Websites**



Beach Center on Families and Disability, <http://www.beachcenter.org>

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, [www.air.org/cecp](http://www.air.org/cecp)

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

Council for Exceptional Children, [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

Family and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE), [www.fape.org](http://www.fape.org)

Family Village; <http://familyvillage.wisc.edu/>

Family Voices, <http://www.familyvoices.org/>

Kids Source, <http://www.kidssource.com/>

Learning Disabilities Association, [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

MUMS National Parent to Parent Network; <http://www.netnet.net/mums/>

National Information Center for Children & Youth with Disabilities, [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

Pacer Center, Inc., [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

Parents Reaching Out, [www.parentsreachingout.org](http://www.parentsreachingout.org)

Raising Resilient Kids, [www.raisingresilientkids.com](http://www.raisingresilientkids.com)

Special Needs Special Gifts, <http://www.geocities.com/mountainmama.geo/special.html>

Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (Alliance), [www.taalliance.org](http://www.taalliance.org)

Wrights Law, [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)



# New Mexico Resource Directory

## **ARC of New Mexico**

3655 Carlisle NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87110-1644  
505-883-4630 or 1-800-358-6493

## **Brain Injury Association of NM, Inc.**

11000 Candelaria NE Suite 113W  
Albuquerque, NM 87112  
505-292-7417 or 1-888-292-7415

## **Carrie Tingley Hospital**

1127 University NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
505-272-5200 or 1-800-472-3235

## **Center for Development and Disability**

UNM Health Sciences Center  
2300 Manual Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
505-272-3000 or 1-800-827-6380

## **Cerebral Palsy Parent Association**

1127 University Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102-1715  
505-272-5296 or 1-800-472-3235

## **Department of Health**

### **Children's Medical Services**

2040 South Pacheco  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
505-476-8868

## **Department of Health - Long Term Services**

### **Family Infant Toddler Program**

1190 St. Francis Drive  
P.O. Box 26110  
Santa Fe, NM 87502-6110  
1-877-696-1472

## **Disability Rights New Mexico (DRNM) (formerly NM Protection and Advocacy)**

1720 Louisiana Blvd. NE Suite 204  
Albuquerque, NM 87110  
505-256-3100 or 1-800-432-4682

## **Easter Seal Society of New Mexico**

2819 Richmond NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
505-888-3811 or 1-800-279-2795261

## **Muscular Dystrophy Association**

6733 Academy NE Suite A  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
505-828-1321

## **Native American Disability Law Center**

3535 E. 30th Street Suite 201  
Farmington, NM 87042  
(505) 566-5880; (800) 862-7271 (in NM)

## **New Mexico Autism Society**

P.O. Box 30955  
Albuquerque, NM 87190  
505-332-0306

## **NM State Department of Education**

300 Don Gaspar  
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786  
505-827-6541

## **NM Developmental Disabilities Planning Council**

435 St. Michael's Dr. Bldg. D  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
505-827-7596 or 505-827-7589

## **New Mexico Family Network (formerly PBDC)**

1101 Cardenas Rd. NE #202  
Albuquerque, NM 87110  
505-265-0430 or 1-800-273-7232

## **New Mexico School for the Deaf**

### **Albuquerque Preschool/Kindergarten**

3802 Hermosa Dr. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87110  
Phone: 505-800-0345 (TTY/Voice)

## **NM School for the Visually Handicapped Early Childhood Programs**

230 Truman NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87108  
1-800-437-3505

## **Parents Reaching Out**

1920B Columbia Drive SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106  
505-247-0192 or 1-800 524-5176



"The most important gift we parents have to give our children is our talent for dreaming...for envisioning a better life, a better way. Allow other people to share that vision and share that dream, and you will be closer than ever to making it real."







# Parents Reaching Out

*Your One Stop Resource for a Stronger Family*

As a statewide non-profit organization, we connect with parents, caregivers, educators and other professionals to promote healthy, positive and caring experiences for New Mexico families and children. We have served New Mexico families for over twenty five years. Our staff and Family Leadership Action Network volunteers reflect the unique diversity of the communities throughout our state.

Children do not come with instructions on how to deal with the difficult circumstances that many families experience. Parents Reaching Out believes that families' needs go beyond the bounds of formal services. *What we can offer to each other is uniquely ours. We have all been there.*

## Our Mission

The mission of Parents Reaching Out is to enhance positive outcomes for families and children in New Mexico through informed decision making, advocacy, education, and resources. Parents Reaching Out provides the networking opportunities for families to connect with and support each other. This mission supports *all families* including those who have children with disabilities, and others who are disenfranchised. Parents Reaching Out achieves this by:

- Developing family leadership
- Connecting families to each other
- Building collaborative partnerships
- Providing families knowledge and tools to enhance their power

## Our Beliefs

- Families need support where ever they are in their journey.
- All families care deeply about their children.
- Families may need tools and support to accomplish their dreams.
- All families are capable of making informed decisions that are right for their family.
- Families in the state benefit from our organization having the staff and materials that meet their diversity.
- Systems that listen carefully to the family perspective improve outcomes for our children.

We invite all families and those serving families and children in New Mexico to make *Parents Reaching Out your one stop resource for a stronger family.* Our publications, workshops, and Resource Center offer tools for informed decision-making and building partnerships in communities. Our trained staff and network of volunteers are here to serve you.

*Parents Reaching Out is the home of:*

- NM Parent Information and Resource Center (NMPIRC)
- NM Parent Training and Information Center (NMPTIC)
- NM Family to Family Health Information Center (NMF2FHIC)

## Parents Reaching Out

1920 B Columbia Drive, SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106  
1-505-247-0192 ♦ 1-800-524-5176  
[www.parentsreachingout.org](http://www.parentsreachingout.org)

From I-25—take the Gibson Blvd Exit 222 and go East on Gibson. Turn left at the third stop light (Girard). Turn left on Vail. Go one block to Columbia. Turn left on Columbia. Parents Reaching Out is on the east side of the street. Welcome!

