

Getting Started: Implementing the OCDEL Inclusion Announcement A Guide for Coaches and Programs

The PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is deeply committed to supporting all early care and education programs in their efforts to serve all children in their community. This “Getting Started” document provides additional guidance to early care and education programs to implement the next steps outlined in the OCDEL Announcement, [*Inclusion of All Children in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania*](#). It also supports the core principle of “inclusion, equity and respect for all children” of the Keystone STARS System and OCDEL programs in general.

Prior to using this document, programs are encouraged to:

- **Understand your obligations under the law.** Review the laws, policies and program standards found in the Background section of the Announcement to understand specific program guidance, responsibilities and expectations.
- **Understand how inclusion is commonly defined.** Review the Background section of the Announcement.
- **Understand the level of supports your program needs.** Recognize that the needs of individual programs will vary. Because of this, the level of support and type of resources required will vary as well.
- **Understand the Announcement is a first step.** The Next Steps section of the Announcement outlines the process of building inclusive practices and a commitment to identifying and supporting local needs.

The next steps outlined in the Announcement are intended to support early care and education programs in promoting and implementing inclusive practices. Resources to support each step are listed below.



1. In collaboration with program staff and families, develop a program philosophy that emphasizes the benefits of inclusion for all children.

It is important that all members of an early care and education program have the same understanding of why it is important to include all children.

A program philosophy is a brief statement that identifies the shared values of members of

your program. It should be reflected in your program's policies and procedures. If your program needs help writing a program philosophy, you can get support from your Keystone STARS Quality Coach, Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA) staff or other technical assistance provider. The following document can be used for inspiration and guidance, but is not intended to serve as a reference for how long a policy should be or it's format.

- [How to Write a Program Philosophy](https://ccids.umaine.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2015/01/How-to-Write-a-Program-Philosophy-Matrix-5-11-09.pdf) is a flowchart that provides additional information to consider when developing an inclusion policy. (ccids.umaine.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2015/01/How-to-Write-a-Program-Philosophy-Matrix-5-11-09.pdf)
- [Early Childhood Inclusion: A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood \(DEC\) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf) defines inclusion, explains the defining features, and provides recommendations for using the position statement to guide the development of high quality inclusive programs for all children. (www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf)

2. In collaboration with program staff and families, develop and implement a written program policy that focuses on actively including young children with disabilities.

When developing your program's inclusion policy, please think about the following questions. Be sure to also consider the topics of access, participation and supports.

- How will your program promote access and participation for all children?
- How will your program involve and support staff so they are comfortable supporting all children?
- How will your program partner with families so they feel welcome and feel free to ask questions?

- How will your program partner with other community partners?

- [Writing a Quality Inclusion Policy](#) provides guidance to child care providers, parents and community leaders.



www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/Writing a Quality Inclusion Policy article.pdf)

3. In collaboration with program staff and families, review and modify existing policies, practices, and procedures to ensure barriers are removed that would prevent including children with disabilities.

Whether your program is rethinking current policies, or developing new ones, this is a wonderful time to think about how families are involved in your process. Developing shared values with families is an opportunity to build connections, relationships and community. Partnerships with families & communities are an essential Keystone STARS Performance Standard at the STAR 3 & 4 levels, and a foundational component of Early Intervention and Head Start. If your program is interested in understanding how collaboration around inclusion can support your program's STAR level movement, your Keystone STARS Quality Coach can help.

- The [Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center website](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities) provides several resources to support children with disabilities. (eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities)
- [PA Inclusion Self-Evaluation Tool](http://www.eita-pa.org/inclusion/) provides a framework for discussion that promotes partnerships to benefit young children with special needs and their families. It can provide local programs with insights to help focus their efforts on specific areas to improve the quality of inclusive services. (www.eita-pa.org/inclusion/ Available to download under "Supports for Inclusion.")
- [Commonly Asked Questions About Child Care Centers and The Americans With Disabilities Act](http://www.ada.gov/childqanda.htm) provides guidance related to the rights of children with disabilities in child care settings. The information can be useful when reviewing program policies and procedures. (www.ada.gov/childqanda.htm)



4. In collaboration with program staff and families, develop resources for effective communication between families and early childhood program staff to ensure families know the benefits of and their rights related to inclusion.

The infographic, *The Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood* (right), shares the impact of inclusion for all children, families and communities. The infographic can be used in print or electronic form by all OCDEL programs.

- [The Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood \(www.papromiseforchildren.com\)](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com)

5. Assess program staff competencies and implement professional development, which includes family perspectives, related to inclusion based on the needs of staff and families.

All teachers and program staff deserve resources and professional development to support the meaningful inclusion of all children they serve. There are staff competencies, program standards and recommended practices related to inclusive practices. These can be used to identify areas where programs and individuals may need additional resources and support through professional development. Early care and education programs in Pennsylvania can assess staff competencies using some of the following tools:

- [PA Core Knowledge Competencies \(www.pakeys.org\)](http://www.pakeys.org)
- [Head Start Program Performance Standards \(eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii\)](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii)
- [DEC Recommended Practices \(www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices\)](http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices)

THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Inclusion supports the **RIGHT** of every infant, child and their family to participate as a **FULL MEMBER** of communities and society.

CHILDREN

- Develop more friendships.
- Learn from diverse peers, which prepares them to be global citizens.
- Continue positive social and academic benefits into the K-12 general education classrooms.
- Promote high expectations which leads to greater achievement, increased confidence, and more independence.
- Recognize everyone has different needs and those with disabilities may need accommodations. Not all disabilities are immediately seen.

FAMILIES

- Foster friendships with families of diverse backgrounds and parenting experiences.
- Create empathy and understanding of other families' journeys and reduces feelings of isolation.
- Provide opportunities for family stories and experiences to support others and to be a source of parenting knowledge.

COMMUNITIES

- Maximize early childhood resources.
- Incorporate the experiences of families and children into successful community planning for all.
- By sharing common experiences, a stronger and safer community is created for everyone.

6. Establish and refine local partnerships with other early childhood programs, families, advocates, practitioners, schools, and community leaders to develop local community plans on the shared responsibility of the learning, participation and belonging of all children.

Early care and education programs should begin with organizations that already exist in their communities. Regional Keys can help facilitate these partnerships and your Local Education and Resource Network (LEARN) and Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) partners will be reaching out to programs as well. Find out about local behavioral health resources before you need them by contacting your local mental health agency (<http://bit.ly/2vvzbr2>). Also, make sure your program knows about the OCDEL Early Childhood Mental Health Program (www.pakeys.org).

- [Local Education and Resource Network \(LEARN\)](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com/be-a-childrens-champion/become-a-learn-partner/)
(www.papromiseforchildren.com/be-a-childrens-champion/become-a-learn-partner/)
- [Local Interagency Coordinating Council \(LICC\)](http://www.pattan.net/category/About/Partners/Single/?id=13)
(www.pattan.net/category/About/Partners/Single/?id=13)

7. Participate and engage in ongoing opportunities for stakeholder input, professional development opportunities and additional guidance related to the inclusion of all children.

Early care and education programs have access to free or reduced cost professional development through various sources, such as PA Key, EITA, and other state and local technical assistance providers. Consider inviting families and other community stakeholders to join you! Shared professional development builds shared understanding in your program's community.



- The [PA Key](http://www.pakeys.org) offers many professional development opportunities.
(www.pakeys.org)

- [Early Intervention Technical Assistance \(EITA\)](http://www.pattan.net/category/Training/Calendar/) offers many professional development opportunities for both early childhood and Early Intervention. (www.pattan.net/category/Training/Calendar/)
- The [Inclusion Topic of Interest Page](http://www.eita-pa.org/inclusion/) on the Early Intervention Technical Assistance Online Learning Portal provides links to several resources and learning modules to support high quality inclusion practices. (www.eita-pa.org/inclusion/)
- [Parents as Partners in Professional Development \(P3D\)](http://padlet.com/saholland/w63v45qb68s5) brings together families of children who have received Early Intervention services with opportunities to contribute to professional development and pre-service learning. (padlet.com/saholland/w63v45qb68s5)

Many of the steps required to promote and implement practices that support the inclusion of all young children in the early childhood programs within their local communities involve collaboration with program staff, families, partners, and other stakeholders. The following resources provide additional information on collaboration and working with stakeholders:

- [Stakeholder Engagement: Tools for Action](http://www.cssp.org/publications/general/WPIC_DCFS_Stakeholder_Engagement_Toolkit.pdf) describes stakeholder engagement principles and offers a self-reflection checklist. It is suggested that you reference the specific pages listed below. (www.cssp.org/publications/general/WPIC_DCFS_Stakeholder_Engagement_Toolkit.pdf)
 - Page 11 - Levels of Stakeholder Engagement
 - Page 13 - Guiding Principles
 - Page 14 - Self-Reflection Tool
- [Zero To Three Comments on Family Engagement Before the Interagency Policy Board](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/518-zero-to-three-comments-on-family-engagement) offers key messages, barriers to effective family engagement and effective strategies. (www.zerotothree.org/resources/518-zero-to-three-comments-on-family-engagement)

