



## Inclusion of Children with Special Needs

**Inclusion is a basic principle in early care and education. This principle guides policies and practices that are embedded throughout early childhood programs and classrooms, ensuring that young children with special needs are cared for and educated alongside their peers who do not have special needs. Federal law not only protects the rights of children and adults with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA]; Rehabilitation Act [Section 504]), but specifically requires that infants and toddlers be served and educated in natural environments (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], Part C), with preschoolers to be served and educated in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, Part B) (Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge, 2012). In early care and education, the principle of inclusion, and the policies and practices that flow from it, increasingly also have come to be applied to all children whose special needs are recognized and accommodated within early childhood programs and classrooms, including those with individual plans in the areas of health, mental health or behavior. In this document, the term "special needs" encompasses all of these children, whereas the term "disabilities" refers specifically to those children with special needs who have in place an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individual Education Plan (IEP), or 504 Plan (rehabilitation plan guaranteeing access to services for individuals with disabilities). (See Appendix A for additional definitions.)**

A Joint Position Statement (2009) of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) highlights three key practice principles for early childhood inclusion, to be utilized collectively in high quality early childhood programs and services. Each is defined within the Joint Position Statement:

- **Access...**Every child has access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings and natural environments, through the removal of structural, social, and learning barriers and multiple, varied formats for instruction and learning.
- **Participation...**Some children receive additional, individualized accommodations and supports to participate fully in play and learning opportunities with peers and adults, and to benefit from those opportunities.
- **Supports...**An infrastructure of systems-level supports for coordinated services and personnel development is in place to undergird the efforts of individuals and organizations providing inclusive services to children and families.

Collaboration is fundamental to achieving the full benefits of inclusion. When children receive services from different professionals or in more than one setting, their development and learning benefit when information on assessments and intervention practices are shared among parents and those professionals and across those settings. However, sharing information must be done with full respect for the family's wishes, and only with compliance to all applicable federal, state, and local privacy and confidentiality laws. The practices recommended in this document are based on the assumption that they are accomplished with full, signed consent of the family.

The Award of Excellence for Inclusion of Children with Special Needs, part of ExceleRate Illinois, reflects these principles.

***Has your program already achieved the Gold Circle of Quality? If so additional technical assistance can be received to work toward this Award of Excellence. Visit [www.aoeinclusion.com](http://www.aoeinclusion.com) or contact [aoeinclusion@eclre.org](mailto:aoeinclusion@eclre.org) for more information.***

***For more information, contact [gov.ExceleRateAoEs@illinois.gov](mailto:gov.ExceleRateAoEs@illinois.gov).***

# Standards

<b>Standard 1</b>	The program demonstrates commitment to achieving the principles of full inclusion; natural proportions; and full participation of children with disabilities and their families in natural environments.
<b>Standard 2</b>	<p>The program demonstrates inclusive program and classroom practices that support access, participation, and support of children with special needs and their families.</p> <p><b>Evidence:</b> The program achieves a minimum score of 85% on the Illinois Inclusion Guidelines Checklist, as verified by a state-approved committee of peers and on-site Assessor.</p>
<b>Standard 3</b>	Program administrators have completed Gateways to Opportunity-approved training on the Illinois Inclusion Guidelines Checklist and portfolio development for the Award of Excellence for Inclusion of Children with Special Needs.
<b>Standard 4</b>	Program administrators demonstrate current knowledge of state and community service systems, policies, and requirements related to children with special needs and their families, and of local, state, and national recommended practices and resources related to inclusive care and education.
<b>Standard 5</b>	All classroom and special services staff who provide direct services to children with special needs have current knowledge of requirements and recommended practices for children with special needs and their families, and implement assessment, curriculum, instructional, and environmental practices that support education and care of children with special needs and their families in inclusive, natural environments.