

Comments to ECI Advisory Committee on ECI

Initial Themes from Interviews with Texas Parents of Children with Disabilities

We would like to share a few high-level themes from our recent research interviews with 18 families whose children have participated in Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) or recently transitioned out of ECI. The goal of these conversations was to better understand barriers to accessing ECI and the challenges families face during the transition out of the program. Additionally, we asked where there are opportunities to strengthen the multiple systems these parents encounter when accessing interventional services for their children.

Across the board, families described ECI as life-changing for their child.

Families especially valued ECI's home-based model and its emphasis on coaching within their child's natural environment.

One parent shared that many of their child's physical milestones were made possible through ECI support. But just as importantly, they described how ECI helped their entire family learn to support their child together, especially by including siblings in the process and making them part of that growth.

Families also identified opportunities to build on the strong foundation ECI has created.

Many families expressed how much they valued ECI and, as a result, wished services could continue longer. Parents consistently spoke about the strong relationships they built with therapists, the meaningful development progress their child made, and the confidence they gained in supporting their child's needs.

Families shared that additional clarity and guidance during the initial enrollment process would further strengthen their experience.

In particular, parents described uncertainty at the beginning of services about what to expect, including who would conduct assessments, where they would occur, and what the next steps would be. Many were also unsure whether they needed to follow up or whether providers would initiate next steps, and what questions they should be asking.

Once families were engaged in services, they consistently spoke about the strong level of support, communication, and coordination they experienced from providers. This was true for ECI services taking place in the family’s home and at their child care setting. That collaboration between providers and caregivers made a real difference for families.

When children turn three and transition out of ECI, that sense of coordination often wasn’t sustained.

The transition from ECI to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) – to new providers, a new learning environment, a new system, a new state agency – is extremely challenging for families. Many parents described the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process as complex and overwhelming, particularly when developing and implementing their child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Parents expressed a strong desire for more guidance on how to advocate for their child. We heard comments like: “I didn’t have the right questions to ask,” and “I couldn’t imagine being a parent navigating this transition without any prior exposure to special education.” Even parents who were relatively knowledgeable about the system still found the transition difficult to navigate.

We urge the Committee to support a better transition from ECI to public school.

These themes point to opportunities to strengthen continuity, improve family support and navigation, and better align services with the real needs of children and families.

As this group works to develop a coordinated, cross-agency strategic plan, there is a clear need and opportunity to strengthen collaboration across systems so that families experience a more seamless and supportive continuum of care.

Once our team wraps up our in-depth analysis, we would be happy to share our findings with the Committee.