

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

ExceleRate Illinois Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs

Why should we apply for this Award of Excellence?

The ExceleRate Illinois Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs will bring community and statewide recognition of program excellence in services to children with special needs and their families, and will enable programs to identify themselves as excellent programs to families and to their communities. Additionally, it provides programs with an opportunity to increase their program's sustainability and improve practices.

How does this Award of Excellence define a commitment to full inclusion?

At least 10% but not more than 30% of the children in the program must be children who have special needs; the large majority of children with special needs are served in inclusive classrooms; and the majority of children in each inclusive classroom are children who do not have disabilities. For more information, please see the *Supplement for Center Based Programs* or the *Supplement for School Based Programs*. Note that for school based programs, the Educational Environments (EE) data for the district also must meet or exceed the targets set forth by the Illinois State Board of Education.

What kinds of supports are available to our program through this Award of Excellence?

The inclusion supports team will assist the program to engage in self-assessment in relation to criteria for high-quality inclusion and will identify and offer appropriate training. Programs pursuing the Award of Excellence will become part of a community-of-practice cohort, and will receive training, coaching, technical assistance and facilitated discussions with other cohort members. For more information about supports, please visit the website: *Award Of Excellence for Inclusion of Children with Special Needs*.

Why should a program enroll in the supports for the Award of Excellence for this Award of Excellence?

The training, coaching, and facilitated discussions offered by the supports team will directly address the requirements of the Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs. This will enable programs to select evidence for their portfolio and complete forms required by the process, increasing the likelihood that their applications will be successful.

Which programs can enroll in the supports offered for this Award of Excellence?

Supports are available to any program that has a goal of increasing the quality of their inclusive practices and that demonstrates continued commitment improvement in inclusive practices, regardless if they apply for the Award.

How does a program apply for an Award of Excellence?

There are two routes for applying for an Award of Excellence. The first is via a supported route in which programs complete activities with individualized support from a coach. The second is an independent route, in which programs apply on their own and may participate in training activities.

How long does it take to work toward this Award of Excellence using the supports route?

Programs that enroll in the supports for this Award will become part of a cohort of programs whose application materials will be reviewed at a specific time. The full process for developing the Self-Study Portfolio through the supported route will take approximately 4-5 months. However, if programs find they need additional time, they are free to change to a future review period.

How do we know which training counts toward the staff qualifications for this Award?

All training conducted by the support team for the Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs will automatically count toward these requirements. The inclusion support team will work with providers to determine other trainings that are appropriate for the Award.