

EARLY CHILDHOOD MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT FOR TRANSITION BETWEEN

Northwest Indiana First Steps
(11045 Broadway Ste.F, Crown Point, IN 46307)
AND

Michigan City Area Schools
(408 S. Carroll Ave., Michigan City, IN 46350)
AND

Community Organization of Social Concerns (COSC) Head Start
(251 Medical Plaza, Michigan City, IN 46350)

INTRODUCTION:

This agreement is developed in response to requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), the federal early intervention/special education legislation and Title 511 Article #7, Indiana's state special education laws. The agencies participating in this agreement are working collaboratively to provide coordinated services to young children and their families and to insure the implementation of federal and state law and regulation.

This agreement serves the period of 1 June 2009 to 31 May 2011.

PARTIES AND THIS AGREEMENT:

This joint statement of agreement is between Northwest Indiana First Steps (NWI First Steps), COSC Head Start and Michigan City Area Schools (MCAS), Early Childhood Special Education, which will be referred to as agencies. The agreement affects the staff of the signatory agencies, as well as the local early intervention providers.

NWI First Steps is the program responsible for implementing the Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers, age birth through two years, and their families in accordance with IDEIA, Part C. NWI First Steps covers Lake, LaPorte, Jasper, Newton and Porter Counties.

COSC Head Start services young children, ages three to five, and makes available at least ten percent of their enrollment opportunities to children with disabilities. COSC Head Start serves all of LaPorte County.

Early Childhood Special Education Services are provided by Michigan City Area Schools, Special Education Department and are confined to the boundaries established for Michigan City Area Schools.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this joint agreement is to promote cooperation in the development of a coordinated, interagency system of services for young children with special needs from birth through five years and their families. The content is designed to specify the roles and responsibilities of the participating agencies related to services required and to provide guidance for their implementation. This agreement provides a policy framework for cooperative efforts and seeks to clarify issues related to these efforts.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THIS AGREEMENT:

- The best interest of children are served when parents and service providers work in partnership.
- Agencies will strive to provide services with typically developing peers.
- Inter-agency collaboration and non-duplication of services are encouraged.

SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES FOR TRANSITION:

Transition planning from Part C (First Steps) to Part B (Early Childhood Special Education) occurs prior to the child's third birthday to enable the child to experience a smooth and effective transition. The NWI First Steps Service Coordinator initiates the transition planning process, bringing together public agencies and the family to plan a process that maximizes continuity and minimizes disruptions in services. [IAC 1-17-74] NWI First Steps provides families with formal written information about the transition process and parental rights. The state developed transition packet will be utilized throughout the transition process as appropriate. Any changes to these roles and responsibilities will be reviewed annually in order to comply with state and federal guidelines.

This agreement further clarifies procedures and responsibilities of the participating agencies in the transition of children with disabilities between First Steps, Early Childhood Special Education, and Head Start.

I. Transition Information:

A. Transmission of information from Part C Agencies to Part B Special Education Agencies is necessary to insure a smooth and efficient transition of services.

1. NWI First Steps Intake / Service Coordinator, representing the child and family enrolled in Early Intervention System for Infant and Toddlers will discuss the electronic transmission of Child Find data (child's name, date of birth, parent contact and school district information) with the parents during procedural safeguards at Intake and before the child reaches 18 months of age.

First Steps will send electronic Child Find data (child's name, date of birth, parent contact and school district information) on any child 18 months of age or older in the system to the public school of record twice a year, generally in April and October.

2. At least (6) months prior to the child's third birthday and after gaining a written release from the parents, First Steps Service Coordinator shall transmit the following information to the Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education:
 - a. The most recent Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP); and
 - b. The most recent evaluation reports from any appropriate sources , including any additional information deemed necessary for eligibility determination.
3. In the case that a child is enrolled in the First Steps program after the age of thirty-four (34) months of age, the First Steps Intake Coordinator will serve as the Service Coordinator and will make the referral to the Michigan City Area School, Early Childhood Special Education after gaining a written release from the parents. The Following information will be forwarded to the Michigan City Area Schools:
 - a. The most recent Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP); and
 - b. The most recent evaluation reports from any appropriate sources , including any additional information deemed necessary for eligibility determination
4. Head Start will refer to MCAS for formal evaluation of a child who resides within Michigan City Area schools and who has been identified as possibly having a disability through screening or developmental assessment conducted by Head Start. The Head Start Disabilities Coordinator will refer a child to MCAS Special Education Department as soon as the need is evident.
5. Head Start will maintain record of the number of children referred from First Steps to Head Start and will provide the Service Coordinator with documentation of when the child was accepted into the program.
6. Pursuant to the Part C (IDEIA), NWI First Steps representatives shall follow all required procedures in transmitting information regarding children who may be eligible for services from the Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education.
7. If not forwarded by First Steps, parents will need to provide MCAS Special Education Department with a copy of the birth certificate and immunization records of the child.

II. Transition Conference

MCAS Special Education Department participation is subject to parental approval. NWI First Steps will provide the MCAS Special Education Department with written notice of the date , time and place of the Transition Conference meeting. If such approval is obtained, the NWI First Steps Service Coordinator shall convene a Transition Conference with representatives from First Steps, Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education, and any other resources of the parents' choice at least ninety (90) days before the child's third birthday (if the child is likely to be Part B eligible). In the case that the child may not be eligible for Part B services at age three, First Steps Service Coordinators will make reasonable efforts to include providers of appropriate services within the community, such as Head Start, a community preschool or childcare.

- A. The purpose of the Transition Conference is to review the child's program options through the remainder of the school year and up to the child's third birthday. This meeting may coincide with the IFSP review meeting held every six months. The transition meeting must be held at least ninety (90) days prior to the child's third birthday. Service Coordinator will use State developed transition packets for the child Transition Plan.
- B. The Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education representative will attend the conference with parental consent. The local Head Start representative will make every effort to attend transition meetings to which they are invited. NWI First Steps Service Coordinators will encourage parental consent for Part B agency participation in the Transition Conference and will send notice to all who are to attend.
- C. With regard to parental consent for MCAS Special Education Department participation in Transition Conferences, First Steps will inform parents that a lack of such consent may result in a delay of the evaluative process utilized to determine eligibility for , and delivery of special education services.
- D. At the Transition Conference a transition plan, including evaluations, and time line will be established. The State developed transition plan will be utilized.
- E. Head Start will support and encourage transition planning for young children with disabilities into the overall disabilities service plan.
- F. Records will be reviewed annually to ensure the percentage of children with a smooth transition by their third birthday steadily increase until reaching and maintaining 100%. The records that will be used for this review will include DOE records as well as First Steps records.

III. Evaluation

- A. The Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education shall be responsible for reviewing the evaluation data, including medical records, transmitted from NWI First Steps to determine if sufficient assessment and evaluation data exists in order to determine the eligibility of a particular child for Early Childhood Special Education services. The Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education shall utilize this information whenever appropriate to avoid unnecessary reassessments and delays in services. Michigan City Area School may seek parent permission to begin the evaluation when the Transition Meeting is held to further expedite a smooth transition to early childhood special education services.
- B. Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education shall be responsible for obtaining parent permission to test as well as obtaining evaluation data, if necessary, including;
 - 1. A developmental and basic health history, including vision and hearing screening.
 - 2. A systematic observation of the child in a daily routine setting or other appropriate setting by an appropriate professional.
 - 3. Appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures that measure differences between expected level of development and current level of functioning. When norm-referenced instruments do not accurately reflect a student's performance because of the severity of the delay, other instruments or procedures shall be considered.
 - 4. Information from parents and other caregivers.
- C. NWI First Steps will collaboratively work with MCAS Special Education Department in scheduling transition conferences to ensure availability of personal, and a time frame that allows the MCAS pre-school Evaluation Team sufficient time to complete the necessary assessments prior to the child's third birthday.
- D. If it is ascertained at the Transition Conference, or at a later time, that additional evaluation data is necessary to establish eligibility for Early Childhood Special Education, then the MCAS Special education Department shall hold a Personal Consultation with the child's parent or guardian to discuss the reasons the evaluation is needed. In addition, the MCAS representative will inform the parent of the intent to pursue an initial educational evaluation, provide a written copy of parental rights and procedural safeguards, and obtain written parental permission to evaluate. In addition, the MCAS

Special Education Representative will provide the parent with a description of the evaluation process including the proposed assessment techniques and what the tests or evaluation procedures measure. The Transition Meeting may serve as the Personal Consultation Meeting.

During the Personal Consultation Meeting, the MCAS Special Education Representative will interview The parent to:

- Obtain a copy of the child's birth certificate and immunization records and proof of residency
 - Complete the Social, Developmental, and Health History
 - Provide Parent Rights
 - Discuss parent concerns
 - Arrange vision and hearing screening if not already completed
 - Secure permission to conduct initial education evaluation
 - Obtain release of information from other agencies
 - Complete Transition Plan if not already completed at the Transition Conference
 - Arrange for Diagnostic Evaluation Sessions and set the time table for completion of the evaluation
 - Inform parent of anticipated completion of testing and projected Case Conference date
- E. Referrals for Early Childhood Special Education received from Head Start will follow the same procedures as outlined above in the Personal Consultation Meeting conducted by the MCAS, Special Education Representative.
- F. All referrals (included those received from First Steps) after the child's third birthday will be deferred to Michigan City Area Schools for the evaluation and Case Conference determination. Referrals received after the child's third birthday will be completed within fifty (50) school days upon Michigan City Area Schools receipt of parent consent. The evaluation report will be made available within 45 days upon parent consent.

IV. CASE CONFERENCE:

- A. Prior to the child's third birthday, the Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education will convene a Case Conference Committee to discuss the results of the evaluation and to determine if eligibility for special education and related services exists. The First Steps Coordinator will be invited to all Case Conferences at the request of the parent. Service Coordinators will make every effort to attend Case Conference meetings to which they are invited.
- B. The development and implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) will occur prior to the child's third birthday subject to parental consent.
- C. If the child's third birthday occurs during the summer, the Case Conference will be scheduled in May or early June. The Case Conference Committee will determine if the student requires extended school year services. If the student does require extended school year services, the student's IEP shall describe and include services that will be initiated during the summer of the student's third birthday.
- D. If the student does not require extended school year services, the student's IEP shall state that services will be initiated at the beginning of the upcoming school year.
- E. Parent may apply for Head Start Services. Head Start personnel shall make every effort to attend the Case Conference meeting to which they are invited.
- F. A Head Start Representative shall participate in the development of the IEP for all students enrolled in Head Start who are eligible for Early Childhood Education Services.

V. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

- A. MCAS Special Education Department will complete all evaluation deemed necessary to the child study and services, in order for them to begin at age three, in accordance with Article #7.
- B. NWI First Steps will complete all evaluations in determining eligibility for First Steps services and will provide services up to the child's third birthday.
- C. Head Start defers all referrals for child studies to Michigan City Area Schools, Special Education

Department. Head Start will provide speech and language services only when the parent chooses not to access Michigan City Area Schools as the local education agency. All speech and language evaluations will be conducted by Michigan City Area Schools.

VI. JOINT RULES OF AGENCIES IN SYSTEM COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION:

- A. To avoid duplication of services, NWI First Steps will share all evaluations and IFSPs, subject to parental approval, to facilitate a smooth and efficient transition to Early Childhood Services by the child's third birthday.
- B. To avoid duplication of services, parents may choose to access speech and language services from Head Start, with consultation from MCAS.
- C. Michigan City Area Schools offers preschool services at no charge to **all** eligible three and four year old students who reside within the district boundaries. In adhering to the principle of least restrictive environment and in our effort to provide students with disabilities interaction with non-handicapped peers, the Case Conference Committee shall consider various placement options in the public school preschool setting where a full range of special education services may be offered. In the event, parent has unilaterally placed their child in the Headstart setting, the following placement options may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - General Headstart setting, Michigan City Area Schools Special Education Early Childhood Teacher to provide consultation with Headstart staff;
 - General education in the Headstart Setting for half of the day and Preschool Classes the other portion of the day with Special Education Services provided at the public site.

NON-ELIGIBLE CHILDREN:

If the Michigan City Area Schools, Early Childhood Special Education case conference determines that the child is not eligible for Part B special education and related services, the First Steps Service Coordinator will refer the child to existing community resources, childcare providers and service providers to work to ensure that appropriate and/or necessary services or educational opportunities continue for the child. Children may enroll in the three year old program at the public school site if they turn three by August 1st of the projected school year.

DURATION OF THE AGREEMENT:

In an effort to ensure that this agreement remains effective and current Northwest Indiana First Steps, Michigan City Area Schools and COSC Head Start will participate in an annual review of this agreement. In the event that any revisions that are needed all parties involved will revise and reauthorize this agreement.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

All identified conflicts will be discussed honestly and openly with all interested parties at the local level. Should the identified issues not be resolved the issue may be brought to each involved parties supervisory level position. If a satisfactory result is still not achieved the issue will be directed to state and/or federal organization for direction.

Clara Mann
Director Northwest Indiana First Steps

Date

Joan McCormick
Director MCAS Special Education

Date

Earnestine Bernard
Director COSC Head Start Child Development

Date