

Education

POSITION STATEMENT ON EARLY INTERVENTION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

Summary of the Issue:

Oregon's Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) program is unique because it serves children from birth through age five under one umbrella. This seamless approach to early childhood education is shared by only one other state in the nation, and reflects Oregon's leadership in the development of high quality, family-centered programs for children with disabilities. However, in 2005 families are expressing concerns about lack of funding, inappropriate levels of service and increasingly restrictive service models in Oregon's EI/ECSE programs.

Background:

The Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Program in Oregon was designed to be a seamless, multidisciplinary, interagency, family and child focused effort. Service reductions, lack of capacity in human service, childcare, and education programs, and a gradual shift in the philosophy and implementation of the program has threatened this vision.

In some areas, home visits for very young children have been reduced or even eliminated. Families report that their children are unable to access physical, speech and occupational therapy. Increasing numbers of children are served in self-contained, disability specific preschool programs with limited or no access to typically developing peers.

Providing for the broad range of children's needs is challenged by the elimination of other support services. As both the Oregon Health Plan and private insurance companies become increasingly restrictive in their coverage of therapies, many children with disabilities are unable to access the essential services they need to develop their speech, motor, social and cognitive skills. Families are frequently unable to access the support, training, and technical assistance they need. All of this has a detrimental impact on families of young children with developmental disabilities, school readiness and future life success.

Too many families and professionals continue to be unaware of services available to young children with disabilities. School districts and EI/ECSE programs must

aggressively pursue the identification and referral of infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities. This renewed energy for child find must include special attention to linking children from homeless, migrant and low-income families to the services they need to be successful.

Council Position:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that multi-disciplinary, inter-agency Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education Services are critical to the development and future success of young children with disabilities and essential to the health of their families. To create a successful Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education Program:

- Funding of EI/ECSE must be a top priority for the Oregon Department of Education.
- Increased attention must be given to Child Find activities, to ensure that children receive appropriate services as early as possible
- EI/ECSE services must be culturally and linguistically appropriate and family centered.
- Options for inclusive preschool environments must be supported and the development of preschool environments that are more restrictive than educationally appropriate must be discouraged
- Infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities must be afforded access to appropriate specialized services such as speech, physical and occupational therapy.
- Families must be linked with opportunities for support, training, and technical assistance.
- Professional staff must be linked with opportunities for support, training, and technical assistance.

Future Activities:

- Work with coalitions of parents and professionals to advocate with the Department of Education and the Legislature for appropriate levels of funding for EI/ ECSE services.
- Participate in the State Interagency Coordinating Council.
- Working through EI/ECSE contractors and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils, encourage participation of families of young children in the Oregon Network.
- Working with families, contractors, the Department of Education, and others, promote a family centered, multi-disciplinary, interagency service model