Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers:

A Systems Approach to Preschool Inclusive Practices

*A project of the Virginia Department of Education and the Technical Assistance Centers of Virginia*

Planning Guide

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  **Acknowledgements**

To address the need to create placement options for preschoolers with disabilities in inclusive settings, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) continues to support a statewide initiative encouraging a continuum of inclusive placement opportunities for students with disabilities. The purpose is to guide systemic change in school divisions’ preschool programs in order to increase the number of inclusive programs. Additionally, in order to maintain implementation and sustain success, quality professional development continues to be an on-going need. This planning guide and accompanying materials, developed by VDOE’s early childhood network, is designed to serve as a resource to programs in implementing preschool inclusive practices across the Commonwealth. This document is aligned with the *Virginia Guidelines for Early Childhood Inclusion* (April, 2018).

The steps in this guide are based on an extensive review of the literature and were originally developed in 1993 by Arlene Aveno, Mary Voorhees, and Tracy Landon at the University of Virginia (UVA) through the Systematic Inclusive Preschool Education Project, a federal grant funded through the United States Department of Education (Grant Number HO86D00010). In 1995, Jaye Harvey, Mary Voorhees, and Tracy Landon expanded and modified these steps through the Integrated Placement Options for Preschoolers (IPOP) Project, a VDOE federal Section 619 preschool grant activity. Staff from Virginia school divisions and collaborating early childhood education programs, as part of the IPOP Project, then tested these revised steps.

In addition to this 2019 revision, the guide was revised in 1999, 2007, and 2015 by a group of representatives from local school divisions, colleges and universities, parent organizations, and state agencies. As research and literature on recommended practices continue to evolve, the information in this guide will be continually updated. The team for the 2015 revision of this guide included Phyllis Mondak, VDOE 619 Grant Coordinator; Sheryl Fahey and Kris Ganley, VDOE T/TAC at George Mason University; Cheryl Henderson, VDOE T/TAC at James Madison University; Mary Swingle and Sandy Wilberger, VDOE T/TAC at Virginia Commonwealth University; Dawn Hendricks, VDOE 619 Coordinator; and Lisa Gehring, Portsmouth City Public Schools. The team for the 2019 current revision of this guide included Sheryl Fahey and Debi Stepien, VDOE T/TAC at George Mason University; Mary (Swingle) Szymanski, Mary Tobin, Adrienne Quarles-Smith and Sandy Wilberger, VDOE T/TAC at Virginia Commonwealth University, Cheryl Henderson, VDOE T/TAC at James Madison University and Dawn Hendricks, VDOE 619 Coordinator.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Each year, the United States Department of Education issues an annual Performance & Accountability Report. In the FY 2014 U.S. ED Program Performance Plan for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (U.S. ED, 2013), one of the program goals is to help preschool children with disabilities enter school ready to succeed. The objective designed to address this goal is that preschool children with disabilities will receive special education and related services that result in increased skills that enable them to succeed in school. The performance indicator for this goal and objective is to increase the percentage of children receiving special education and related service with peers without disabilities.

In response to this requirement from the U.S. Department of Education, members from the Virginia Department of Education’s early childhood network reviewed the current data from the Commonwealth. While school divisions across Virginia have implemented inclusive practices at various stages, systemic change is still needed. Child count data trends over the past years indicated that many preschoolers with disabilities (>19,000 students currently, December 2018), received the major portion of their services in non-inclusive settings. Since the initial publication of the *Inclusive Opportunities for Preschoolers Planning Guide* in 2007, the Commonwealth of Virginia has made minimal progress in offering services to preschoolers with disabilities in inclusive environments.

# **GUIDE OVERVIEW**

This guide is designed to help local school divisions meet federal and state mandates that children with disabilities be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment. Determining the LRE for a child with disabilities requires that school divisions have an array of placement opportunities from which to choose, including placement in general education classrooms with peers without disabilities. The intent of the LRE provision within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) is that children with disabilities under age five should be educated with their typically developing peers to the greatest extent possible. These settings include home and community preschool settings, child care centers, Head Start, and local school division early childhood classrooms (Smith & Rapport, 2001; Gupta, Henninger IV, & Vinh, 2014; Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014). While the federal law refers to serving students, ages three through 21 years, Virginia regulations mandate public school services for children ages two (by September 30) through 21 years.Choosing the LRE option for children ages two through five years may present a dilemma for some school divisions because not all offer educational programs for children without disabilities of this age. Often, if non-school division early childhood programs are available, many lack collaborative agreements with school division early childhood special education programs that would permit enrollment of children with disabilities. As a result, some school divisions in Virginia offer limited options such as home-based or center-based ECSE placements.

This *IPOP Planning Guide* describes how local school divisions and community agencies can form a preschool planning team to explore and develop a culture that supports inclusive practices and programs. The *Guide* details a process that is flexible, thus enabling teams to plan for options that are compatible with local school division assets and priorities. Users of this *Guide* are urged to also refer to the *Virginia Guidelines for Early Childhood Inclusion* (April 2018) and their local policies and program requirements for further direction as they plan for inclusive programs. The *IPOP Planning Guide* is organized into five sections:

Section I provides a rationale for local school divisions to begin exploring and developing inclusive practices. First, the educational, philosophical, legal, and cost-effectiveness bases for preschool inclusive practices are identified. Next, a summary of the benefits of preschool inclusive practices to children, families, staff, and administrators is provided.

Section II introduces types of inclusive placement opportunities. Information about a particular curricula option and program designs used within that option are provided.

Section III describes each of the different early childhood programs that could serve as a placement option for preschoolers with disabilities. First, school-sponsored programs, including Title I preschool, local education agency sponsored programs for four-year-olds, and occupational child care programs in secondary schools are described. Next, information about school-sponsored and community-sponsored Head Start programs is supplied. Finally, community-based early childhood programs and family child care provider programs are reviewed. Information related to collaboration between each program and an ECSE program is also addressed.

Section IV presents the process of systems change associated with planning and initiating these practices, followed by the steps that local school divisions may use to explore and develop inclusive placement opportunities.

Section V includes information on funding streams and sustainability.

## **SECTION I: RATIONALE, BENEFITS, AND CHALLENGES**

# **Rationale**

“We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment” Chief Justice Earl Warren, 1954.

In May 1954, the Supreme Court of the United Stated decided a landmark case in favor of the defendants. The Oliver Brown, et al v. Board of Education of Topeka, et al judgment stated that segregation of students in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment because separate facilities are inherently unequal. In the 1970s, parents of children with disabilities began to publicly advocate for the end of the civil rights violations against their children. In 1971, [*Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pennsylvania_Association_for_Retarded_Citizens_(PARC)_v._Commonwealth_of_Pennsylvania&action=edit&redlink=1) (<https://www.pubintlaw.org/cases-and-projects/pennsylvania-association-for-retarded-citizens-parc-v-commonwealth-of-pennsylvania>) was heard in the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania. The ruling stated it was the obligation of Pennsylvania to provide free public education to mentally retarded children. This decision struck down various state laws used to exclude children with disabilities from the public schools. In 1972, the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia heard [*Mills v. Board of Education*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mills_v._Board_of_Education&action=edit&redlink=1) (<http://usedulaw.com/438-mills-v-board-of-education-of-the-district-of-columbia.html>). The courtdecided that every child, regardless of the type and severity of their disability, was entitled to a free public education. In 1973, the *(American)*[*Rehabilitation Act*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rehabilitation_Act)became law. [*Section 504*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_504_of_the_Rehabilitation_Act) of the Act states “No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his [sic] handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” This was the first U.S. federal civil rights protection for people with disabilities. All of these cases, plus many activities by the community, led to the passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142* (1975). The law, renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, has been reauthorized many times. Each time, children with disabilities access to the same education curricula and settings have been at the forefront of the law. The intent of the law is to allow children with disabilities to be taught in the least restrictive environment, where their peers are being taught, as much as possible.

The empirical evidence and research to support the exclusion or inclusion of children was scarce at the time of the passage of IDEA in 1975. However, the intent of the law at the time was to end the exclusion of and discrimination towards children with disabilities in public school settings. Today the evidence does not support the success of segregated settings or the lack of benefits of inclusive settings. After 30 years of research, the evidence shows that children with disabilities in quality inclusive settings make greater gains in all developmental areas than those in segregated settings (Gupta, et al., 2014; Strain, 2014). The research has demonstrated that inclusive settings benefit all children attending. Children without disabilities do not learn less; they benefit from the individualized instruction provided in the classroom and learn to be more compassionate and empathetic (Buysee & Bailey, 1993; Odom, Vitztum. Wolery, Lieber, Sandall, & Hanson, 2004; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004). Inclusive settings offer language, social, and concept learning opportunities for all children that are not available in segregated settings. Even with all the evidence, serving children in inclusive settings is not happening in early childhood settings. Barton and Smith (2015) compared 1985 data to 2012 data. The practice of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities ages three to five years old in regular early childhood settings increased by only 5.7%.

Virginia has a long history of having self-contained preschool programs. In 1975, the Virginia General Assembly legislated that preschoolers ages two through five be served in the early childhood special education programs. At the time, there were very limited placements with typically developing peers available. As the number of placements available in the community and public schools for preschoolers has increased, Virginia has not changed the service settings for most of the preschool special education population. Many reasons have been given, including cost, teacher preparedness, and availability of spaces for children already in a program. Research has shown that the cost of inclusive programs is less expensive than self-contained programs (Odom, Hanson, Lieber, Marquart, Sandall, Wolery, Horn, Beckman, Hikido, & Chambers, 2001; Odom, Parrish, & Hikido, 2001). Special education and general education teachers have the skills to teach children with a wide range of abilities daily. It is time to change the context in which programs are developed. Programs need to be based on inclusive practices, quality practices/strategies for learning for all children, and have a system of supports in place for the program, children, teachers, and families to be engaged and successful.

**High Quality Inclusion**

It is recommended to begin with common language/definitions for all preschool programs. This document uses the definition of inclusion developed jointly in 2009 by the Division for Early Childhood and the National Association for Educating Young Children, the two professional organizations of the early childhood field.

*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.*

Access, participation, and supports are the defining features of successful inclusion. Access is providing a range of activities and settings for all children by removing barriers (physical and developmental). It includes offering learning and developmental opportunities multiple ways, such as having the playground wheelchair accessible or having the toys in the classroom on a shelf all children can reach. Participation refers to providing a range of instructional approaches for children which encourages engagement in play activities that promote learning. Participation allows all children to feel as if they fully belong. Supports are the broader aspects of any program – teacher support, professional development, and meaningful communication and collaboration with families and all staff. DEC and NAEYC offer recommendations on how to use this statement and definitions to improve early childhood services, among them:

1. Create high expectations for every child, regardless of ability, to reach his or her full potential.

2. Develop a program philosophy on inclusion to ensure shared assumptions and beliefs about inclusion, and to identify quality inclusive practices.

3. Establish a system of services and supports that reflects the needs of children with varying types of disabilities and learning characteristics, with inclusion as the driving principle and foundation for all of these services and supports.

4. Revise program and professional standards to incorporate key dimensions of high quality inclusion.

5. Improve professional development across all sectors of the early childhood field by determining the following: who would benefit from professional development on inclusion, what practitioners need to know and be able to do in inclusive settings, and what methods are needed to facilitate learning opportunities related to inclusion.

The position statement by DEC and NAEYC focuses on the inclusion of young children in society more broadly. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education provided a policy statement to focus on the inclusion of young children with disabilities in general early childhood programs. “All young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs, where they are provided with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations” (p. 1). The policy statement provides recommendations to states, local education agencies, schools, and early childhood programs for increasing inclusive early learning opportunities.

In addition to using the same language/definitions, the same quality indicators for high quality preschool programs need to be in place for all children to benefit. Poor quality settings benefit no one, especially children with disabilities or at-risk for learning difficulties. DEC, NAEYC, the BUILD Initiative, Virginia Quality, and many others promote the same quality indicators – building strong and nurturing relationships between children and adults; teaching expected social and friendship skills, executive functions, vocabulary, and literacy and numeracy skills; and schedules and environment that promote engagement and participation of all children. Programs need to be evaluated using appropriate instruments for preschool and staff need professional development to improve their teaching. Research has shown the importance of providing safe, nurturing and supportive environments in preschool (DEC, NAEYC). Preschools are getting better at providing an environment where children can make choices, learn autonomy, and have their perspectives values. Programs are not getting better at teaching concepts, vocabulary, language usage, and problem solving and deeper level thinking skills.

To increase the number of opportunities for inclusive placements and improve the quality of preschool programs in general, the organizational contexts used for providing preschool programs needs to expand. These contexts can be viewed in two categories – settings and service delivery models for inclusive supports. According to data reported to VDOE (2018), presently settings continue to be segregated; there are early childhood special education classes, Head Start and Early Head Start, the Virginia Preschool Initiative program, Title I, community-based preschool programs and Child Care Centers, community-based play groups, preschool funded by local funds, and occupational child care. Despite progress, very few of these programs collaborate or coordinate beyond a teacher level within a school or program. Many of these current service delivery models include itinerant teachers (direct service and consultation to ECE teachers), co-teaching (where a preschool teacher and an ECSE teacher meet the needs of all children), early childhood classes with no special education support, early childhood special education reverse inclusion classes, and self-contained early childhood special education that may provide some social inclusion (lunch, playground time). In these settings, there may be minimal or no collaboration for service delivery. The administrative agencies providing the programs need to support the families, teachers, and children differently than they have in the past. Supports need to follow the child, funds can be braided to support teachers from different programs, and professional development should be provided across programs. All teachers need to know how to provide specialized instruction and align the curriculum to address the children’s developmental needs. Accommodations to the environment using universal design for learning benefit everyone. Everyone needs to keep in mind that children do not need to be ready for inclusive programs; programs need to be ready to work with all children.

Preschool programs need to mirror society’s composition, and consist of diverse learners, cultures, and languages. For all our children to be successful in the future – independent, contributors to society, part of their community – they need to experience this from day one. We must provide these experiences in preschool in order to set the tone for all children to learn and play together in one community. Adults and children need to collaborate and cooperate in preschool in order to expect this in the next stage of education!

**Table 1. Preschool Inclusion Benefits (Wolery & Odom, 2000; Gupta, Heninger, IV, & Vinh, 2014)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **To Children with Disabilities**   * experiencing a more stimulating environment with a broader range of learning experiences and forming a wider circle of friends * using appropriate behaviors to meet own needs * learning to be more independent and to rely more on peers instead of teachers * acquiring and using knowledge and skills, such as early language * learning age-appropriate social and play skills (more likely to engage in advanced levels of play) * applying social skills to new interactions (generalizing across settings) * exhibiting higher levels of social participation   (developing positive social-emotional skills for social relationships)   * increasing academic gains, including higher achievement test scores and high school graduation * increasing confidence and independence and a stronger sense of self | **To Children without Disabilities**   * having more chances to be leaders, teachers, or role models, thereby increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem, autonomy, and leadership skills * making normal or greater than expected developmental progress * learning to appreciate the similarities and differences between people at an early age, becoming more understanding of and developing positive attitudes toward diversity * having opportunities to form friendships with children with disabilities * exposing children to inclusion at an early age, increasing the likelihood that they will approach children with disabilities with acceptance | **To Families**   * having opportunities to see that many of their children’s behaviors may be typical of most children * gaining a broader view and new perspective of their children’s abilities and needs * having opportunities to become acquainted with other families, participating in the same activities, and feeling more a part of the community * promoting community awareness and acceptance that children with disabilities are children first * learning and developing positive attitudes about individuals with disabilities * providing opportunities for teachers and family to view specialized instruction as something that occurs in all settings | **To Direct Service Staff**   * feeling successful in meeting new challenges      * cooperating with a wider circle of teachers and specialists * adopting fresh approaches to teaching * individualizing instruction for all students * adapting to different student learning styles * developing a collaborative support system * making significant change in the life of a child with disabilities as well as others in the classroom * having opportunities to work with specialists and integrating advice on working with all children * having opportunities to participate in IEP planning and gain knowledge of all goals and strategies | **To Administrators**   * providing more collaborative programs by educating children with and without disabilities in an inclusive program * having increased classroom and staff resources * improving staff skills through coaching and professional development * increasing programming opportunities by offering a great number of placement options |
|  |  |  |  |  |

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## **SECTION II: INCLUSIVE PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Currently, there are a number of inclusive models at the preschool level. A continuum of quality placement options enables IEP teams to place preschoolers with disabilities in the least restrictive environment that meets their individualized needs. Inclusive settings vary in design and in the amount of time that children with and without disabilities are included with each other (Guralnick, 2001). Potential inclusive placement opportunities include: full-time early childhood settings, part-time early childhood/part-time early childhood special education settings, and reverse inclusion settings. This section of the *Guide* describes each of these potential options. First, a definition of the placement is provided. Next, critical features that are needed to ensure success and a clarification of the misconceptions are provided. Different program designs which may be used along with examples of how they have been used by Virginia school divisions are described. The benefits and challenges of each design are also discussed.

**A. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SETTINGS**

One inclusive placement opportunity for preschoolers is an early childhood education setting. With this option, children with disabilities are enrolled full-time with same-aged peers in neighborhood settings for preschoolers without disabilities on the same schedule. Neighborhood settings may be community-based, such as private preschool programs, child care centers, Head Start/Early Head Start and family day care programs, public school-based programs, Title I preschool programs, four-year-old programs (Virginia Preschool Initiative), and Occupational Child Care programs in secondary schools. Head Start requires at least 10% of the children enrolled in that system’s program be identified with disabilities. Children with disabilities receive all their special education and related services in these educational programs designed primarily for children without disabilities (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005).

**Critical Features**

**Program philosophy.** A well-defined program philosophy supports the belief that all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, have the right to participate actively in early childhood education settings within their community. This means that no child is excluded from an early childhood setting based on the type or degree of disability. The philosophy should include a written statement that represents the goals and values of the program personnel and defines the program’s purpose and outcomes. A strong philosophy will allow the team to function optimally with a shared perspective (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005; Odom, 2002). The philosophy may include statements such as, “Children, staff, administrators, and families accept, understand, and value individual differences.” To be most effective, develop the philosophy statement with input from administrators, staff, and families (*All Children Belong*, 1994; Peck, Furman, & Helmstetter, 1993). See Appendix for a sample statement of program philosophy.

**Collaborative policies.** Successful inclusive programs share responsibility for the children between the early childhood education and the early childhood special education professionals (Odom, 2002). Collaborative policies should be established within and external to the school systems between ECSE and ECE programs to support inclusive programs (Peck et al., 1993; Gupta et al., 2014). The policies should foster the program philosophy and goals. For example, if a program goal is that all children will follow the same schedule, then a policy may be needed to specify that the children with disabilities in the program will follow the ECE program schedule. Other policies may be needed with regard to transportation, tuition payment, and provision of special education and related services in the early childhood setting.

**Classroom composition.** Classroom composition may be determined by considering the needs of all children. Natural proportions are generally accepted to be 10-12% of the total class (Guralnick, 1981; Snell & Brown, 2005). Decisions should be based on the needs of the children with disabilities being included, characteristics of the children without disabilities, the attitudes and training of the staff, support services available, and the ratio of adults to children. Class size/ratio must respond to community changes and be flexible (Odom, 2002). Class size, ratio, and special education case load guidelines should be taken into consideration in addition to the above mentioned variables during the school year.

**Shared professional development.** Staff should be prepared through joint professional development to be equipped for the role changes that are required in an inclusive program. Teamsof participants may include early childhood education teachers, early childhood special educators, paraeducators, therapists, and families (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). Refer to training modules for topics for shared professional development.

**Collaborative team meetings.** Teamwork is necessary when planning for students. It is important to schedule collaborative meetings between ECE, ECSE, and related service staff to plan to meet the educational needs of each child in the early childhood setting (Fox & Williams, 1991; Rainforth, York, & MacDonald, 1992; Odom, 2002). Collaborative team meetings can include interaction, problem solving, brainstorming, and sharing concerns and experiences (Cavallaro & Haney, 1999). Research shows that ongoing staff communication is critical for program success in inclusive settings. Effective ECSE and ECE teams meet frequently (e.g., one hour a week) with the related service staff attending the team meeting at least one time per month.

**Role definitions.** Each staff member’s role and responsibilities must be clearly defined; staff must understand each other’s responsibilities in an inclusive program. Staff roles may vary based on the program design and staff, in addition to child and family needs. For example, in one classroom the ECSE and related service staff may not provide direct services but consult regularly with the ECE staff, while in another classroom they may need to provide direct as well as consultative services in order to meet staff, child, and family needs. See Appendix for sample roles and responsibilities.

**Adequate supports.** A wide range of strategies is required to ensure meaningful participation by all children, including those with disabilities, in the ongoing activities of the classroom (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005). Supports for children include environmental adaptations, instructional or curricular modifications, specialized instructional strategies, peer supports, team teaching strategies, assistive technology, or additional adults in the class. Supports for staff include planning time, training, collaborative teaming, parental involvement, and administrative support (*All Children Belong*, 1994; Grisham-Brown et al., 2005; Odom, 2002).

**Effective instructional methods**. Materials should be shared among ECE staff, ECSE staff, and related service staff in the program. This collaboration includes the use of evidence-based practices and specialized instruction to meet the needs of all early childhood children. Odom (2002) also suggests that IEP objectives be embedded in activities and routines that naturally occur in the class. Universal Design for Learning suggests that instructional design encompass a range of flexible learning materials and activities and is a blueprint or framework for supporting all learners of any age. The three principles of UDL call for multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. An article on UDL is [Integrating Principles of Universal Design Into the Early Childhood Curriculum](https://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/Dimensions_Vol41_1_Dinnebeil.pdf), (<https://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/Dimensions_Vol41_1_Dinnebeil.pdf>).

Teachers can systematically provide short interactions that help children build new skills. This will allow for high rates of engagement for students with disabilities with the materials and peers within natural classroom routines (McWilliam, Wolery, & Odom, 2001).

**Integrated therapy.** When therapy is provided in the classroom, teachers and specialists consult with each other four times as much as they do when therapy is provided out of the class (McWilliam, 1996). Grisham-Brown et al. (2017) recommend that therapists also conduct activities within the daily routine in order to observe the children they serve. For example, the occupational therapist may observe fine motor and sensory skills during a cooking activity. A physical therapist may observe gross motor skills on the playground, and a speech and language pathologist can observe communication throughout the day. This service delivery model provides opportunities for children to learn and use skills in functional settings where they are required (Rainforth et al., 1992; Grisham-Brown et al., 2017). In another example, a speech pathologist may be working on language goals for a specific child while reading a story to the entire class during story time. This is a relevant article, [Integrating Therapy Into the Classrooom](https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/integratingtherapyintotheclassroom) (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/integratingtherapyintotheclassroom>).

**Facilitation of friendships.** Friendships between children with and without disabilities can be fostered using the least intrusive strategies, such as environmental arrangement, curricular activities and materials, peer-mediated approaches, and child-specific strategies (Odom, 2002). See Module 4 “Fostering Social Relationships” for suggested training module on fostering friendships.

**Family involvement.** Families should be involved in planning and evaluating the inclusive program as well as in designing and supporting their children's educational program. It is important for families to have the opportunity to participate in family-to-family socialization and support (Kaczmarek, 2006). According to Cavallaro & Haney (1999); Wolery & Odom (2000); and Gupta et al. (2014), family involvement is especially critical in inclusive preschool programs. In order to provide the maximum educational benefits for children with disabilities, coordinated efforts between home and school are essential to support the social goals of inclusion for all children, and to address the special concerns of all families who choose inclusive programs.

**Misconceptions**

All programs that include children with disabilities in early childhood education settings need to be well planned with appropriate vision and training (Gupta et al., 2014). When planning does not occur, misconceptions on the part of administrators, staff, and families may arise. During the planning process, it is critical to dispel common misconceptions. Participants should understand that including children in early childhood settings does ***NOT*** mean:

* Placing children with disabilities into early childhood education settings without the supports and services they need to be successful;
* Grouping children by ability level within the early childhood education classroom;
* Eliminating or reducing special education services;
* Teaching all children the same thing, at the same time, in the same way;
* Expecting ECE teachers to teach children with disabilities without the skills, professional development, and support they need to teach all children effectively;
* Ignoring each child's unique needs;
* Identifying children by their special education label (e.g., the child with autism in my class);
* Teaching children with disabilities in isolation or outside of the usual classroom routines;
* Ignoring parent's concerns;
* Separating families of children without disabilities from families of children with disabilities for program activities such as parent meetings or workshops, etc.; and
* Children without disabilities receive less attention.

**Program Designs**

There are several ways to serve children with disabilities in general education settings.

**Individual Teacher Model.** In this program design, a teacher may be dually endorsed in early childhood education (preK-3 or preK-6) and early childhood special education, or the local education agency determines that the ECSE teacher can deliver services to both populations. This teacher has one classroom with children with and without IEPs. To meet the criteria of an inclusive setting, there must be at least 50% of the children without IEPs.

**School System Examples:**

* There is an average of 15 children in a classroom with up to three children with IEPs. The school division determines that an ECSE endorsed teacher and an instructional assistant will deliver the services. Related services are delivered within the daily routine.
* A teacher endorsed in both early childhood education and early childhood special education serves up to 18 children with up to six of these children with IEPs. In this model, there are two instructional assistants/paraeducators. Related services are delivered within the daily routine.
* A teacher endorsed in both early childhood education and early childhood special education serves up to 18 children, although the school division limits children with IEPs to a maximum of four ECSE children. Two instructional assistants/paraeducators are supporting this model. Related services are delivered within the daily routine.

**Co-Teaching Model of Collaboration.** In this program design, a group of children with disabilities (e.g., an ECSE teacher's caseload) is enrolled in one or two early childhood programs. An ECSE teacher and assistant are based full-time at the early childhood setting to team teach, coach, learn from, and meet periodically (e.g., weekly) with ECE staff. Related service staff provide integrated therapy in the ECE classrooms and participate regularly in monthly team meetings. There are a variety of ways this design is implemented.

**School Division Examples:**

* Up to ten children eligible for special education services from an LEA attend a private child care center. Three to four children with disabilities are enrolled in each of three classes at the center. The ratio of children with disabilities to children without disabilities varies in each class (e.g., 3:17 in the older fours class). An ECSE teacher and assistant are based full-time at the center and related service staff provides consultative and direct services at the center as do the ECSE teacher and assistant. Planning between all professionals is collaborative.
* Up to eight children with disabilities are enrolled in two LEA four-year-old program classrooms that are co-located. The maximum enrollment of children with disabilities to children without disabilities is 1:4 in each class. An ECSE teacher and assistant are located full-time at the program and split their time between the two classes. One of them is in each classroom at all times. Related services are also included in the classroom and delivered within the daily routine. Planning between all professionals is collaborative.
* Up to eight children with disabilities are enrolled in one school division's ECE classroom. The ratio of children with disabilities to those without disabilities in the classroom is 1:3. An ECSE teacher and assistant team teach with an ECE teacher and assistant in the program. Related services are included in the classroom and delivered within the daily routine. Planning between all professionals is collaborative.

**Itinerant Model of Collaboration.** In an itinerant model program design, children with disabilities are enrolledfull-time in multiple early childhood education programs with same-aged peers. An ECSE teacher may serve multiple settings and travel from program to program to consult with ECE staff and/or provide direct services as needed to the children with disabilities. A typical caseload includes up to twelve children, some may only receive home-based services. The ECSE teacher meets regularly (e.g., weekly) to consult with the ECE staff. When children with disabilities require more support to succeed in the early childhood education setting, additional ECSE teaching assistants may be placed in settings to provide additional support. The ECSE teacher provides guidance and feedback to the assistant.

**School Division Examples:**

* One local school division uses a variety of placement opportunities for their students with disabilities. Children are enrolled full-time in a variety of early childhood settings, such as Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative as well as in community-based preschool programs or child care centers. An ECSE teacher and assistant, under the direct guidance of the ECSE teacher, may have between eight to 12 children on the caseload, depending on the amount of hours of direct and consultative support services that are specified on the children's IEPs. The teacher and assistant travel from program to program to provide direct support as needed and to consult with the ECE staff. They also spend a large amount of time assisting the early childhood education staff to make modifications or accommodations as needed (e.g., developing a communication system or picture schedule for a classroom). The ECE and ECSE staffs meet on a regular basis (e.g., weekly or biweekly) depending on staff and children's needs. Related service staff attend meetings one time a month.
* One public school program enrolls up to 12 children with disabilities full-time in five early childhood settings (e.g., Head Start, child care centers). One ECSE teacher and three ECSE teaching assistants provide support to these sites. ECSE assistants are based full-time at three of the sites where children with severe disabilities are enrolled. The ECSE teacher provides limited direct guidance and support to the ECSE assistants and meets with the ECE staff and ECSE assistants, providing coaching, on a weekly basis.

**Benefits and** **Challenges**

Individual teacher, co-teaching model of collaboration, and itinerant model of collaboration are program designs that have numerous benefits as well as some challenges. The table on the following page depicts these.

**Table 2. Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative and Consultative Program Designs**

|  | **Individual Teacher Model** | **Co-Teaching Model** | **Itinerant Model** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Benefits** | * Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to attend a preschool program with their peers in their community, to form friendships, & to participate actively with their peers without disabilities * Provides a blended program with one teacher serving all children in a consistent manner * Resolves fiscal & space issues for administrators by freeing up space in the public school building & eliminates the cost of furnishing new ECSE classrooms and requiring less staff * Eliminates the possible   challenges of co-teaching   * Provides a benefit to administrators who have the opportunity to support a comprehensive preschool program | * Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to attend natural settings within their community, to form friendships, and to participate actively with their peers without disabilities * Provides the opportunity for the ECE and ECSE teachers to learn strategies from each other, to merge practices, and to have the opportunity for role release * Resolves fiscal & space issues for administrators by freeing up space in the public school building and eliminates the cost of furnishing new ECSE classrooms * Lowers the overall cost for educating some children with disabilities by using existing ECE programs * Facilitates the scheduling of regular team meetings as ECSE & ECE staff are housed in the same program * Allows for adequate on-site staff support to meet the needs of children with severe disabilities * Facilitates the provision of on-site related services as multiple children are located at one or two sites * Provides opportunities for ECSE teacher and assistants to be part of the school community | * Provides more choices for families regarding the ECE programs for children to attend (e.g., a full-day child care, a part-day community-based program, or a Head Start program). * Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to attend natural settings within their community and to form friendships and participate actively with their peers without disabilities * Provides the opportunity for the ECE and ECSE teachers to learn strategies from each other * Resolves fiscal and space issues for administrators by freeing up space in the public school building and eliminating the costs of furnishing new ECSE classrooms * Lowers the overall cost for educating some children with disabilities by using existing ECE programs |
|  | **Individual Teacher Model** | **Co-Teaching Model** | **Itinerant Model** |
| **Challenges**  (See Section V for possible solutions to address challenges) | * The teacher must understand and implement the requirements of both the Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education programs, including philosophy, strategies, curriculum, and paper work * The teacher may be somewhat isolated if this is the only early childhood classroom in the building | * May be difficult for staff to switch roles from direct service providers in their "own" classrooms to team teaching & collaborative teaming * May present administrative challenges (e.g., coordinating program schedules and policies, supervising staff, arranging for transportation, paying tuition) * May limit the community placement choices available to families as the school division develops collaborative agreements with a select number of sites. | * May necessitate traveling to a variety of ECE programs which can be time-consuming * May make the scheduling of regular meetings with ECE staff more difficult because the ECSE teacher and related service staff are working at numerous sites * May limit the time for the ECSE teacher and related service staff to provide direct services to the children with disabilities within the ECE program * May present administrative challenges (e.g., coordinating transportation of children with disabilities to numerous early childhood programs, paying tuition) * May require hiring additional staff if children with more significant disabilities are enrolled in multiple sites |

## **B. PART-TIME ECE/PART-TIME ECSE SETTINGS**

A second inclusive placement opportunity for preschoolers with disabilities may be in a part-time ECE/part-time ECSE setting. With this option, children with disabilities participate in both an ECSE program and a school or community-based early childhood education program (e.g., community-based preschool, Head Start, Even Start, Title I preschool program, LEA-sponsored four-year-old program Occupational Child Care program in secondary schools). The children with disabilities attend the early childhood education program either at the same time on a daily basis (e.g., for free choice or center time) or on the same days each week as their typically developing peers (e.g., every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). Children with disabilities receive a portion of their special education and related services in the ECE program and the remainder of their special education and related services in the ECSE program. The main purpose of part-time inclusion is to provide children with disabilities access to meaningful interactions with children without disabilities. Appropriate supports for the child with disabilities must be implemented in the ECE setting.

Special Considerations**.** For school divisions just beginning to expand their placement opportunities, part-time inclusion may be a stepping stone to full-time inclusion. More planning time can be allocated to prepare for full-time inclusion while children with disabilities concurrently have access to interactions with peers without disabilities. Time can be spent planning for reallocation of staff and a new definition of staff roles, while their roles remain fairly intact during the year of planning.

**Critical Features**

Successful part-time ECE/part-time ECSE programs include some specific features. A program that includes these features will be more successful.

**Shared Professional Development.** Staff should be prepared through joint training and technical assistance to be equipped for the role changes that are required in a part-time ECE/part time ECSE program design. Teams of participants should include the ECE teachers, early childhood special educators, paraeducators, related services providers, and families to participate in joint in-service trainings.

**Program attendance.** In order to observe progress, children with disabilities should interact with typically developing children as frequently as possible. Attendance should be regularly scheduled (e.g., three days per week, every afternoon, M-W-F, etc.). Settings should include the appropriate numbers of typically developing children in order for children with disabilities to participate in activities with their typically developing peers.

**Collaborative policies.** Collaborative policies should be established between the school division's ECSE program and the school-sponsored or community-based general ECE program to support part-time inclusion. Policies must specify the responsibilities of each program in regard to numerous issues (e.g., transportation, liability, staff roles).

**Program coordination.** Teamwork is necessary in order for inclusive programs to be successful. Early childhood education and early childhood special education teachers, related service providers, families, and administrators need to work together as a team in order to coordinate services for the individual students (Odom, 2002). In addition, ECE and ECSE staff develop similar classroom rules and expectations, behavioral plans, classroom schedules, and use the same curricula to provide coordinated services to the children enrolled in both programs. The roles of teaching staff in the classroom should be demonstrated through shared ownership of all the children and sharing of traditional ECE and ECSE roles. The merging of practices should be visible in the classroom at any time. In a high quality inclusive classroom, it should be difficult to determine who is in the role of the ECE teacher and who is in the role of the ECSE teacher.

**Regular meeting and consultation time.** Regularly scheduled meetings and consultation time should be scheduled between early childhood education and special education staff. Ideally, ECE and ECSE teachers and assistants meet weekly or biweekly and related service staff attends these meetings at least monthly. Direct services are also provided as needed. This consultation time, as well as any direct service time, should be included in the children's IEPs.

**Consistent schedule.** To promote independence and help children understand routines, class schedules must be implemented consistently. Predictable routines provide children with a sense of security and help them feel in control of their world (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014). Families and ECSE and ECE staff must work together for this to occur. For example, a child with disabilities may attend the ECSE class every morning and an ECE program every afternoon or a group of children with disabilities may visit the ECE class daily for a portion of the day.

**Smooth transitions.** Even when young children follow a predictable schedule, it is developmentally appropriate for children to have difficulty with transitions. A significant number of young children experience four or more transitions in one day (e.g., from home to child care provider, to the ECSE program, to the child care provider, and back home). Taking time to plan for transitions can help to alleviate problems and increase student success (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014). Additionally, transitions should be predictable and supportive of all children. Strategies include decreasing the number of whole group transitions, being prepared with interesting activities for those who must wait for others, giving all children a warning or signal, modeling or “practicing” routines related to transition activities, sharing important information through a home-school notebook or other means of communication, talking positively to the children about where they will go next, and providing time for children to talk about their experiences in the previous setting.

**Misconceptions**

There are numerous misconceptions about placements in part-time ECE/part-time ECSE settings. Prior to beginning the inclusive program, it is important to eliminate these. Explain to program participants that part-time inclusion means:

* Allowing children with disabilities to have the same educational experiences in ECE and ECSE classrooms (e.g., same curricula implemented in each classroom, same behavioral expectations);
* Communicating regularly with ECSE and ECE teachers, related service staff, and families;
* Placing children with disabilities into early childhood education classes with the supports and services they need to be successful there;
* Addressing the needs of all children, with and without disabilities; and
* Ensuring consistent schedules.

**Program Design**

When designing inclusive placement options, programs may begin on a part-time basis. Children with disabilities are enrolled in both ECE and ECSE programs.

## **Part-Time Design**

In one program design option, children with disabilities are enrolled in both ECSE and ECE classrooms. Children may attend each program for part of each day. ECE, ECSE, and related service staff meet regularly and coordinate services, but a majority of services are received in the ECE class.

**Part-time Example:**

* In one LEA, an ECSE class and two Head Start classes are located on the same campus. The ECSE teacher and four children with disabilities attend one Head Start class and the ECSE assistant and three children with disabilities attend the other Head Start class. The ECSE teacher and assistant switch classrooms weekly. The children with disabilities attend the self-contained classroom with their teachers on a regular schedule. The ECSE teacher and the Head Start teachers meet weekly and plan monthly. The majority of services are received in the ECE classes.

**Benefits and Challenges**

There are specific benefits and challenges to part-time ECE, part-time ECSE program designs that are depicted in the following table:

**Table 3. Benefits and Challenges for Part-time Program Designs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Part-time ECE/ECSE Enrollment** |
| **Benefits** | * Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to play and learn with peers without disabilities on a regular basis * Provides teaching partners to meet the needs of all children * Enables staff to begin to shift delivery of services and look at role release so that children can be together 100% of the time |
| **Challenges** | * May demand additional transitions and require adjusting to differences in the ECE & ECSE programs which can be difficult for some young children * May be difficult to arrange regularly scheduled meetings between the ECE, ECSE, and related service staff as children with disabilities may be placed in multiple ECE programs * May be difficult to arrange for the ECSE teacher or assistant to support individual children who are included part-time in the ECE class due to multiple responsibilities |

## 

## **C. REVERSE INCLUSION MODEL**

Another opportunity for inclusion at the preschool level is placement in a reverse inclusion setting. Reverse inclusion involves bringing typically developing children into special education classrooms and having them attend the reverse inclusion classroom to enhance the opportunities for all children to learn together.

**Special Considerations.** The quality of a program will dramatically affect the success of inclusion. Some school divisions are faced with a lack of quality ECE programs in their community. This option for inclusion provides a way for children with disabilities to accrue the benefits provided by having peers without disabilities as role models when quality ECE settings are not available. An inclusion planning team may recommend initiating a reverse inclusion program as the first step. The team may then investigate ways to begin quality ECE programs or work collaboratively with established programs to improve their quality in order to expand inclusive opportunities for the future.

**Critical Features**

**Class composition.** It is documented in the literature that typically developing children receive multiple benefits from being educated with their peers with varying abilities. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (September 2015) defines reverse inclusion as 50% or more typically developing children in a class designed for children with special needs. While Guralnik (2001) suggests that a reverse inclusion program may offer some developmental advantages for children with disabilities, research shows that there is a more limited potential for growth and development with a program design where only a few children without disabilities serve as "role models." In order to produce the desired social and instructional outcomes for the children with disabilities, the children without disabilities must attend the program on the same schedule as their typically developing peers. In addition, these models should include planning time for teachers to meet and to choose and modify activities so that all children will be actively engaged (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014).

**Program policies and procedures.** Policies and procedures should be developed for the reverse inclusion program. Many issues related to serving the children without disabilities should be addressed, including a nondiscriminatory selection process, transportation guidelines, and liability.

**Combined use of ECE and ECSE practices.** As teachers plan their classrooms, develop lesson plans, etc., recommended practices from the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](http://www.naeyc.org) ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org/)) and the [Council for Exceptional Children Division for Early Childhood](http://www.dec-sped.org) ([www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org/)) should be implemented that is consistent across all classrooms. Additionally, it is important that teachers use developmentally appropriate curricula that are consistent with the curricula that are being used in the ECE program. Similar to all high quality classrooms, in reverse inclusion classrooms learning centers should be clearly defined and materials should be accessible, labeled, and adapted for use by all children. The schedule should include a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, the same curricula must be used, and IEP objectives should be taught within the early childhood education routines and activities.

**Facilitation of friendships.** Thevalue of friendships is critical for young children. The social component of the environment can be structured to promote engagement, interaction, communication, and learning by providing peer models, responsive and imitative adults, and by expanding children’s behavior and play (Sandall et al., 2005).

**Integrated therapy.** Preschool teachers and therapists should embed individual therapy goals into ongoing routines and activities in the classroom. Fine and gross motor, sensory, and speech and language skills can be integrated during classroom activities (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005). When related services (such as speech, physical, and occupational therapies; behavioral support, etc.) are integrated into the classroom, the learning needs of all children are addressed.

**Family involvement.** Families must be involved inplanning and evaluating the inclusive program as well as in designing and supporting their children's educational program. By providing opportunities for family-to-family socialization, support, and participation in these activities, family members may enhance their confidence and knowledge base in learning skills which are appropriate for their child with a disability.

**Misconceptions**

There are numerous misconceptions about the reverse inclusion model that should be eliminated prior to initiating this type of model. Program participants should be informed that reverse inclusion means:

* Having at least equal or greater number of typically developing children with their peers with disabilities enrolled in the reverse inclusion classrooms;
* Using specialized instructional strategies appropriately may benefit all children;
* Enhancing opportunities for typically developing children to value diversity, support members of the community with differing abilities, increase empathy and develop friendships;
* Differentiating instruction so that all children can learn;
* Allowing each child to learn at his/her own pace; and
* Welcoming and including all families of children with and without disabilities for program activities and events such as parent meetings, workshops, etc.

**Program Design**

**Reverse Inclusion.** In a reverse inclusion model, equal or greater numbers of same-aged children without disabilities attend the ECSE classroom on the same days and times as the children with disabilities. A systematic nondiscriminatory method (e.g., a lottery) is used to select the children without disabilities to include in the classroom.

**School Division Examples:**

* An LEA enrolls equal numbers of children with and without disabilities in its ECSE classes. Each special education teacher has a caseload of eight children with disabilities but four children attend the morning program and four children attend the afternoon program. This is how they can provide equal numbers. The children are selected by using a lottery system. The school division provides transportation.
* An ECSE classroom in a public elementary school enrolls eight children with disabilities and eight children without disabilities. This school division determines that the ratio will include an ECSE teacher and 2 ECSE assistants as some of the children with disabilities have more significant needs. The enrollment of the children without disabilities may be funded with Title I or Virginia Preschool Initiative monies. Staffing, meals, transportation, materials, building space, etc. are determined by program administrators by written agreement prior to establishing the classroom.

**Benefits and Challenges**

There are benefits as well as challenges to the reverse inclusion model. These are delineated in Table 4.

**Table 4. Benefits and Challenges to Reverse Inclusion Model**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Reverse Inclusion Model** |
| **Benefits** | * Provides an option for inclusion in school divisions where quality ECE programs are not available within the community * Provides an option for ensuring that two- year-olds with disabilities have access to their same age peers * Offers the opportunity for children with and without disabilities to play and learn together on a regular basis and develop friendships * Provides a quality program for parents of preschoolers without disabilities in the community using a developmentally appropriate curriculum |
| **Challenges** | * May present difficulty in maintaining appropriate proportions of children with and without disabilities (e.g., children who are identified during the year are guaranteed special education services and there must be equal or greater numbers of children without disabilities to meet the criteria of reverse inclusion) * May present challenges to ECSE staff who are accustomed to the 8:2 student teacher ratio * May present with administrative issues related to serving children without disabilities (e.g., transportation, liability, nondiscriminatory selection) * May present challenges to a teacher certified in ECSE to deliver developmentally appropriate practices that reflect more ECE pedagogy |

## **SECTION III: PROGRAM COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

To initiate a full- or part-time placement option in an ECE setting, partnerships must be established between ECSE and ECE programs. This section describes the variety of ECE programs that may be used as inclusive placement sites for preschoolers with disabilities. These include Title I preschool programs, LEA-sponsored four-year-old programs, occupational child care programs in secondary schools, Head Start, and community-based early childhood programs. Specific information is provided about each program and explicit issues related to serving children with disabilities within each program are discussed.

For the past several decades, research has consistently demonstrated that high-quality early education programs that are designed to support the full range of children’s development can have long-term positive implications on later school success. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, preschool programs for at-risk children have been funded by both state and federal grants. With the exception of Head Start programs, which are funded directly to the locality, the programs are administered by the VDOE and are currently supported by the following funding streams: Title I, Virginia Preschool Initiative, and IDEA Section 619. Head Start programs are granted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, federal Head Start office.

# **Title I preschool programs**

# *Legislative authority*

The legislative authority for Title I preschool programs is Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by P.L. 107-110: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

*Program purpose, description of service, eligibility and funding*

Title I Part A funds are primarily intended to provide funding to improve the teaching of children from low income families in elementary and secondary education schools and to enable children to meet challenging state academic standards. Title I has three goals: to help children succeed in regular classrooms, attain grade-level proficiency, and improve achievement in basic and more advanced skills.

Designated funding sources for preschool services fund services to improve the cognitive, health, and social-emotional outcomes for at-risk children from families with low income. The program’s intent is to prepare at-risk children with the prerequisite skills that will assist children in transitioning to elementary school programs.

Developmentally appropriate instruction is encouraged at the preschool level where key concepts are taught using age-appropriate activities. For in depth information, visit the [U.S. Department of Education](http://www.ed.gov) ([http://www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov/)) or the [Virginia Department of Education](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/title1/part_a/index.shtml) (<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/title1/part_a/index.shtml>).

School divisions target the Title I funds they receive to public schools with the highest percentages of children from low-income families. Unless a participating school is operating a school-wide program, the school must focus Title I services on children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet state academic standards. Schools enrolling at least 40 percent of students from low-income families are eligible to use Title I funds for school-wide programs that are designed to upgrade their entire educational programs for all students, particularly the lowest-achieving students. [Title 1, Part A](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/title1/part_a/index.shtml) (<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/title1/part_a/index.shtml>)

*Collaboration with special education*

ECSE programs in Virginia and across the nation have developed collaborative agreements to serve preschool children with disabilities in Title I preschool programs with special education and related services supplied through the ECSE program. These programs coordinate their resources to provide quality educational experiences for all children. For example, some ECSE and Title I preschool programs incorporate funding where both programs fund the program and costs are allocated to particular funding sources. Other ECSE and Title I preschool programs both count children for funding purposes and split the costs but provide all services in the Title I preschool program (ex., if it is determined the cost per child in the classroom is $6,000, both ECSE and Title I are charged $3,000 for each child who is in the program.). Still others co-locate or combine ECSE classes and Title I preschool classes but maintain separate administration and personnel.

**Virginia Preschool Initiative**

*Legislative authority*

The Virginia General Assembly approves funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), an at-risk program for 4-year-olds, with final approval by the Governor and costs shared by state and local governments.

*Program purpose and description of services*

The purpose of the legislation is to provide quality preschool programming for four-year-old children who are at-risk for school failure and not presently receiving preschool services from the Head Start program. Each locality is responsible for coordinating resources to serve the greatest number of four-year-old children in need based on current eligibility criteria. Local VPI programs should be developmentally appropriate and implement evidence-based practices, including a quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement and transportation. The program goal is to have these children ready to successfully enter kindergarten.

*Participant eligibility*

To meet eligibility criteria, visit the VPI site listed below. This eligibility may change based on legislative direction. <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/index.shtml>

*Funding*

VPI is financed by a combination of state and local funds using a designated formula.

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/index.shtml>

*Collaboration with special education*

ECSE programs in Virginia have developed agreements with school division sponsored four-year-old programs to include children with disabilities. Historically, one of the major barriers to full-time placement of children with disabilities in this program has been that many of these programs have waiting lists and accept children on a first-come, first-served basis. Some programs indicate they are not able to “save” spaces for children with disabilities when there is a waiting list and the children with disabilities can be served in other ECSE programs. Localities are expected to coordinate resources and funding streams to serve the greatest number of at-risk four-year-old children, including students with disabilities. All children must meet an eligibility requirement as specified at the time of application. Families of children with disabilities may attempt to enroll their child in the VPI program but must meet local VPI criteria. In some areas, children with disabilities are guaranteed spaces where the ECSE and four-year-old programs both contribute funding and/or staff to the program.

**Occupational child care programs in secondary schools**

The occupational child care program is a two-year secondary program that meets for a block of time (two to three hours) each day and trains high school students for entry-level positions in the child care industry. The students in the program are juniors and seniors. All programs have a laboratory training component. The schools may opt for a child care laboratory in the school setting or students may be placed in jobs in the community through a “cooperative education” agreement. The ratio of high school students to preschoolers in a classroom varies. Otherwise, child care laboratories operate similarly to community-based early childhood programs.

Virginia ECSE programs in some school divisions collaborate in a variety of ways with occupational child care programs to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities. These school divisions may co-locate ECSE or Head Start/Early Head Start classrooms at secondary schools or career centers to provide opportunities for full- or part-time placement of children with disabilities in the child care lab programs. High school students enrolled in the program benefit tremendously from this arrangement as they gain firsthand experiences working with children with disabilities. One of the greatest challenges to collaboration with this type of program is coordinating the communication that is needed with all of the students, the occupational child care instructor, and ECSE staff. Regular meetings as well as the use of notebooks to communicate daily are effective. Another challenge is to promote child-initiated learning when there may be a high ratio of adults to children in the classroom.

#### **Head Start programs**

*Legislative authority*

Head Start was established by the federal government in 1965 and was later updated by the Head Start Act of 1981 (as amended by P.L.103-218 and P.L. 105-285). During its 1994 reauthorization, the program was expanded to include Early Head Start programs, serving children birth to three and pregnant women. Reauthorized as Public Law 110-134, the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* includes significant provisions to improve the quality and programming for Head Start programs serving children birth to five and their families.

*Program purpose and description of services*

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are comprehensive child development programs supporting the emotional, mental, and social development of children birth to age 5 and their families. Each Head Start is unique in reflecting the needs of the community it serves (e.g., home-based, center-based, combination, half day, full day, wraparound with child care, etc.) and program hours range from at least six hours per day under the Early Head Start program to half and full day programs under the Head Start program. Services are child-centered and responsive to each child and family’s cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritage.

The goal of the program is to increase school readiness through comprehensive services determined necessary by family needs assessments. Individualized learning opportunities exist in the areas of language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development. Comprehensive health care, including medical, dental, mental health, and nutrition services may be provided, as well as services for children with disabilities and transition services. The parent involvement component includes ongoing opportunities for parent education, parent participation in program governance, and preference for employment in Head Start jobs. The social services component provides families with a method for assessing their needs and then provides services that build upon the individual strengths of families to meet these needs.

*Participant eligibility*

A child is eligible for Head Start if he meets the age and income requirements as established in the Head Start regulations. Up to 10 percent of the children enrolled may be from families that exceed the income eligibility guidelines if slots are available, based on local guidelines. Additionally, at least 10 percent of children enrolled must be children with disabilities. To be eligible for Head Start services, a child must be at least three years old by the date used to determine eligibility for public school in the community in which the Head Start program is located. Early Head Start programs serve children from birth to 36 months.

*Funding*

Grants are awarded by the federal Administration for Children and Families regional offices and the Head Start Bureau’s American Indian and Migrant Program branches directly to local public agencies, private nonprofit and for-profit organizations, Indian tribes, and public school divisions for the purpose of operating Head Start programs at the community level.

*Collaboration with special education*

According to the Head Start Center for Inclusion, Head Start is the largest provider of inclusive practices for young children with disabilities in the United States. As a result, Head Start programs work with localities to write interagency agreements to serve students with disabilities from local education agencies, including procedures for Child Find activities, services for children with disabilities, and professional development in inclusive practices for staff. School divisions have developed collaborative agreements between the ECSE program and school- or community-based Head Start programs to provide full- and part-time placement opportunities for children with mild to significant disabilities. Inclusive programming should be considered for all children regardless of type or severity of disability. When children with disabilities are enrolled in Head Start but receive special education and related services from the school division, children can be counted for funding purposes in the school division’s IDEA Part B child count. Head Start program monies are also available to provide services. Systems address different policies and procedures to merge these to improve quality.

##### **Community-based early childhood programs**

*Program purpose and description of services*

Community-based early childhood programs are diverse. They may be private for-profit or private nonprofit. Community-based programs may be housed in recreation centers, private buildings, private homes, universities, churches, and many other locations. These programs may operate part or full time.

*Licensure and accreditation*

Some programs are licensed or regulated by the Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs while others are not licensed. Licensed or regulated child care programs must meet certain requirements. Contact the local licensing office for specific program requirements.

Some community-based organizations have voluntarily participated in Virginia Quality ([www.virginiaquality.com](http://www.virginiaquality.com/)) to document a commitment in providing high quality care and early education to children served in the program. Community-based programs may also be accredited by national organizations such as the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](http://www.naeyc.org) ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org/)).

*Funding*

Parents typically pay a fee or tuition for their child to attend community-based programs. Local school divisions may use special education funds for placement in these settings if determined appropriate by the child’s IEP team.

*Collaboration with special education*

Community-based programs are required by the [Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)](https://www.ada.gov/) (<http://www.ada.gov/>) to accept children with disabilities and make reasonable accommodations to meet these children’s needs. School divisions have developed agreements with a variety of community-based programs to provide opportunities for full- or part-time placement in ECE settings. For example, some school divisions have based an ECSE teacher and an assistant full time at one or two community programs and enrolled children with disabilities full time in the early childhood classes. Other ECSE programs have rented space at community-based centers in order to co-locate ECSE classes to assist in providing part-time placement opportunities. Still other school divisions “buy slots” and pay tuition for children with disabilities to attend. Some of the major challenges related to collaboration between ECSE and community-based programs involve administrative issues (e.g., tuition payment, transportation) and philosophical issues (e.g., merging of ECSE and ECE practices, role release for teaching staff).

## **SECTION IV: PLANNING STEPS**

**Changes associated with initiating preschool inclusion**

Once an inclusive practices planning team has a good understanding of why it is important to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers, it must then recognize the inevitable changes which will be required to initiate these options.

Change is difficult because it is always accompanied by its three cousins: risk, fear, and possible failure (Alessi, 1991). Reasonable risk taking is essential in order to grow and develop. Remember, when initiating programs with inclusive practices, the team is free to make mistakes; there is no such thing as failure, only feedback and results. The team’s success depends to a large degree on how well it processes the feedback it gets regarding its efforts (Alessi, 1991). In addition, change is typically gradual and incremental, but can occur rapidly in response to crisis situations (Burnes, 2004).

Because change is personal, some individuals in school divisions will be very excited and ready to include children with disabilities into programs with peers without disabilities; others will be ready but afraid they cannot meet the needs of all the children in the inclusive programs. Others will feel comfortable with the current programs and question the change. Concerns should be shared and addressed by the team. Initial program implementation may include only staff who are ready for change. Long term success could very likely depend on the attitudes of staff and families involved the first year the new option begins. When not forced, others will be more likely to participate after they hear and see colleagues, peers, children, families, and community benefit from the inclusive programming. Remember the underlying success to initiating placements utilizing inclusive practices: communication between team members, administrative support, and commitment to implementing an inclusive program.

The key to the success and longevity of inclusive placement opportunities is systematic planning and a community sense of ownership for the program being offered (Peck et al., 1993). This requires that ECSE programs in local school divisions form grassroots initiatives with early childhood programs to make decisions regarding what inclusive placement opportunities are compatible with their local assets and priorities. Many initially successful inclusive early childhood programs fail to sustain because preliminary steps are not taken to gain support from all the key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, educators, families, and related service staff) and to involve them in planning for implementing inclusive practices.

This section of the *Planning Guide* is written specifically for the preschool inclusive practices planning team and describes 16 planning steps which may be taken to plan for and initiate or expand quality inclusive placement opportunities with inclusive practices for preschoolers within the local school division. First, a rationale for the planning step is provided. It is followed by tasks that are needed to complete each step, including strategies or special considerations that will assist the team. Examples of sample materials that have been used by Virginia school divisions to complete the steps and tasks are also provided in the Appendix.

**Planning steps overview**

These planning steps are designed to be completed over a one- to two-year period by preschool inclusive practices planning teams. Year one is devoted to planning prior to offering a new inclusive placement option. Planning continues in year twowhile the program is operating. Some school divisions may take longer to complete these planning steps if more than one new option is going to be offered.

As teams prepare, the planning steps may sound overwhelming. The key is to work collaboratively and to prepare. Planning is proactive; fewer problems will arise if the new program or expansion of an existing program is planned for a year before beginning. Steps one through five will prepare teams to investigate preschool inclusive opportunities and gain administrative approval for initiating one. Steps six through 16 will ensure the success and longevity of the new program and some may be completed simultaneously. Some begin prior to placing children with disabilities in the setting(s) with inclusive practices; others continue throughout the first year of operation of the inclusive program. The following chart depicts these steps.

**Inclusive practices planning steps**

Step 1: Form an inclusion planning team.

Step 2: Educate the team about inclusive practices.

Step 3: Visit quality ECE programs with inclusive practices.

Step 4: Expand inclusive placement opportunities.

Step 5: Gain administrative support for proposed plan.

Step 6: Identify barriers and solutions to initiating approved inclusive placement opportunities.

Step 7: Recommend job revisions and develop sample roles and responsibilities descriptions to use for staff selection.

Step 8: Share information about the inclusive placement opportunities, elicit concerns, and gain support from key stakeholders.

Step 9: Develop a philosophy and goals for the inclusive practices.

Step 10: Provide ways for ECSE, ECE, and related service staff to learn about each other’s programs.

Step 11: Plan for and conduct a series of professional development sessions on recommended practices.

Step 12: Develop contracts (if applicable) and policies to support the philosophy and goals for the inclusive placement opportunity.

Step 13: Develop and use a process for making individualized placement decisions in the least restrictive environment.

Step 14: Plan for and conduct ongoing evaluations and use results for program improvement.

Step 15: Recommend orientation activities to begin the inclusive placement opportunities.

Step 16: Sustain and expand inclusive opportunities.

## **Planning Steps**

## **STEP 1: Form an inclusive practices planning team**

The first step in planning for inclusion is to form a team of representatives from all groups of key stakeholders who could be affected by early childhood inclusive programming (e.g., families, teachers, administrators) in order to make recommendations regarding inclusive placement opportunities that the school division could offer and conduct the necessary planning steps to provide these options.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine the procedures within your school division for forming a team and obtain permission from school division administrators:

* Prepare written materials regarding the purpose of forming a team, the rationale for and benefits of preschool inclusive programming, and the steps the team will take to plan for the practices.
* Make a formal presentation to the school board or schedule an informal meeting with your superintendent.

\_\_\_\_\_ Obtain approval to appoint members to serve on the planning team.

\_\_\_\_\_ Once approval is obtained, develop a list of potential representatives (e.g., Head Start, Title I preschool programs, Virginia Preschool Initiative, home child care providers, community-based programs). It is strongly recommended that an administrator be included on the inclusive practices planning team.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine what method to use to invite key stakeholders to the first meeting.

\_\_\_\_\_ Select and use a structured collaborative team meeting process; identify monthly meeting times. See the Appendix for a sample team process and Action Plan forms.

**STEP 2: Educate the team about inclusive practices**

Beginning a quality inclusive preschool program is a challenging task that embraces the process of change. In order for the changes to be implemented system-wide, team members must not only have a strong belief in the value of inclusive practices but also understand the significance of their involvement on the team. Team members must understand and acknowledge the importance of planning for program(s) with inclusive practices and be willing to learn about and endorse recommended inclusive practices in ECE programs.

\_\_\_\_\_ Review the rationale behind preschool inclusive practices, including educational, philosophical, legal, and cost effectiveness research.

\_\_\_\_\_ Provide an overview of the planning steps and the team's purpose.

\_\_\_\_\_ Review the potential placement opportunities for preschoolers.

\_\_\_\_\_ Review recommended practice guidelines for use in inclusive early childhood programs that merge recommended ECSE and ECE practices. See the Appendix for quality indicators for inclusive preschool/pre-k classes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Review information about the process of change and the specific organizational and programmatic changes required to develop inclusive practices option(s) for preschoolers.

\_\_\_\_\_ Conduct a needs assessment with staff to gain consensus about potential changes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine how many stakeholders are willing to be active team members now that they have a better understanding of their potential role.

**STEP 3: Visit quality inclusive ECE programs**.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Seeing inclusive practices in action is a critical step in planning. By visiting different programs offered by other school divisions, team members will gain perspective of potential placement opportunities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Select a variety of programs with inclusive practices to visit and determine which team members will visit which program(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ Schedule and observe classrooms and team meetings, then ask program participants to identify the benefits and challenges of the program they encountered and how they addressed these. See the Appendix for questionnaires to use when visiting a model site.

\_\_\_\_\_ Collect written program materials (e.g., program descriptions, contracts or interagency agreements, job descriptions, etc.).

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask team members to describe the programs they visited during a regularly scheduled team meeting.

**STEP 4: Expand inclusive placement opportunities**

Following visits to quality sites with inclusive practices, the team will determine potential inclusive placement opportunities to best meet the diverse needs of children and families in the school division.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify potential ECE sites offered within the school division (e.g., Title I, VPI, Head Start) and in the community (e.g., family child care, preschools).

\_\_\_\_\_ Decide how to contact potential ECE sites to determine their receptivity to collaboration.

\_\_\_\_\_ Decide how to determine the quality of the interested sites:

* Consider visiting early childhood programs in the area, talking personally with program directors, and using an observation guide to assess program quality.
* Consider limiting contacts of ECE programs to only those that are accredited by the NAEYC, National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, or are part of Virginia Quality (VQ). Consider conducting a survey or using a Request for Proposal process to identify interested sites that meet specific standards of quality set by your locality.

\_\_\_\_\_ Observe programs to rate program quality and collect specific program information.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine the number of children who will be eligible for ECSE services in the upcoming school year.

\_\_\_\_\_ Contact families to determine interest in and share information about *potential* inclusive placements (e.g., letter, survey, home visit, phone call). Decide which team members will make these contacts. See Appendix for sample letter and brochure for families.

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop a matrix of support. See Appendix for the sample matrix of levels of support and steps in scheduling.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make recommendations regarding inclusive placement opportunities to initiate next year. Recommendations for the long-range plan for inclusive practices should be incorporated into the school system’s long-range plan.

**STEP 5: Gain administrative support for proposed plan**

The next step is to obtain administrative approval and support to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine your LEA's existing procedures to obtain approval to initiate new or expanded programs. Tailor the following tasks to fit these procedures.

\_\_\_\_\_ Request time to meet with administrators and revised proposed inclusion plan.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare the overview of the summary that will be presented to the administrators.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify administrators’ questions and concerns and take them back to the full planning team to develop solutions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Share your team's next planning steps upon approval of the proposal, including expanding the team, if needed, to include representatives from additional collaborating ECE programs.

Once your team has gained administrative approval to begin your recommended options, there are ten additional steps to complete concurrently as you continue planning. Review these next steps and their associated tasks during regularly scheduled team meetings. Prioritize the order in which they will be completed based on your local needs and concerns.

**STEP 6: Identify barriers and solutions to initiating approved inclusive placement opportunities**

To avoid possible roadblocks to inclusion, it is important to address the team's concerns about the placement opportunities before the concerns become realities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify questions/issues/barriers about initiating the approved placement opportunities and prioritize the most urgent barriers to resolve first.

\_\_\_\_\_ Brainstorm solutions for each prioritized question/issue/barrier.

\_\_\_\_\_ Reach consensus on solution(s) for each question/barrier/issue:

* Discuss issues and potential solutions in more detail as you decide which solutions to implement.
* Contact stakeholders who are not part of the team to gather more information if necessary prior to selecting solutions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Continue to identify questions/concerns/barriers from the team as well as all participants in the inclusive program and bring these to subsequent team meetings to resolve.

**STEP 7: Recommend job revisions and develop sample roles and responsibilities for staff selection.**

In order to identify the most qualified, appropriate, and interested staff to serve children in the new placement sites, develop or modify job descriptions to include the duties associated with the new inclusive practices.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask appropriate administrators what procedures to follow to make changes to job descriptions and obtain permission for the team to make recommendations regarding job revisions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Gather current direct service staff job descriptions and modify as needed based on the staff roles and responsibilities required in the inclusive placement. Elicit suggestions about job revisions from the staff who may work in the inclusive program.

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop a description of the roles and responsibilities and include general specifications (e.g., flexibility, an ability to work cooperatively with other adults, etc.) as well as specific criteria for each staff position (e.g., competency in using a push in, integrated therapy approach for related service staff).

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop sample job announcements, letters eliciting staff interest in inclusive practices, and sample interview questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Share recommended job descriptions and the sample roles and responsibilities description with person(s) within your school division and with collaborating ECE administrators (if applicable) responsible for hiring/selecting staff.

\_\_\_\_\_ Share the revised job description with interested staff. Encourage them to visit an inclusive program like the one you plan to initiate.

\_\_\_\_\_ Interview appropriate personnel and select the most qualified staff.

**STEP 8: Share information about the inclusive placement opportunities with key stakeholders.**

It is important to share information about inclusive placement opportunities with key stakeholders, identifying and addressing stakeholder concerns, and gaining support prior to beginning the placement(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ Generate a list of stakeholders in need of information about the inclusive practices opportunities and select method(s) for sharing information (e.g., individual or group meetings, phone calls, written information, videos).

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine what information to share (e.g., the rationale and benefits for inclusive practices, a description of the option, etc.), identify person(s) responsible, and set deadlines for accomplishing these tasks.

\_\_\_\_\_ Designate team representatives to contact stakeholders to share information about the placements with inclusive practices, elicit concerns, and gain support for the option(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ Address all stakeholder concerns in regular team meetings. It is important to share information regarding all actions taken to address particular concerns.

**STEP 9: Develop a philosophy and goals for the inclusive opportunities**

Having a shared vision will guide the team as they make future decisions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine how to develop a philosophy statement and goals.

\_\_\_\_\_ Involve representatives from all stakeholder groups in the development of the philosophy and goals:

* Include the development of a philosophy statement and goals as an agenda item for team meetings that occur prior to initiating the inclusive placement option(s).
* Invite all families, staff, and administrators who are directly involved in the placement option to these meetings to provide input.

\_\_\_\_\_ Use the philosophy and goals during team meetings to guide decisions, develop/revise policies, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refine the philosophy and goals, if needed, following the completion of professional development and firsthand experiences with inclusive practices.

\_\_\_\_\_ Use the refined philosophy and goals to develop collaborative agreements or contracts, revise policies (if needed), and make future decisions about the inclusive placement opportunities.

**STEP 10: Provide time for collaboration to include all staff, ECSE, ECE, and related service staff**

In order to foster collaboration among staff in programs getting ready to implement inclusive practices, it is **critical for staff to learn about each other's practices and programs**. Once staff understands each other's practices, they can decide how these practices can complement each other to provide the best services for all children.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify important practices for the programs’ staff to learn. Ask those regularly involved in the classroom, such as the ECE and ECSE teachers and paraeducators, related service staff, and volunteers, to identify what they want to learn about each other's practices and what they feel is important to share about their practices.

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend ways for staff to learn about each other's programs.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask staff to identify preferred methods of learning and identify team members responsible for collecting this information.

## **STEP 11: Plan for and conduct a series of professional development training sessions on recommended** **practices**

Training on how ECE and ECSE practices may be used in complement will provide staff with a common foundation regarding quality early childhood programs with inclusive practices.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify who will be involved in the inclusive program and participate in professional development.

\_\_\_\_\_ Select methods to identify professional development needs, preferred times/locations for training, and preferred training methods. Assign persons responsible for collecting this information:

* Conduct a needs assessment and/or a self-study related to implementation of recommended practices.
* Generate a list of potential training methods (e.g., workshops, videotapes, reading).

\_\_\_\_\_ Select topics for training and variety of training methods based on the results of the needs assessment or self-study. Contact your regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) for training materials related to inclusive practices or use the training modules included in this manual.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare for follow-up technical assistance to assist staff in applying the information presented at professional development sessions. Identify persons responsible for facilitating these activities:

* Consider using checklists, peer coaches, and/or mentors to assist with implementation.
* Schedule regular team meetings for staff to discuss classroom issues and encourage use of professional development training materials to select strategies and solutions to issues.

**STEP 12: Develop contracts/policies to support the philosophy and goals**

Establishing policies to support the inclusive placement opportunities philosophy and goals will help to define the responsibilities of the ECSE and collaborating ECE program (if applicable) staff and administrators.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify appropriate procedures to use to develop/revise contracts and policies. Obtain permission to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop a formal contract (if applicable) between the collaborating program(s) specifying each program's responsibilities related to accomplishing the philosophy and goals. See the Appendix for Memorandum of Agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_ Obtain approval for the agreement or contract from LEA and ECE officials as needed (e.g., the superintendent, director of special education, school board, school attorney, ECE director, ECE advisory board).

**STEP 13: Develop a process for making placement decisions in the least restrictive environment**

It is important to develop a process for IEP committees to use to make individualized placement decisions in the least restrictive environment. “Parents and professionals should have a full range of placement options from which to make individual placement decisions" and "all placement options should be of sufficient quality to result in the delivery of appropriate and effective special education and related services." Once these criteria are met then "placements should be made individually for each child – tailoring the location and services to meet the individual needs and preferences of the child and family" (Odom, 2004, p. 17).

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop written guidelines for IEP teams to use to make placement decisions in the LRE. See Table 5 for examples of activities to conduct prior to and during IEP meetings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Gain approval for the use of this decision making process in IEP team meetings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine strategies to use if more children qualify for the program than the number of spaces that are available:

* Pilot the option in one geographical area of the division and provide access to children who live in that area.
* Give priority of placement based on child and family needs (e.g., those families needing full day care would have the priority of placement in a day care setting).
* Explain this dilemma to families and involve them in developing creative solutions. Inform them of the team's goal to develop additional options so all children will be served in the least restrictive environment.

**Table 5. Example of IEP Activities**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pre-IEP Meeting Activities**   * Provide families with information about placement options (e.g., ECSE classroom, Head Start, community preschool, etc.) * Have ECSE staff share information with families about each of these options (e.g., providing written information or videotapes, discussing options during visits with families, having families meet others with children with disabilities currently placed in each of the options) * Arrange for families, ECSE staff, and ECE staff to discuss the pros and cons of each option in regard to meeting their children's individualized needs * Have staff elicit family preferences and concerns about the option(s) * Invite staff and administrators from the collaborating ECE program (if applicable) to attend IEP meetings * Schedule meetings at mutually convenient times | **IEP Meeting Activities**   * Begin IEP meetings by addressing the present level of performance, and then develop goals and objectives * Determine the amount and type of special education and related services needed to assist the child to accomplish these goals and objectives * Determine the LRE in which these goals and objectives can be accomplished. Prior to making this decision, determine if modifications are needed to assist the child to achieve skills in a general early childhood setting and, if so, what these modifications will entail * If the team feels modifications will not enable the child to achieve skills in a general ECE setting, then they must document why * The team must identify and verify on the IEP the LRE in which the child can receive appropriate special education and related services * Take family and child needs into consideration when making a placement decision (class size, teacher-child ratio, structure of the program, staff attitudes, a family's need for day care or family services should all be considered)   If a placement is made in an ECE program, the IEP must specify the amount of consultation time the ECSE teacher and related service staff will have with the ECE staff and the amount of direct service time the ECSE teacher (and related service staff, if applicable) will provide to the child. |

**STEP 14: Plan for and conduct ongoing evaluations and use results for program improvement**

Programs are most successful when ongoing improvements are based on informed decisions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine the overall evaluation purpose. Ask families, staff, and administrators what information they would like to have about the program's impact.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify evaluation participants.

\_\_\_\_\_ Select evaluation methods and instruments (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, cost-benefit analyses, standardized tests, portfolios, etc.) and assign staff to collect or develop them. See Appendix for sample evaluation tools.

\_\_\_\_\_ Select staff or ask college/university students to conduct evaluation activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop an evaluation timeline.

\_\_\_\_\_ Conduct evaluation activities and summarize evaluation results. Use the results to make program improvements and to provide feedback to program participants.

**STEP 15: Recommend orientation activities to begin the inclusive placement opportunities**

Orientation activities may be helpful for children with disabilities and their families at the onset of the new placement opportunities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine what information to share about the children with disabilities (e.g., children's strengths, preferences, use of adaptive equipment, etc.) prior to their beginning the program, when it will be disseminated, and who will do this.

\_\_\_\_\_ Share information with ECE staff about the children with disabilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Develop guidelines to facilitate ongoing communication among families, staff, and administration in the ECE and ECSE programs:

* Ask families to identify preferred contact persons (e.g., ECSE teacher, ECE teacher, related service staff) and method(s) of communication such as written notes, phone calls, home visits, team meetings, etc.
* Identify one person to be responsible for coordinating communication between the direct service providers in the inclusive classroom and the ECE and ECSE administrators, if applicable.

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend pre-enrollment activities to facilitate a smooth transition to the inclusive opportunity:

* Recommend that each child with disabilities visit his/her next classroom with ECSE staff prior to attending the classroom.
* Following the visit, conduct a team meeting to elicit and address issues, concerns, and barriers.
* ECSE and ECE programs should collaborate to develop one introductory packet for all parents that includes all necessary paperwork.

**STEP 16: Sustain and expand inclusive opportunities**

\_\_\_\_\_ Ensure that a system-wide plan exists for the consistent continuation of the administrative team to guide the inclusive opportunities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ensure written guidelines are in place that include policies and procedures related to inclusive opportunities to guide new administrators and teachers.

\_\_\_\_\_ Update program procedures and policies handbook as needed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Update job descriptions as necessary to reflect roles related to inclusive practices.

\_\_\_\_\_ Provide joint professional development on a regularly scheduled basis.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ensure that a process is in place that systematically expands the inclusive placement options and replicates with appropriate modifications for improved quality of practices.

**CONCLUSION**

Although forming a team and completing these planning tasks requires time and commitment, it is truly worth the effort. Research on what sustains inclusive programs indicates that programs that succeed have a clearly articulated philosophy and use highly collaborative planning and decision-making processes (Sandall et al., 2005). Less likely to be successful are programs with professionals who hold different views about recommended practices and instruction delivery for children with disabilities (Peck et al., 1993). Programs that fail are ones that were planned and implemented by administrators or special education staff alone, without the involvement of the early childhood professionals or families (Peck et al., 1993). The planning steps described in this section of the guide aim to ensure your success in developing inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers. Consider that the efforts that are devoted in one year of planning for these options will make a lifetime of difference to preschoolers with and without disabilities in your community!

**SECTION V: SUSTAINABILITY AND EXPANSION**

**A systemic plan exists for the consistent continuation of the administrative team to guide the inclusive opportunities.**

Administrative advisory team remains consistent in philosophy of providing inclusive opportunities for all preschoolers. Administrators commit to the process of sustaining and expanding opportunities in the Local Education Agency. Revisit current inclusive opportunities with the key members of the planning team and assess progress in a five-year plan.

Evaluation procedures are a necessary and important part of this process and should be determined prior to implementing the programs. Teams can determine the most appropriate evaluation plan based on the values of the individual school division. Considerations could include individual child outcomes, cost analysis, and/or individual measures to assess evidence-based practices related to quality inclusion. Other measures to be considered could include friendships, peer relationships, and family and staff satisfaction.

**A process is in place to guide new administrators and teachers in policies and procedures related to inclusive opportunities.**

Information is provided to administrators and teachers on the vision, mission, and five year plan for the inclusive opportunities.

**A systematic process is identified to inform parents/community of the inclusive options at the local school level on a yearly basis.**

This needs to be a face-to-face community meeting to share and identify inclusive options, respond to parent concerns or questions, and include parent input on current placements and/or possible future expansion opportunities. Informing parents of the benefits of inclusion for all children is important.

**Program procedures and policies handbook is updated as needed.**

The handbook is to provide information related to setting expectations for high quality inclusion, inclusive education guidelines, inclusive service descriptions, procedures, curriculum adaptations, support for inclusive education, and collaboration with parents. This handbook is shared with all staff.

**Job descriptions are updated as necessary to reflect roles related to inclusive practices**.

Interviewing questions should elicit attitudes, beliefs, and understanding of inclusive practices (Gupta et al., 2014). Determine knowledge and experience with practices to support children with disabilities as well as typical child development. Candidates with a dual endorsement in EC and ECSE may be prioritized.

**A systemic plan exists for the consistent continuation of the administrative team to guide inclusive opportunities.**

Administrators and teachers are provided with information/resources on how to assess the inclusive classrooms and quality early childhood practices. A mentoring and/or coaching program can support this initiative.

**Joint professional development training continues**

Personnel Support

* + Ongoing joint (ECE and ECSE) professional development occurs yearly for new members of the team. See IPOP modules.
  + Ongoing joint professional development opportunities support the existing members of the team (a staff survey may be helpful in determining level of support and specific focus areas)
    - Coaching for early childhood educators
    - Consultation
    - Quality practices
    - Collaborative teaming
    - Benefits and challenges of inclusive programs
  + Sacrosanct planning time is provided for teaching teams (including ECE, ECSE teachers, and paraprofessionals) prior to and during the school year.

**Written Memoranda of Agreement or Understanding are established for Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education Programs.**

Funding streams are identified and, if possible, funding is blended or braided to support all learners.

**A process is in place that systematically expands the inclusive placement options and replicates with appropriate modifications for improved quality of practices.**

Annually in the spring, ECE and ECSE teams assess the benefits and challenges of the current model, reflect on improvements, and formalize the process for program improvement for the next calendar year. Standardized measures and anecdotal information may assist in assessment (e.g., *Inclusive Classroom Profile* [ICP], *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised* [ECERS-R], *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool* [TPOT], *Pre-K Classroom Assessment Scoring System* [CLASS]).

Additionally, at this time, the LEA staff with partners commit to make program improvements for the current model, replicate the successful inclusive program, and expand opportunities to include an additional model (e.g., a simple formula may be to double the number of programs in existence and add at least one additional inclusive opportunity).

* For example, a school system may have two inclusive collaborative classrooms. In addition, there are three consultative classrooms. This system determines that if early childhood and early childhood special education classrooms are co-located, the following year there will be four inclusive collaborative programs and six consultative models. In addition, this system plans for an individual teacher design in which this teacher will have a classroom of both ECE and ECSE preschoolers. The five-year goal in this LEA is for all children to work and play together in the community, becoming a community of learners.

**Review Steps 2 through 16 in the *Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers Planning Guide* to assist in Sustaining and Expanding this initiative!**

**Key Factors for Sustainability and Expansion** have remained consistent over many years as reported by school divisions in which inclusive opportunities are thriving. These factors include:

* Consistent Advisory Team Members (including parents and community members)
* Administrative Support
* Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs
* Ongoing Professional Development
* Sacrosanct Planning Time for Teaching and Administrative Teams

**Reflection**:

Currently, only 42% of preschoolers with disabilities receive special education services within regular ECE settings based on a 2011 U.S. Department of Education Report (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014). As noted earlier, this is similar to the data in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

“As early childhood professionals we are the starting point for inclusion. We have the ability to make inclusion a reality for every child and family. We still have work ahead of us to support policies, resources, and even perceptions about inclusion, but we have a clearer vision today of an inclusive future. Together we can recognize the right of every child to have a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential” (Crist, 2015, pg. 1).

**APPENDIX**

**Video Resources**

* 1. [Video Resources to Support Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers (IPOP)](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/1%20AV%20Resources%20for%20Inclusion_7-2016.docx)

**Program Philosophy**

* A. [Wilson County Inclusive Early Childhood Pilot Program: Program Philosophy](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/A-Program%20Philosophy-Wilson.doc)
* B. [Kensington County Public Schools Preschool Inclusion Pilot Program: Program Philosophy](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/B-Program%20Philosophy-Kensington.doc)

**Roles and Responsibilities**

* C. [Roles and Responsibilities of Staff in Inclusive Preschool Classes](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/C-Roles%20and%20Responsibilities.doc)

**Sample Team Meeting Notes Form**

* D. [Team Meeting Notes](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/D-Team%20meeting%20notes.doc)

**Action Plan Templates**

* E. [Sample: Inclusive Practices Action Plan](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/E-IPOP%20Action%20Plan_Sample.docx)
* F. [Action Plan](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/F-Action%20Plan%20acg%20edits.doc)

**Quality Practices Checklist**

* G. [Quality Pre-K Program Criteria Checklist](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/G-Quality%20Indicators.doc)
  + [A Compilation of Selected Resources September 2010 Quality Indicators of Inclusive Early Childhood Programs/Practices](http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/qualityindicatorsinclusion.pdf)
  + [Preschool/Pre-K Classroom Pre-Coaching Quality Checklist](http://www.agendaforchildren.org/uploads/documents/tieredta/CLASSROOM%20QUALITY%20CHECKLIST%20-Preschool.pdf)

**Interview Questions**

* H. [Interview Questions for Inclusive Sites](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/H-Interview%20Questions%20for%20Site%20Visits.doc)
* I. [Interview Questions for Community Sites](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/I-Questions%20for%20Community%20Sites.doc)

**Collaboration**

* J. [Collaboration Questionnaire – Short](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/J-Collaboration%20questionnaire.doc)
* K. [Collaboration Questionnaire – Long](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/K-Collaboration%20questionnaire%20-%20long.doc)

**Brochures**

* L. [Wilson County Public Schools – Brochure](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/L-Brochure-Wilson.pdf)
* M. [Kensington County Public Schools – Brochure](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/M-Brochure-Kensington.doc)

**Levels of Support**

* N. [Process for Determining Level of Supports](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/N-Process%20for%20Determining%20Level%20of%20Supports.doc)
* O. [Levels of Support Matrix](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/O-Level%20of%20Support.doc)

**Memoranda of Agreement**

* P. [Wilson County Public Schools – Memorandum of Agreement](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/P-Memorandum%20of%20Agrmt-Wilson.doc)
* Q. [Kensington County Public Schools – Memorandum of Agreement](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/Q-Memorandum%20of%20Agrmt-Kensington.doc)

**Sample Letters to Support Inclusive Options in the Early Childhood Special Education Classroom for Community Peers**

* R. [Powers County Public Schools – Application](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/R-Application%20form-Powers.doc)
* S. [Powers County Public Schools – Visit Letter](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/S-Visit%20letter-Powers.doc)
* T. [Powers County Public Schools – Acceptance Letter](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/T-Acceptance%20letter-Powers.doc)
* U. [Powers County Public Schools – Regret Letter](http://spedsurvey.gmu.edu/ttaconline/Resources/IPOP2016/Appendix/U-Regret%20letter-Powers.doc)

**Information to Support Inclusive Options in the Community Preschool Settings**

* [Letter to Community Preschool Directors](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Community%20preschool%20letter.doc)
* [Tips for Building Collaborative Partnerships between Community Preschool Teachers and Special Education Teachers](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Tips%20for%20Building%20collaborative%20Partnerships%20Between%20Community%20Partners%20and%20Early%20Childhood%20Special%20Education%20Teachers.doc)
* [Tips for Community Preschool Visits](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Tips%20for%20Community%20Preschool%20Visits.doc)
* [Tips for Working with Families and Children at Home](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Tips%20for%20Working%20with%20Families%20and%20Children%20at%20Home.doc)
* [Tips to Support Successful Collaborative Partnerships](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Tips%20to%20Support%20Successful%20Collaborative%20Partnerships.doc)

**Handbooks to Support Inclusive Opportunities**

* [Richmond Public Schools Preschool Inclusive Experience Program Guidelines](file:///C:\Users\jkilkear\OneDrive%20-%20George%20Mason%20University%20-%20O365%20Production\IPOP\Appendices\Richmond%20Public%20Schools%20Preschool%20Inclusive%20Experience%20Program%20Guidelines.docx)

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