

Regional Centers and Schools - Important Transitions

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The Early Start Transition at Age Three

Two Systems, One Child

Before age three, most early intervention comes from a regional center through the Early Start program. At age three, primary responsibility shifts to the local school district under special education law. This handoff is one of the oldest transition points in the developmental services system, and it still causes stress for many families.

How the Transition Is Supposed to Work

The transition process must begin well before a child's third birthday, generally 90 days to nine months ahead. A transition planning meeting brings together the family, the regional center service coordinator, and a school district representative, and the school district must complete its own evaluation and develop an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, so services can continue without a gap. Regional center Early Start services end at age three, when school-based special education services begin.

What Changes Later

Some children keep regional center eligibility after age three if they meet Lanterman Act criteria for a developmental disability. For these children, the regional center and school district both stay involved, each covering different needs. Regional center involvement often steps back during school years, then increases again as a child approaches age fourteen, when transition-to-adulthood planning begins as a joint effort between the IEP team, the regional center, and sometimes the Department of Rehabilitation.

For Individuals and Families

Ask for the transition planning meeting early if the regional center has not already scheduled one. And, bring copies of evaluations and reports so the school district has full information. If you disagree with an eligibility decision at any transition point, you have the right to request a hearing or an IEP dispute process.

For Service Coordinators

Initiate transition planning within the required window, generally 90 days to nine months before the child's third birthday. Confirm a single point of contact is designated for the

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family. Share evaluations and IFSP documents with the school district, once the family consents. And ,follow up after the third birthday to confirm the IEP was implemented without a service gap.

Sources

[Undivided: Eligibility Under the Lanterman Act After Age 3](#)

[Undivided: Turning 3 in California — Part C to Part B](#)

[Parents and Wellness Community Foundation: Early Start Transition Guide](#)

The Transition to Adult Living at Ages 18 to 22

Two Systems, One Adult

School districts serve students with disabilities until age twenty-two. Some students graduate earlier with a standard diploma. After school services end, regional centers may support eligible adults. This creates a second major transition point in the system.

When Planning Should Begin

Transition planning should begin around age fourteen. IEP teams should begin including transition goals at this age. Regional center involvement should increase around the same time. Early planning allows time to explore services and options. New applicants should also start the process early. Regional center eligibility determinations can take time to complete.

How Regional Centers Can Support the Transition

Service coordinators can join the IEP team as invited members. They can help identify realistic goals for adult life. They can explain which regional center services may apply. They can help families start applications before age twenty-two. Families can also reopen a closed case at this time.

What Transition Services Regional Centers Can Support

There are adult service options that the regional center can support in the transition from school:

- Eligible adults may receive supported employment and job placement help.
- Day programs offer structured activities and skill building.
- Independent living skills training covers cooking, budgeting, and safety.

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- Supported living services help adults live in their own home.
- Community integration services support social and recreational participation.
- Transportation assistance helps adults reach work and activities.
- Assistive technology supports communication, mobility, or daily tasks.

Exact services vary by regional center and individual need.

For Individuals and Families

Ask the regional center to join transition IEP meetings early. Ask to reopen a closed case well before your child turns eighteen. Gather evaluations, IEP goals, and diagnostic reports in advance. If a request is denied, you can request a fair hearing.

For Service Coordinators

Begin transition discussions with families around age fourteen. In addition:

- Join IEP meetings when invited by the school district.
- Help identify which adult services best match each person's goals.
- Confirm applications are complete well before age twenty-two.

Sources

[Undivided: The Transition to Adulthood — Public Benefits for Young Adults with Disabilities in California](#)

[Regional Center of Orange County: Transition at Age 18/22](#)

[Tri-Counties Regional Center: Transition to Adulthood](#)

[California Department of Developmental Services: Post-Secondary \(Ages 19-22 Years\)](#)

[Meristem: Understanding Regional Center Services for Autistic Adults in California](#)