

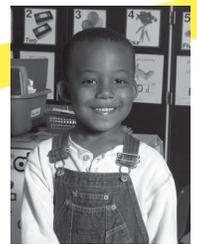
# Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



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## **Inclusion: The Role of the Program Administrator**

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**SERIES**

**WHAT WORKS BRIEFS**

# Inclusion: The Role of the Program Administrator

This *What Works Brief* is part of a continuing series of short, easy-to-read, “how to” information packets on a variety of evidence-based practices, strategies, and intervention procedures.

This particular Brief is designed in a Question-and-Answer format, with a focus on administrators.

*The inclusion of young children with special needs with their typically developing peers has been the subject of discussion for more than three decades. There are several compelling reasons to create high-quality inclusive programs for young children with special needs. First, federal law supports inclusion. Second, research has shown teachers’ ability and success in modifying activities and contexts in such a way that they facilitate the development of young children with special needs. Third, inclusive settings are necessary to implement a number of effective intervention practices, such as social skills training where typically developing peers support the development of social competence by children with special needs. Finally, inclusive settings enhance children’s generalization of skills and support the development of positive attitudes by typically developing children. The burden is not on children with special needs to “get ready” to benefit from inclusive child care or Head Start settings. Rather, early childhood settings need to be ready to modify staffing, curriculum, and teaching practices for children whose range and depth of need may exceed that of many other youngsters.*

*Research indicates that state and local administrators and other program leaders play a pivotal role in making inclusion work. In addition to complying with state and federal requirements, child care and Head Start administrators and program leaders in other early childhood environments set the tone and philosophy of a program. The tone with which administrators approach inclusion affects how personnel and families feel about inclusion as well as the capacity of the personnel to be successful in including children with disabilities. Following are some frequently asked questions about challenges that administrators of early care programs face and some strategies for addressing those challenges. The challenges and the strategies presented below have been gathered from program personnel, researchers, and family members from across the country.*

## What Disability-Related Federal Laws Are Important to Know About when Meeting the Needs of Young Children with Disabilities in Child Care or Other Early Childhood Programs?

*This information is taken in large part from a DEC/NAEYC brochure entitled: “Including All Children: Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs” (DEC/NAEYC, 2000).*

Three important federal disability laws related to early care and education of young children with disabilities promote inclusion to the fullest extent and protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities:

*The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, a federal civil rights law that went into effect in 1992, states that people with disabilities are entitled to equal rights in employment, state and local public services, and public accommodations, such as schools and early childhood programs, including child care centers, Head Start programs, and family child care homes.

*Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*, enacted in 1973, prohibits discrimination against children and adults on the basis of a disability by any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Included under this Act is any public or private preschool, child care center, Head Start/Early Head Start, or family child care home that receives federal funds either directly or through a grant, loan, or contract.

*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, originally enacted in 1975 (as the Education for All Handicapped Act, or EHA), ensures all children and youth with disabilities access to a free, appropriate public education. The 1997 revisions to the Act strengthened early childhood services under IDEA. Several major provisions apply to young children:

- *Part C Infants and Toddlers* program provides all states with grants for early intervention services for children from birth to age 3 who are developmentally delayed, or at a substantial risk of delay, because of diagnosed factors and conditions (and their families). Each family and child identified receives an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- *Part B* requires a free, appropriate public education for young children with disabilities ages 3 through 21 years. Each eligible child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) outlining the range of services needed. *Section 619, the Preschool Grants* program, provides grants to all state education agencies for services for eligible children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities.

## What Should Child Care and Head Start Administrators Do to Ensure That Programs Are Meeting ADA, Section 504, and IDEA Requirements?

*For ADA and Section 504*, it is important to assess the program’s accessibility, policies, activities, and materials. Administrators can develop action plans that use the following strategies:

- Evaluate recruitment, enrollment, and employment policies and procedures to make sure that they are nondiscriminatory.
- Assess the physical accessibility of the home-based or center-based setting. For example, changes may require rearranging furniture or installing a ramp or a handrail.
- Schedule time for staff to meet to develop ways that the child care program can prepare to include children with disabilities.
- Look for other ways to accommodate children, staff, and families with disabilities in the early childhood setting.

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**For IDEA requirements,** make sure that the activities and strategies of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for infants and their families and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) written plan for older children are being followed. Also, if you think that a child in your care may have a disability or special need, you should talk with the family and provide them with contact information for your local school district for an IDEA evaluation. If the child is under 3 years of age, the child's health care provider may make the referral for evaluation, or the parent can contact the local school district or state early intervention program under IDEA.

Young children with disabilities and their families who are eligible for programs under IDEA have a right to services to meet their individual needs. Depending on the child's age, and a state's procedures, either the early intervention program or the local school district should respond to the parent's or your referral. If the child is found eligible for IDEA services, an individualized plan will be developed with the child's parents and others to determine what services will be provided and where they will be delivered.

### **How Can Child Care Providers and Early Childhood Educators Work Effectively with Families?**

Frequent and open communication and strong partnerships with the child's family are paramount to working effectively with families. Listen to parents to find out what concerns family members may have about their child's development as well as what the child is able to do in the home setting. Make sure that they understand the concerns you have about their child's development as well as the child's strengths.

As a person who spends time with the child, a child care provider or early childhood educator is in an ideal position to assist the child and family in developing plans and instructional approaches to achieve those goals. Your involvement in this process is very important!

### **What Are Typical Challenges to Including Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings?**

Researchers have reported that early childhood professionals and parents describe similar challenges to inclusion whether they are involved with child care, school districts, or Head Start:

- **Collaboration.** Issues arise between school districts and early intervention programs that receive funding and other resources to educate children with disabilities, and child care or Head Start programs where children with disabilities are served. These challenges have to do with agreements for child care programs to cooperatively provide services to children for whom the school district or early intervention program has responsibility under IDEA so that the child might be served in the natural environment of the child care setting. Such collaborative arrangements involve shared responsibility, communication, shared assessments and planning, and shared resources.
- **Training and experience of child care personnel.** Many child care personnel worry that they do not have the knowledge, skills, and resources to serve children with disabilities. Many families and school district personnel are concerned about the expertise of personnel as well. IDEA requires that personnel either have the expertise or are supervised by someone who does.
- **Beliefs and attitudes.** Fears and inadequate or misleading information can contribute to personnel and families being reluctant to include children in child care settings.

Although all of these concerns and challenges are very real, they can and have been addressed effectively by administrators in many communities.

### **What Are Some Strategies for Overcoming These Challenges?**

**First,** administrators from child care, Head Start, school districts, and other early care and education settings can work to develop a vision and belief that inclusion is important and can be successful in their communities. Administrators can develop this vision by accessing research findings about the importance of inclusion and by talking with those who have accomplished successful inclusion efforts.

**Second,** community planning teams composed of school districts, child care, Head Start, families, and others can be formed to plan how to make inclusion work and to develop cooperative agreements for sharing information and resources and for contracting or arranging for consulting services and shared training. Programs can share trained and certified personnel by cost sharing or by providing itinerate services to each other. These certified personnel can provide technical assistance, support, and supervision to program staff who are in day-to-day contact with children and families.

**Third,** administrators can recognize that beliefs and attitudes are critical to the success of inclusion. By arranging meetings with staff and families, administrators can (1) set a tone of trust and assure that peoples' fears and concerns are valid, (2) provide information about the importance of inclusion, (3) clarify laws supporting inclusion, (4) offer a format for brainstorming strategies for overcoming challenges, and (5) provide opportunities for staff and families to hear from programs that have successfully implemented inclusion. As staff receive training and technical assistance, early childhood providers will experience success and feel supported and more positive about their skills and knowledge in serving children with disabilities.

### **Where Can I Get Help to Further My Program's Inclusion Efforts?**

Administrators can try a number of different strategies to help them facilitate their programs' inclusion efforts:

- **Ask the families.** Parents know their child better than anyone and are already familiar with many resources for both services and support.
- **Ask your provider network.** Many providers are already including children with disabilities and can serve as excellent resources.
- **Contact your local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) program.** Local CCR&Rs can provide information and assistance.
- **Contact your local school district and local early intervention program.** Local districts and programs will likely know about training and technical assistance resources. Pediatricians, therapists, and early childhood special educators can be great resources for information.
- **Contact organizations whose members provide services to individuals with disabilities.** These organizations have a wealth of knowledge to share on practical as well as scientific information related to inclusion.



**We welcome your feedback on this What Works Brief. Please go to the CSEFEL Web site (<http://csefel.uiuc.edu>) or call us at (217) 333-4123 to offer suggestions.**



### **What Is the Scientific Basis for This Practice?**

**For those wishing to learn more about the topic, the following resources provide additional information:**

- Brault, L., Carta, J., Hemmeter, M., McEvoy, M., Neilson, S., Rous, B., Smith, B., Strain, P., & Timm, M. (1999). DEC concept paper on the identification of and intervention with challenging behavior. In S. Sandall & M. Ostrosky (Eds.), *Young Exceptional Children monograph series: Practical ideas for addressing challenging behaviors* (pp. 63-70). Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
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- Smith, B. J. (2003). *Leadership strategies for supporting children's social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior*. Training Module. Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.
- Walsh, S., Smith, B. J., & Taylor, R. C. (2000). *IDEA requirements for preschoolers with disabilities: IDEA early childhood policy and practice guide*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Walsh, S., Smith, B. J., & Taylor, R. C. (2000). *IDEA requirements for preschoolers with disabilities: Challenging behaviors*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

**This What Works Brief was developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. Contributors to this Brief were B. J. Smith, P. Strain, and M. M. Ostrosky.**

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