What is the purpose and philosophy of IDEA Part C?

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), called the “Infant and Toddlers with Disabilities Program”, focuses on infant and toddlers (birth to age three) as well as their families. In Section 1431(a) of the IDEA Statute, the following two purposes point to this dual focus:

“Congress finds that there is an urgent and substantial need:

• To enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities, to minimize their potential for developmental delays and to recognize the significant brain development that occurs during the child’s first three years;

• To enhance capacity of families to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers with disabilities.”

When the Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Program was added to the original education statute in 1986, parents, professionals and advocates worked to ensure that crucial basic themes provided the foundation for the legislation. These themes were:

• Infants and young children are viewed as whole persons whose needs must be met by service strategies that cut across the traditional discipline, programmatic and funding categories and boundaries.

• The development of infants and young children can best be fully appreciated, understood and promoted within the context of the family environment.

• Early intervention is most effective when parents are respected and empowered as consumers and as team members collaborating with professionals.

Part C is NOT intended to be a stand-alone program serving this population. The intent of Part C is to build interagency partnerships among existing state agencies in health, education, human services and developmental disabilities. Section 1431 (b) of the statute states, “It is the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to states in order to:

1. Develop and implement a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system that provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers and their families;

2. Facilitate the coordination of payment for early intervention services for Federal, state local and private sources (including public and private insurance coverage);
3. Enhance State capacity to provide quality early intervention services and expand and improve existing early intervention services being provided; and
4. Encourage states to expand opportunities for children less than 3 years of age who would be at risk of having substantial developmental delay if they did not receive services.”