

Early Childhood Inclusion:
FOR ALL CHILDREN IN LOUISIANA



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Inclusion Is About All Children.....	2
Benefits of Inclusion.....	3
Top Three Misconceptions About Inclusion ...	3
What Is an Early Childhood Program?	4
Local Community Resources for Parents	5
Terms and Definitions.....	5
What Does the Law Say About Preschool Inclusion?.....	6
References and Resources	7

Introduction

All children, no matter what their physical, cognitive, or emotional level of development, need meaningful opportunities to develop skills, establish a sense of self, and lay a foundation for life-long learning. Early childhood programs provide all children with early learning environments that help them develop cognition, communication skills, social/emotional skills, health and physical skills, creativity, and a style of learning.

Children with disabilities should have the opportunity to attend early childhood programs alongside children without disabilities. All children learning together will foster the potential of every child.



“Inclusion has been a saving grace in my child’s life.”

- Parent

Inclusion Is About ALL Children

The inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs is based on the idea that every child is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences as those children who are non-disabled.

Louisiana is committed to including all preschool children with disabilities in natural environments regardless of the setting.

However, it is not enough for children with disabilities to be present in the early childhood programs, but there must be supports through accommodations and/or modifications to ensure full and active participation of these children with typically developing children.



Early Childhood Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and support.

“Inclusion currently is and will be the answer to my child’s long term classroom success.”

- Parent

Benefits of Inclusion

For Children

- » Promotes the development of friendships because children can play and interact together;
- » Enhances language and communication skills;
- » Helps children learn to understand and accept their own and other similarities and differences; and
- » Develops positive interactions, patience and kindness.

For Teachers

- » Provides teachers with the opportunity to grow by observing variations in learning styles, learning new instructional techniques and broadening their perspective of child development;
- » Builds stronger relationships through communication with parents and others;
- » Learn to appreciate the benefits and importance of inclusion; and
- » Expands the opportunities to discover and develop partnerships with other community resources and agencies.

For Families

- » Increases family participation and connects them with resources in the community;
- » Unites families and provides a support network where they can share many of the same frustrations, concerns, needs, hopes and desires for their children;
- » Allows families the joy of watching their children make friends with a wide variety of children; and
- » Provides families of non-disabled children the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and support for children with disabilities.

For Communities

- » Sends a message to the community that all children are valued and welcome;
- » Helps communities become more accepting and supportive of all people;
- » Leads to more creativity, possibilities and opportunities by having diversity in the community; and
- » Allows for the sharing of resources in the community from various agencies that can benefit all children;



Top Three Misconceptions About Inclusion

1. All children with disabilities require one-to-one care.

Most children with disabilities can participate in an early childhood program without one-to-one assistance. Children with disabilities may require some assistance at times just as any other child may need assistance (such as when eating or toileting).

2. All children with disabilities have challenging behaviors.

Just because a child has a disability does not necessarily mean the child has behavior problems. Just like any other child, some children with a disability may also have some challenging behaviors. This could be a result of frustration by not being able to perform an activity or being unable to communicate.

3. All disabilities are visible.

Some of the disabilities are easily recognized, but some are not as obvious. Children with a disability should not be judged by their diagnosis.

What Is an Early Childhood Program?

According to the federal government, an Early Childhood Program is a program that includes children with disabilities, and the majority of the children in the program are non-disabled children. These programs may include, but are not limited to:

- » Head Start Programs;
- » Kindergartens;
- » Preschool classes offered to an eligible pre-kindergarten population by the public school system;
- » Private kindergartens or preschools; and
- » Group child development centers or child care.

Placement of children with a disability is an IEP team decision. Every child with a disability should be placed in the environment that will best meet the needs of the individual child.



Early Childhood Programs should:

- » Promote learning that is child-centered and active;
- » Provide learning activities on the developmental levels of the children;
- » Have activities that are relevant to the children in the program;
- » Offer a variety of hands-on activities and materials in learning centers.
- » Provide learning experiences that corresponds to the interests of the children; and
- » Include conversations and interactions between the children and adults throughout the day.



Types of Inclusion in the Early Childhood Program:

Dual Enrollment

- » The student is enrolled in a special education program part of the day and in a regular early childhood program for the other half of the day. Classes may be on the same campus or on different campuses.
- » Team Teaching (or Co-Teaching)
- » A regular education preschool teacher and an early intervention teacher teach the children in the early childhood program together throughout the day.

Reverse Mainstreaming

- » An early intervention teacher is the lead teacher in an early childhood program which has children with disabilities and at least 50% of the children are non-disabled.

Itinerant

- » The early intervention teacher works on skills with a child with a disability in the early childhood program (push in) or in another service location (pull out).



Local Community Resources for Parents

- » Local school district (children ages 3-5 years of age)
- » *Families Helping Families*
- » *Child Find*
- » Resource and Referral Agencies
- » *EarlySteps* (children ages birth through 2 years of age)



“Inclusion helps to teach children very important life lessons early in life. It teaches them to value empathy, tolerance and acceptance.”

- Teacher

Terms and Definitions

Access – Providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development

Accommodations – Using a variety of activities, materials, and/or teaching methods to meet the needs of children

DEC – Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

IEP – Individualized Education Plan

Inclusion – The practice of placing children with disabilities into early childhood programs with children who are not disabled, as appropriate, and providing them with the necessary services and supports to enable them to benefit from being there

Modifications – Making alterations or adjustments to teaching aids in order to meet the needs of children

NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children

Natural Environment (least restrictive environment) – A setting in which the child would spend time had he or she not had a disability

Non-Disabled – the children in an early childhood program who do not have a disability and are not on an IEP

Participation – Students engage in play and learning activities with a sense of belonging for every child. Depending on the individual needs and priorities of a child/family, implementing inclusion involves a range of approaches from embedded, routines-based teaching to more explicit interventions to promote learning and participation for all children.

Support – Broader aspects of the system such as professional development, incentives for inclusion, and opportunities for communication and collaboration among families and professionals that assure high quality inclusion

What Does the Law Say About Preschool Inclusion?

“In this world, we will cross people in all walks of life. We must start at an early age teaching our children that different is not strange or scary. Different is beautiful!”

- Parent



I. Part B Sec. 300.114 LRE requirements.

(a) General.

- (1) Except as provided in Sec. 300.324(d)(2) (regarding children with disabilities in adult prisons), the State must have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that public agencies in the State meet the LRE requirements of this section and Sec. 300.115 through 300.120.
- (2) Each public agency must ensure that--
 - (i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled; and
 - (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

(b) Additional requirement--State funding mechanism.

(1) General.

- (i) A State funding mechanism must not result in placements that violate the requirements of paragraph (a) of this section; and
- (ii) A State must not use a funding mechanism by which the State distributes funds on the basis of the type of setting in which a child is served that will result in the failure to provide a child with a disability FAPE according to the unique needs of the child, as described in the child's IEP.

- (2) Assurance. If the State does not have policies and procedures to ensure compliance with paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the State must provide the Secretary an assurance that the State will revise the funding mechanism as soon as feasible to ensure that the mechanism does not result in placements that violate that paragraph.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5))



“Inclusion allows for children of all ability levels to rise to the occasion.”

- Teacher

II. Part B Sec. 300.116 Placements.

In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each public agency must ensure that--

- (a) The placement decision--
 - (1) Is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options; and
 - (2) Is made in conformity with the LRE provisions of this subpart, including Sec. Sec. 300.114 through 300.118;
- (b) The child's placement--
 - (1) Is determined at least annually;
 - (2) Is based on the child's IEP; and
 - (3) Is as close as possible to the child's home;
- (c) Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if non-disabled;
- (d) In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs; and
- (e) A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5))



References and Resources

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- Isbell, C. & Isbell, R. (2005). *The inclusive learning center book for preschool children with special needs*. Beltsville, MD.: Gryphon House, Inc.

“Since inclusion, my child has become a social butterfly. He loves playing with his peers for recess and having lunch with all children in his age range.”

- Parent



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