



Highlights of [GAO-06-26](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate.

Why GAO Did This Study

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established to ensure that infants and toddlers with disabilities, from birth to age 3, and their families receive appropriate early intervention services. Within the Department of Education (Education), the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is responsible for awarding and monitoring grants to states for Part C according to IDEA requirements. To address questions about how states have implemented IDEA Part C, this report provides information on (1) how Part C programs differ in their eligibility criteria and whom they serve, (2) to what extent states differ in their provision of services and funding, and (3) how Education and state lead agencies help support and oversee efforts to implement Part C, such as identifying children for services and transitioning children to follow-on programs, such as IDEA Part B.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education provide states with additional guidance on transition planning and services, especially for children who would enter Part B during the summer. In comments on our draft, Education cited an ongoing study of general transition issues. When Education verifies the results of its study, it should use that information to inform guidance to states on transition planning.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/gettrpt?GAO-06-26.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie Shaul at (202) 512-7215, or shaulm@gao.gov.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

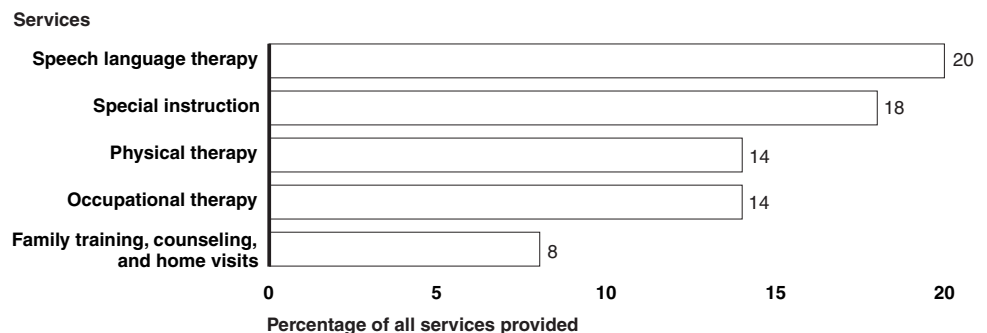
Education Should Provide Additional Guidance to Help States Smoothly Transition Children to Preschool

What GAO Found

Eligibility criteria for Part C services for infants and toddlers with disabilities differ from state to state, but do not consistently explain the percentage of children served, which ranges between 1.3 and 7.1 percent. To determine eligibility, most states measure how much the child is delayed in one or more areas of early childhood development, while a few rely exclusively on a clinical team's judgment. Although IDEA Part C is intended to cover children from birth to age 3, most states provide the majority of their Part C services to children 2 to 3 years old. States have public awareness campaigns to identify more eligible infants and toddlers but cite a number of obstacles, including difficulty reaching children in rural areas or in families where English is a second language.

The states we visited provide a similar set of services but vary in funding sources. States are required to make available certain early intervention services under IDEA, such as occupational, physical, and speech therapy. However, states report challenges recruiting and retaining professionals, such as speech language pathologists, to provide these services. States rely on various funding sources, but state general revenue funds were generally the largest source of early intervention funding.

Percentage of Early Intervention Services Most Frequently Provided



Source: GAO analysis of the Department of Education's 2002 IDEA data, IDEAdata.org.

OSEP and state lead agencies have provided training and technical assistance and used data to monitor implementation of IDEA Part C, but OSEP has lacked some information from local officials needed to determine if children are smoothly transitioning from Part C to Part B. OSEP uses annual reports and performance indicators as part of its effort to monitor compliance with Part C and target technical assistance. For example, data on the percentage of children served help inform OSEP of states' efforts to identify all eligible children. States use similar approaches. Despite these activities, state officials cited challenges transitioning children to Part B services when they turn 3 years old. Education indicated that in preliminary and unpublished data from an ongoing study it had found that gaps occur throughout the year. Officials in the states we visited reported that some children who turn 3 during the summer experience gaps in service. If Part B eligibility is not determined prior to children turning 3 during the summer, then subsequent decisions about whether children should receive extended school year services cannot be made.