ARIZONA · AZEIP TO PRESCHOOL · FOR FAMILIES

Turning Three with Hearing Loss

A step by step map of the Arizona transition from early intervention to preschool: the transition planning meeting, the audiology window, the transition conference, the evaluation, the eligibility meeting, and the IEP.

Written for families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing moving from the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) to public preschool special education. Current as of September 2026.

Your child has been receiving early intervention through AzEIP. Somewhere around their second birthday and a half, a process begins that ends on their third birthday with a completely different set of services from a completely different agency. This guide walks that process one stage at a time.

It is written specifically for children with hearing loss. The general transition materials are useful, but they are written for every disability at once, and they leave out the things that matter most here: when to get the audiogram, who in the district actually knows anything about hearing loss, and what a good evaluation of a deaf or hard of hearing three year old looks like.

What this guide is, and what it is not

This guide is the map. It covers each stage of the transition, in order, and what to do at each one.

It does not cover what to do if your child is found not eligible. That is a separate situation that needs its own material, and it has it: ask for our guide on preschool eligibility, which covers what the district has to prove, the reasons districts give for saying no, and the formal ways to disagree. Keeping the two apart means you are not reading about a fight you may never have.

It does cover placement, including what to do if you would rather not use the district preschool, because that decision comes up whether or not eligibility is contested.

This guide is general information, not legal advice, and not a substitute for advice about your individual child.

The whole process on one page

When	Stage	What you should be doing
Any time before 2 years 6 months	**Stage 1** Getting ready	Gather records. Start a listening log. Learn what your district offers.
By 2 years 6 months	**Stage 2** Transition Planning Meeting	Attend. Do not opt out of district notification. Ask for your records to be shared.
The three months in between	**Stage 3** The audiology window	**Book and complete a full audiological evaluation.** Send it to the district.
Before 2 years 9 months	**Stage 4** Transition Conference	Meet the district. Ask what they will evaluate and who will do it.
After the conference, 60 days from consent	**Stage 5** Consent and evaluation	Sign consent with your requests attached. Make sure hearing specific areas are assessed.
Before the third birthday	**Stage 6** Eligibility meeting	Read the MET report. Ask which categories were considered.
On the third birthday	**Stage 7** The IEP meeting	If eligible, the IEP must be written and in effect that day. Placement is decided here, after the goals.

1. Before the Transition Planning Meeting

Nothing formally requires you to do anything yet. This is exactly why it is the easiest stage to use well. Everything you assemble now saves weeks later.

Gather the records

- [ ] Every audiogram your child has had, in date order.
- [ ] The audiologist's reports, not just the graphs.
- [ ] Hearing aid or cochlear implant fitting records, and any datalogging reports showing wear time.
- [ ] Newborn hearing screening results and any diagnostic follow up.
- [ ] Relevant medical records: ENT notes, imaging, genetics if you have had it, and any history of ear infections or surgeries.
- [ ] Your current IFSP and every previous one.
- [ ] Progress notes from your early intervention providers, especially your teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing or speech language pathologist.

Start a listening log

Two or three entries a week is plenty. Date each one and be specific about the conditions. The point is to capture what your child does in real listening situations, which is the one thing no professional will see and no test will measure.

> **What a useful entry looks like**
>
> *9/3, park, late afternoon.* Did not respond to name four times when other children were nearby. Turned immediately when I moved to within a metre.
>
> *9/7, dinner, four people talking.* Stopped joining in after a few minutes, watched faces instead of talking. Fine again one to one afterward.
>
> *9/11, car.* Could not follow conversation from the front seat with the road noise. Repeated everything twice.
>
> Compare that with "struggles in noise," which is an opinion. The dated, specific version is evidence, and it goes in the file.

Find out what your district actually offers

See section 8. Knowing whether your district has its own teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, or works with the ASDB cooperative, or neither, tells you a great deal about what the next six months will look like.

2. The Transition Planning Meeting

By the time your child is 2 years 6 months. This is a meeting with you and your AzEIP service coordinator, and it is part of your IFSP. It is the smaller and quieter of the two transition meetings, and it is where the process formally begins.

What happens

- You review your child's current development.
- You discuss their needs and how they learn.
- You raise any concerns.
- You identify possible options for services after age three.

The one thing not to get wrong: do not opt out

At this meeting your service coordinator will share your child's information with the local school district **unless you opt out, and the opt out closes at the end of this meeting.**

Families sometimes opt out because they are unsure about public preschool, or because they plan to stay private, not realizing that opting out also means the district is never told your child exists. No notification means no transition conference, no evaluation, and no IEP. You can always decline services later. Recovering the lost months is much harder.

Say clearly at this meeting that you want your information shared with the district.

What to do here

1. Confirm out loud, and ask to have it noted, that you are **not** opting out of district notification.
2. Ask that your audiological records, IFSP, and provider progress notes be included in what is shared. Sharing usually requires a written consent to share, so ask what you need to sign.
3. Say plainly that your child has a hearing loss and that you expect the district to involve someone with training in deaf education. Saying it this early, and having it recorded, is worth more than saying it later.
4. Ask who the district contact will be and when the Transition Conference will be scheduled.
5. Ask your service coordinator what they know about how your district serves children who are deaf or hard of hearing. They have usually dealt with your district before.

3. The audiology window

The roughly three months between the Transition Planning Meeting and the Transition Conference. No rule tells you to do anything in this window. For a child with hearing loss it is the most valuable stretch of the entire process, and almost nobody tells families to use it.

> **Book a full audiological evaluation now, so the report exists before the Transition Conference**
>
> **Why this window and not later:**
>
> - **The Transition Conference is where the district explains what it plans to evaluate.** A current audiogram on the table changes that conversation. Without one, the district is scoping an evaluation for a child it knows almost nothing about, and what it scopes is usually a general preschool battery.
> - **Type and degree are what the eligibility category turns on.** Arizona defines hearing impairment as a loss of hearing acuity established by evaluation. A line in a file saying "hearing loss" is far weaker than a current report naming the type, sensorineural or conductive or mixed, and the degree, mild through profound, *in each ear separately*.
> - **Hearing changes.** Some losses are progressive, some fluctuate, and middle ear problems come and go. A report from infancy may not describe the child who is about to be evaluated.
> - **Pediatric audiology books out.** Appointments are often scheduled weeks or months ahead. Calling at the time of the Transition Planning Meeting is what makes a report by the Transition Conference realistic at all.

What to ask the audiologist to include

- [ ] Unaided thresholds for each ear.
- [ ] The type of loss and the degree, stated in words as well as on the graph.
- [ ] The configuration, meaning the shape of the loss across pitches.
- [ ] Aided results, if your child wears hearing aids or cochlear implants.
- [ ] Speech detection and, if your child is able, speech recognition.
- [ ] Middle ear testing, since fluid can change the picture temporarily.
- [ ] **A short statement about what this means for listening in a preschool classroom.** Ask for this specifically. It is often the single most valuable sentence in the report, because it translates numbers into the language the school team actually needs.

Then send it

Email the report to the district special education office and to your service coordinator. Ask them to confirm they received it. Keep the confirmation. A record that arrives by email on a dated message cannot later be described as something the team never had.

4. The Transition Conference

Before your child is 2 years 9 months. This is the larger meeting. Your AzEIP team, the school district, and any other programs identified at the planning meeting. Your service coordinator arranges it and sends the invitations.

What happens

- You discuss options for your child, including district preschool and community programs.
- You discuss the differences between AzEIP and preschool services.
- You discuss your child's and family's rights.
- **The district explains the evaluation process, how eligibility is determined, and the timelines.**

That last line is the reason this meeting matters so much. The district is describing the evaluation it intends to carry out. This is the moment when what gets assessed is still an open question, and it is far easier to add something now than to argue about its absence afterward.

What to ask here

1. Did you receive the audiological report we sent? Is it in the file?
2. What areas do you plan to assess, and with what?
3. Will the evaluation include functional listening, meaning how my child does at distance, in background noise, and in a group?
4. Will someone observe my child in a setting with other children?
5. Who will conduct each part of the evaluation, and what is their training in deaf education?
6. Will a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing be part of the evaluation team, and part of the eligibility meeting?
7. Which disability categories will the team consider?
8. When will I receive the consent form, and when will the evaluation be complete?

Take notes, or bring someone who can. If an answer is vague, ask for it in writing afterward by email, which is a polite and entirely normal thing to do.

5. Consent and the evaluation

The district cannot evaluate your child without your written consent. Once you give it, Arizona generally requires the evaluation to be completed within **60 calendar days**. Because the IEP has to be in effect on the third birthday, the district usually has less time than that in practice.

> **Consent is the leverage point**
>
> Signing consent is the last moment when the shape of the evaluation is still open. You can sign it *and* hand over a short letter at the same time saying what you want assessed. A request made before the evaluation costs the district very little to honor. The same request made afterward means redoing work, and it gets resisted.

What a good evaluation of a three year old with hearing loss includes

Arizona requires only two things for the hearing impairment category: an audiological evaluation by a qualified audiologist, and an evaluation of communication and language proficiency. That is the floor. A complete picture of a preschooler with hearing loss covers more.

Area	What it tells the team
Audiological status	Type, degree, and configuration of the loss in each ear, and how well the devices restore access. The starting fact for everything else.
Functional listening	How your child does at distance, in background noise, and with several people talking. **The piece most often left out, and the one that speaks most directly to a classroom.**
Receptive and expressive language	What language your child has, in every language and mode they use. Note what it does not show: whether they can access language across a noisy room.
Speech production	How intelligible your child is, and whether the sounds they get wrong are the ones they cannot hear well.
Listening skills	Where your child sits on the path from detecting sound, to telling sounds apart, to identifying them, to understanding them.
Thinking and development	Ideally measured in ways that do not depend on spoken language. A test that leans on language will underestimate a deaf child and can send the team toward the wrong conclusion entirely.
Social and emotional	How your child gets on with other children, joins play, and handles group settings.
Device use	Wear time, whether your child tolerates the devices, and whether they can tell someone when something is wrong.
Observation	Your child watched in a real group setting, with the date, place, length, and observer written down.
What you report	Your listening log and your answers about how your child does across a whole day, in every setting. This is required information, not a courtesy.

If there is more than the hearing loss

The evaluation is **not limited to the hearing loss.** Federal law requires the district to assess your child in every area related to any suspected disability, and to make the evaluation broad enough to identify all of your child's needs, whether or not those needs are the ones normally associated with hearing loss.

So if your child has another diagnosis, or if you or your early intervention providers have concerns beyond hearing, say so **before you sign consent** and ask in writing that those areas be assessed too. Things families raise at this point include:

- Motor development, balance, and coordination. Balance differences are common with some kinds of hearing loss.
- Vision. See below, because this one matters more than most families are told.
- Feeding, swallowing, or oral motor concerns.
- Attention, regulation, sensory responses, or behavior.
- Social communication and play, including any question about autism.
- Genetic or medical syndromes already diagnosed, and what else is known to travel with them.
- General development, if your child seems behind in areas that have nothing to do with hearing.

A concern you raise now costs the district very little to add. The same concern raised after the evaluation is finished means redoing work, and it gets resisted. This is the cheapest moment you will ever have to ask.

Vision, and children who are deafblind

Ask for vision to be checked for any child with hearing loss. There are two reasons, and both are easy to miss.

First, some causes of hearing loss also affect vision, either at birth or later on. Second, and more immediately: a child with hearing loss is already leaning on vision harder than a hearing child does, for faces, for speechreading, for signs, and for watching what other children do. Even a mild, ordinary vision problem takes away part of the access your child is relying on to compensate. A vision screening is quick, and it is worth insisting on.

> ### What deafblind actually means
>
> It does not mean a child who is totally deaf and totally blind. **Deaf-Blindness** is a federal disability category on its own, and it covers a child with both hearing and vision loss where the *combination* creates needs that cannot be met by a program designed for deaf children alone or for blind children alone. A child with a moderate hearing loss and a moderate vision loss can meet it.
>
> It is worth knowing that federal law treats this as its own category rather than folding it into "multiple disabilities," which specifically excludes it. That is a deliberate recognition that combined sensory loss is different in kind, not just two things at once.
>
> If both senses are involved, say the word *deafblind* at the meeting and ask whether the team is considering that category. Teams sometimes default to whichever loss was identified first.

In Maricopa County, the **Foundation for Blind Children** is the main specialist provider for children who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind, and for preschool age children it is a placement option in its own right. See section 8. If both senses are involved, raise it early, because a team focused on the hearing loss alone will not necessarily think of it.

A SHORT LETTER TO ATTACH TO THE CONSENT FORM

Dear *[Special Education Director]*,

I am providing consent for the evaluation of my child, *[name, date of birth]*, who has a documented bilateral hearing loss. I am requesting that the evaluation include the following, and that any item not included be explained to me in writing:

1. Review of the current audiological evaluation already provided to the district.
2. An evaluation of communication and language proficiency.
3. An assessment of functional listening, including listening in background noise, at distance, and in a group.
4. Observation of my child in a group setting with other children, with the date, setting, duration, and observer recorded.
5. Assessment of thinking and development using measures that do not depend on spoken language.
6. A vision screening or evaluation.
7. Assessment in the following additional areas of concern: *[list them, or write "none at this time"]*.
8. Review of the AzEIP records, including the IFSP and provider progress reports.

I am also requesting that a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing take part in the evaluation and in the eligibility meeting, and I am attaching my written observations of my child's listening in everyday settings for inclusion in the evaluation record.

Sincerely,
[Your name, phone, email, date]

6. The eligibility meeting and the MET report

In Arizona the evaluation report is called the **MET report**, for Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team. The team meets, reviews everything, and decides whether your child qualifies for special education. You are a member of that team.

> **Ask for the report before the meeting**
>
> You are entitled to it. Ask for a copy several days ahead, in writing, so you can read it rather than hear it read aloud. Districts will often agree, and a team that has sent the report in advance tends to run a better meeting.

What is in a MET report

Section	What it should contain
Review of existing data	Everything the team already had before testing anything: your input, previous evaluations, the AzEIP records, the IFSP, provider reports, and the audiological reports. If the AzEIP material is not named here, ask whether the team received it.
Assessments given	Each test or procedure by name, with the date, who gave it, and what their role is.
Results	Scores, and what they mean in plain terms. Ask for confidence intervals, which show the range a score really sits in, and for the detail underneath any summary score.
How the disability shows up for this child	A description of what the hearing loss actually looks like for your child in a learning setting. This has to be specific to your child. Wording that would fit any child with hearing loss is a sign the section was not really written.
Educational needs	What your child needs in order to access instruction.
The three findings	Whether there is a qualifying disability, whether it affects learning, and whether your child needs specially designed instruction. Three separate findings, each supported.
The category	Which disability category, and ideally which categories were considered and set aside.
Who was on the team	Names, roles, and credentials.

Eligibility can be established in more than one area

A child can be found eligible under more than one disability category, and for a child with hearing loss plus something else, this matters in two directions.

It can open a door that is otherwise contested. Districts sometimes argue that a hearing loss alone does not affect a child enough to qualify. Where a child also has a developmental delay, another diagnosis, or a syndrome with known effects, the team may find the child eligible on that basis as well, or instead. Common pairings at preschool age are hearing loss with developmental delay, with a speech or language impairment, with vision loss, or with a diagnosed medical or genetic condition. Being eligible by one route does not make the other route go away, and it should not.

> ### The label does not decide the services
>
> This is the part that gets lost. Whatever category ends up on the form, **the evaluation must identify every need your child has, and the IEP must address them, whether or not a given need is one normally associated with that category.**
>
> So a child found eligible as Developmental Delay still gets goals and services for the hearing loss. A child found eligible as Hearing Impairment still gets goals and services for the motor or social needs the evaluation turned up. If anyone says a need cannot be addressed because it does not match the category, that is not how it works, and it is worth saying so calmly and asking for the reasoning in writing.
>
> Two practical asks: request that *every* category the team considered be recorded in the MET report, and check that the IEP has goals for each area of need the evaluation identified, not only the headline one.

One exception worth knowing. If your child has both hearing and vision loss, the right category is usually Deaf-Blindness, which is its own category. It is not the same as "multiple disabilities," which specifically excludes it. Ask about this directly if it applies.

What to check, and what to ask

1. Compare the assessments given against the table in section 5. What is missing, and why?
2. Which disability categories did the team consider? Was Hearing Impairment considered? Was Deafness?
3. Who on this team has training in deaf and hard of hearing education, and what is their credential?
4. What evidence supports what the report says about how the hearing loss affects my child?
5. Are confidence intervals available for the scores?
6. Where is my input reflected? Ask this if your listening log appears in an appendix but nowhere in the reasoning.
7. Ask for prior written notice of whatever the team decides, including if the answer is yes. It is the district's written explanation, and it is the most useful single document you can hold.

If the answer is not eligible

Stop here and get the separate eligibility guide. It covers what the district is actually required to prove, the five reasons districts most often give and what is wrong with each, your right to an outside evaluation at the district's expense, and the three formal ways to disagree in Arizona. That material is deliberately kept out of this guide so that it is there in full when you need it, and out of the way when you do not.

One thing to know straight away, because it is easy to assume otherwise: a finding of not eligible does **not** close off ESA funding. A preschooler with a diagnosed hearing loss can qualify for an ESA through an evaluation from their doctor, entirely separately from what the district decided. See section 8.

7. The IEP meeting

If your child is found eligible, the IEP has to be **written and already in effect on the third birthday**. Not scheduled. Not started. In effect. Often the eligibility meeting and the IEP meeting run back to back, which is allowed, but you can ask for time between them if you want to read the MET report properly first.

What is in an IEP, and what it should say for a child with hearing loss

Required part	What it should carry for your child
Present levels	Where your child is now: hearing levels in plain terms, how they listen at distance and in noise, language in every language and mode they use, device use and wear time, and how the hearing loss affects taking part in preschool. Everything else is built on this section, so a thin one limits the whole plan.
Annual goals	Measurable goals in the areas hearing loss actually touches: listening skills, listening in noise, managing and speaking up about their devices, language, and playing and communicating with other children. Speech and language goals alone are usually not enough.
How progress is measured	Measures that can actually detect change in listening, and reporting to you at least as often as other families get report cards.
Services and supports	Who provides what, for how many minutes, and whether the time is direct with your child or consultative with the teacher. Audiology is a service in its own right. So is interpreting. Equipment such as a remote microphone system, along with staff training, belongs here.
Time with other children	How much of the day your child spends with children who do not have disabilities, and the reasons for any time apart.
Accommodations	Changes that give your child access, such as seating, lighting for speechreading, visual supports, and checking understanding rather than asking whether they heard.

Dates and details	When services start, how often, where, and for how long. Specific enough that you would notice if a service did not happen.

The hearing specific part the team must also consider

Federal law requires every IEP team, for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, to consider your child's language and communication needs, their opportunities for direct communication with other children and with staff in their own language and mode, their academic level, and their full range of needs including direct instruction in their language and mode.

> **Ask for this to be written down, not ticked**
>
> Arizona does not require a separate communication plan document, and many Arizona IEP forms handle the requirement above with a single checkbox. A checked box shows the question was reached. It shows nothing about what the team decided, and it gives you nothing to point to later if a service gets thinned out.
>
> Ask that the team's actual thinking on each of those points be written into the present levels or the meeting notes. It is a small request, teams usually agree to it on the spot, and it is worth a great deal a year from now.

Where your child will go

Placement is decided at this meeting too, and it is decided *after* the goals, not before. Section 8 covers how that decision is supposed to be made, what options exist, and what to do if you do not want the district's preschool.

Before you sign

- [ ] Read the services page and check that every service has minutes, a frequency, and a provider role attached.
- [ ] Check that "consult" time is separated from time with your child.
- [ ] Check that the goals cover listening, not only speech and language.
- [ ] Ask who is responsible for checking the hearing devices each day, and confirm it is written down.
- [ ] Ask what happens when the provider is absent.
- [ ] Remember that the first IEP is not permanent. You can request a meeting in writing at any time.

8. Placement: where your child goes, and who provides the service

Two different questions get tangled together here. **Placement** is where your child spends the day. **Service delivery** is who provides the specialized help and how. A district can be strong on one and weak on the other.

How placement is decided

The order matters, and it is the thing most often done backward.

> **Goals first, then placement**
>
> Placement is decided **after** the IEP goals are written, and it is based on them. The team works out what your child needs to learn, then asks where that can happen. A team that opens the conversation with "we have a spot in the developmental preschool" has reversed the order, and you can say so: *"Could we finish the goals first, and then talk about where they can be delivered?"*

The rules the team is working under:

- Placement is decided by a group that **includes you**, and it is reviewed at least once a year.
- Your child should be with children who do not have disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate for them.
- Placement should be as close to home as possible, and in the school your child would attend if they did not have a disability, unless the IEP requires something else.
- The team must consider any potential harmful effect of a placement on your child or on the quality of the services they need.
- A child cannot be removed from an age appropriate regular classroom *solely* because the curriculum would need modifying.
- The district must have a **range** of options available, not one program that every child is fitted into.

> **If your district does not run a preschool**
>
> Many Arizona districts do not operate a general preschool at all, and some try to use that as the end of the discussion. It is not. Federal guidance is explicit that a district without its own preschool must still look at other ways to meet the requirement, including placing children in programs run by other public agencies such as Head Start or community child care, or enrolling them in private preschools. And where a private preschool placement is what the child needs in order to receive services in the least restrictive environment, **it is provided at no cost to you.**
>
> "We do not have a preschool" is a description of the district's current programs. It is not an answer to what your child needs.

The options that exist

Option	What it looks like
District developmental preschool	The district's own early childhood special education classroom. In Arizona these are often **integrated**, meaning children with IEPs learn alongside typically developing children whose families usually pay tuition for the place. Specialized services are delivered either *push in*, with the provider working with your child inside the classroom, or *pull out*, with your child taken to another room for a session.
District general preschool with itinerant support	Your child attends a regular preschool class and a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing visits on a schedule to work with them, with the staff, or both.
Head Start or Early Head Start	Community based, income eligible, and required to reserve at least ten percent of its enrollment for children with disabilities. District services can be delivered there.
Community or private preschool	A program you choose, with district services delivered on site. Where this is what the child needs for services in the least restrictive environment, the district bears the cost.
Phoenix Day School for the Deaf	ASDB's Phoenix campus. Center based, with deaf and hard of hearing peers and staff who sign, and satellite preschools in the Phoenix metro area. The most concentrated option for language access and peers, and usually the furthest from home.
Desert Voices	A private listening and spoken language program in Phoenix, working with children from a few weeks old through about age five or six, with a preschool classroom. **Desert Voices accepts district placement**, so it can be written into an IEP as the placement. It does **not** accept ESA funds, and uses other funding sources instead, so ask them about cost directly.
Foundation for Blind Children	Phoenix based, and the main specialist provider in Maricopa County for children who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. The natural option to ask about if your child has both hearing and vision loss.
Private therapy alongside any of the above	Auditory verbal therapy, family coaching, itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing services, and IEP consultation, purchased privately. Hear Talk Grow provides these, and they are designed to sit alongside a school placement rather than replace it. Self pay and ESA are both accepted.

No option on this list is better than the others in the abstract. The right one depends on your child's language, their communication mode, how much access they get in noise, whether they have peers who communicate the way they do, and how far you are willing to drive. A quiet, well staffed classroom close to home can beat a specialized program an hour away, and the reverse is also true.

Who provides the specialized service

Whatever the placement, the specialized help comes from one of three arrangements.

1. An ASDB regional cooperative. ASDB runs five regional cooperatives. These are voluntary partnerships between a district and ASDB, and the district pays to belong. ASDB staff come into the district's own schools and provide

specialized teaching, staff training, equipment, audiological support, and assessment. Because membership is voluntary and costs money, not every district belongs, and two neighboring districts can offer very different things.

Only the school district can make the referral to ASDB

This one catches families out, and it is worth knowing before you spend a week on phone calls.

You cannot refer your own child. Services through the cooperative are requested by the school district, under its cooperative contract, using a form the district submits to ASDB. There is no other way in. A parent cannot submit it. An outside provider cannot submit it. Calling ASDB yourself and describing your child will not start anything, however reasonable that seems.

So the obligation sits squarely with the district. **It is the district's job to tell ASDB that there is a child in its schools who needs to be evaluated and served.** If that referral is never submitted, ASDB does not know your child exists and nothing happens. Nobody has refused anything. The form was simply never sent.

What to do with that:

- Ask directly, and in writing: *"Has the district submitted the ASDB referral for my child, and on what date?"*
- If the answer is no, or vague, ask when it will be submitted and ask to be told once it has been.
- You *can* still call ASDB to ask whether your district holds a cooperative contract. That is a question about the district, and they will answer it. What you cannot do is refer your child yourself.

2. A teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing on the district's own staff. That person is on staff and part of the team by default. What to check is capacity: caseload size, how many campuses they cover, and whether they serve preschool or only kindergarten and up.

3. A center based program, where the specialized staff and the placement are the same thing, as at Phoenix Day School for the Deaf.

Maricopa County districts that work with the ASDB cooperative

These districts and charter holders rely on the ASDB cooperative rather than running their own preschool program for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, grouped by AzEIP region. **If your district is not on this list,** it most likely provides its own services with a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing on staff, as most of the large Maricopa districts do. Confirm rather than assume.

AzEIP region	District or charter holder
Region 2	Cave Creek Unified. Fountain Hills Unified. Ball Charter Schools (Hearn).
Region 3	Cartwright Elementary. Glendale Elementary. Litchfield Elementary. Palo Verde Elementary. Saddle Mountain Unified.
Region 4a	Alhambra Elementary. Osborn Elementary. Arizona Autism Charter Schools. Arizona Agribusiness and Equine Center, Mesa.

Region 4b	Isaac Elementary. Murphy Elementary. Phoenix Elementary. Roosevelt Elementary. Friendly House.
Region 5	Balsz Elementary. Creighton Elementary. Madison Elementary. Tempe Elementary. Wilson Elementary. Noah Webster Schools, Pima.
Region 6	Avondale Elementary. Buckeye Elementary. Fowler Elementary. Liberty Elementary. Littleton Elementary. Pendergast Elementary. Riverside Elementary. Tolleson Elementary. Union Elementary. Agua Fria Union High School District. Buckeye Union High School District. The Odyssey Preparatory Academy.
Region 9	Leman Academy of Excellence. Noah Webster Schools, Mesa.

Arrangements between districts and ASDB are voluntary and can change from year to year. Treat this as a starting point and confirm with your district. The Foundation for Blind Children also works with the cooperative and is not tied to a single region.

Two things that trip families up

For preschool, the elementary district is usually the one that matters. Many parts of Maricopa County are served by a separate elementary district and union high school district. Union high school districts run grades nine through twelve and do not provide preschool. If your address falls in one of those, look to the elementary district.

Many charter schools do not offer preschool at all. A number of charter holders serve kindergarten and up only. If your child attends or is enrolled at a charter, ask whether it provides preschool special education, and if not, ask which public education agency is responsible for evaluating your child.

If you do not want the district preschool

Being found eligible is an **offer, not an obligation.** You do not have to accept the placement, and you do not have to accept services at all. Families decline for all sorts of reasons: the program is not a good fit for their child's communication, the drive is impossible, they had already chosen a private program, or they intend to homeschool.

What you can do instead:

- Accept eligibility and the IEP but negotiate a different placement, using everything in this section.
- Accept some services and decline others. Consent is not all or nothing.
- Decline services and enroll privately, paying yourself.
- Use an **Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA)** to fund private school, therapy, materials, or homeschooling.

About the ESA, including the part that is easy to miss

Arizona's ESA program lets families take state funds to spend on approved education expenses instead of attending a public school. Preschool age children with disabilities are eligible, and the age rule is that your child must be **two years nine months old** at the time of application. The requirement that a student first attend public school for 100 days does not apply to preschoolers.

There are two ways a preschooler can qualify, and this matters a great deal

Route one, through the school district. A current MET or evaluation, IEP, or 504 plan from an Arizona public school.

Route two, through your doctor. An educational evaluation from a **qualified examiner**, which Arizona defines as a licensed physician (MD or DO), a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. A copy of that examiner's current license goes in with the application.

So a child with a diagnosed hearing loss **can reach ESA funds through their doctor even if the district finds them not eligible, and even if you never pursue district eligibility at all.** This is worth knowing before you walk into an eligibility meeting, because it means a district saying no does not close off every option.

One caution. The amount awarded can differ depending on which route establishes eligibility. Before deciding between them, ask ADE's ESA team what your child's award would actually be under each, because the difference can be substantial and it is not published in a way that is easy to work out on your own.

Both routes are real, and they are not equivalent. Route one takes longer and puts you through a district evaluation, but it is also the route that establishes an IEP, keeps your options open, and may carry a different funding amount. Route two is faster and does not depend on the district agreeing with you.

What accepting an ESA costs you, stated plainly

This is a real trade and it deserves to be understood before signing, not after.

When you accept an ESA, **your child's rights under IDEA no longer apply** for as long as you are in the program. Specifically:

- You give up the right to a free appropriate public education from the district.
- A private school is **not** required to follow your child's IEP, and is not required to provide a qualified special education teacher.
- You give up access to the state's dispute resolution processes, meaning mediation and due process hearings.

The protection is not gone forever. **Leaving the ESA program and re-enrolling your child in public school restores those IDEA rights.** But while you are in it, the safety net is not there, so choose the private program on the strength of what it actually delivers rather than on what you could require it to deliver.

None of this is a reason to avoid the ESA, and for many families with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing it funds exactly the specialized program the district cannot offer. It is a reason to know which route you used to qualify, what the award actually is, and what you are trading for it.

9. What to ask about the district's program

These are different from the eligibility questions. They are about whether the program on offer is any good for a child with hearing loss. Ask them at the Transition Conference or at the IEP meeting.

Staffing and expertise

1. Who on staff has training in deaf and hard of hearing education, and what is their credential?
2. Does the district work with the ASDB regional cooperative, and how many hours does that provider spend here?
3. If so, has the district submitted the ASDB referral for my child, and on what date? If not, when will it be submitted?
4. How many children with hearing loss does the district serve at preschool age right now?
5. Who would be my child's case manager, and have they worked with a child with hearing loss before?
6. Does an educational audiologist support this program, and how often are they on site?

How services are delivered

1. Would services be direct, meaning someone works with my child, or consultative, meaning someone advises the teacher? How much of each?
2. How many minutes per week, and is that time in the classroom or pulled out?
3. What happens to those minutes when the provider is absent or the caseload grows?
4. Who would teach listening skills, self advocacy, and device care, and when in the day?

The classroom itself

1. What are the acoustics of the room? Is there carpet, are there soft surfaces, is there an air conditioning unit running through the session?
2. Does the district provide a remote microphone system, and who checks that it works each morning?
3. How many children are in the class, and what is the adult to child ratio?
4. Has the classroom teacher had training on hearing loss? Who provides it and when?
5. How does the teacher get my child's attention before speaking, and what happens during whole group time on the rug?

Communication and language

1. What communication approaches does the district support, and does it support the approach our family uses?
2. If my child uses sign language, who in the building signs, and at what level of fluency?
3. How does the district handle the language my child does not overhear, meaning everything said across the room rather than to their face?
4. Will my child ever be in a room with another child who is deaf or hard of hearing, or with a deaf adult?

Equipment and follow through

1. Who does a daily listening check on the hearing aids or implants, and what happens when a device fails at school?
2. What is the plan for outdoor time, the cafeteria, assemblies, and fire drills?
3. How will progress on listening and language be measured and reported to me, and how often?

> **What the answers are telling you**
>
> Specific answers with names, numbers, and schedules attached are a good sign. Answers shaped like "we would look at that" or "it depends on the child" to every single question usually mean the district has not served many children like yours. That is not necessarily a reason to walk away, but it is a reason to be more specific in the IEP, get more in writing, and check in sooner.

10. Checklist

- [ ] Records gathered: audiograms, audiologist reports, device records, IFSPs, provider notes.
- [ ] Listening log started.
- [ ] Transition Planning Meeting attended, and district notification **not** opted out of.
- [ ] Consent to share records signed.
- [ ] Audiology appointment booked.
- [ ] Audiological evaluation completed.
- [ ] Report emailed to the district, receipt confirmed.
- [ ] Transition Conference attended, questions asked and answers noted.
- [ ] Consent to evaluate signed, with the request letter attached.
- [ ] Any other diagnoses or concerns raised in writing before consent.
- [ ] Vision screening requested.
- [ ] MET report requested in advance of the eligibility meeting.
- [ ] Eligibility meeting attended, every category considered confirmed on the record.
- [ ] IEP checked for goals covering every area of need, not only the hearing loss.
- [ ] Prior written notice requested, whatever the decision.
- [ ] IEP written and in effect on the third birthday.
- [ ] Services page checked for minutes, frequency, and provider.
- [ ] Daily device check written into the IEP.
- [ ] Placement discussed after the goals were written, not before.
- [ ] If the district works with the ASDB cooperative, the referral confirmed as submitted, with a date.

- [ ] If considering an ESA, the trade off understood before signing anything.

11. Words you will hear

AzEIP

Arizona Early Intervention Program. Serves children from birth to three under Part C of IDEA, through the Department of Economic Security.

Part C and Part B

The two halves of the federal special education law. Part C is birth to three. Part B is age three through twenty one and is run by school districts.

IFSP

Individualized Family Service Plan. The plan under AzEIP. It is built around the family as well as the child.

IEP

Individualized Education Program. The plan from age three onward. It is built around the child at school.

TPM

Transition Planning Meeting. The first transition meeting, by 2 years 6 months, with you and your service coordinator, as part of the IFSP.

Transition Conference

The second transition meeting, before 2 years 9 months, with the school district and other programs present.

PEA

Public Education Agency. The district or charter holder responsible for your child.

MET

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team, and the name of the evaluation report it produces.

Prior written notice

The district's written explanation of anything it proposes or refuses, including why, what it relied on, and what other options it considered and rejected.

Specially designed instruction

Teaching that is adapted in its content, its method, or the way it is delivered. It is what makes something special education rather than an accommodation.

Related services

Support services that help a child benefit from special education. Audiology and interpreting are both related services.

TODHH

Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. A teacher with specific training in deaf education, which is a different qualification from speech language pathology.

ASDB

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. Runs two campuses, satellite preschools in the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas, and five regional cooperatives that partner with school districts.

Deaf-Blindness

A federal disability category in its own right, for a child with both hearing and vision loss whose combination creates needs that a program for deaf children alone, or blind children alone, cannot meet. It does not mean total deafness and total blindness.

Push in and pull out

Two ways of delivering a service. Push in means the provider works with your child inside the classroom. Pull out means your child leaves the room for a session.

Placement

Where your child receives their education. Decided by the team after the IEP goals are written, not before.

ESA

Empowerment Scholarship Account. Arizona state funds a family can use for private school, therapy, materials, or homeschooling instead of public school. A preschooler can qualify either through school district documentation or through an evaluation from a qualified examiner. Accepting one sets aside your child's IDEA rights for as long as you are in the program.

Qualified examiner

For ESA purposes, a licensed physician (MD or DO), psychologist, or psychiatrist whose educational evaluation Arizona will accept in place of school district documentation.

FBC

Foundation for Blind Children. Phoenix based, and the main specialist provider in Maricopa County for children who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind.

FAPE

Free Appropriate Public Education. What the district owes an eligible child.

LRE

Least Restrictive Environment. The requirement that children be educated with children without disabilities as much as is appropriate for them.

Where this information comes from

The transition process and the two meetings

Arizona Department of Economic Security, *Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) Transition Guide for Families: What You Need to Know Before Your Child's Third Birthday* (GCI-1120A), which sets the Transition Planning Meeting by 2 years 6 months, the Transition Conference before 2 years 9 months, the district's role at the conference, and the opt out that closes at the end of the planning meeting. Arizona Department of Economic Security, AzEIP Technical Assistance Bulletin on transition.

Federal transition requirements

34 CFR 303.209, requiring the early intervention lead agency to notify the school district and the state "not fewer than 90 days before the third birthday," and to convene a transition conference "not fewer than 90 days, and, at the discretion of all parties, not more than 9 months" before the third birthday. 34 CFR 300.124 and 300.101(b), requiring an IEP to be developed and in effect by the third birthday. 34 CFR 300.323(c)(1), IEP within 30 days of a determination of need. Arizona Department of Education, Policy and Procedures for Early Childhood Special Education Transition.

Placement and least restrictive environment

34 CFR 300.114, least restrictive environment. 34 CFR 300.115, the continuum of alternative placements. 34 CFR 300.116, placement determinations: decided by a group including the parents, at least annually, based on the IEP, as close as possible to home, in the school the child would attend if nondisabled unless the IEP requires otherwise, with consideration of any potential harmful effect, and with no removal from age appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Dear Colleague Letter on preschool least restrictive environment, January 9, 2017, on districts that do not operate their own preschool programs and the use of Head Start, community child care, and private preschools.

Deaf-Blindness and multiple disabilities

34 CFR 300.8(c)(2), deaf-blindness, defined as concomitant hearing and visual impairments the combination of which causes severe communication and other needs. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(7), multiple disabilities, which states expressly that it "does not include deaf-blindness."

Empowerment Scholarship Accounts

Arizona Department of Education, Empowerment Scholarship Account Program Parent Handbook and ESA eligibility requirements, on eligibility for preschool age children with disabilities, the age requirement of two years nine months at application, and the two accepted forms of documentation: a current MET or evaluation, IEP, or 504 plan from an Arizona public school, or an educational evaluation from a qualified examiner, defined by A.R.S. 15-2403(J)(2) as a licensed physician (MD or DO), psychologist, or psychiatrist, submitted with a copy of the examiner's current license. Award amounts depend on several factors including disability status and the district of residence, so confirm the figure with ADE. Disability Rights Arizona, *Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) Program*, on the rights set aside by participating, including that "the child's rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) no longer apply," the loss of the right to a free appropriate public education and to state dispute resolution, the fact that private schools are not obliged to follow an IEP, and that re-enrolling in public school restores IDEA protections.

Programs named in section 8

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, which runs the Phoenix Day School for the Deaf and site based preschools in the Phoenix metro area and Tucson. Foundation for Blind Children, Phoenix, the main specialist provider in Maricopa County for children who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Desert Voices, a listening and spoken language program in Phoenix serving children from a few weeks old through about age five or six, which accepts district placement but not ESA funds. Head Start, which under federal law must reserve at least ten percent of its enrollment for children with disabilities. Hear Talk Grow provides auditory verbal therapy, family coaching, itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing services, and consultation on a self pay or ESA basis.

Eligibility categories and evaluation requirements

A.R.S. 15-761(8), Arizona's definition of hearing impairment. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(3) and (c)(5), the federal definitions of deafness and hearing impairment. A.A.C. R7-2-401(E), which requires an audiological evaluation by a qualified professional and an evaluation of communication and language proficiency. 34 CFR 300.304(c)(4) and (c)(6), assessment in all areas related to the suspected disability and sufficiently comprehensive to identify all needs. A.R.S. 15-766(B), the 60 calendar day evaluation timeline.

The MET report

Arizona Department of Education, *AZ-TAS Evaluation Process*, covering the review of existing data, team composition, the requirement that the description of impact be individualized rather than generic, and the three findings of qualifying disability, impact on learning, and need for specially designed instruction.

IEP content

34 CFR 300.320(a)(1) through (a)(7), the required components. 34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(iv), requiring IEP teams to consider a deaf or hard of hearing child's "language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode." 34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(v), assistive technology. 34 CFR 300.34(c)(1) and (c)(4), audiology and interpreting as related services.

Prior written notice and consent

34 CFR 300.503(b), the elements of prior written notice, including the other options considered and the reasons they were rejected. 34 CFR 300.300(a) and (b), consent for initial evaluation and initial services.

ASDB and the cooperative

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind: two campuses, satellite preschools in the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas, and five regional cooperatives. Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee, ASDB baseline, which describes the cooperatives as serving children in their home districts and funded through special education vouchers, district membership fees, and tuition. The list of Maricopa County districts working with the cooperative was supplied by Hear Talk Grow from its own records and is grouped by AzEIP region.

Hear Talk Grow. Deaf and hard of hearing services, birth through grade 12. heartalkgrow.com

This guide is general information and is not legal advice. It does not create a professional relationship of any kind. Laws, agency addresses, and program details change, and arrangements between districts and ASDB change from year to year. Verify current information with your district and with the Arizona Department of Education before relying on any deadline or list in this guide. Prepared September 2026.