



Enhancing Collaboration w/State Directors to Achieve a High-Quality Inclusive Preschool Education

Ruth E. Gallucci, NASDSE

John Eisenberg, NASDSE

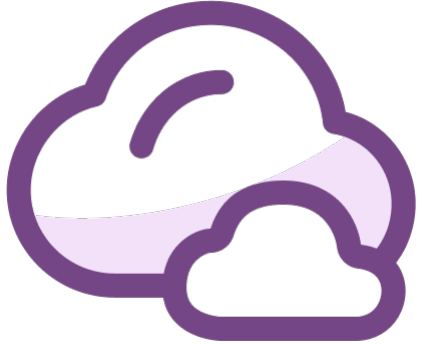
Danita Pitts, AR Dept of Education

Dawn Mendonca Meskil, NC Dept of Public Instruction

#IDIO2024

8/28/2024

slido



Where are you joining us from?

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Agenda

1. The Urgency of Preschool Inclusion

2. Preschool Inclusion: Unique Challenges

3. Opportunities to Leverage State Policy, Guidance & Funding

4. Opportunities for State EC Collaboration

The Urgency of Preschool Inclusion

Disability as a Natural Part of the Human Experience

Almost 45 million adults have a disability, and nearly one out of six children are estimated to have a developmental delay.

A disability should not diminish one's right to participate in or contribute to society.

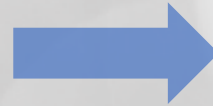
[policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf \(ed.gov\)](#)

High Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Programs are ones that:

- Include children with disabilities (CWD) in early childhood (EC) programs they would participate in if not for their disability.
- Provide high-quality (HQ) services within daily classroom activities, minimizing pulling children out of class/routines.
- Intentionally promote participation in all learning activities through accommodations, differentiated instruction & individualized interventions.
- Use HQ, evidence-based services, and supports that are developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive.
- Recognize families as collaborative partners, experts, & engaged decision-makers.
- Ensure supports, such as screening and referral, and PD are in place.
- Ensure partnerships between EC programs and LEAs.

Inclusion & Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) are not the same thing.

LRE means that children who receive special education should be in the same classrooms as other children as much as possible and is an important part of the IDEA



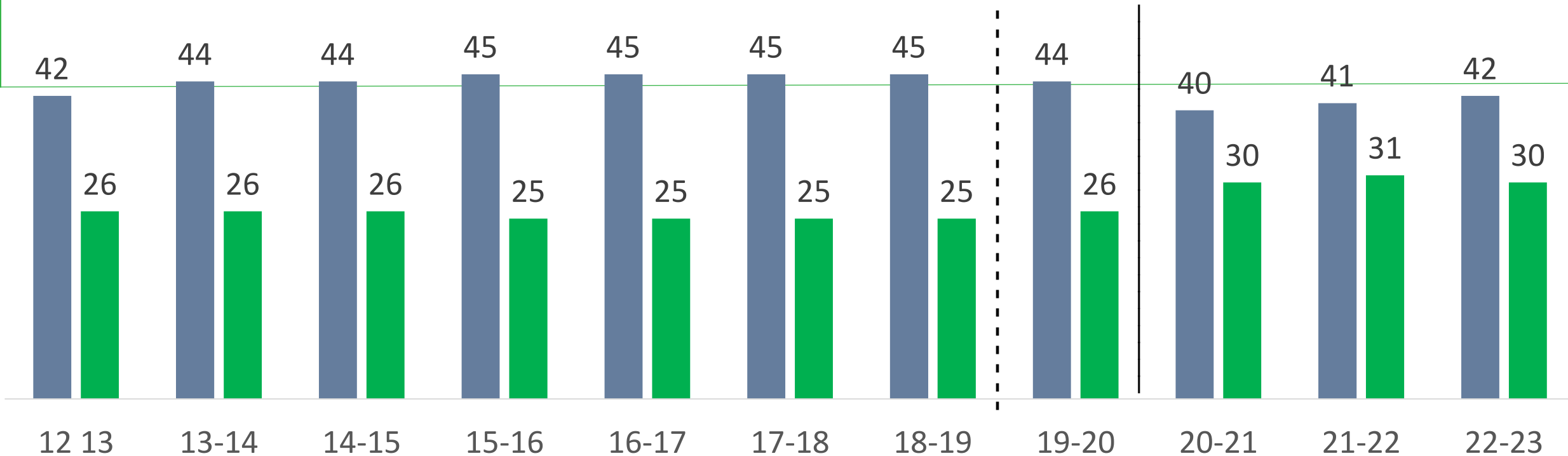
Although inclusion is not mentioned in IDEA, it is the US DoE & HHS's position that "all young CWD should have access to inclusive high-quality EC programs, where they are provided with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations."

Inclusion goes beyond LRE.

Why is Preschool Inclusion Critical?

- Research shows inclusion is beneficial to children with & without disabilities.
- Inclusion in high-quality EC programs can support CWD in reaching their full potential resulting in broad societal benefits.
- Inclusion in EC programs can set a trajectory for inclusion across the course of an individual's life.

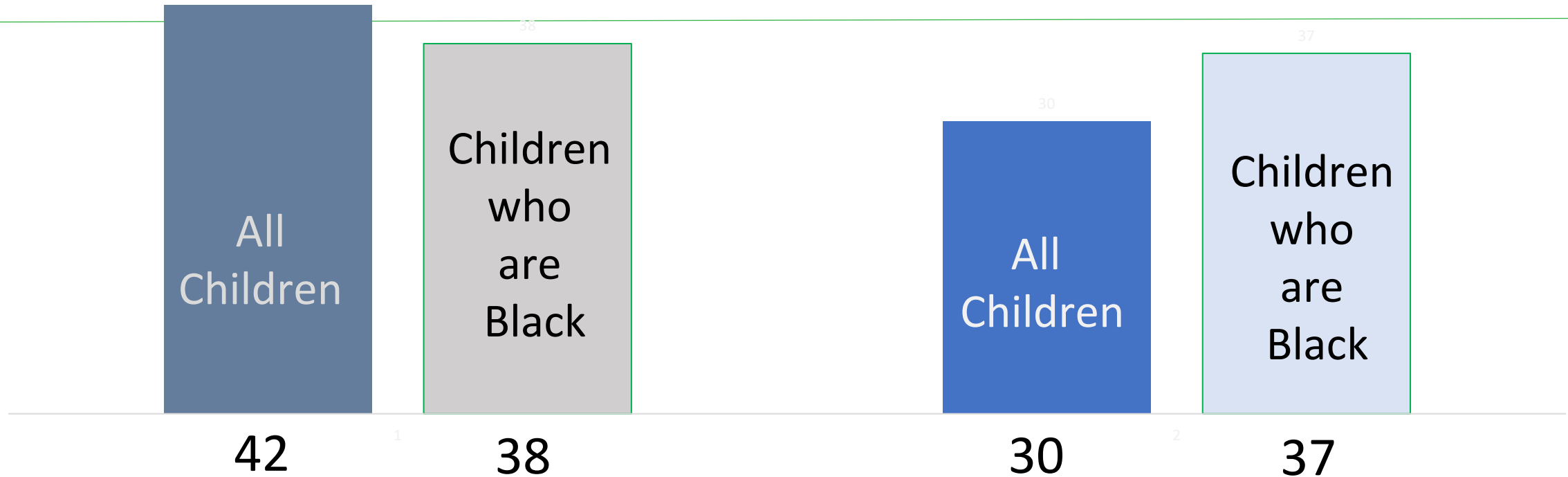
Indicator 6 Data Over Time



SPP/APR Indicator 6a: Children attending a regular early childhood program (RECP) and receiving the majority of special education services in the program

SPP/APR Indicator 6b: Children who do not attend an RECP, who receive their special education services in a separate class, separate school or residential facility

Indicator 6 Data for All Children and for Children Who are Black, 22-23



SPP/APR Indicator 6a: Children attending a regular early childhood program (RECP) and receiving the majority of special education services in the program

SPP/APR Indicator 6b: Children who do not attend an RECP, who receive their special education services in a separate class, separate school or residential facility

Preschool Inclusion: Unique Challenges

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



What types of challenges are unique to preschool inclusion?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Unique Challenges

- Early childhood is not compulsory, nor universal.
- 619 Coordinators require close collaboration with EC partners, who sit in various state agencies and offices.
- A K-12 lens is often used when considering preschool implementation.
- 619 falls within Part B, but the coordinator may sit in a different state agency/office than their state directors.

Partnerships with state directors will prove critical to moving the needle toward inclusive early childhood education.

Opportunities to Leverage State Policy, Guidance & Funding

Expectations for Inclusion

- Young CWD must be given access to **the same early childhood programs as children without disabilities.**
- **All CWD** should have access to HQ-inclusive EC programs regardless of the type of disability, level of services and supports needed, race and ethnicity, language, and geographic and economic circumstances.
- **Spec Ed services should be embedded into daily activities and routines in these inclusive environments** so CWD can remain for the whole day/week alongside their peers without disabilities.

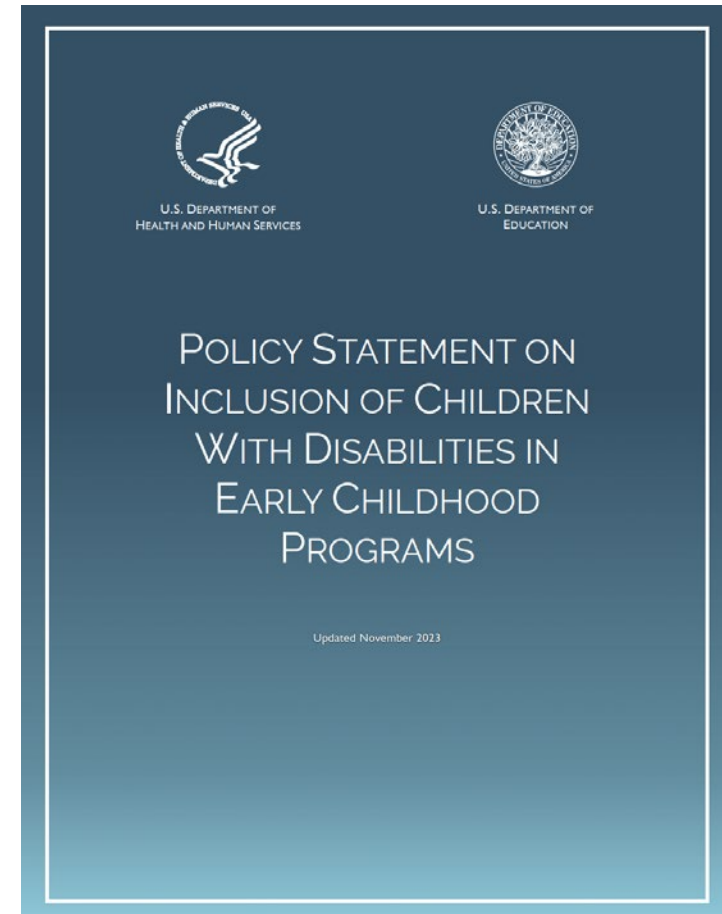
619 Coordinators as State Leaders

619 Coordinators are uniquely poised to guide and leverage resources to support the inclusion of CWD in HQ inclusive EC programs.

Close collaboration with state directors is essential to facilitating the effective implementation of federal and state statutes and regulations and creating systems to ensure inclusion for all.

Policy Statement on Inclusion of CWD in EC Programs

All young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs that provide individualized and appropriate support so they can fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities, meet high expectations, and achieve their full potential.



Why Release an Updated Policy Statement on EC Inclusion?

- CWD continue to face significant barriers to accessing and participating in inclusive early childhood programs.
- Too many children with disabilities receive special education services in settings separate from their peers without disabilities.
- There are disparities in children's access to inclusive early childhood programs.
- The COVID-19 pandemic further limited access to inclusive early childhood programs.

The Policy Statement...

- reiterates the expectation for inclusion in HQ EC programs,
- sets the expectation that inclusion continues as children transition into elementary school,
- highlights the latest science that supports inclusion and reinforces the legal foundation for inclusion,
- reiterates and updates recommendations to States and local programs and providers for increasing inclusive early learning opportunities, and
- updates resources and examples of inclusion.

State Inclusion Recommendations



- 1) **Cross-Sector State Leadership Team, Shared Vision, Goals & Strategies for Inclusion**
- 2) **Ensure State Policies/Guidance Meet Requirements & Support Inclusion in HQ Programs**
- 3) Engage Families as Essential Partners
- 4) Use Data to Guide Decisions for Continuous Quality Improvement
- 5) **Leverage Funding and Resources to Support Inclusion Across EC Systems**
- 6) Implement State EL Guidelines and Initiatives that Support Development/Learning for All Children
- 7) Ensure Program Standards Support High-Quality Inclusion
- 8) Strengthen Accountability Systems and Build Structures to Support Inclusive Models
- 9) Build a Coordinated Early Childhood Workforce System
- 10) Raise Public Awareness

1. Cross-Sector State EC Inclusion Leadership Team

- Broad & Diverse Representation- partnering agencies, programs & family networks
- Shared **Vision** to expand access to HQ EC programs and supports for young CWD
- Review of **State Policies/Guidance**- Meet Requirements & Support Inclusion (#2)
- Leverage **Funding & Resources**- Support Inclusion Across EC Systems (#5)
- Creation of shared **Goals & Strategies**

STATE SPOTLIGHT: ILLINOIS

- Illinois established a **cross-sector leadership team** to increase inclusive opportunities in their state.
- They used the [Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion](#) to help guide their work.
- They adopted an [inclusion vision statement](#) modeled after the federal joint position statement on inclusion.
- A recent report, [Strengthening Early Childhood Inclusion](#), includes **recommendations to inform the Governor's Office of EC's needs assessment and strategic planning process** funded through [Preschool Development Grant](#) Birth through 5 (PDG B-5).
- Their [Community Inclusion Team Report](#) showcases data on programs that received TA, which shows how the number of children with disabilities receiving their special education services in regular education settings has increased.

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



Does your state have a Cross-Sector State Leadership Team focusing on Inclusion?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



If you have a team, what are some of the positive outcomes?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



If you have a team, what are some of the challenges/obstacles that have prevented forward movement?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

2. State Policies/Guidance Meet Requirements & Support Inclusion

Review and coordinate existing state plans to ensure that EC inclusion and the necessary services and supports for CWD are consistently addressed across plans.

- Head Start
- State PreK
- CCDF
- Title 1
- IDEA State Systemic Improvement Plans
- Plans for specific grant programs (e.g., PDG, EC Comprehensive Systems Grants)

State Policies- Review & Modification

- Consistent with federal and state legal requirements
- Free of guidance that creates barriers to inclusion
- Informed by quality data
- Responsive to the unique needs of communities/populations of children
- Promoting cross-agency collaboration at state/local levels
- Sustaining alignment/coordination across early learning and EC health systems?
- Promoting culturally/linguistically responsive comprehensive services (physical and mental health, home visiting, and other social services)
- Including explicit plans to meet the needs of underserved children and families- affirm the diversity of their experiences; consider the specific intersections of poverty, race and ethnicity, language, and disability; promote belonging; and support their ability to navigate the systems that serve their children

Do state policies and guidance support CWD and their families by ensuring...

- First placement option IEP teams consider is the regular EC program the child would attend if they did not have a disability?
- CWD have access to the same amount of time if state policy defines “preschool” as a minimum number of days and hours per week?
- Services delivered in community settings where children without disabilities participate?
- Services provided in EC programs where all children participate so CWD can remain for the whole day/week?
- Transitions between service providers and EC programs are minimized?
- Families do not have to choose between remaining in existing EC program and receiving special education services?

The GOAL

Goal- State policies, guidance, and procedures REDUCE the creation and maintenance of PARALLEL early childhood programs for CWD.

ACCESS, not Duplication

- Promoting inclusive opportunities that may already be available within the community, such as Head Start or other high-quality early care and education programs; and
- Expanding early learning initiatives within the state (such as State PreK and use of the Child Care and Development Fund) to increase the number of high-quality inclusive programs and ensure that these programs have:
 - specific policies and procedures to recruit and enroll CWD
 - specific policies and procedures to support the learning/development of all young CWD regardless of the level of their service and support needs.
- LEAs provide special education and related services that layer on top of the state or federally-funded EC program.

Reminder...Special Education

- Is not a place
- It refers to specially designed instruction (adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction)
- It ensures access to the general education curriculum, so that each child with a disability can meet the educational standards that apply to all children
- Excess cost

Paradigm Shift- Allowing young children to meaningfully participate in the programs they typically would if not for their disability can set a trajectory for inclusion and belonging across a lifespan.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: KENTUCKY

- Kentucky's State-funded preschool program is available for all four-year-old children whose families meet income eligibility requirements.
- Kentucky modified the eligibility requirements for its State-funded preschool program for CWD to serve all three and four-year-old CWD, regardless of income, ensuring that a high percentage of young CWD are educated in inclusive environments.
- Kentucky uses a mixed delivery system and has worked to support alignment, coordination, and efficiencies across the system

5. Leverage Funding & Resources to Support Inclusion Across EC Systems

- Establishing policy includes conversations around leveraging funding
- Providing services in EC programs can produce cost savings and greater return on investment
- State leadership team should review:
 - how existing funding and resources are allocated;
 - whether there are disparities in funding and resources across communities;
 - how funds may be reallocated to better support increased access and participation in inclusive EC programs;
 - how state policies and guidance could facilitate the coordination of funding and resources across state and local EC agencies.

Accessing State/Federal EC Funding and Layering IDEA

- Head Start
- State PreK
- Title 1
- Childcare/CCDF

Layering IDEA funds:

- Providing special education and related services
- generally used for costs in excess of regular education
- targeted for the needs of children with disabilities

Opportunities for State EC Collaboration

Coordination with State/Federally-Funded EC Programs

Head Start	State PreK	Title 1	CCDF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federally funded History of inclusion 10% of all slots to CWD Disabilities Services Coordinators Recruitment, screening, referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many strive to create inclusive environments Natural proportion should guide design Should have explicit requirements for recruiting, enrolling, screening & referral Should have agreements with LEAs to embed services in everyday activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public school funding source with an option to utilize for preschool CWD are eligible to participate, like all eligible children Under section 504, CWD may not be excluded FAPE in the LRE Spec educ should be provided within everyday routines and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subsidized child care to low-income families Allows states to eliminate co-payments for families- set aside child care slots for CWD. Opportunity- CWD have equal access Spec educ should be provided within everyday routines and activities

CCDBG Provisions that Support Inclusion

- States are required to:
 - Develop strategies for increasing supply and quality of child care
 - Continue prioritizing assistance to children with special needs
 - Provide training and support to child care providers
 - Collect and report data on CWD served
 - Ensure children receive developmental screenings and referrals
- The state CCDF Plan can serve as a vehicle for collaborative planning and implementation of state-level policy strategies that take full advantage of the opportunities available through CCDBG to further inclusion in child care.
- Embedding these strategies in administrative, legislative, and regulatory changes are also powerful ways to ensure the sustainability of these efforts.

[Start Early/DEC report on inclusive state cc systems](#)

[New CCDF Child Care Subsidy Rule to Enhance Access, Affordability and Sustainability](#)

Increasing Inclusive Opportunities: Table Talk

- 1) How does your state partner with the following programs?
 - Head Start
 - State PreK
 - Title 1
 - Childcare/CCDF
- 2) How has your partnership with these programs intentionally facilitated inclusion for CWD?
- 3) What new opportunities do you see to further collaborate with one of these programs? (biggest impact, ease of implementation)?



Importance of Director Engagement

- Championing preschool inclusion
- Understanding the preschool inclusion landscape & bridging with K-12
- Creating new policies across state agencies
- Leveraging state/federal funding efforts
- Embedding strategies in administrative, legislative, and regulatory changes-
powerful ways to ensure the sustainability of efforts.
- Other?

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



Why is it important to engage directors?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Collaboration with Directors

NASDSE Conference Session:

Equitable & Inclusive EL: Policy Levers for Directors & 619 Coordinators

Monday, October 7, 3:30 - 4:30 PM

- How do we continue the targeted inclusion conversation with directors?
- How would you frame the NASDSE session?
- What would be most meaningful?

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



How would you frame the NASDSE session?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Resources

US HHS and ED Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf>

Inclusion Indicators <https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp>

Finance Strategies <https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/funding.asp>

Mixed Delivery System Dear Colleague letter

Title-I-Preschool-Early-Learning-Guidance-Revised-2023-FINAL.pdf

Guidance-on-Creating-Effective-MOU-to-Support-Early-Childhood-Systems-10-05-2022.pdf (ed.gov)

State Early Childhood Inclusion Self-Assessment
<state-inclusion-self-assessment.pdf> (ectacenter.org)

Building Inclusive State Child-Care Systems
<https://www.startearly.org/app/uploads/2020/09/Building-Inclusive-State-Child-Care-Systems-Division-for-Early-Childhood-and-Start-Early-May-2024.pdf>

Thank you!

Be sure to fill out your session evaluation.
You might win a prize!



[Home - National Association of State Directors of Special Education \(nasdse.org\)](http://nasdse.org)

ruthgallucci@outlook.com