

A Look at Your Rights and Options after Your Child Turns Three

In Florida, children enrolled in the Early Steps Program may be eligible for extended early intervention services until the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday. This program is known as the Early Steps Extended Option.

Eligibility

The Early Steps Extended Option is available to children who:

- Are currently enrolled in Early Steps, or were referred to Early Steps, at least 45 days before their third birthday.
- Are eligible for Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (Pre-K ESE) under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

After being notified of their child's Pre-K ESE eligibility, families have 7 days to notify their service coordinator that they want to continue services through the Early Steps Extended Option.

If a family has concerns regarding the results of their Part B eligibility determination, they may dispute the results under IDEA section 619.

Extended Option Eligibility Determination Process

Throughout a child's time with Early Steps, planning for what happens after their third birthday is an important part of the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP). Beginning around nine months before a child's third birthday, the service coordinator will start talking with families about what options and support may be available for their child's next steps.

The service coordinator will:

- Explain the notification process, so families know what information is shared, and why.
- Speak with families about services an eligible child may receive after turning three.
- Share the child's early intervention records with the local school district, if the parent has provided consent to share information. This step is required if a family wants to explore the Early Steps Extended Option, because the Extended Option is only available for children who qualify for Part B, Pre-K ESE.
- Schedule an exit conference with the family and a representative from the local school district. During this meeting, the family will learn how eligibility for Pre-K ESE is determined and what to expect next.

After the exit conference:

- The local school district will determine whether a child is eligible for Pre-K ESE services. In order to determine eligibility, the school district may need additional information about the child. If so, the school district will contact the family to explain what is needed, ask for consent, and schedule any necessary evaluations.
- If a child is eligible for Pre-K ESE, the family may ask questions to learn about the school-based services their child could receive. Examples of questions to consider asking can be found in the Pre-K ESE Question Guide for Families.
- **If a child is eligible for Pre-K ESE, the family has 7 calendar days from the date they are notified to complete the Services After Three Decision Form and return it to the service coordinator. This form lets families choose one of the following options for their child:**
 1. Move to the Pre-K ESE Program. The child will exit Early Steps on their third birthday and receive free appropriate public education through an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) from the local school district.
 2. Stay in Early Steps through the Early Steps Extended Option. The child will continue receiving early intervention services through an IFSP that includes an educational component.
 3. Stop Early Steps services and decline Pre-K ESE services. If the family chooses this option, they can still ask the school district whether their child is eligible for the Pre-K ESE Program later.

IMPORTANT: If a family chooses the Early Steps Extended Option, they may leave the program at any time. Once a child exits Early Steps after turning three, they cannot return to early intervention through an IFSP.

More details for each option are included in the Option Summary below.

Program Comparison

	Early Steps Extended Option	Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (Pre-K ESE)	Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA)
Ages Served	Age three to the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday.	Three- to five-year-olds, prior to kindergarten entry.	Age three through graduation or age 22, whichever comes first.
Type of Plan	An Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) identifies the desired outcomes for the child, as well as the supports and services to be provided. An Extended Option IFSP includes an educational component that promotes school readiness.	An Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) , identifies the child's educational goals, services, and placement, including how progress will be measured.	The family develops an individualized plan of services for the child. NOTE: Each year, Florida law sets a maximum number of FES-UA scholarships that can be awarded. If applications reach that limit, some eligible students may not receive funding.
Outcome and Goals	Supports the family to meet the developmental needs of their child.	Supports the child to access and participate in the general education preschool curriculum.	Enables families to personalize the education of their student.
Service Location	Services are provided in natural environments as much as possible, such as the child's home, childcare setting, or other places in the community.	Services are provided in the least restrictive environment . School placement and service location may vary based on the child's unique needs and is ultimately determined with consensus from the IEP team, which includes parents.	Services are provided in the environment chosen by the family , with the exception that a child may not be enrolled in public school or Early Steps at the same time they are receiving and using scholarship funds.

	Early Steps Extended Option	Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (Pre-K ESE)	Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA)
Time Frame of Services	Continuous year-round services. Early intervention services are provided during all 12 months of the year.	Services are provided during the school year, based on the local school district calendar. Some children may also be eligible for Extended School Year (ESY) services during the summer months. Please note, not all children enrolled in Pre-K ESE are eligible for ESY services.	Services are provided at the time chosen by the family.
Cost	All early intervention services included in a child's IFSP are provided at no cost to families and are coordinated through local Early Steps programs.	Pre-K ESE services included on a child's IEP are provided at no cost to the family and are coordinated by the local school district.	The parent accepts all costs associated with their child's education. Education services may be partially or fully covered by the scholarship amount, which is subject to change annually. If a service or expense chosen is not eligible for scholarship funds, the family will incur the cost.

	Early Steps Extended Option	Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (Pre-K ESE)	Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA)
Services	<p>Early Steps provides services to children and supports to their families including service coordination, IFSP development and early intervention.</p> <p>Depending on the child's individual needs, services may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistive technology • Audiology services • Family training and counseling • Health services • Medical services • Nursing services • Nutrition services • Occupational therapy • Physical therapy • Psychological services • Sign language and cued language services • Social work services • Speech language pathology • Transportation services • Vision services 	<p>Pre-K ESE provides specialized instruction to ensure the child has access to the general preschool curriculum.</p> <p>Depending on the child's individual needs, services may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specially designed instruction • Speech therapy • Language therapy • Interpreting services • School health services and school nurse services • Transportation <p>Related Services may also be available if required for the child to benefit from special education. Depending on the child's individual needs, related services may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special transportation • Speech therapy • Language therapy • Occupational therapy • Physical therapy 	<p>Specialized services by approved providers include but are not limited to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services • Services provided by a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) • Services provided by a licensed occupational therapist • Services provided by licensed physical therapists • Services provided by listening and spoken language specialists • Other specialized services provided by an approved provider
Procedural Safeguards	<p>The Early Steps Summary of Family Rights outlines rights and dispute resolution processes while the child is enrolled in Early Steps, including the</p>	<p>The Notice of Procedural Safeguards for Parents of Students with Disabilities outlines parent rights and dispute resolution processes for eligibility determination</p>	<p>The Procedural Safeguards under IDEA Part C and IDEA Part B are not applicable to this program.</p>

	Early Steps Extended Option	Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (Pre-K ESE)	Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA)
	<p>Early Steps Extended Option. These rights apply from the time you are referred to Early Steps until you exit early intervention services. These rights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Written Notice • Native Language • Parental Consent • Surrogate Parents • Confidentiality of Records <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to Records ○ Confidentiality of Information ○ Opt-Out Policy • Dispute Resolution Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mediation ○ State Complaint ○ Due Process Hearings <p>More information about Procedural Safeguards can be found on the Florida Early Steps website.</p>	<p>and ongoing activities while the child is enrolled in Pre-K ESE services. These rights apply from the time of referral with respect to any determination made with regards to eligibility. These rights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Written Notice • Native Language • Informed Parental Consent • Access to Education Records • Confidentiality of Records • Dispute Resolution Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ State Complaint Procedures ○ Mediation ○ Due Process Complaint Procedures • Independent Educational Evaluations <p>More information about Procedural Safeguards can be found on the Florida Department of Education website.</p>	

Summary of Early Steps Exit Options at 3

A brief summary of the options available to families determined eligible for the Early Steps Extended Option is below. This summary is not comprehensive. Please discuss any questions with your service coordinator.

Option 1:

- ❑ **Extended Option:** A child continues Early Steps services under the Early Steps Extended Option and may receive these services until the **start of the school year following their fourth birthday.**
 - The child may exit the Extended Option at any time and choose to pursue other services for which they are eligible at that time.
 - The child must end services through an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) one day prior to beginning services through the Part B, Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education Program.
 - This option does not guarantee that a child will be eligible for Part B services when exiting the Extended Option if the child has reached their goals and is no longer eligible.
 - Once a child exits Early Steps after their third birthday, they may not return to the Extended Option.
 - A child may not receive services through the Part B, Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education Program or the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program under section 1002.394, Florida Statutes, while enrolled in the Early Steps Extended Option.

Option 2:

- ❑ **School-Based Services:** Special Education preschool services through the Lead Education Agency (LEA) with an IEP under the IDEA, Part B, Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education Program.
 - The child will exit the Early Steps Program on their third birthday and will not be able to return to the Extended Option.
 - If the family provides consent, the LEA will be notified by the family's Service Coordinator that they are planning to engage in Part B services.
 - Once the LEA receives this notice, someone will contact the parent with next steps.
 - A child may not receive services through the Early Steps Extended Option or the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program under section 1002.394, Florida Statutes while enrolled in Part B Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education services.

Option 3:

- No Services:** Decline all services and choose to exit the Early Steps Program.
 - The child will exit the Early Steps Program on their third birthday and will not be able to return to the Extended Option.
 - Parents may discuss with their service coordinator whether they would like their child to be referred to any other program(s).

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