



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
U.S. Department of Education  
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Students with  
Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

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State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

# Purpose

- To increase the inclusion of infants, toddlers and preschool children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs.
  - Expectation for high-quality inclusion in Early Childhood programs
  - Increasing public understanding
  - Highlighting the legal foundations supporting inclusion
  - Providing recommendations to States
  - Identifying resources to support programming and inclusive practices



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# Inclusive Settings

- Early care and education to children birth through five, where the majority of children in the program are typically developing
  - Child care, publically or privately funded
  - Head Start and Early Head Start
  - Center and Family based programs
  - Public school and community based pre-kindergarten programs
  - Private Preschools



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# Current Challenges

- Families continue to face significant barriers to accessing inclusive high-quality child care settings
  - There has not been a proportional expansion of inclusive early learning opportunities for young children with disabilities
  - Attitudes and beliefs have largely remained unchanged
  - Staff training and expertise in individualizing instruction, promoting social emotional development, and managing challenging behaviors is lacking



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# Benefits of Inclusion

- Friendships with peers
- Sense of belonging
- Greater cognitive and communication development
- Ability to practice skills with peers
- Inclusion in early learning has a greater likelihood to continue into school
- Less absent from school
- Higher test scores
- Higher potential for employment



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# Robust Legal Foundation

- IDEA – services available to all eligible birth through 21
  - Part C – all infants and toddlers in natural environments
  - Part B – related services for ages 3 – 21
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the regular classroom the child would normally attend if he/she did not have a disability
  - Full range of aids and services to support child's placement in classroom
- Free and Appropriate Public Education must be provided regardless of setting



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# Nine Recommendations for State Action

1. Create a state-level interagency taskforce and plan for inclusion
2. Ensure State Policies Support High-quality inclusion classrooms
3. Set Goals and Track Data



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# Nine Recommendations for State Action (cont.)

4. Review and Modify Resource  
Allocations

5. Ensure Quality Rating Frameworks are  
Inclusive

6. Strengthen Accountability and Build  
Incentive Structures



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# Nine Recommendations for State Action (cont.)

7. Build a Coordinated Early Childhood Professional Development (PD) System
8. Implement Statewide Supports for Children's Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health
9. Raise Public Awareness



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# Statewide Task Force on Special Education

- Improve access to high-quality early care and preschool for all students, but especially children with disabilities
- Increase the funding formulas to provide equitable financial support for equitable access
- Program standards that all providers must use and reflect evidence-based developmentally appropriate practice
- Common assessments
- Clear specific competencies



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# Other General Fund for Issues Related to Special Education

- **Preschool and Slots for Children with Exceptional Needs**
  - Budget Act of 2015-16 provides:
    - Additional \$265.0 million for child care and preschool programs which will fund an additional 6,800 child care slots and 7,000 preschool slots.
    - Maintains \$12.1 million for 2,500 slots for part-day preschool with language giving first priority for these slots to state preschool contractors that use the slots to increase access for children with exceptional needs



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# Conclusion

- While expanding access to high-quality early childhood learning experiences, it is imperative children with disabilities be included at the onset of these program efforts
- There is a national vision to have States re-double efforts toward expanding equal access for all as stated in IDEA, Section 504 and the ADA
- Current research supports the idea that inclusion of all children with mild to the most severe disabilities has a positive effect on their peers in general education classrooms



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# Questions

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