

Inclusive Practices for Preschoolers

Why?

Inclusive childcare settings benefit children with and without disabilities.

Who benefits from inclusion?

- Children with disabilities and their families
- Children without disabilities and their families
- Early childhood staff, programs, and the community

Early childhood inclusion is defined as,

“The values, policies, and practices that support every young child and his or her family to participate in a variety of activities as members of families, communities, and society.”¹

What is Early Childhood Inclusion for Preschoolers?

Michigan’s Preschool Inclusion Collective Action Plan, states:

“An inclusive system values diversity and equity while creating a dynamic environment for children, families, and professionals. We must strive to ensure that early care and education environments are ready to meet the needs of all children rather than solely expect children to be ready for the environment.”²


1 NAEYC. (2009, April). Early childhood inclusion. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/ps_inclusion_dec_naeyc_ec.pdf

2 NAEYC. (2009, April). Early childhood inclusion. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/ps_inclusion_dec_naeyc_ec.pdf

3 Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (n.d.) Least Restrictive Environment: A Requirement Under IDEA. Retrieved from: Microsoft Word - LRE Position Statement - sign-ons.docx (council-for-learning-disabilities.org)

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 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that:

“Children with disabilities must receive their education alongside peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate, and that children with disabilities should not be removed from general education settings unless their learning is adversely affected ³.”

Michigan Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services include special instruction and related services provided to young children, ages 3 through 5, who qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, Part B, Section 619). Through its 56 Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), Michigan’s ECSE program offers a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all eligible children at no cost to



their families, and in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE means that young children with disabilities should get services in the same community-based preschool settings and programs as other children as much as possible.

Recognizing and Implementing Inclusive Practices for Preschoolers

Inclusive practices help all children learn and grow together. Meaningful inclusion requires access, participation and support.

Access: In full inclusion, all children have access to a wide range of learning opportunities and activities. Environments are adapted as needed to meet the unique needs of all children in the setting.

Participation: When spaces are designed to facilitate access, children may be able to participate and follow along with the daily routine. Some children may need additional accommodations and support to fully participate in play and learning with peers and adults.

Support Children in inclusive classrooms are provided the individual support that they need to thrive. This support can look different ways depending on a child's needs.



Strategies to Support Active Participation and Belonging

There are several strategies you can use to promote participation and belonging and move toward inclusive educational practices.

Intentional Teaching and Support

Intentional teaching and caregiving means that adults act with specific outcomes or goals in mind for children's development and learning. For example, educators may structure daily routines to promote independence by using visual strategies. "First/Then" boards or cue cards help children by organizing the daily schedule of activities and providing concrete support for what's next. This reduces frustration for both the child and teacher.

Support Social and Emotional Growth

Getting to know each child and planning for their strengths and interests is an important part of teaching and caregiving. This includes understanding the wide range of social-emotional skills expressed by children during the preschool years. A big part of their learning is about how to understand and identify their own feelings, and how

to identify and respond to the feelings of others. Giving children the tools to express themselves can help reduce frustration and improve behavior. For example, you can support children to name their feelings, match how they feel to pictures, and express their emotions in safe and appropriate ways.

Design and Follow Consistent Schedules and Routines

Making sure children can fully participate in activities and routines means ensuring that all children know how to participate. Children should know what is expected of them and each step associated with the activity or routine. Some tasks may need to be broken down into smaller steps. You can teach the activities and routines to all children using a posted visual schedule. This lets children know what is expected of them and what is happening next.

Embedded Learning Opportunities

Embedded learning opportunities are another strategy you can use to foster the development of children in your care. Embedded instruction involves multiple, brief teaching interactions between a teacher and child during everyday routines and activities⁴. These interactions include those "teachable moments" that may be planned or occur naturally throughout daily routines, including during play.

Partnering with Families and Professionals

Children thrive when the adults in their lives agree to work together to share information, celebrate successes, and brainstorm strategies to best support the child's learning and development. Partners may include families, early interventionists, direct service providers (e.g., occupational therapists, physical therapists), and other colleagues in your workplace setting. For example, a family should be encouraged to share caregiving preferences, routines, and cultural information so educators can incorporate these practices into the child's school day. Similarly, specialists working with children should partner with families and educators to promote a team approach to focused interventions.

Some useful collaboration strategies include:

- **Engaging in practices that promote a collaborative planning effort.** Families are your greatest resource in getting to know and supporting their child.

⁴ https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/decrp/Pg_Ins_EmbeddedInstr_prac_print_2017.pdf



- **Developing an understanding of each family’s culture, background, and routines.** This will help you understand ways you can reflect these values and routines within the classroom environment.
- **Demonstrating respect for all family members.** Regardless of how families’ preferences, backgrounds and cultures differ from your own, it is important to demonstrate respect for their ideas, ways of child rearing, and preferences.

Family-professional partnerships are essential for all children. Working with families requires intentionality and effort to build trust and ensure that families feel valued.



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