

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

“All young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs, where they are provided with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations.”

~U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, September 2015
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>



Plan: Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), each preschool aged child with a disability has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed by a group of educators and the child’s parent. The team documents the child’s strengths and areas of need, develops yearly goals and plans services that will enable the child to reach their goals. The final step in developing the plan is for the team to determine the type of placement where the child will receive their services. The first consideration is discussion of the supplementary aids, and special education and related services the child would need to be successful in a regular early childhood setting.

Settings: Settings might include programs such as Head Start, State Pre-K, preschool, Title I, Kindergarten, or child care. Consideration should be given to an early childhood program the child is attending. If the plan can be delivered in that setting, it would allow the child to remain with his peers and avoid unnecessary transitions. Only when a child's educational needs cannot be met in an early childhood program should other placement options be considered.



Equal Access: Young children with disabilities have equal access to early care and education programs, as detailed in the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If a child is otherwise eligible to attend a public or private program, the child cannot be denied access based on disability and must be considered for enrollment in the same manner as their peers.



Programs and Services: Children with disabilities may attend publicly funded programs such as Head Start, State Pre-K, Title I, or other inclusive program at no cost to families. If a child attends a publicly funded preschool program, the child’s placement is funded through that entity. Special education and related services are provided through the school system. In addition, Special education funds may be used to provide supports for the child and teachers, including training for those working with the child. If a child’s IEP team decides an inclusive setting is needed, and a public program is not available, the district is responsible for providing the inclusive setting. School districts should work with their community partners to create inclusive opportunities for young children with disabilities.

Inclusion Resources

Federal

U.S. Department of Education Early Learning Website

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/inclusion/index.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education Joint Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs (2015)

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Dear Colleague Letter on Preschool Inclusion (2017)

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/preschool-lre-dcl-1-10-17.pdf>

OSEP Dear Colleague Letter on Preschool Referrals (2016)

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/oseptipreschoolmemo4-29-16.pdf>

Technical Assistance Centers

Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center

ECTA Inclusion page

<https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion>

National Inclusion Webinar (2016)

<https://ectacenter.org/~calls/2016/nationalinclusion.asp>

Inclusion Finance Toolkit (2018)

<https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/funding/funding.asp#preschoolinclusionfinancetoolkit>

ECTA & The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)

National Early Childhood Inclusion Indicators Initiative

<https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp>

NCPMI's Inclusion page

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/inclusion.html>

For more information, visit the ECTA Center's Inclusion page:

[**https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion**](https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion)

The ECTA Center is a program of the FPG Child Development Institute of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, funded through cooperative agreement number H326P170001 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the Department of Education's position or policy. *Project Officer:* Julia Martin Eile


Early Childhood
Technical Assistance Center


Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

 | FRANK PORTER GRAHAM
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE