

MISSOURI FIRST STEPS YEAR AT A GLANCE 2022-23



What is First Steps?

First Steps is Missouri's Early Intervention system for infants and toddlers, birth to age three, who have delayed development or diagnosed conditions that are associated with developmental disabilities. The federal law governing First Steps is Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is the lead state agency responsible for implementing the First Steps program.

First Steps is a voluntary program which provides families the tools they need to help their child be successful. Families play an integral role in their child's development.

What is a SPOE?

First Steps is operated through contractual agreements in ten regions across the state. Each regional office is known as a System Point of Entry (SPOE). The SPOEs employ approximately 170 Service Coordinators who provide service coordination, intake and eligibility determination, as well as all local administrative activities for the program. Building a strong network among the SPOE and primary referral sources in a community assists in the early identification and referral of children who are potentially eligible for First Steps. Missouri is a geographically diverse state, yet regardless of location within the state, all Missouri children and families receive support from a SPOE in their area.

Who is Eligible for First Steps?

Infants and toddlers who have one of the following criteria may be eligible for First Steps:

Newborn Condition*	Diagnosed Conditions*	Developmental Delay
Referred prior to 36 months of age with a birth weight of 1,500 grams (3.31 pounds or 3 pounds 4.9 ounces), or less with one or more of the following conditions diagnosed at birth or within 30 days post birth: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• APGAR of 6 or less at 5 minutes• Intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH) (Grade II, III, or IV)• Any Positive Pressure Ventilation greater than 48 hours, including continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), ventilator or oscillator• Resuscitation/code-event requiring chest compressions	Referred prior to 36 months of age with a diagnosed condition including, but not limited to, the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autism Spectrum Disorders• Chromosomal Trisomy• Craniofacial Anomalies• Disorders of the Nervous System• Disorders Related to Exposure to Toxic Substances• Infections/Viruses/Bacteria• Other Chromosomal Abnormalities• Other Genetic/Congenital/Metabolic Conditions• Sensory Impairments• Severe Attachment Disorders	Referred prior to 36 months of age, with a half-age developmental delay, as measured by appropriate diagnostic measures and procedures emphasizing the use of informed clinical opinion, in one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cognitive development• Communication development• Adaptive development• Social or emotional development• Physical development, including vision and hearing

**Newborn and Diagnosed Criteria updated in the Part C State Plan - Revised January 2023.*

Eligibility is determined through an evaluation of the child, during which the Service Coordinator reviews information about the child's birth, medical history, and developmental history. An evaluator may administer a test to determine the child's abilities. With the parent's consent, the Service Coordinator may gather information from caregivers, child care providers, educators, or other family members. Eligibility criteria for First Steps, including examples of diagnosed conditions, are available at:

<https://dese.mo.gov/childhood/early-intervention/first-steps/eligibility>

To Make a Referral to First Steps:

call toll-free 866-583-2392 Ext. 3 or refer online at: www.mofirststeps.com

What is an IFSP?

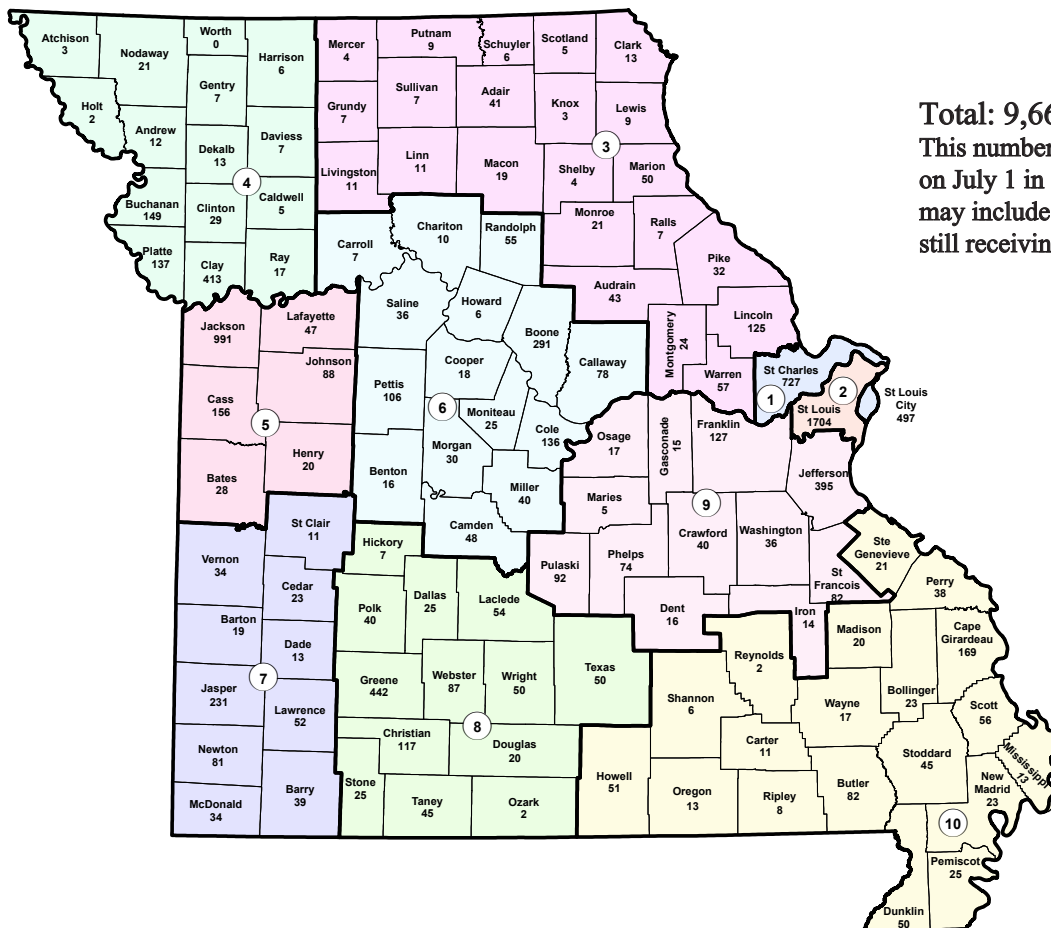
Children found eligible for First Steps have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that reflects the family's concerns, priorities, and resources regarding the development of their infant or toddler. Families participate as partners in the planning, development, implementation, and review of the IFSP. The IFSP process is unique to each family. Service Coordinators and service providers collaborate with family members to ensure the development of meaningful goals and related services that assist the family in improving their child's functioning in everyday routines and activities.

Who Provides Services?

Early intervention services are designed to meet the developmental needs of the child and assist the family with the child's development. First Steps offers 18 types of early intervention services to eligible children and families. All 18 services are available to every child and family in First Steps; however, the type and level of service appropriate for each child and family is decided by the child's IFSP team.

Early intervention services are delivered by providers who meet DESE's qualifications. All providers enroll in First Steps as individuals who are either independent vendors or affiliated with an agency. There are approximately 2,900 providers enrolled in First Steps and roughly 1,500 of these providers participate on Early Intervention Teams (EIT) across the state. EIT is Missouri's model for service delivery.

Number of Children Served in First Steps in Each County



Who Referred Families to First Steps?

First Steps receives referrals from parents as well as many community programs such as hospitals, physicians, child care centers, preschools, and other public agencies.

Referral Sources in 2022-23	% of Referrals
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other Health Care, Public Health)	48.0%
Parents	35.0%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health, Health & Senior Services, Children's Division, Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters)	7.0%
Early Childhood Programs (Parent Education Program, Early Head Start, School Districts, Child Care Programs)	10.0%
TOTAL	100%

When Parents Made the Referral, How Did They Learn About First Steps?

In 2022-23, Parents Learned About First Steps From	% of Parent Referrals
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other Health Care, Public Health)	55.0%
Other (Friend, Family Member, Neighbor)	30.0%
Early Childhood Programs (Parent Education Program, Early Head Start, School Districts, Child Care Programs)	13.0%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health, Health & Senior Services, Children's Division, Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters)	2.0%
TOTAL	100%

When It's Time to Leave First Steps, Where do Families Go?

Most families leave First Steps when the child turns three years old; but, there are times when families leave First Steps before the child is three. Most children go to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) through the local school district or another community program after First Steps. However, some children leave for other reasons such as completing IFSP outcomes before age three or the parent chooses to leave the program.

Reasons for Leaving First Steps in 2022-23	# of Children	% of Exiting Children
Completed First Steps Program:		
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Eligible	3,254	49.8%
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Not Eligible	418	6.4%
Parent did not request referral to ECSE	716	11.0%
Eligibility for ECSE in process	268	4.1%
Other Reasons:		
Family withdrew from First Steps	1,009	15.4%
Unable to contact the family	417	6.4%
Moved out of state	273	4.2%
Child completed IFSP outcomes	159	2.4%
Child passed away	20	0.3%
TOTAL	6,534	100%

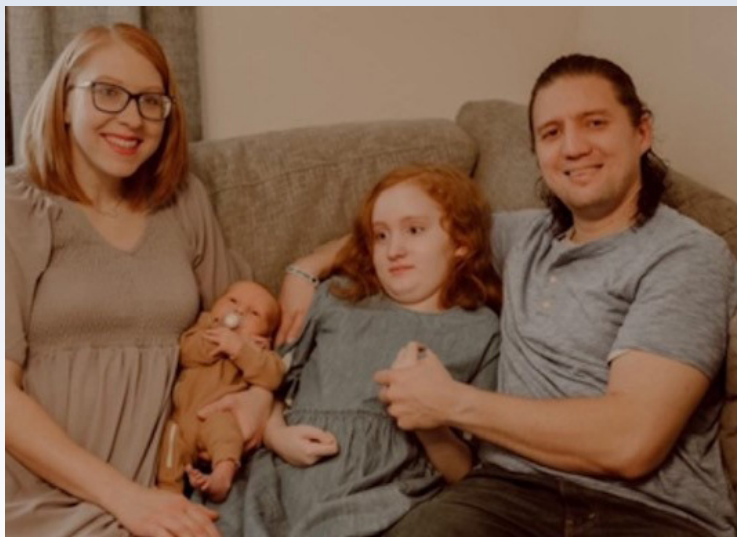
Jordyn's Story

By Amber of Jackson, MO

"My daughter Jordyn began showing delays at a year old. In 2015, she was diagnosed with Alexander disease. She was quickly screened and qualified in several areas for Missouri First Steps.

We met the most amazing therapists who became like family. Despite a terminal diagnosis, First Steps helped my daughter thrive. My daughter's Physical Therapist gave me the courage to seek more testing to figure out what was causing tremors to occur.

My daughter's speech therapist was with us when she had her first seizure and helped guide me through the process of getting my daughter to the emergency room. I can't say enough great things about everyone we met during our time with Missouri First Steps."



Family Time

Ben's Story

By Ryan of Lees Summit, MO



Family Fun

"The word that comes to mind is empowering. Not only for our son, who was empowered by his amazing therapists to learn, grow, and overcome - but also us as parents. We were empowered with the wisdom and knowledge that once the therapists left, we were able to continue their work and provide an environment that gave our son the best chance to continue to grow and develop. We learned tips and tricks so that he could be free to play as all children should and when he felt like it, could work on various things as well.

We saw immeasurable growth once he began with First Steps and were so sad when he aged out. He was light-years ahead of where he was when he first started, and we know it is directly related to the great work of the First Steps team. From the very first meeting, to the last day of therapy they were our partners, walking side-by-side with us in this journey. They provided us the honest feedback we needed and allowed us to ask any questions we could think of without ever making us feel like it was a silly or "dumb" question.

Our First Steps experience was nothing short of amazing and we could not be more thankful for the program and staff!"



Family Adventures

Leo's Story

By Sophie of Kirksville, MO



Smiles All Around

“Our son Leo was born 12 weeks early and spent a 70 day stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). When he was discharged, we began working with First Steps immediately knowing that he would likely have developmental delays due to his prematurity. Every milestone felt impossible at first, and took time. But with the help of Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech services, he is thriving!

He is walking, running, completing puzzles, climbing playground equipment, and speaking in small sentences. If it wasn't for First Steps, I am not sure he would be walking or talking. We are so thankful to every therapist that has put in the time to work with him and teach us skills as parents so we can be in the best position to help him thrive.”

Sebastian's Story

By Kristin of Boonville, MO

“Our relationship with First Steps began during the pandemic when we received our first placement as newly licensed foster parents. A six-month-old medically complex baby boy joined our home with one phone call and 48 hours of training at the hospital. His name was Sebastian. He was born with an extremely rare genetic disorder, KAT6B genetic syndrome, causing numerous medical complexities and delays. In his first home life he experienced abuse and neglect leading to him being brought into foster care.

Once my husband and I were cleared to bring him home from the hospital we were referred to First Steps. We were desperate to help our boy in any way we could. Sebastian couldn't lift his head, he couldn't sit up, roll, or crawl, his eyes would shake back and forth, he was limp and stiff all at the same time, he had an extreme startle response, he was afraid to be held, his hair was falling out, he was severely underweight and had been treated in hospital for refeeding syndrome. Our First Steps coordinator set him up with Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech, and Nutrition services. We later added Vision therapy when he was diagnosed with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI).

From the moment we met our First Steps providers we were encouraged, loved, and validated. We were given simple instructions and steps to take to help our boy on his journey of recovery and improvement. He inched along at his own pace while his providers cheered him on. His therapists cared for him and our entire family, they showed our other children ways to engage in play with their brother, and they listened as I voiced frustrations of parenting in both the medical world and the foster care world. Our therapists took time to teach our in home nurses techniques so his therapy could continue every single day. His providers became the steady part of our week and earned our boy's complete trust. Our providers have given us so many resources, fought battles for us, and filled many gaps. In a situation where our boy was coming from a lot of loss he has gained a team of people who rallied around him. After 505 days in our home as our foster son, we officially adopted Sebastian and became a family of six. Our physical therapist was in the courtroom with us to take pictures of his adoption day.



A Family Bond

Now as our boy is about to age out of First Steps, I find myself wishing there was a Second Steps Program so we could continue with them. They have assisted in setting him up for future success at home and school. Looking back on where we started and how far this boy has come we have been given a gift from our providers I could never repay. Sebastian is now able to crawl, sit up unassisted, take steps in his gait trainer, wheel his wheelchair, use an eye gaze tablet, put a toy into a bowl, and has achieved numerous additional “inch stones”. Without First Steps we would not be this far along in meeting his goals and our journey would have been much lonelier. His therapists check in on him as if he was their own, we dearly love them, and they will stay apart of his story forever.”

Annual Performance Report

Each year DESE sends a report to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) about the performance of the First Steps program. The report contains information on the following Annual Performance Report (APR) indicators:

2023 APR Submission	Statewide Performance	
#1 - Timely Services	95.33%	
#2 - Services in Natural Environments	99.77%	
#3 - Early Childhood Outcomes	Made Progress	Reached Age Expectation
3A - Social Emotional Skills	91.19%	9.49%
3B - Acquiring and Using Knowledge and Skills	91.88%	6.21%
3C - Use of Appropriate Behaviors	91.66%	7.25%
#4 - Family Involvement: First Steps helped the family...		
4A - Know Their Rights	98.50%	
4B - Effectively Communicate Their Children's Needs	96.50%	
4C - Help Their Children Develop and Learn	97.63%	
#5 - Child Find: Birth to Age One of MO Population	1.44%	
#6 - Child Find: Birth to Age Three of MO Population	3.51%	
#7 - 45-Day Timeline	93.26%	
#8A - Timely Transition Plan with Steps and Services	96.25%	
#8B - Timely Notification to the School District	98.75%	
#8C - Timely Transition Conference	100%	
#9 - Resolution Sessions	NA	
#10 - Mediation	NA	

A complete report on the performance of the First Steps program is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/state-performance-plan> under Part C - ages Birth to 3 (First Steps).

First Steps Child Count and Cost by Fiscal Year (FY)

	FY20***	FY21***	FY22	FY23
Total Children Served*	15,564	15,733	17,662	19,068
Increase in Children Served	-2.7%	1.1%	12.3%	8.0%
Total Cost per Child**	\$2,862	\$3,240	\$3,163	\$3,629**
Total Program Expenditures	\$44,549,786	\$50,972,801	\$55,864,367	\$69,198,821
*Total number of children who had at least one First Steps service (e.g., evaluation, IFSP meeting, direct service) **Total cost per child includes administrative, training, testing, and direct service costs. FY23 total cost per child also includes Part C American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. ***FY20 & FY21 data impacted by COVID-19 pandemic				

A complete report on the First Steps budget is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/childhood/early-intervention/first-steps/data-budgets-reports> under Financial Reports.

Parents: Are You Interested in Sharing Your Experiences?

Parent participation and feedback are important in helping the First Steps program make a difference for children and families in Missouri. If you currently have a child in the First Steps program or your child previously participated in the First Steps program, here are two ways you can share your experiences:

- First Steps regional council meetings are held throughout the state to provide an opportunity for parents to share their experiences and participate in discussions with local members.
- First Steps state council meetings are held in Jefferson City to provide an opportunity for parents to share their experiences and participate in discussions with state members.

Information about the Early Childhood State Advisory Council (ECSAC) and Regional Interagency Coordinating Councils (RICC) is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/childhood/early-intervention/first-steps/parents>

**For more information, contact your Service Coordinator
or local SPOE office at: 866-583-2392 Ext. 3**

Office of Childhood - Early Intervention

First Steps 2023 Highlights

Provider Rate Increase

\$9.3M

House Bill 3002 (2022), which is the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's budget bill, included an additional \$9.3 million in general revenue funds for the Office of Childhood's First Steps Early Intervention program. These additional funds were used for a First Steps provider rate increase effective July 1, 2022.

Missouri American Academy of Pediatrics (MOAAP)

Initiated quarterly stakeholder meetings with MOAAP to assist with referrals to First Steps from the physicians throughout Missouri.

New Provider Service Types

In conjunction with the Part C State Plan updates, the state created new provider types of Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA), Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) to better represent the licensed and certified professionals providing behavior services across the state.

WebSPOE Update

Updated the First Steps data system, known as WebSPOE, with a Child Library that allows for documents to be maintained in a secured, electronic format. This update will allow the program to move to a paperless filing system.

Update to First Steps Regulations

Part C State Plan

In January 2023 the State Board of Education approved updates to the Part C State Plan, including changes to eligibility criteria for newborn and diagnosed condition(s) to allow greater access to the program and remove administrative burden for children typically found eligible for the program.

Established a New First Steps Provider Cohort

First Steps providers across Missouri applied and were selected as stakeholders to assist the state with program improvement initiatives for 2023-24.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funds

Utilized American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to provide in-person trainings to First Steps providers and SPOE staff across the state in the summer of 2023. These trainings were related to social-emotional development and building protective factors for families.

New First Steps Training Page

Created a new First Steps training page for easy access to DESE offered trainings and webinars, on-demand trainings, and national trainings.

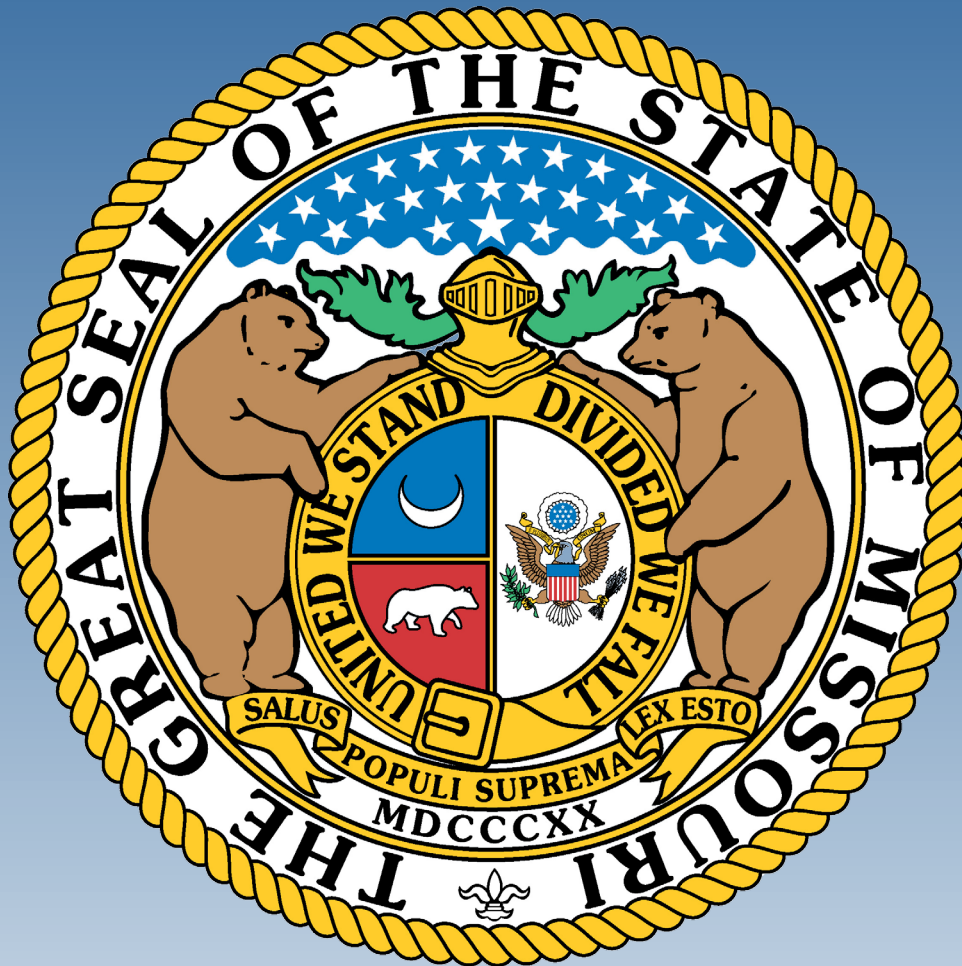
Additional Highlights

- ▶ Added information on developmental milestones to the First Steps Parents page to promote developmental milestones information for families so they can be an advocate for their child's development.
- ▶ Increased provider professional development requirements to promote preparation and training of First Steps providers.
- ▶ Worked collaboratively on quality initiatives to support Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) in partnership with state Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) - Part B staff and stakeholders to provide consistent ECO procedures for children who transition from First Steps to ECSE.
- ▶ Updated and combined the Family Assessment Interview and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Observation tool to assist the field with gathering information on best practices.
- ▶ Collaborated with other Office of Childhood Home Visiting programs, Community Leaders and Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) to streamline connections and promote child find and public awareness across the state.



Missouri First steps

EARLY INTERVENTION



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