



# Family Transition Guide

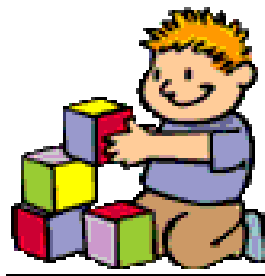
A handbook to facilitate the transition from the  
Infant & Toddler Program  
to the Allegheny Intermediate Unit  
DART Program

## Welcome!

As you begin this process, we recognize that change can be challenging. However, there is no growth without change and with preparation it can be a great experience. This handbook will provide you with many answers to ease the transition process. Use this folder to keep your information together and record your contacts with Allegheny Intermediate Unit DART Program. Early planning is important, that's why we are starting now. Your service coordinator will continue to work with you until your child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

As children grow they are expected to work more independently, follow group directions and attend to their own needs. It is important to facilitate this growth. Please be assured your child will be supported as needed. DART has a dedicated staff who are committed to children.

The Infant/Toddler services and the DART Program are working together to support families during the transition process and both programs are alike in many aspects. However, it is important for families to be aware that they are also different in some ways. Understanding the differences can be helpful as a child moves from one program to another. The next two pages are a brief list of acronyms and common terminology to help you navigate through the process. The rest of the handbook should help you to understand the DART program. As always, please don't hesitate to ask questions. We are here to help!



**Early Intervention/ Special Education Acronyms**  
(Specific to DART)

- AIU**      **Allegheny Intermediate Unit**  
AIU is a regional education service agency charged with providing programs and services to public, private and non-public schools in Allegheny County (not the city of Pittsburgh).
- APS**      **Approved Private School**  
State approved special education schools designed specifically for children with disabilities.
- BDI**      **Battelle Developmental Inventory**  
The BDI is an assessment tool that is used to determine if a child has a delay in one of the five developmental domains.
- CCAT**      **Countywide Consultation and Assessment Team**  
DART itinerant staff who provide early intervention services into over 300 early childhood environments and homes in Allegheny County.
- DART**      **Discover, Assessment, Referral and Tracking**  
The DART program provides special education services to children ages 3-5 in Allegheny County, not including the City of Pittsburgh.
- ECE**      **Early Childhood Environment**  
Early Childhood Environments include community preschool, Head Start, and daycare. DART is in over 300 in Allegheny County.
- EI**      **Early Intervention**  
Special education services for children 0-5.
- ER**      **Evaluation Report**  
The evaluation report is issued to the parents/guardian within 60 days of the receipt of the Permission to Evaluate.
- FBA**      **Functional Behavior Assessment**  
A functional behavior assessment is a formal observation and data collection documenting behaviors of concerns.
- HI**      **Hearing Impairment**  
The teacher of HI services children with hearing loss.
- IEP**      **Individualized Education Plan**  
The IEP is developed within 30 days of the ER and outlines the goals, teaching strategies and services recommended.

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Local Education Agency</b> The LEA is the LEA for children ages 3-5 in Allegheny County (not including the city of Pittsburgh) that require special education services.
<b>LRE</b>	<b>Least Restrictive Environment</b> The LRE means where children with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who do not have disabilities.
<b>MA</b>	<b>Medical Assistance</b> MA provides the broadest coverage of medical and mental health services for children. LEAs receive federal reimbursement for certain medically necessary services.
<b>NOREP</b>	<b>Notice of Recommended Educational Placement/ Prior Written Notice</b> The NOREP/PWR summarizes the recommendations, explains rights, and must be signed by the parent before services can begin.
<b>OCDEL</b>	<b>Office of Child Development and Early Learning</b> OCDEL sets policies and allocates funds for EI in Pennsylvania.
<b>OT</b>	<b>Occupational Therapist</b> An OT addresses significant delays in the areas of fine motor or adaptive development.
<b>PDE</b>	<b>Pennsylvania Department of Education</b> PDE is the state agency responsible for overseeing the provision of education and educational services with the state.
<b>PKBS</b>	<b>Preschool Kindergarten Behavior Rating Scales</b> The PKBS is an assessment tool used if there are concerns regarding behavior in the preschool or daycare setting.
<b>PT</b>	<b>Physical Therapist</b> A PT addresses significant delays in the area of gross motor.
<b>PTE/PTR</b>	<b>Permission to Evaluate/ Permission to Re-evaluate</b> This document must be signed by the parent prior to an evaluation.
<b>SDI</b>	<b>Specially Designed Instruction</b> SDI includes specific teaching strategies to address the goals.
<b>SLP</b>	<b>Speech Language Pathologist</b> An SLP addresses delays in the area of communication.
<b>VI</b>	<b>Visual Impairment</b> The teacher of VI services children with vision loss.

## **INFANT/TODDLER AND THE DART PROGRAM ARE ALIKE IN MANY WAYS**

### **BOTH PROGRAMS:**

- Offer individual services to children and families
- Have professionals trained to meet the needs of children and their families
- Recognize parents as important team members
- Develop written plans for each child
- Strive to provide services to children in a supportive environment

## **INFANT/TODDLER AND THE DART PROGRAM ARE DIFFERENT IN SOME WAYS**

- Pennsylvania Department of Education eligibility requirements are required for DART services
- Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for each child
- Delivery, frequency and coordination of services are based on the needs of the child.
- DART services are provided over 39 weeks across the year.

## Transition Timeline for Parents

6 months prior to your child's third Birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your infant and toddler coordinator meets with you to discuss the transition process.</li> </ul>
3-4 months prior to your child's third birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brief transition meeting will be held for your child. Members of DART, Alliance and the agency providing the current services to your child will attend (some parents choose to participate via telephone). If you do not attend this meeting, paperwork will be sent home.</li> <li>• At the meeting the team will assist you in filling out consents, initial paperwork (e.g., Permission to Evaluate) and provide you with additional information concerning transition and the services provided by the DART program.</li> <li>• Your infant/toddler therapist will be meeting with you to discuss your child's current developmental levels.</li> </ul>
Within 60 days after DART receives your Permission to Evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluations and observations will have been completed for your child and an Evaluation Report will be mailed to your home.</li> </ul>
Within 30 days after the evaluation report is issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An IEP meeting will be held for your child (if they have qualified for special education services).</li> </ul>
Your child's third birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DART services begin (as indicated on the IEP).</li> </ul>

## The Transition Process

It will be very important to give DART as much information about your child as possible. Together, the team can then reach good decisions about your child's education. These steps are followed to gather this information.

- Your Service Coordinator will meet with you to tell you more about the transition process. You will be asked for additional information about your child and to sign a form giving Alliance permission to share information about your child. This will include your child's current MDE and IFSP.
- All information is forwarded to the DART Transition Service Coordinators and a planning meeting is scheduled by the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers approximately 90 days prior to your child's third birthday. The details of your child's transition from the Infant/Toddler program will be explained and discussed.
- Your Service Coordinator and the DART Service Coordinator will talk to you about service delivery options to meet your child's need in the least restrictive setting.

## The Evaluation

Your child must be evaluated to determine if he/she is eligible for special educational services. The following describes the evaluation process:

- DART will review all of the information received about your child. A Permission to Evaluate will be presented to you for your signature. DART cannot start the process without your permission.
- As an important member of this team, you will be asked to provide information and answer questions about your child. Please be as accurate and detailed as possible. Staff from DART and your child's Infant/Toddler program will also provide information.

- Information from the evaluation will be summarized in an Evaluation Report (ER). The ER is used to determine your child's eligibility for special education services, under the Department of Education. You will receive a copy of this report in the mail to review.

Please keep in mind, our goal is to have an appropriate plan in place when your child turns three. In order to do so, we must receive your permission as soon as possible. We appreciate your cooperation in completing this thorough evaluation so that we can meet the needs of your child.

### Educational Options

There are a variety of ways DART can meet your child's developmental needs. Research shows that children learn through play and that they learn best from other children and daily caregivers. Our goal is to provide instruction in the least restrictive environment to ensure that children can be successful in a setting that provides opportunities for growth. The next few paragraphs outline the different models of our service delivery.

Early Childhood Environments: An early childhood environment can be defined as a preschool, daycare or Head Start setting. Support is provided to the early childhood programs and their staff, as well as to your family. DART consultants from a variety of disciplines visit the early childhood environment on a regular basis as determined by the IEP team. This is often the best option for many children as children learn from and interact with typically developing same age peers.

Home Services: As an educational agency, DART strives to have children receiving services in the community where they learn from and interact with their peers. If the IEP team determines that in home services represents an appropriate option for a child after their third birthday, DART staff visits the home and consults with the family to support your child's continued development.



Early Childhood Special Educational Classroom: DART's early childhood special education classrooms are designed for children with significant developmental delays and disabilities. The recommendation for one of our classrooms is based on the child's needs and the areas of delay. Other factors are considered as needed. Placement decisions are determined at the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. DART staff will inform you of appropriate sites/classrooms to observe after the evaluation and prior to the IEP meeting.

Itinerant Services Outside the Home: Itinerant services outside the home are special education services for children with a similar need. An example is a speech and language group.

Approved Private Schools: Approved private schools are designed to meet a child's needs that have a specific diagnosis and need highly intensive services. The PA Department of Education outlines a specific process and approves children for these programs on an individual basis.

### Related Services

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) you develop with the IEP team to meet your child's needs may include related services. Related services are those services that your child needs in order to benefit from the special education program.

Your child's need for a related service is decided at the IEP meeting. If your child is eligible, the related service is written on the service page of the IEP. Most related services are integrated into the child's educational environment.

These related services may be included as part of the child's preschool education program. Examples of related services include the following: Hearing Services, Vision Services, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech/Language Services, Family Services, Behavior Consultation, and/or Transportation.

## Observations

You are welcome to observe an educational option that might be appropriate for your child prior to the transition. Explore options such as Head Starts, Pre-K Counts and community preschools. Your Infant/Toddler service coordinator has a list of early childhood options for you to review.

To schedule an observation of a DART special education classroom, please notify your Infants/Toddler service coordinator. Service coordinators will then contact the DART program. These observations must be scheduled at least 48 hours in advance to ensure the safety of our children and staff. Remember, you are observing the teacher/therapist's techniques and interactions with the children, not a specific group or level of service. This will be determined via the evaluation and IEP meeting.

To minimize distractions to the classrooms, parents should observe without children whenever possible. Keep in mind that the teachers are busy during this time and may not be able to answer your questions. Please call the DART service coordinator if you have additional questions or concerns.

## Preparing your child for a new program

Your child will be making many adjustments entering a new program. There are many ways that you can help prepare your child for a smooth transition from one program to another.

### TALK

Talk about growing up and what exciting new experiences your child will be having. Say a warm goodbye to your current therapists and talk with your child about the new program and new teachers. Be positive and reassuring. It will be a good transition!

### VISIT

Whenever possible, visit the building before the start of school. A visit to the building before school starts can help prepare your child for the first day. If possible, take a picture of your child in front of the building. Keep it in a special place and respond to your child's comments about it.

### FIND

Visit a library for children's books about school. Read these aloud with your child. Make reading a part of your daily routine.

### TAKE

Let your child take a favorite book or toy in his/her backpack from home to school. This can be a great comfort during the early days in the new program.

### LABEL

Put the same label, symbol or sticker on all your child's belongings. Use the same sticker on some of your child's things at home. This will give your child a sense of accomplishment in finding his/her own things in the new program.

### PRACTICE

Think about what skills would be helpful for your child to have when school starts. Practice these at home. Some skills might include taking off his/her coat and hanging it on a hook or washing hands and using the bathroom independently. This will help give your child a sense of confidence.



## PLAY

If your child has been receiving home-based services it would be helpful to start involving him/her in group play or other community activities, such as story hour or "mother's day out". Think about getting your child together with a few other children for a small playgroup or going on a planned outing. Start out with short amounts of time. Make the playgroup longer as your child's skills develop.

(Adapted from *Communication Skill Builders*, 1991)

All adjustments and successful transitions take time and effort. Working together insures positive outcomes. We look forward to working with you to help your child as he/she turns three years old. They grow and learn and so do we...

