EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION



Early Childhood is forever growing and changing. As we continue to promote learning for children ages 3-5, Four Rivers is committed to educating young children with disabilities in the most appropriate settings to meet their needs.

Supporting the policy statements from national agencies and government departments\*, Illinois supports the movement toward inclusion of preschool age children with disabilities. Inclusion in early childhood refers to the including children with disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities. These activities are facilitated by individualized accommodations, using evidence-based services/supports to foster their development, friendships with peers and belonging. This applies to all children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities to those with the most significant disabilities.

\*Agencies and Departments include: Division of Early Childhood (DEC), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education, The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge.

Currently, Special Education services are provided within the Four Rivers Cooperative in the areas of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and Early Childhood Inclusion Support (ECIS).

**Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)**

There are presently 6 Early Childhood Special Education classrooms that are located regionally throughout the nineteen districts served by the Four Rivers Cooperative. ECSE classrooms are cross-categorical which means that children with a variety of delays and developmental levels may be served within the same ECSE classroom.

Each classroom may be assigned a maximum of 10 children per half day session and is staffed with a teacher and an aide. Every child in the classroom has an IEP. The classes are 2 ½ hours long, five days per week. Each local district provides transportation to and from the class. If 2 or more programs/classes are located in one region, student placement may change during the time the student is in the Early Childhood Program. For example, a student may attend class in the morning one year and may attend the afternoon class the next year. Placement with the same class or teacher is not guaranteed from year to year. The needs and supports of each student are assessed each year, thus creating the possibility that students may experience a change.

Related services can include speech, OT, PT, Social Work, Vision, Hearing and nursing support. Programs given by these related service providers are reinforced in the classroom, providing a more therapeutic environment for the students.

**Early Childhood Inclusion/Itinerant Support (ECIS)**

Four Rivers provides children who are attending local Preschool For All (PFA), HeadStart, private preschool, child care center or home-hospital (students are medically designated not able to attend school by a physician) programs with inclusion support services. There are three models for inclusion support. They are:

* Itinerant support-Special educator and related service staff provide support in the classrooms moving from room to room or site to site.
* Co-Teaching-Two teachers (special and general educators) team teach the students in the classroom together
* Blended-One teacher dually licensed to teach both general and special education teaches all children together

Services can be inside or outside the general PreK classroom depending on the needs of the student. Related services typically include speech and sometimes OT, PT, Social work or vision/hearing. Students not attending a program are served in an agreed upon location, typically a place in the school.

Early Childhood Special Education services are designed to provide specific learning activities for children within a developmentally appropriate framework. Due to the developmental level of the children, activities are designed to incorporate play-like materials while also using a variety of different teaching strategies to build upon the child’s individual strengths and to improve areas of weakness. Instruction may take place within a small group or whole class setting.

