

# Inclusion



## Early Childhood Inclusion for Each and Every Child in Illinois

Inclusion is about each and every child.

Inclusion is the principle that supports the education of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers rather than separately. Both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Sec. 504) require schools and agencies to provide equal education opportunities for children with disabilities. The primary source for the inclusion requirement is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. For preschool and school age children (ages 3-21), IDEA requires that children with disabilities be educated in the “least restrictive environment” (§1412(a)(5) and §1413(a)(1)). For infants and toddlers (ages

0-3) with disabilities, IDEA promotes the use of “natural environments” for early intervention services (§1432(4)(G)).

Inclusion in early childhood programs refers to including children with 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 belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities, from those with mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities.

Center for Language and  
Early Child Development



Illinois State Board of Education

James T. Meeks, Chairman  
Tony Smith, Ph.D., State Superintendent of Education

## Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion

“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 supports.”

Definition from the Joint Position Statement of Inclusion from Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

“Being included at age 3 laid the foundation for success when my son entered kindergarten.”

Parent

## 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 childcare.

## 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 learning activities and materials in learning centers
- Provide learning experiences that correspond to the interest of the children
- Include conversations and interactions between the children and adults throughout the day





## Benefits of High Quality Inclusive Preschool for Each and Every Child

- ★ Research indicates that meaningful inclusion is beneficial to children with and without disabilities across a variety of developmental domains.
- ★ Children with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities and the highest needs, can make significant developmental and learning progress in inclusive settings.
- ★ Children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood programs also demonstrate stronger social-emotional skills than their peers in separate settings.
- ★ Meaningful inclusion in high quality early childhood programs can support children with disabilities in reaching their full potential resulting in broad societal benefits.

US Dept. of Health and Human Services and US Dept. of Education's Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, Full Text, Sept. 14, 2015.



## Defining Features of Inclusion

### 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.



### Participation:

Using a range of instructional approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child.

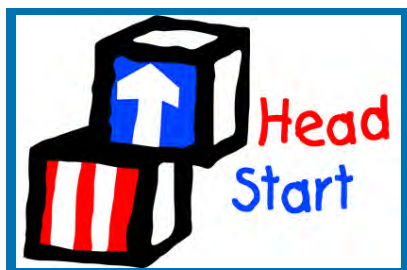
### Supports:

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

From the Joint Position Statement of Inclusion from Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

## Where Can Inclusion Happen for My Child?

Anywhere young children are together! Some common options are:



## How Can My Child Receive Special Education Services in a High Quality Inclusive Environment?

Itinerant	Team Teaching	Blended
Special educator and related service staff deliver support in classrooms, moving from room to room.	Two teachers (special and general educator) team together to teach all the children.	One teacher dually licensed to teach both special and general education teaches all the children together.

The above supports for inclusion could take place wherever young children are cared for and educated. Some common options are community childcares, Head Starts, Preschool For All classrooms, and early childhood classrooms in public schools.

With each support the goal is to provide special education services to children with disabilities in the high quality program that includes children with and without disabilities.



## References & Resources

CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge. (2012). Policy advisory: The law on inclusive education (Rev. ed.). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, Author.

DEC/NAEYC. (2009). Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute available as a free download from: [http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/Early\\_Childhood\\_Inclusion](http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/Early_Childhood_Inclusion)

Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.

US Dept. of Health and Human Services and US Dept. of Education's Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, Full Text, Sept. 14, 2015.