



Alabama's Standards *for* Early Learning and Development

APPENDIX THREE

INCLUSION IN EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
Early Childhood
Education

In partnership with



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Inclusion in Early Learning Programs

(Adapted from: *Delaware Guide to Promoting Inclusion in Early Care and Education*¹; *A Place For Me: Including Children With Special Needs in Early Care and Education Settings* by Phyllis A. Chandler²; and *Preparing Young Children for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities into the Classroom* by Marla Lohmann³)

“Inclusive early education is not just about placement in a program, but is more about active participation in social interactions and the development of children’s abilities and skills. Children at a range of developmental levels, including children identified with special needs, should be welcomed as valued members of the community by supporting active participation in all early childhood settings.”

(UNDERWOOD ET AL., 2012)

Inclusive early childhood programs are in the best interests of all young children, with and without disabilities, and result in greater empathy and acceptance of differences among all children, as well as in improved academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for children with disabilities. Like all children, it is critical for children with disabilities to be exposed to a variety of rich experiences where they can learn in the context of play and everyday interactions and engage with their peers. High-quality early childhood programs can facilitate experiences that foster learning for all children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Young children with and without disabilities play and learn together in a variety of settings: homes, daycare centers, Head Start centers, as well as private, state, and federally supported early childhood programs. Promoting development and a sense of belonging for every child are widely held values among early education and intervention professionals and in society.

Inclusive early care and education is:

- Children of all abilities and backgrounds living, learning, and playing together in the same classroom;
- Children of all abilities and backgrounds fully participating in daily activities because the activities and routines are planned to meet the needs of each child;
- Caregivers and teachers holding high expectations for every child; and
- Valuing each child’s individual strengths and needs.

Protections for students with disabilities:

Protections for young children with disabilities are provided through long-standing federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In the findings to the IDEA (2004), Congress states, “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by ... having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom program, to the maximum extent possible in order to ...meet developmental goals and ... the challenging expectations that have been established for all children...” This principle applies equally to the participation of young children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood programs. Although more broadly based than the IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 safeguard children with disabilities’ access to programs and services provided by entities that receive any federal funding. These laws prohibit discrimination based on service availability, accessibility (e.g., ramps), and delivery. Under both the ADA and Section 504, programs cannot deny a child with a disability the opportunity to participate in or benefit from a program’s services solely based on the disability. (Illinois Early Learning Project, 2015).



What does inclusive early care and education look like?

- Children with different abilities, interests, and backgrounds playing and learning together in the same classroom;
- Every child involved in all daily activities;
- Any specialized services needed by individual students are embedded within the routines and curriculum of the regular early childhood setting;
- Materials or activities adapted to meet the different needs of each child;
- Full participation of every child intentionally encouraged;
- Needs of the children are the basis for the daily plans and schedules; and
- Teachers encouraging and modeling attitudes of acceptance, high expectations, and facilitated learning at all times.

Who benefits from inclusion and inclusive early care and education?

The early childhood professional:

- Inclusion improves teachers – teachers experience increased growth and learning to benefit all children.
- Inclusion allows for more interaction with colleagues – regular and special education teachers, along with service providers, work together to meet the unique learning needs of all students.
- Inclusion is rewarding - all children will learn and grow together.

Other children in your care:

- Inclusion helps children discover that all children are more alike than different.
- Inclusion builds children's self-esteem.
- Inclusion allows children to learn from each other.
- Inclusion helps children see the strengths and abilities of each unique friend.

Children with a disability:

- Inclusion increases children's opportunities to play and talk together.
- Inclusion creates opportunities for friendships among children.
- Inclusion builds children's self-esteem and independence.

Families:

- Inclusion connects families to other families and resources in their community.
- Inclusion increases families' participation in the classroom, school, and community.

Community:

- Inclusion increases the sharing of resources among various agencies, benefiting all children.
- Inclusive early care and education sends a message to the community that all children are valued and welcomed equally.



Successfully including children with special needs in early childhood programs with typically developing children depends on:

- **teachers who believe that all children have the potential to learn.** A positive attitude towards helping all children grow and develop is important.
- **teachers who know and understand child development.** Understanding that children learn skills in a particular order will help the early care and education provider and educator set realistic expectations for a child's skill development. As an example, a child needs to practice standing before the child can practice walking. A child with special needs may need to have a skill divided into smaller steps before the skill can be mastered.
- **teachers who realize that the child with special needs is more like other children than different.** While there are some exceptions, many two-year-old children with special needs have the same challenges of being two that all children face. Where and when possible, setting similar expectations for all children will help them to be accepted by peers.
- **teachers who encourage a child to be independent.** Children like to do things on their own. There is a tendency to "over" help children with special needs. However, it is better for the development of all children to encourage them to do whatever they can for themselves.
- **having a physical environment that meets the needs of the child.** In most cases, the environment may not need to be changed at all. Adapt your space to the needs of the child.
- **planning activities that all children can do.** It is possible to plan activities, snacks, meals, and programs that are appropriate for all children.
- **a willingness of the teachers to work with the family and other professionals who may be providing support services to the child.** While in an early care and education program, a child with special needs may receive additional services from a specialist. Communication with those providing support helps improve the experience of the child.

An inclusive early care and education program plans activities and routines so that all children can participate.

Some activities may need to be adapted or changed for children of different abilities or stages of development. When you observe children being successful, repeat the activity or plan similar activities to let children practice their skills. Success builds on success. Adjust routines to meet the needs of all children with special needs, as well as for all children in the program.



How can you make your program more inclusive and help all students be successful?

- Be sure that your classroom is physically accessible for all students. Remove any barriers that might prevent a child getting from one place to another.
- Position children with disabilities in the midst of their peers. Do not place a child with a disability at the edge of the group or away from his peers.
- Encourage children without disabilities to interact with children with disabilities.
- Promote authentic friendships—children without physical impairments sometimes take on a “parent” role in interactions with their peers with disabilities.
- Help children find common ground and ways to interact with one another as friends.
- Give all children tools for interactions and conversations. Provide them with toys or objects to initiate discussion (an example might include a popular book).
- Provide children who struggle with communication with alternate ways to express themselves. This could be pointing or using pictures and using picture schedules.
- Pair children with and without disabilities to work and play together.
- Use a variety of methods for instruction—talk to the children, illustrate with pictures, model, and provide the opportunity for hands-on learning whenever possible.
- Provide a detailed and changeable visual classroom picture schedule so that all children know the plan for the day.
- Explain a child’s disability to other children in an age-appropriate way. Allow them to ask questions about differences.
- Provide developmentally appropriate activities in the early childhood setting that meet the learning, behavioral, and social needs of all children.
- Assist children with self-help skills, but expect them to help themselves whenever possible. Foster independence in all children.
- Communicate frequently with parents and other early childhood professionals.
- Treat all children in your classroom with love and respect.
- Have high expectations for all children, regardless of their abilities.
- Seek out resources for learning more about teaching all types of learners, for example, the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (<http://ectacenter.org/>) and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>)

Suggestions for activities to support children's needs

To support children with speech and language delays:

- Talk while you are doing activities – use simple words:
 - Talk to yourself, describing what you are doing.
 - As a child is doing a task, talk about the steps the child is using to complete a task.
- Repeat what the child says, modeling correct grammar and forms of words (ex.: verb forms, word endings, etc.) and adding any omitted words.
- Take advantage of opportunities or events that naturally occur during the day to talk.
- Talk with children while going through tasks during the day using as much descriptive language as possible.
- Create situations where a child needs to communicate (for example, forget silverware for a meal; place objects out of reach and ask the children to get or ask for objects).
- Create situations that would encourage a child to interact and talk (for example, offer a new toy, a popular book, a new learning center, or a new visual).
- Count a set of objects together, out loud, and name the objects.
- Use visual supports to help children express themselves (pointing, using pictures, individual picture schedules, first-then boards, etc.).
- Give simple directions.
 - Start with one step at a time.
 - Repeat directions if necessary, using simplified wording.

Activity ideas to help children to develop speech and language skills:

- Sing.
- Read to a child or to the group.
- Use rhymes, pausing before saying a word to let the child/children shout it out.
- Repeat sounds in a game-like fashion, imitating each other.
- Play “What’s this?” with pictures.
- Use picture cards: “feed the dog” by pretending to feed a stuffed animal picture cards of the alphabet, numbers, colors, and/or pictures of common objects.
- Do simple puzzles – supply words for colors, shapes, and directions.
- Plan time each day for each child to talk with you and with other children.
- Plan for “show and tell” – at first, a child may just nod “yes” or “no” to statements you provide about their item. As a child feels more comfortable, they will start to add words.
- Let other children ask questions about the “show and tell” item.

To support children with developmental delays:

- Follow routines.
- Be consistent, follow the same routine every day.
- Give the child one direction at a time.
- Plan new activities for a short amount of time and gradually increase the time spent on the activity each day.
- Practice skills over and over again.
- Limit number of choices given to avoid confusion.
- Give information in a variety of ways – speech, gestures, and/or pictures.
- Use activities that involve the interests of the children (for example, dinosaurs, cars, and/or sports).

Activity ideas to help children develop their skills:

- Develop an obstacle course to encourage crawling, pedaling, etc.
- Scavenger hunt for items with characteristics (for example, use plastic eggs to hunt for colors or objects to hunt for shapes).
- Give food in small pieces like cereal to pick up with fingers.
- Sort and make patterns with colored blocks, beads, etc.
- Prepare food or snacks – naming food items; counting and measuring; physically mixing, rolling, and stirring during the food preparation.
- Create areas for children to use pretend play such as a grocery store, doctor's office, restaurant, beach, or farm. These theme areas allow children to interact at all different levels.

To support children with hearing loss:

- Speak or gesture directly to the child.
- Position the child near to the front of the classroom and/or the speaker.
- Wait for children to watch you. This indicates they are ready to pay attention.
- Eliminate background noises that may be distracting.
- Help children use simple signs that the entire group can practice at circle time.

Activity ideas to help children who have hearing loss:

- Use simple music activities – shaking rattles to music or rhythm.
- Play matching games – taking time to identify the picture and look at it.
- Exercise with picture directions or video.
- Cook with picture cards.
- Sing songs with actions such as “If You’re Happy” and “Hokey Pokey”.
- Have all children learn simple signs to use at mealtime or snack time.
- Have children use picture cards to express what they want.

To support children with visual impairment:

- Be aware of lighting – make sure the rooms are well lit.
- Arrange furniture to have clear, uncluttered pathways.
- Talk, describing what everyone is doing during an activity.
- Use many descriptive words rather than vague words.
- Use more words to replace gestures or body language.
- Use clear visual images – dark solid lines for cutting.

Activity ideas to help children who have visual impairments:

- Play games involving the senses of touch, smell, and taste.
- Velcro® laminated body parts, animals, etc. on board or mat.
- Toss balls.
- Put shapes into a shape box.
- Make up stories during circle time; use their imagination – each child adds a sentence.
- Play “Copy Cat” – stacking blocks in different patterns.

To support children with physical disabilities:

- Ensure walkways are wide enough for all children to move freely around the room.
- Position children with disabilities in the midst of their peers.
- Make sure the furniture arrangement can be adjusted for special equipment.
- Adapt activities so that all children can participate.
- Use larger crayons or special scissors as needed.

Activity ideas to help children who have physical disabilities:

- Blow bubbles.
- Use puzzles with knobs on them.
- Put shapes into shape boxes.
- Animal walk.
- Scarf dance to music.
- Play “Hot Potato” – sitting or standing.
- Play “I Spy”.
- Use group exercises.
- Use a “Follow the Leader” approach. Consider playing “Follow the Leader” in different positions (lying, standing, sitting, etc.) so that all can participate.
- Toss bean bags.
- Prepare food – Consider cooking at a table rather than standing at a counter.
- Play obstacle course – Set up the course in a way that all children can participate, perhaps having children crawl on the floor or use “wheeled” transportation.
- Do art projects – Create group murals or collages while laying on the floor or sitting at a table.
- Lace cardboard cards.
- Use Velcro® wall boards that children can access either standing or sitting.
- Bowl with plastic water bottles as pins.

To support children with social and/or behavior issues:

- Follow routines.
- Be consistent, follow the same routine every day.
- Use a lot of structure to offer comfort and predictability.
- Promote positive behavior; model appropriate behavior.
- Use activities appropriate for age or ability.
- Provide a safe, risk-free environment for children to try new activities without feeling that they might fail. Focus on their willingness to try something new.
- Watch for frustration, talk through possible ways to solve problems.
- Do new activities or teach a new skill when children are rested and relaxed.

- Balance physically demanding activities with less active or quiet activities (for example, plan a quiet activity before nap time).
- Remember that some children may need to “watch” before participating.
- Provide a quiet place in case a student needs to “cool down”.

Activity ideas to help children with social and/or behavioral issues:

- Have a “Show and Tell” during circle time.
- Use play dough.
- Make individual or group collage.
- Have a music center – Play marching band with simple homemade instruments.
- Follow the leader through an course using a variety of movements such as crawling, slithering, or walking.
- Play a game of “Red Light/Green Light” or “Go/Stop”.

Final Thoughts: Inclusion Benefits Everyone

A child with a disability is a child first. His disability does not define him. Children with disabilities are as different as all children are - treat them as individuals. All children can develop friendships with peers, learn how to play and interact with one another, and learn new skills by observing and imitating peers through participating in an inclusive early childhood environment. The experiences that children with and without disabilities have with teachers in their earliest years can set the tone for their interactions with teachers in later grades and are crucial to promoting positive attitudes about school and learning (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2013).

If you are concerned that your child may have a disability:

For children 0 through 2 years:

Early Intervention Child Find - 1-800-543-3098 (or TTY 800-499-1816)

For children 3 through 21 years:

Contact your local school system’s Special Education department.

1 Adapted from the *Guide to Promoting Inclusion in Early Care and Education: A Section of the User’s Guide to the Growing Together Portfolio*, Delaware Health and Social Services Birth to Three Early Intervention System (<https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dms/epqc/birth3/files/growingtogether.pdf>).

2 Adapted from *A Place For Me: Including Children With Special Needs in Early Care and Education Settings* by Phyllis A. Chandler: National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, D.C., 1994.

3 Adapted from *Preparing Young Children for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities into the Classroom* by Marla Lohmann: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Blog. (2017). (<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/preparing-young-children-inclusion>).