



Statewide Parent
Advocacy Network

Empowering families,
professionals, and others
interested in the well-being
and education of children
and youth

In this fact sheet:

What are the
benefits of inclusive
services for
preschoolers with
disabilities?

Why is inclusion
appropriate for
preschoolers
with significant
disabilities?

What type of
supports and
modifications
should be
considered?

Why is preschool
inclusion so
important?

{and more}

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In the last two decades, evidence supporting the benefits of integrated special education services for young children with disabilities has grown. It is therefore vital that parents are able to identify the markers of a high-quality preschool inclusion program and understand their child's rights.

INCLUSION AND PRESCHOOL

What are the benefits of inclusive services for preschoolers with disabilities?

Children with disabilities who are fully included in high-quality classrooms with typically developing peers have been shown to make positive gains across nearly every developmental domain. In addition to academic gains, they are more likely to show positive social and emotional behaviors; develop higher level social skills; engage in more advanced play; develop more advanced communication skills; and generalize skills across settings. There are also long-term benefits. Researchers have found that high expectations can lead children with disabilities to develop more confidence, independence, and a stronger sense of self.

What are the benefits for typically developing children?

Typical children in inclusive classrooms have shown positive developmental and attitudinal changes from integrated experiences. They may develop more realistic attitudes about children with disabilities, become sensitive to their needs, and learn to appreciate individual differences at an early age.

Is inclusion appropriate for preschoolers with significant disabilities?

There is no evidence that children with particular disabilities or “significant levels” of impairment are poor candidates for integrated programs, given appropriate planning, services, and support. In fact, research shows children with significant disabilities have improved social and academic outcomes when educated in inclusive settings. There have been “no studies conducted since the late 1970’s that have shown an academic advantage for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities educated in separate settings.” (Falvey, 2014)

Does inclusion mean that a preschooler will not have access to individual supports or specialists?

Not at all. In fact, State rules require that each school district assure a student’s IEP can be implemented in an early childhood program with any supplementary aids and services that are specified in the student’s IEP, and that all special education and related services specified in the IEP are provided by appropriately certified and/or licensed personnel or by paraprofessionals.

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Placement Options for Preschool and Early Childhood Inclusion:

State and Federal law require that children with disabilities ages 3-21 receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

- Such settings might include:
- Head Start Programs
- Regular elementary school preschool programs - State rules for local school district preschool programs specify that school districts must ensure the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible.
- A private preschool or kindergarten designed for ALL children.
- A public “preschool disabled” class that is linked with other public programs for typical children, such as Head Start
- An accredited, non-sectarian, non-public school.

Successful preschool inclusion programs...

- Enroll natural proportions of children with disabilities (10-12%) full-time in regular classrooms with same-aged peers.
- Have policies in place to support inclusion.
- Have all children follow the same schedule (i.e., arrival, departure, etc.)
- Schedule regular collaborative meetings to plan to meet the educational needs of all children.
- Share responsibility for all children.
- Integrate related services in the regular classroom routines and activities.
- Facilitate friendships between children with and without disabilities and teaching diversity.
- Share materials and use innovative strategies to teach children side-by-side, even when they are working on different educational goals.
- Use problem-solving to keep all children in the general education early childhood program.

What type of supports and modifications should be considered?

Simply attending a program with typical peers does not mean the program is effective or appropriate. Special education services and supports must also be provided. These include, but are not limited to:

- Curricular or instructional modifications or specialized instructional strategies
- Assistive technology devices and services
- Teacher aides
- Related services
- Integrated therapies
- Consultation services
- In-class resource programs

Q: Why is preschool inclusion so important?

A child’s preschool education placement has a direct impact on future placement. Children who begin their educational services in segregated settings often remain in similar settings for their educational career. Similarly, students who start out receiving their services in inclusive settings are more likely to continue to be included in general education settings moving forward.

Learn More:

Federal rules regarding preschool special education can be found in Part B (CRF 300).

Regulations regarding LRE can be found at 300.114.

New Jersey regulations regarding services for students who are preschool disabled NJAC 6A:13-4.2, 4.3 (d).

Go on line for more information including:

How do I know if my child is truly included?

What are some common barriers and solutions to preschool inclusion?

What are the hallmarks of successful programs?



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