

publications or to consult with a tax professional for dependent child eligibility requirements. The IRS website is at <http://www.irs.gov>.

SECTION 7: EDUCATION

ARIZONA EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM (AZEIP)

The Arizona Early Intervention Program (AZEIP) is the statewide system of services and supports for families of infants and toddlers, birth to three years of age, with disabilities or delays. AZEIP partners with community providers to support families.

AZEIP is established by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides eligible children and their families' access to services to enhance the capacity of families and caregivers to support the child's development.

Developmental delays means a child has not reached fifty percent of the developmental milestones expected at his/her chronological age in one or more of the following areas of childhood development: physical, cognitive, language/communication, social/emotional, and adaptive self-help.

Established conditions that have a high probability of developmental delay include, but are not limited to:

- chromosomal abnormalities;
- metabolic disorders;
- hydrocephalus;
- neural tube defects (e.g., spinal bifida);
- intraventricular hemorrhage, grade 3 or 4;
- periventricular leukomalacia;
- cerebral palsy;
- significant auditory impairment;
- significant visual impairment;
- failure to thrive;
- severe attachment disorders;
- sensory impairments;
- inborn errors of metabolism;
- disorders reflecting disturbance of the development of the nervous system;
- congenital infections;
- disorders secondary to exposure to toxic substances, including fetal alcohol syndrome.

The state's definition of "eligible child" does not include children who are at risk of having developmental delays if early intervention services are not provided. For more information go to www.azdes.gov/azeip.

If the Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) assessment of a child under 3 years of age identifies developmental delays, the RBHA will refer the child to AZEIP.

The DCS Specialist or Foster Caregiver can refer a child for assessment on-line at <https://extranet.azdes.gov/azeip/AzeipREF/Forms/Categories.aspx> or by calling 602-532-9960 or (800) 237-3007.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

A school-aged child placed in foster care should be maintained in the home school (where they were enrolled prior to entering foster care) unless it is in their best interests to enroll in a new school. The child's Service Team (including the DCS Specialist, Local Education Agency (LEA), parents, Foster Caregivers, and IDEA parent, if different from the biological parents and if applicable, and others) should complete the Best Interests Determination/Transportation Plan (CSO 1348A, included in the Go To Guide) to guide the decision-making process. If it is a child's best interests to be enrolled in a new school, enroll the child as soon as possible or within five days of the date of placement.

The Best Interests Determination/Transportation Plan provides a number of areas to consider when discussing what is in the child's best interest, including:

- the safety of the child;
- the wishes of the child and parent;
- the distance and time for the child to travel to and from the school he/she is attending at the time of placement;
- the child’s academic, developmental, and socialization needs;
- the effect a school change will have on the child’s learning;
- any potential for loss of credits which may occur due to changing schools in the middle of a term or semester, etc.

Transportation to school should provide for normalcy and safety of the individual child. The DCS Specialist will work cooperatively with the school and foster caregiver to select the best option for the child. Options may include:

- the school providing the transportation,
- the Foster Caregiver (or another approved adult) providing transportation, or
- DCS using a contract service (cab, vouchers, etc.) or providing bus tickets (for a high school student).

Schools typically will provide transportation if it is included in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for a student with special education needs. They may also provide transportation if the student can get to a bus stop on an existing school route. In that case, the Foster Caregiver or DCS Specialist may talk with the school about possible routes and help to determine how to safely ensure the student can get to the pick-up point. If the school cannot assist or there are safety concerns with a child utilizing school transportation, the Foster Caregivers are required to provide transportation to school. Relatives/kinship caregivers may also provide transportation.

The Notice to Provider (Out-of-home, Education, and Medical) is provided to Foster Caregivers at the time of placement or within five days of the date of placement. The Notice to Provider contains information that is necessary to enroll the child in school. Foster Caregivers may enlist the help of the DCS Specialist with enrollment if necessary. A school aged child should be enrolled in public school unless alternative education arrangements, such as private, charter, or home schooling, have been approved by DCS. A school must immediately enroll the child even if documents or supplies (such as a school uniform) are not readily available. The Arizona Department of Education website <http://www.azed.gov/> can be used for resources and to locate schools and for more information on support to foster children (www.azed.gov/fostercare).

SCHOOL BREAKFASTS AND LUNCHES

Children in foster care are eligible for free meals through their school. The schools accept the “Notice to Provider” as verification of a child’s foster care status. There is no income testing for the foster child or for the foster family. If the school does ask about income, the child’s annual income is usually “\$0.”

EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATE

If a child age three or older requires a special education evaluation and/or services, it is the responsibility of the Local Education Agency (LEA) to determine who will act as the special education parent. The DCS Specialist cooperates with and assist the LEA in meeting this obligation.

If a child birth to age three requires special education evaluation and/or services for early intervention services, it is the responsibility of AzEIP to determine who will act as the special education parent. The DCS Specialist cooperates with and assist AzEIP in meeting this obligation.

When the identity and whereabouts of the biological or adoptive parent are known, the LEA must contact the parent to ensure the parent’s consent for special education evaluation and/or services. The biological or adoptive parent has parental decision making authority for special education evaluation and/or services for a foster child, except when:

- parental rights have been terminated;
- a parent cannot be identified or located;
- a court has suspended the parent’s education rights or appointed a legal guardian or issued an order permitting others to serve.

When the foster child’s parent does not attempt to serve as the special education parent for a child in out-of-home care, the DCS Specialist ensures that the LEA obtains a special education parent for the child. DCS’s preference order for a special education parent for a foster child is:

- a court appointed legal guardian but not the State or an employee of a contractor of the State
- kinship caregiver or licensed foster parent with whom the child resides; and
- surrogate parent.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. This law mandates a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth-2 years) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages 3-21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. Please refer to <http://idea.ed.gov> for more information.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public schools to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for every student with a disability who meets the federal and state requirements for special education. The IEP refers both to the educational program to be provided to a child with a disability and to the written document that describes that educational program. Key considerations in developing an IEP include assessing students in all areas related to the suspected disability(ies), access to the general curriculum, how the disability affects the student's learning, developing goals and objectives that make the biggest difference for the student, and ultimately choosing a placement in the least restrictive environment.

Services may include: Assistive technology (e.g., communication boards, computerized language devices, padded supportive chairs) audiology, counseling services, medical services (limited to certain diagnostic services), rehabilitation counseling, parent counseling, school health services, school social work services, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, transportation, instructional support or individualized educational assistance, transition services and special considerations needed in the regular classroom, homework and/or testing. The established services are provided in the least restrictive school environment unless it is determined that the child is not medically able to participate in educational services in the school environment. Foster parents and kinship caregivers are encouraged to take the lead role in monitoring and advocating for services to meet the child's educational needs. DCS Specialist are available to assist in this role if needed.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

The Arizona Head Start Programs provide high quality early childhood education, nutrition, health, mental health, disabilities, and social services with a strong parent involvement focus. All children, ages zero to three, who are placed in foster care, are eligible for Early Head Start. All children, ages four to five, who are placed in foster care, are eligible for Head Start. Children in foster care are given priority placement for Head Start services. In order to locate a Head Start program in a child's area, go to <http://www.azheadstart.org/head-start-programs.php>.

APPOINTMENTS NOT DURING SCHOOL

DCS, foster parents and kinship caregivers are to make every reasonable effort not to remove a child from school during regular school hours for appointments, visitation or activities not related to school. Visitation between the child and his/her family including parents and siblings should be scheduled during non-school hours. Medical and dental appointments should be scheduled before or after school, on early release days or dates school is out for a break. Health care providers and other service providers who have extended office hours may be identified on dcs.az.gov/cmdp. For a child who wishes to attend a court hearing (particularly older youth), consult with the DCS Specialists or child's attorney to make a request that the court schedule the hearing after the child's school hours.