Federal Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

www.ed.gov/early-learning/inclusion
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• It is the Departments’ position that all young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs where they are provided with appropriate support in meeting high expectations.
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• The importance of early childhood inclusion:
  – Being meaningfully is the first step to equal opportunity, and is every person’s right
  – Research indicates that meaningful inclusion is beneficial to children with and without disabilities
  – Meaningful inclusion in high-quality early childhood programs can support children with disabilities in reaching their full potential resulting in broad societal benefits
  – Inclusion in early childhood programs can set a trajectory for inclusion across the course of an individual's life
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• The need to focus on inclusion in early childhood:
  – Children with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to accessing inclusive early childhood programs
  – Too many preschool children with disabilities receive special education services in settings separate from their peers without disabilities
  – While States have worked to expand access to high-quality early learning programs, there has not been a proportionate expansion of inclusive early learning opportunities for young children with disabilities
The Facts

• Inclusion benefits all children
  – Children can be effectively educated in inclusive programs using specialized instruction
  – Families of all children generally have positive views of inclusion

• Inclusion is not more expensive

• Children do not need to be “ready” for inclusion
The Facts

And Yet…

• **In 27 years**, inclusion has **increased only 5.7%**

• And **many children** continue to be educated in separate settings
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• A “high-quality” early childhood program is one that is inclusive of children with disabilities and their families and ensures that policies, funding, and practices enable their full participation and success
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• The Policy Statement:
  • Sets an expectation for high-quality inclusion in early childhood programs;
  • Highlights the legal and research base for inclusion;
  • Provides recommendations to States and local programs and providers for increasing inclusive early learning opportunities for all children; and
  • Links to free resources for States, local programs and providers, and families that have been developed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in high-quality early education programs.
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**Inclusion in early childhood programs:**

- including children with disabilities in general early childhood programs together with their peers without disabilities;
- holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations; and
- using evidence-based services and supports to foster their development, friendships with peers, and sense of belonging.

This applies to all young children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities.
Parent Centers: Implementing the Policy Statement

• State Recommendations

• Local Recommendations
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• Recommendations for State Action
  1. Create a State-Level Interagency Task Force and Plan for Inclusion
  2. Ensure State Policies are Consistent with High-Quality Inclusion
  3. Track Data on Goals on Inclusion
  4. Review and Modify Resource Allocations
  5. Ensure Quality Rating Frameworks are Inclusive
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• Recommendations for State Action

  6. Strengthen Accountability and Build Incentive Structures

  7. Build a Coordinated Early Childhood Professional Development System

  8. Implement Statewide Supports for Children’s Social Emotional and Behavioral Health

  9. Raise Public Awareness
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• Recommendations for Local Action
  1. Partner with Families
  2. Adhere to Legal Provision of Supports and Services in Inclusive Settings
  3. Assess and Improve the Quality of Inclusion
  4. Review and Modify Resource Allocations
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• Recommendations for Local Action

  5. Enhance Professional Development
  6. Establish an Appropriate Staffing Structure and Strengthen Staff Collaboration
  7. Ensure Access to Specialized Supports
  8. Develop Formal Collaborations with Community Partners
Resources

Initiatives and Opportunities to Support Inclusion

• Federal Public Awareness Campaign with a Joint Policy Statement on Inclusion
• DEC Recommended Practices and Special Initiative on Inclusion
• DEC Recommended Practices
• CONNECT Modules
• http://www2.ed.gov/earlylearning
• OSEP
• ECTA Center
What are the DEC Recommended Practices?
DEC Recommended Practices are a DEC initiative that bridges the gap between research and practice, offering guidance to parents and professionals who work with young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The Recommended Practices were first developed by DEC in 1991 to provide guidance to the relatively new field of early intervention/early childhood special education. In the late 1990s, work was undertaken to revise the initial set of practices and establish the evidence base for the practices through an extensive review of the literature. Through recent collaborative work with the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), the practices have been revised and updated, and a new set of DEC Recommended Practices is now available.

What is the purpose of the DEC Recommended Practices?
The DEC Recommended Practices were developed to provide guidance to practitioners and families about the most effective ways to improve the learning outcomes and promote the development of young children, birth through age 5, who have or are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The purpose is to help bridge the gap between research and practice by highlighting those practices that have been shown to result in better outcomes for young children with disabilities, their families, and the personnel who serve them.

Who uses the DEC Recommended Practices?
The Recommended Practices are intended to be used by individuals working across a variety of early childhood settings providing services to young children who have or at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The updated set of practices consists of eight domains: leadership, assessment, environment, family, instruction, interaction, teaming and collaboration, and transition. It is anticipated that the practices will also be helpful for those engaged in both preservice and in-service professional development.

To reference the DEC Recommended Practices, please use the following citation:
CONNECT Modules

http://connect.fpg.unc.edu/

CONNECT Courses are self-paced and self-guided and designed for professionals who work with or support young children and their families in a variety of learning environments and inclusive settings. Each course (except for the FREE Foundations of Inclusion) is priced at $30 / participant.

**Available Courses**

1. Foundations of Inclusion (FREE)
2. Adaptations that Work (5 clock hours / .5 CEUs)
3. All, Some, and A Few: Tiered Instruction (4 clock hours / .4 CEUs)
4. Better Together: Powerful Family Partnerships (2.5 clock hours / .25 CEUs)
5. Communication for Professional Collaboration (2.5 clock hours / .25 CEUs)
6. Smooth Moves: Program Transitions (5 clock hours / .5 CEUs)
7. Storybook Conversations (4 clock hours / .4 CEUs)
8. Weaving Inclusion Into Everyday Activities (5 clock hours / .5 CEUs)

CONNECT Modules are FREE practice-focused instructional resources for faculty and other professional development providers. CONNECT modules are designed using a 5-Step Learning Cycle ™, an approach for making evidence-based decisions about practice dilemmas, based on the integration of multiple sources of evidence.

Read Factsheet [pdf]

Available Modules (in English and Spanish)
OSEP Early Learning

http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/inclusion/index.html

**Recommendations and Resources For:**

- States
- Local Programs and Providers
- Families

**View the April 14th Inclusion Webinar**

The Department of Education's Office of Early Learning hosted a webinar: “Early Childhood Inclusion: Implementation of the State Recommendations.” The webinar included representatives from Maryland, Vermont and Massachusetts who discussed the implementation of high-quality inclusion programs in their states and how they are supporting local programs.

**Watch the Feb. 18th National Inclusion Webinar**

*Preschool Inclusion: What's the Evidence, What Gets in the Way, and What do High-Quality Programs Look Like?*

Phil Strain from the University of Colorado, Denver, shared an overview of the research supporting early childhood inclusion. [Watch here.](#)

**OSERS Michael Yudin Visits an Inclusive Early Learning Program in Houston, Texas**

"How do we make sure that kids with disabilities get the same kinds of opportunities that kids without disabilities get? The opportunity to learn and develop and thrive alongside their peers in the general curriculum gives them the best foot forward in life."

— OSERS Assistant Secretary Michael Yudin speaking at the Bertha Alyce Early Childhood School.

[Read an article about OSERS Assistant Secretary Michael Yudin's visit to the Bertha Alyce Early Childhood School in Houston, Tex., where he met with teachers, administrators and, of course, students to discuss the importance of early learning, particularly those with high needs.](#)

**Inclusion in Early Childhood Programs—Watch the Webinar Series Kickoff**

The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services hosted a February 11th Google Hangout for a discussion about inclusion in early childhood programs and why it matters to states, early childhood programs, families, and young children with and without disabilities. Speakers included leadership from federal early childhood programs, a local program director, and the parent of a child with a disability.
ECTA Center

http://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/default.asp
Early Childhood Inclusion

Today an ever-increasing number of infants and young children with and without disabilities play, develop, and learn together in a variety of places—homes, early childhood programs, neighborhoods, and other community-based settings. The notion that young children with disabilities and their families are full members of the community reflects societal values about promoting opportunities for development and learning, and a sense of belonging for every child. It also reflects a reaction against previous educational practices of separating and isolating children with disabilities. Over time, in combination with certain regulations and protections under the law, these values and societal views regarding children birth to 5 with disabilities and their families have come to be known as early childhood inclusion.

The most far-reaching effect of federal legislation on inclusion enacted over the past three decades has been to fundamentally change the way in which early childhood services ideally can be organized and delivered. However, because inclusion takes many different forms and implementation is influenced by a wide variety of factors, questions persist about the precise meaning of inclusion and its implications for policy, practice, and potential outcomes for children and families.

The lack of a shared national definition has contributed to misunderstandings about inclusion. DEC and NAEYC recognize that having a common understanding of what inclusion means is fundamentally important for determining what types of practices and supports are necessary to achieve high quality inclusion. This DEC/NAEYC joint position statement offers a definition of early childhood inclusion. The definition was designed not as a litmus test for determining whether a program can be considered inclusive, but rather, as a blueprint for identifying the key components of high quality inclusive programs. In addition, this document offers recommendations for how the position statement should be used by families, practitioners, administrators, policy makers, and others to improve early childhood services.
Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning

HHS/ACF/OHS resources on the ECLKC website include:

• 15 Minute In-Service Suites to support professional development through training materials
• Curriculum modifications
• Embedded learning
• Intensive individualized teaching practices
Classroom Visuals & Supports

The Head Start Center for Inclusion offers a library of visual supports for teachers to use with children in the classroom. Look for illustrations of toys, art materials, daily schedule pictures, problem solving cue cards, and classroom certificates, to name just a few. Each one can be downloaded and printed out for immediate use.

How to Use the Documents

Pictures can increase a child’s understanding and engagement in the classroom. Visual supports can be especially helpful for children with special needs by giving them another way to communicate, instead of relying on verbal communication.

Select the links below to open a list of pictures for Activities, Block Building Ideas, etc. Download and print out the pictures as you would any Word document, in color or black and white.

Tips for Using the Pictures
- Cut out and laminate for durability
- Punch a hole in the corner and keep together on a metal ring for portability
- Put a strip of hook-and-loop tape on the back and keep organized in a binder or folder
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

• Families, early childhood programs, schools, communities, and government at all levels must develop a robust partnership to build a culture of inclusion to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to thrive
We want to partner to build a nationwide culture of inclusion

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www.ed.gov/early-learning/inclusion
HHS and ED Policy Statement on Family Engagement

From the Early Years to the Early Grades

www.ed.gov/early-learning
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd
Policy Statement Purpose

- Align the Frameworks

**PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**
When parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across program foundations and program impact areas, family engagement outcomes are achieved, resulting in children who are healthy and ready for school. Parent and family engagement activities are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families.

*THE CHALLENGE*
- Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

*OPPORTUNITY CONDITIONS*
- Process Conditions
  - Linked to learning
  - Relational
  - Development vs. service orientation
  - Collaborative
  - Interactive
- Organizational Conditions
  - Systemic: across the organization
  - Integrated: embedded in all programs
  - Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

*POLICY AND PROGRAM GOALS*
- To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “4 C” areas:
  - Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
  - Connections (networks)
  - Cognition (beliefs, values)
  - Confidence (self-efficacy)

*FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES*
- School and Program Staff who can
  - Honor and recognize families’ funds of knowledge
  - Connect family engagement to student learning
  - Create welcoming, inviting cultures
- Families who can negotiate multiple roles
  - Supporters
  - Encouragers
  - Monitors
  - Advocates
  - Decision Makers
  - Collaborators

*Effective Family–School Partnerships*
Supporting Student Achievement & School Improvement
Policy Statement Purpose

- Building a common language
- Prioritizing family engagement as an early childhood and educational strategy.
- Providing guidance to the field for implementing high-impact family engagement practices.
Definition of Family Engagement

Family engagement refers to the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including in the planning, development, and evaluation of such activities, programs, and systems.
Policy Statement Research Highlights

• Parenting and Parent Engagement
  • Early parent-child relationships have powerful effects on children’s emotional well-being
  • With parents’ sensitive, responsive, and predictable care, young children develop the skills they need to succeed in life.
  • Supportive and extensive social networks for parents help them create more stimulating home environments for their children, communicate better with their children, and feel more confident in their role as parents.
Parent-School/Provider/Program Relationships

• Strong, positive relationships between families and providers reinforce learning at home and in the community
• Two-way communication and cultural and linguistic responsiveness enable strong, positive relationships
Home-School Connections

Promoting enriching learning activities in the classroom and in the home contributes to children’s learning and development.

Family activities such as reading and talking to young children lead to positive outcomes.

Research to Practice Series
• Family Well-Being Matters

• Family well-being is a strong predictor of children’s school readiness

• Promoting families’ strengths and resilience through comprehensive services and promising practices (such as two-generation approaches) support young children

Research to Practice Series
Principles of Effective Family Engagement

1. Create **continuity and consistency** for children and families.

2. Value **respectful and trusting relationships** between families and professionals.

3. Develop **goal-oriented relationships** with families that are linked to children’s development and learning.

4. Engage families around **children’s health, mental health and social and emotional well-being**.

5. Ensure that all family engagement opportunities are **culturally and linguistically responsive**.
Principles of Effective Family Engagement

6. Build **staff capacity** to implement family engagement practice principles.

7. Support **families’ connections and capabilities**.

8. Systemically **embed effective family engagement strategies** within early childhood systems and programs.

9. Develop **strong relationships with community partners** that support families.

10. Continuously **learn and improve**.
Recommendations to Promote Family Engagement

1. **Plan** for and **prioritize** family engagement.

2. Communicate **consistent messages** that support strong family engagement.

3. **Invest and allocate** resources.

4. Establish **policies, procedures, and practices** that support family engagement.

5. Establish **workforce capacity building** that supports family engagement.

6. Develop and integrate **family engagement data** for continuous improvement in systems and programs.
Early Intervention & Special Education

1. Additional support needs of families with children with disabilities.

2. Intersection of IDEA and family engagement practices

3. Role of parent leadership
What strategies should the Departments use to promote the statement and move the work of family engagement forward?