

Supporting Luis

Luis is 6 years old and has just started his kindergarten year in a comprehensive elementary school. He was born in Guatemala at 27 weeks gestation. Shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). Although he currently wears glasses, the glasses do not completely correct the damage incurred by his retinas. He was also diagnosed with cerebral palsy in infancy. Luis was adopted just before his fourth birthday. His adoptive family speaks English at home, but Luis's maternal grandmother, who is originally from Mexico, speaks Spanish when she is with him because "it makes him comfortable."

As soon as Luis moved to the United States, his parents contacted Child Find to request a screening for Luis. A multidisciplinary assessment indicated that Luis met the educational criteria for both visual impairment and orthopedic impairment. It was therefore determined that Luis would receive services under Part B of IDEA based on the qualifying disability code of Multiple Disabilities. Luis attended a public preschool special education program for half days, 5 days per week. He seemed happy in his new program, but his parents remained concerned because he was only speaking single words, and most of what he said was in Spanish. To Luis's parents' dismay, no ESOL services were available at the preschool level. The preschool team assured them that ESOL services would start "as soon as Luis gets to kindergarten."

It's now October of his kindergarten year. Although the special education team has been working hard to make sure he is included in a class of 21 other kindergartners, the family has been told that the ESOL teacher, Mrs. DeVries, is not sure how-to best work with Luis due to his low vision. To complicate matters further, Mrs. DeVries is split between schools and is therefore not available for consult each day. The school team has not completed the reading "benchmarking" that is usually conducted at the very beginning of kindergarten. By law, they know that Luis must be reevaluated again when he turns 7, so the team is growing anxious about that formal testing process as well.

Currently, Luis uses a wheelchair for mobility; however, he is learning to bear weight on his legs and can stand in a prone stander for up to 30 minutes each day. He is also working on what his physical therapist (PT) refers to as "long sitting": sitting on the floor with his legs outstretched in front of him while his back is supported.

Luis's parents recently observed him in his kindergarten classroom. They noted that Luis sat off to the side of the room but close to the teacher, using a tray on his wheelchair as his "desk." The kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Milligan, wants to keep him close due to his visual impairment. During a math activity, when other children worked in pairs to build sets to 10 using Unifix cubes, Mrs. Milligan worked directly with Luis. She feels really good about this particular activity, because the stacking cubes provide a tactile opportunity for Luis to touch each block as they count together. She also knows just enough Spanish to count with him in his native language.