

Early Childhood Inclusion: A Summary

A Summary of the Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Background

Today an ever-increasing number of infants and young children with and without disabilities play and learn together in a variety of places—homes, early childhood programs, and neighborhoods, to name a few. Promoting development and belonging for every child is a widely held value among early education and intervention professionals and throughout our society. Early childhood inclusion is the term used to reflect these values and societal views. However, the lack of a shared national definition has created some misunderstandings about inclusion. The DEC/NAEYC joint position statement offers a definition of inclusion. It also includes rec-



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ommendations for how the joint position statement can be used to improve early childhood services for all children.

Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.

What is meant by Access, Participation, and Supports?

Access – *means providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.*

Participation – *means using a range of instructional approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child.*

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

Recommendations for Using this Position Statement to Improve Early Childhood Services

The following recommendations describe how the joint position statement can be used by families and professionals to shape practices and influence policies related to inclusion.

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.
6. Revise federal and state accountability systems to reflect both the need to increase the number of children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive programs as well as to improve the quality and outcomes of inclusion.

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