



Service Coordination and Early Intervention DEC/ITCA Joint Position Statement Executive Summary

Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)
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What is the purpose of the position statement?

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA) collaborated on this joint position statement to acknowledge the importance of early intervention (EI) service coordination and recognize the expertise and needs of the professionals who provide this service. Because of the complex nature of service coordination and the essential role of service coordinators in the EI process (Bruder et al., 2005; Childress, Nichols, & Schnurr, 2019; West, Duggan, Gruss, & Minkovitz, 2018), it is the position of the DEC and ITCA that service coordinators must have the knowledge, skills, administrative support, professional development, and resources they need to provide the highest quality services to children and families. The DEC and ITCA also endorse the use of the guidance document, *Knowledge and Skills for Service Coordinators* (KSSC; see Appendix A; Workgroup on Recommended KSSC, 2020) by state and local programs to ensure consistency in the hiring and training of service coordinators in early intervention.

Call to Action

As described in the joint position statement and in federal regulations, service coordination is an essential EI service that, along with other educational and therapeutic services, has an equal and impactful role in the experience of families. Service coordination is the only mandated EI service under Part C of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004); therefore, it should have equal importance, administrative support, and opportunities for professional development as other services. To build the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively assume the complex roles and responsibilities of EI service coordinators, the DEC and ITCA strongly recommend the following:

- States and local programs should review and align current competencies to the indicators in the *KSSC* guidance document. Or, where competencies are not already in



place, the *KSSC* should be adopted to guide hiring decisions and inform inservice professional development of current and future service coordinators. Adopting this guidance would promote consistency across states and international programs, which would elevate the quality of services provided to young children and families receiving EI.

- Leaders who hire, supervise, and mentor service coordinators must have a thorough understanding of the expertise and needs of these professionals. This understanding is essential to ensure that compensation aligns with the level of responsibility expected of service coordinators. Service coordinators also should have appropriate administrative support, reflective supervision, and resources to successfully manage the workload, navigate changes in policies and procedures, and most importantly, partner with families.
- States and programs must consider multiple factors when determining workload size to ensure that service coordinators can manage the roles and responsibilities outlined in this joint position statement. The factors to consider include (1) the number of families served per service coordinator, (2) the varying levels of need experienced by families, (3) the model of service coordination implemented in the state/program, (4) the need for administrative support and supervision, and (5) the level of responsibility, educational background, and any specific expertise required of service coordinators in a given state or program. Although no single number can ensure an ideal workload for all who provide service coordination, professionals in this role have reported significant challenges with managing their workloads, especially when local resources and support are limited, compensation is low, and the number of families served is high (Childress et al., 2019). It is, therefore, imperative that administrators acknowledge the strain that high workloads place on service coordinators and use the variables provided in this position statement to determine and monitor manageable levels that lead to better retention of these professionals and higher quality services.
- Additional research is needed to identify recommended practices specific to service coordination, which could be guided by the *KSSC* document. Research also needs to address how these practices would be implemented with families and how service coordinators would be trained to use these practices during preservice and inservice trainings. Findings could then be used by policy makers and other leaders to build in the necessary resources EI systems need to ensure that service coordinators can



implement the diverse roles and responsibilities described in this joint position statement.

To achieve the goal of high-quality service coordination for all children and families receiving EI, states must prioritize professional development for new and experienced professionals in this role. As the only federally mandated EI service under Part C of IDEA, states (and their international counterparts) have a responsibility to ensure that families are met by professionals who have the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and abilities to support families using recommended practices.

Why are DEC and ITCA taking a position on service coordination?

The DEC and ITCA recognize the need for a common understanding across the EI field about what high-quality service coordination looks like and what knowledge and skills are recommended for professionals who provide this service. To complement the KSSC document, it is necessary that the field agree on the beliefs, expertise, roles, and responsibilities of professionals who provide service coordination, which are described in the position statement. This statement expands on the service coordination activities outlined in IDEA (2004) so that state and local programs have guidance that can be used when preparing, hiring, training, monitoring, and supporting service coordinators. It is DEC's and ITCA's intent that strengthening the field's understanding of service coordination will lead to increased respect, appreciation, and support for those who provide this important service.

Access the full position statement at:

<http://www.dec-sped.org/position-statements>

