

First Words

*A First Steps Communications Tool for Families
From Family to Family*

“...a FERPA exception exists which allows First Steps to disclose, without parental consent, a child’s personally identifiable information to an LEA at 18 months.”

Change in First Steps Procedures for 18-month Notice

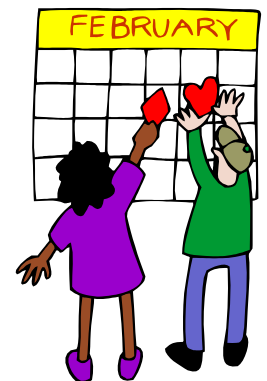
The first “official” step in the transition process out of First Steps has been the 18-month notice to the local education agency (LEA). In the past when a child turned 18 months, parents could give consent for First Steps to give the LEA (another name for the local special education system) personally identifiable information about their child. This information included the child’s name, birth date, suspected area of concern or disability and the child’s school system. Parents also had the option not to consent and in that case, only non-identifiable information about the child was sent (year of birth, area of concern and zip code).

Due to recent clarifications in federal law, the procedure for the 18-month notice has now changed. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) applies to both First Steps (Part C) and special education (Part B) sections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Essentially, it says that unless an exception exists, personally identifiable information about a child cannot be disclosed without prior parental consent. The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has declared that a FERPA exception exists which allows First Steps to disclose, without parental consent, a child’s personally identifiable information to an LEA at 18 months. The disclosure to the LEA is justified in order to meet its child find obligations.

Child find is a required part of IDEA for both First Steps and special education. For preschool special education, this child find activity simply allows schools the ability to begin planning for the future. By receiving information about children in First Steps, schools can roughly plan for the number of classes needed, potential staff requirements, and instructional needs.

Your First Steps service coordinator will no longer be asking for your consent to send information to the LEA at your child’s 18-month birthday. Twice a year, First Steps will send information about children who have reached the 18-month milestone (the information will likely be sent in October and April) to the appropriate LEAs. Your child’s name and birth date, your name, and your school district will be shared with the LEA.

It is important to understand what happens to the information that is shared. First, you are in no way committing to participating in special education or any school services. Your school will not contact you about the information or seek additional information until your child is 30-months old. The school does not



Alphabet Soup

Each month we cover a few abbreviations, terms or acronyms parents might hear or see while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Here are some terms you may hear while planning for transition.

LEA = local education agency

a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted for either administrative control or direction, or to perform a service function for, publicly funded schools as such schools are established under the laws of Indiana. The term includes school corporations and state-operated schools.

CCC = Case Conference Committee

a group of persons, including parents and school personnel, who are responsible for reviewing evaluation data and determining eligibility, developing, reviewing, and revising a student’s Individual Education Program, determining the appropriate special education, related services, and placement for the student in the setting or settings in which the services will be provided, and other matters that are assigned to an IEP team by federal law or to a case conference committee by state law or rule of the Indiana state board of education.

(Continued on page 2)

For more information about Family to Family, visit our web page at <http://www.INF2F.org>. You may also call 1-800-396-7188 or email family2family@sbcglobal.net.

Change in First Steps Procedures for 18-month Notice

(Continued from page 1)

place any label on a child based on the 18-month child find data. As stated before, schools simply use the information for planning purposes. Another important point is that this clarification of the law is only being applied to the 18-month notice. Procedures for the 30-month notice are not changing at this time, so personally identifiable information will not be shared without your consent at that milestone.

Your service coordinator should still discuss with you the transfer of your child's contact information before your child's 18-month milestone. This information should also be discussed as part of your procedural safeguards at intake and at other times as appropriate. Be sure to ask questions of your service coordinator if you need help understanding this new process.

Advocacy Tip Of The Month

Is your child going to transition soon? 90 to 270 days before your child turns 3, your service coordinator will schedule a transition conference. This is your conference, an opportunity for you to learn about a variety of programs and services you might consider for your child when he or she turns three. You and your First Steps team will begin developing your child's transition plan along with other professionals representing programs or services you want to include. This advance planning helps to ensure a smooth transition experience.

The transition conference is a great time to ask questions about the transition process and programs or services you want to learn more about. Here are some questions to consider. Add to this list when planning for your own conference!

- How will our child's eligibility for special education and other programs be determined?
- What additional testing will be done?
- What are the different ways services can be provided?
- If our child is in a private early childhood program or Head Start, how will services be provided?
- Who do we contact if we have questions?

Your Opinion Counts

If you are a family who currently has a child in First Steps or a child who has recently transitioned, please take a few moments to complete the new online First Steps surveys!

Several surveys were posted on the First Steps website under "What's New" this month. These surveys were developed by state staff to assess recent system changes and the local implementation of these changes. A web-based survey tool is being utilized to determine how to best focus efforts to improve certain First Steps System processes, as well as to recognize areas of success.

These are quick, ten question surveys where you just click your answers, so they are very easy to complete. Each cluster has six surveys, three for providers and three for families. Each survey focuses on areas of the system that have recently undergone some level of change. The surveys will only be available for a limited time, so parents are encouraged to visit the link at their earliest possible convenience so their answers and comments will be included in the survey results. To complete the surveys, just click on the link below and choose the surveys you want to complete.

http://www.state.in.us/fssa/first_step/surveys

Resources for Families

Check out these great resources on transition:

[Transition to Early Childhood Special Education: A Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities](http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/speced/pub_trans_guidelines.html)

http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/speced/pub_trans_guidelines.html

[Indiana Transition Initiative](http://www.indianatransition.org/)

(follow the Family Involvement link)
<http://www.indianatransition.org/>

[National Early Childhood Transition and Training Center](http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc)

<http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc>

[Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion Briefs](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECRII/ECRII_Resources_for_You_to_Use/ECRII_Briefs/ecrii_briefs.html)

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECRII/ECRII_Resources_for_You_to_Use/ECRII_Briefs/ecrii_briefs.html