

Planning guide



Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers A Systems Approach to Preschool Inclusive Practices

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Introduction

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) issues an annual Performance and Accountability Report. In the FY 2005 U.S. DEO Program Performance Plan for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Special Education Preschool Grants, 2005), one of the program goals was to help preschool children with disabilities enter school ready to succeed. The objective designed to address this goal was that preschool children with disabilities will receive special education and related services that result in increased skills that enable them to succeed in school. The performance indicator for this goal and objective was to increase the percentage of children receiving special education and related services with peers without disabilities.

In response to this requirement from the DOE, the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) state-directed priority project team on preschool transition and early childhood effective practices reviewed the current data from the commonwealth. Child count data from 2004 indicated that many preschoolers with disabilities received the major portion of their services in self-contained classrooms. The Dec. 1, 2005, child count for Virginia indicated that 47 percent of preschool-age children with disabilities were being provided services in self-contained classes. The child count indicated that 27 percent of preschool-age students with disabilities received special education and related services in settings with typically developing peers: students receiving special education and related services in early childhood (not special education), home, part-time early childhood (not special education)/early childhood special education settings and reverse mainstream settings.

Inclusion of young children with disabilities into programs with peers without disabilities is an area that needs to be addressed across the commonwealth of Virginia. The VDOE's state-directed priority project team on preschool transition and early childhood effective practices developed ways to increase the use of inclusive practices within Virginia's programs for young children with disabilities. The 2006-07 state-directed priority project team includes the following individuals:

- Phyllis Mondak, VDOE 619 Grant Coordinator.
- Cheryl Strobel, VDOE Early Childhood Specialist.
- Patricia Popp, Virginia State Coordinator, Project HOPE.
- Sandy Wilberger and Sue Palko, VDOE's Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) at Virginia Commonwealth University.
- Linda Ingleson, VDOE's T/TAC at Old Dominion University.
- Lynn Wiley and Kris Ganley, VDOE's T/TAC at George Mason University.
- Cheryl Henderson and Dianne Koontz Lowman, VDOE's T/TAC at James Madison University.
- Selina Flores and Gillian Rai, VDOE's T/TAC at Virginia Tech.
- Tanisha Dorsey, Head Start.

- Cori Hill, Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University.

To address the need to create placement options for preschoolers with disabilities in settings using inclusive practices, the VDOE is supporting a statewide initiative to support a continuum of inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities. The purpose of this initiative is to guide systemic change in school divisions' preschool programs so that the number of settings with inclusive practices increases. This manual is designed to serve as a guide to programs in implementing inclusive practices for preschoolers with disabilities across the commonwealth.

The planning steps in this guide are based on an extensive review of the literature and were originally developed in 1993 by Arlene Aveno, Mary Voorhees and Tracy Landon through the Systematic Inclusive Preschool Education Project, a federal grant funded through the U.S. DOE (grant number HO86D00010). In 1995, Jaye Harvey, Voorhees and Landon expanded and modified these steps through the Integrated Placement Options for Preschoolers (IPOP) Project, a VDOE federal Section 619 preschool grant activity. Staff from Virginia school divisions and collaborating early childhood education programs, as part of the IPOP Project, then field-tested these revised steps. We thank the original partners for their hard work and commitment to planning for and providing quality inclusive programs for young children. The partners from the initial IPOP initiative were:

- Augusta County Public Schools in collaboration with Woodrow Wilson Wee Care and Old Dominion Preschool and Learning Center.
- Lee County Public Schools in collaboration with the Head Start and Title I preschool programs and Lee County Child Care.
- Newport News Public Schools early childhood special education program in collaboration with the Title I preschool program (First Step).
- Prince William County Public Schools in collaboration with Clairmont School and Child Care.
- Richmond City Public Schools in collaboration with the Head Start, early childhood 4-year-old programs and community child care centers.
- Shenandoah County Public Schools in collaboration with Presbyterian Playschool and United Methodist Child Care Center.
- Staunton City Public Schools in collaboration with Effie Ann Johnson Day Nursery.
- Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools in collaboration with Bright Horizons Learning Center.

In addition to this 2007 revision, the guide was revised in 1999 by a group of representatives from local school divisions, colleges and universities, parent organizations, and state agencies. As research and literature on recommended practices continue to evolve, the information in this guide will be revised.

Guide overview

This guide is designed to help local school divisions meet federal and state mandates that children with disabilities be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Determining the LRE for a child with disabilities requires that school divisions have an array of placement options from which to choose, including placement in general education classrooms with peers without disabilities. The intent of the LRE provision within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) is that children with disabilities under age 5 should be educated with their typically developing peers to the greatest extent possible (IDEA 2004). These settings include home and community preschool settings, child care centers and Head Start classrooms (Smith & Rapport, 2001). While the federal law refers to serving students ages 3 through 21 years, Virginia regulations mandate public school services for children ages 2 (by Sept. 30) through 21 years. Choosing the LRE option for children ages 2 through 5 presents a dilemma for school divisions because some do not offer educational programs for children of this age without disabilities. Often, if early childhood programs are offered, many lack collaborative agreements with early childhood special education (ECSE) programs that would permit enrollment of children with disabilities. As a result, many local education agencies in Virginia offer only home-based or center-based ECSE placement opportunities.

This guide describes how local school divisions and community agencies can form a preschool inclusive practices planning team to explore and develop a culture that supports inclusive practices and inclusive placement opportunities. The guide is flexible, thus enabling teams to plan for options that are compatible with local school division assets and priorities. Users of this guide are urged to also refer to their local policies and program requirements for further direction as they plan for inclusive programs.

The guide is organized into four sections. Section I provides a rationale for local school divisions to begin exploring and developing inclusive practices. First, the educational, philosophical, legal and cost-effectiveness bases for preschool inclusive practices are identified. Next, a summary of the benefits of preschool inclusive practices to children, families, staff and administrators is provided.

Section II introduces three types of inclusive placement opportunities: early childhood settings, part-time early childhood/part-time early childhood special education settings and reverse inclusion settings. Information about a particular option and program designs used within that option are provided.

Section III describes each of the different early childhood programs that could serve as a placement option for preschoolers with disabilities. First, school-sponsored programs, including Title I preschool, local education agency-sponsored programs for 4-year-olds and occupational child care programs in secondary schools are described. Next, information about school-sponsored and community-sponsored Head Start programs is supplied. Finally, community-based early childhood programs and family child care provider programs are reviewed. Information related to collaboration between each program and an ECSE program is also addressed.

Section IV presents the process of change associated with planning and initiating these inclusive practices, followed by the 15 steps that local school divisions may use to explore and develop inclusive placement opportunities.

Finally, an electronic appendix (CD) contains the planning steps resource materials. The materials on the CD are also available at www.ttaonline.org. These materials include examples of information handouts, copies of letters and memorandums of agreement that have been used by local school divisions in Virginia to complete each of the planning steps.

Section I: Rationale, benefits and challenges

Virginia has a long history of providing segregated special education services to preschoolers with disabilities. Services for preschoolers with disabilities were mandated in 1972, three years before federal law required them. These services were provided at home and/or in center-based special education classrooms in public schools because this was considered best practice at that time. In the early 1990s, through a federal grant from the DOE, training manuals and guides to promote preschool inclusive partnerships and placement opportunities were developed. Today, preschoolers with disabilities in Virginia are served in an array of placement options including early childhood classrooms, home and community-based settings.

With the focus on early brain development since the 1990s, coupled with the increased emphasis on accountability in schools, many states have increased their commitment to early intervention by funding state pre-kindergarten programs (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). Grisham-Brown et al. (2005) found many of these programs serve not only children without disabilities and those who are at risk but also those children who qualify for special education services. As a result, publicly funded inclusive programs have dramatically increased. The need for a continuum of services is further reinforced with the recent reforms associated with IDEA 2004, while the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) addresses learning readiness, achievement goals and access to general education.

In addition to these recent reforms, there is a fundamental commitment in the field of ECSE and early childhood education (ECE) for inclusive programs as reflected in policy statements adopted by their national professional organizations. According to the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Early Childhood position paper, "Inclusion, as a value, supports the right of all children, regardless of abilities, to participate actively in natural settings within their communities. Natural settings are those in which the child would spend time had he or she not had a disability" (Council for Exceptional Children Division for Early Childhood, 1996). In its Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment position statement, the National Association for the Education of Young Children supports "... the right of each child to play and learn in an inclusive environment that meets the needs of children with and without disabilities" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005).

In order to explore and develop inclusive opportunities, preschool inclusive practices planning teams must first have a strong understanding of the rationale for and benefits of inclusive practices, as well as the changes associated with initiating new placement options. This section examines the educational, philosophical, legal and cost-effectiveness bases for undertaking the task of initiating inclusive practices and placement opportunities within a local school division. The benefits to children, families, administrators and staff are described.

A. The rationale for preschool inclusive practices

There are many reasons for providing placement opportunities for preschoolers that demonstrate inclusive practices. The rationales are based on research results that have demonstrated the efficacy of preschool inclusion, regulatory mandates and judicial precedents, and personal experiences of children, families, staff and administrators who have participated in programs with inclusive practices.

The educational rationale

Inclusion of preschool-age children with disabilities in classroom settings with peers without disabilities is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since the early 1990s, inclusion has emerged as a major service alternative for children and their families, and is now a mainstay in the field of ECSE (Odom, 2000). Odom et al. (2006) cite Bricker (1995) in regard to addressing the rationale for inclusive practices stating that general education offers children learning opportunities that do not exist in special education classes.

Research on services to young children with disabilities has produced evidence to support intervention in inclusive settings. According to Salisbury and Vincent (1990), early intervention can reduce or prevent developmental problems which may result in fewer children being retained in later grades, thus reducing educational costs to school divisions. The quality of parent, child and family relationships is also often improved.

Most studies on preschool inclusive practices have concentrated on social outcomes. In general, preschool children with disabilities made modest gains on the social areas when included in settings with children without disabilities (Buisse & Bailey, 1993; Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1995). In a study of level of developmental delay and setting (self-contained versus inclusive), it was found that the only area of development that resulted in a statistically significant gain was that of social emotion (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000). In addition, preschoolers with disabilities in inclusive settings have higher rates of peer modeling behavior, more positive interactions with peers, higher levels of social participation, significant gains in adaptive behaviors and more verbalizations directed to peers (Buisse & Bailey, 1993). Furthermore, studies involving young children with severe disabilities found these children made significantly greater gains than their peers in segregated classes (Rafferty, Piscitelli, & Boettcher, 2003). Children with disabilities in nonspecialized settings are more likely than those in specialized settings to have at least one friend. Not only that, but they are more likely to have a friend without disabilities.

On standardized developmental measures, children with disabilities perform as well in inclusive settings as in traditional special education settings (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Buisse & Bailey, 1993; Lamorey & Bricker, 1993; Odom &

Diamond, 1998). Some studies suggest better performance in inclusive settings than in self-contained settings (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Hundert, Mahoney, Mundy, & Vernon, 1998; Jenkins, Odom, & Speltz, 1989).

Children with disabilities also exhibit higher or equal gains in language, cognition and development of friendships and play skills in inclusive settings (Guralnick & Groom, 1988; Novak, Olley & Kearney, 1980; Jenkins et al., 1989). For example, children with disabilities who attend preschool programs with inclusive practices direct more verbalizations toward peers (Buyse & Bailey, 1993; Novak et al., 1980), develop more complex language and communication skills (Jenkins, Speltz, & Odom, 1985) and show increased intelligence quotient scores (Stafford & Green, 1993). Buyse and Bailey (1993) found that children with disabilities were able to form meaningful relationships with peers. In addition, inappropriate play of preschool children with severe disabilities decreases over time in inclusive settings (Guralnick, 1981) and preschoolers with mild delays and hearing impairments engage in more constructive play (Guralnick & Groom, 1988). Some studies have found that the degree of disability had no impact on the developmental outcomes assessed related to pre-academic, cognitive, language or early reading abilities (Rafferty et al., 2003). Children in programs with inclusive practices have an advantage over their counterparts in segregated settings in social and behavioral skills (Buyse & Bailey, 1993; Lamorey & Bricker, 1993). Consistent research findings have been noted across studies which indicate that inclusive environments do not create circumstances that limit development; rather they are superior with respect to peer-related social development (Guralnick, 2001).

A review of the literature by Strain (1990) and Odom et al. (2004) indicates that preschoolers without disabilities may show positive developmental outcomes from inclusive experiences. The children make normal developmental progress or in some cases even greater progress than would be expected in noninclusive preschool programs. Numerous researchers have also found that peers without disabilities have developed meaningful relationships with their classmates with disabilities and experience personal growth which they, their teachers and their parents find to be positive (Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990; Odom et al., 2004).

An early childhood program that uses inclusive practices provides a more stimulating and child-responsive environment, a wider range of individual learning experiences and exposure to higher personal expectations (Guralnick, 1990). Children with disabilities are much more likely to retain and use newly learned skills in inclusive settings (Strain, 1990; Templeman, Fredericks, & Udell, 1989). Inclusive environments provide more real-life opportunities for children with disabilities to acquire, retain and apply skills where they are needed, resulting in improved maintenance and generalization of learned skills by the students.

The philosophical rationale

There is a compelling philosophical rationale for the use of inclusive practices that is based on the assumption that educating

all children together accommodates, appreciates and celebrates differences. This rationale is reflected in a movement in society toward social justice, which purports that people have a right to be treated equitably. In education, this means that all children go to school together regardless of their differences (Biklen, Lehr, & Taylor, 1987; Fullwood, 1990). Proponents of this rationale presume that there are more similarities than differences between persons with and without disabilities, including the need to be challenged, respected, cared for and to belong (Fullwood, 1990). Separating young children with disabilities from their peers without disabilities is contrary to basic human rights and may have detrimental effects on all children (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000).

According to Kunc (1992), the system of segregated special education has inverted Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs (which states that belonging is an essential need that each of us must experience in order to achieve a sense of self-worth). By making learning "an undefined number of skills" in a segregated class a prerequisite to accessing the general education system, children with disabilities and their families are told that they do not belong in the general system until they have mastered these skills. This "readiness" concept transforms belonging from an unconditional right to something that must be earned by children with disabilities. Removing children from classrooms with their peers teaches them that "they are not good enough to belong and may never be" (Kunc, 1992, p. 35). Ironically, many children — especially those with severe disabilities — may never achieve these prerequisite skills in a segregated environment, thus ensuring permanent exclusion and isolation.

Inclusive practices, on the other hand, promote belonging, friendship, understanding and reduce the fear of differences. When preschool children are educated together they have opportunities to form friendships and become better prepared for future inclusive experiences (Abraham, Morris, & Wald, 1991; Meyer, 1987; Stafford & Green, 1993). Research demonstrates that direct contact between children in inclusive preschool settings results in children without disabilities displaying more favorable attitudes toward preschoolers with severe disabilities (Esposito & Peach, 1983; Stafford & Green, 1993), an increased understanding and tolerance for differences (Buyse & Bailey, 1993; Stafford & Green, 1993) and enthusiasm for inclusion (York & Vandercook, 1991). Early exposure of children without disabilities and their families to children with disabilities results in the development of accepting communities where the strengths and contributions of individuals are acknowledged and diversity is valued (Buyse & Bailey, 1993; Meyer, 1987; Salisbury & Vincent, 1990). The goal of inclusive practices is full participation in education, community activities and work (Kliwer, 1999). Participating in inclusive settings appears to positively affect the attitudes that children without disabilities have toward children with disabilities (Peck, Carlson, & Helmsteter, 1992), as well as increase their knowledge of certain types of disabilities (Diamond & Hestenes, 1994, 1996). Ramsey and Myers (1990) report that the development of attitudes begins in the preschool years and if children's interactions are positive, then their attitudes in later life will be positive toward people with disabilities.

The legal rationale

Legislation. There is a strong regulatory foundation for preschool inclusive practices. In 1975, P.L. 94-142: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was enacted. This act required all states to provide children with disabilities of compulsory school age a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. LRE means that a continuum of placement options, including placement in general education settings, must be provided to children with disabilities. In other words, educational services must be delivered in a setting that least limits or restricts a child's opportunities to be near and interact with peers without disabilities.

Through numerous revisions of the EHA, wording has remained consistent on educational placement of students with disabilities. The News Digest, a publication of the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, states:

...special education instruction can be provided in a number of settings, such as: in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings [Section 300.26]. Public agencies must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities [Section 300.551(a)]. This continuum must include the placements just mentioned (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions) and make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement. Unless a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires some other arrangement, the child must be educated in the school he or she would attend if he or she did not have a disability [Section 300.552(c)].

Special education instruction must be provided to students with disabilities in what is known as the least restrictive environment, or LRE. Both the IDEA and its regulations have provisions that ensure that children with disabilities are educated with non-disabled children, to the maximum extent appropriate. The IDEA's LRE requirements apply to students in public or private institutions or other care facilities [Section 300.550(b)(1)]. Each state must further ensure that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular

classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily [Section 300.550(b)(2)] (NICHCY, 2000).

In 1986, P.L. 99-457 extended the provisions of the EHA to young children with disabilities ages 3 through 5. LRE mandates, however, were difficult for Virginia's school divisions to implement at the preschool level for several reasons. First, very few school divisions operated programs for children without disabilities younger than the age of 5. Second, preschool and child care programs were available in local communities that had experience with children with disabilities. Finally, school divisions had been providing services to preschoolers with disabilities (ages 2 through 5) since mandated by the Virginia legislature in 1972. As a result, most of Virginia's school divisions did not provide opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities to be included with same-aged peers without disabilities for educational purposes. A continuum of placement options, including inclusive options, had not been pursued.

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) added a note to the EHA (later reauthorized in 1990 as P.L. 101-476: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to clarify the LRE provision in regard to preschoolers. The clarification stated that "the requirements ... apply to all preschool children with disabilities who are entitled to receive FAPE." The clarification also stated that:

Public agencies that do not operate programs for non-disabled preschool children are not required to initiate such programs solely to satisfy the requirements regarding placement in the LRE ... for those public agencies, some alternative methods for meeting the requirements include providing opportunities for participation (even part-time) of preschool children with disabilities in other preschool programs operated by public agencies (such as Head Start); placing children with disabilities in private school programs for non-disabled preschool children or private preschool programs that integrate children with disabilities and non-disabled children; and locating classes for preschool children with disabilities in regular elementary schools (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs [DOE, OSEP], 1989).

With the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, the DOE reinforced the earlier clarification on preschool LRE. In developing the final regulations for IDEA 2004, the OSEP provided discussion and explanation on public comments and questions related to topics reflected in the regulations. In response to concerns about public preschool not available in a local education agency (LEA), OSEP's response was:

The LRE requirements in Sec. 300.114 through 300.118 apply to all children with disabilities, including preschool children who are entitled to FAPE. Public agencies that do not operate programs for preschool children without disabilities are not required to initiate those programs solely to satisfy the LRE requirements of the Act. Public agencies that do not have an inclusive public preschool that can provide all the appropriate services and supports must explore alternative methods to ensure that the LRE requirements are met. Examples of such alternative methods might include placement options in private preschool programs or other community-based settings. Paying for the placement of qualified preschool children with disabilities in a private preschool with children without disabilities is one, but not the only, option available to public agencies to meet the LRE requirements. We believe the regulations should allow public agencies to choose an appropriate option to meet the LRE requirements" (DOE, OSEP, 2006).

IDEA 2004 continues to support young children with disabilities and their inclusion with peers without disabilities. One of the federal DOE's program goals is to help preschool children with disabilities enter school ready to succeed (U. S. DOE Performance and Accountability FY 2005 Program Performance Plan IDEA: Special Education Preschool Grants, 2005). To enter school ready to succeed, preschool children with disabilities will receive appropriate special education and related services that result in increased skills. An indicator of this goal related to the service setting stresses an increase in the percentage of children receiving special education and related services in settings with peers without disabilities.

In addition to IDEA 2004, civil rights legislation has also supported the right of children to be educated in general education environments. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities by programs receiving federal funding. The act specifies: "A recipient [of federal funds] shall place a handicapped person in the regular educational environment operated by the recipient unless it is demonstrated by the recipient that the education of the person in the regular environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" [§104.34(a)].

Section 504 protection was extended in 1990 when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. ADA prohibits discrimination based on disabilities and ensures access to all public accommodations including educational programs. ADA's most dramatic impact on preschool inclusive practices is that publicly funded child care centers or preschool programs cannot exclude children based on disabilities. Public agencies

must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Centers must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures in order to accommodate children with disabilities.

Litigation. Litigation that has followed the passage of federal legislation has provided further definition of LRE requirements for school divisions. For example, in one landmark case, *Oberti v. Clementon Board of Education*, the 3rd Circuit Court ruling stated that "IDEA's mainstreaming requirement ... prohibits a school from placing children with disabilities outside of a regular classroom if educating the child in the regular classroom, with supplementary aids and support services, can be achieved satisfactorily" (*Oberti v. Clementon Board of Education*, 1993). Other court rulings have favored inclusion regardless of a child's disability. In another 3rd Circuit Court case, the court ruled that IDEA 2004 requires "access to a regular public school classroom unless there is a compelling educational justification to the contrary" (*Tokarcik v. Forest Hills School District*, 1981). While these cases do not involve preschool children, it is evident that parents are willing to take their cases to court to have their children included in general education programs.

In an Information Update Bulletin, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2000) addressed the issue of the LRE as it applies to preschoolers. It cited a ruling from the federal courts, stating, "In *Board of Education of LaGrange School District Number 105 v. Illinois State Board of Education* ..., the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit found a school district in violation of the least restrictive environment requirement when the district failed to consider alternatives to a segregated school placement for a preschooler."

The cost-effectiveness rationale

Research has demonstrated that programs that use inclusive practices may be more cost-effective or cost equivalent to segregated programs. Singer and Raphael studied 571 students with special needs in a three-state area and Moore, Strange, Schwartz and Braddock researched 60 school districts located in 18 states (both cited in Jones, 1991). According to Miller, Strain, McKinley, Heckathorn and Miller (1993), studies have reflected lower costs for less restrictive or mainstream placements: The lowest average cost was reported for students in full-time general education programs, higher costs for students based in a general education class with some pullout for special instruction and the highest costs for students based in a special class in a general education school.

Simply comparing costs, however, is misleading because of evidence that initial placement settings are strong predictors of future placement settings. Children placed in segregated settings are more likely to remain in segregated placements (Stafford & Green, 1993). For example, a study of 328 children comparing future placements of preschoolers with disabilities in mainstream and segregated settings found that children with disabilities in the segregated settings were four times more likely than the children in mainstream settings to remain in segregated settings (Miller et al., 1993). Thus, an initial inclusive placement may result in future placement in general education settings.

One of the barriers most frequently mentioned by administrators is related to costs of inclusive programming and available funds to support the inclusive services. Many perceive that it costs more to serve young children with disabilities in inclusive settings than in self-contained classrooms. According to Odom (2000), there is virtually no published data to confirm or discount the belief that inclusive programs cost more than traditional special education programs. One study conducted by Odom, Hanson and Lieber (2001) compared the costs of services for matched groups of children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive and special education programs in five states. There were variations in cost across the five states, but overall the inclusive programs cost less per child than the traditional special education programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are strong educational, philosophical, legal and cost-effectiveness bases for developing inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities. The multiple benefits to all participants involved in inclusive practices are summarized next.

B. The benefits of preschool inclusive practices

Research results and field data from Virginia and across other states document the numerous benefits of preschool inclusive practices. The major benefits to children, families, direct service staff (i.e., ECSE and ECE teachers, assistants, therapists) and administrators are highlighted in Table 1 (Page 10).

C. Challenges to initiating placements with inclusive practices

There are two major challenges related to service delivery change: organizational and philosophical. While some preschool children without disabilities are educated in early childhood programs sponsored by local school divisions, most of them are enrolled in community-based programs such as private preschool programs, child care centers, Head Start, mother's day out programs, Kindercare and family day care homes which are not affiliated with public schools (Odom et al., 1999). Creative arrangements, therefore, must be fostered between public school ECSE programs and school-sponsored or community-based early childhood programs (Odom et al., 1999). If sustaining change is to occur in educational programs for preschoolers then multiple organizational changes are required. For example, collaborative policies, staff supervision, job descriptions, physical space and transportation issues must be addressed. Another challenge facing many rural school divisions is the reality that quality early childhood programs may not be available in their areas. Therefore, other opportunities for preschool inclusive practices, such as reverse inclusion, may need to be developed.

Philosophical challenges also arise when a school division expands to include placement opportunities with inclusive practices. ECE and ECSE staff may have divergent philosophical and theoretical perspectives resulting in conflicting curricula and programming differences for children. Although current effective practices in ECE and ECSE are now more closely aligned, many ECSE teachers have been trained in a traditional special education model with a major focus on teacher-directed learning while ECE teacher training often focuses on child-initiated learning. There is a growing trend in the ECSE instructional research literature toward more naturalistic teaching approaches, such as embedding instruction in the natural context (Odom et al., 2004), and supporting child-directed learning.

Today, while the philosophical differences are not as great as they once were, to facilitate the success of placements with inclusive practices, staff will need to acknowledge and address differences. For example, staff may agree to use a continuum of teaching strategies from child- to teacher-directed based on children's needs. Staff may also find they must reach agreement regarding different expectations for children's behavior. Most certainly, they will need to reach consensus regarding how to discipline young children.

These philosophical differences will take time to reconcile. Staff may also need time set aside so they can discuss their feelings about going through the change process. For example, the ECE and ECSE teachers may feel a loss of control of their "own" classrooms. They may also fear they will be unable to meet the needs of the children with and without disabilities in the same classroom. For classrooms that adopt a co-teaching model, time is needed for the team to develop and nurture their collaborative relationship.

In addition to direct service staff, families and administrators need to address their beliefs regarding child, family and personnel roles in programs with inclusive practices in order for change to occur. The prevailing philosophy should be that all children deserve the opportunity to be educated with other children their age and, with appropriate supports, can learn in general education early childhood programs. Alessi (1991) has found that parents and staff must be of the belief that quality education in early childhood programs with inclusive practices requires an individual and group commitment to work as a team. All staff are experts in their own field, but few are experts in inclusive practices.

Conclusion

There are numerous benefits to participants in preschool programs with inclusive practices. Participants should be aware of how the outcome of planning and initiating inclusive opportunities benefits them because of the many challenges they will face. More detail about the changes associated with initiating preschool programs with inclusive practices and the accompanying challenges involved are reviewed next.

Table 1. Preschool inclusion benefits (Wolery & Odom, 2000)

To children with disabilities	To children without disabilities	To families	To direct service staff	To administrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience a more stimulating environment with a broader range of learning experiences. • Form a wider circle of friends. • Serve as role models. • Learn to be more independent and to rely more on peers instead of teachers. • Learn age-appropriate social and play skills. • Acquire developmentally advanced skills. • Exhibit higher levels of social participation. • Have opportunity to be assessed in the natural environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more chances to be leaders, teachers or role models thereby increasing their self-confidence. • Make normal or greater than expected developmental progress. • Learn to appreciate the similarities and differences between people at an early age. • Develop favorable attitudes and increase their comfort level around people with disabilities. • Become sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities. • Have opportunities to form friendships with children with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have opportunities to see that many of their children's behaviors are typical of most children. • Gain a broader view and new perspective of their children's abilities and needs. • Have opportunities to become acquainted with other families, participate in the same activities and feel more a part of the community. • Promote community acceptance of children with disabilities. • Learn and develop positive attitudes about individuals with disabilities. • Provide opportunities for teachers and family members to view specialized learning as something that occurs during non-therapy times, in non-therapy places and with people other than therapists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel successful in meeting new challenges. • Cooperate with a wider circle of teachers and specialists. • Adopt fresh approaches to teaching. • Individualize instruction for all students. • Adapt to different student learning styles. • Develop a collaborative support system. • Make significant changes in the life of a child with disabilities as well as others in the classroom. • Have an opportunity to work with specialists and receive expert advice on working with children with disabilities. • Have an opportunity to participate in IEP planning and gain knowledge of all goals and strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional adult support in the classroom. • Provide more cost-effective programs by educating children with and without disabilities in an inclusive program rather than in the dual systems of education. • Have increased classroom and staff resources. • Improve staff skills through in-service and modeling. • Have more flexibility in programming by offering a greater number of placement options from which IEP teams can choose for children with disabilities.

Section II: Inclusive practice opportunities

No one model of inclusion at the early childhood level is supported by the research as being appropriate for every child. A continuum of quality placement options enables IEP teams to place preschoolers with disabilities in the LRE that meets their individualized needs. Inclusive settings vary in design and in the amount of time that children with and without disabilities are included with each other (Guralnick, 2001). Potential inclusive placement opportunities include early childhood settings, part-time early childhood/part-time early childhood special education settings and reverse inclusion settings. This section of the guide describes each of these potential options. First, a definition of the placement is provided. Next, critical features that are needed to ensure success and a clarification of the misconceptions are provided. Different program designs which may be used, along with examples of how they have been used by Virginia school divisions, are described. The advantages and disadvantages of each design also are discussed.

A. ECE settings

One inclusive placement opportunity for preschoolers is an ECE setting. With this option, children with disabilities are enrolled full-time with same-aged peers in neighborhood settings for preschoolers without disabilities. Neighborhood settings may be community-based, such as private preschool programs, child care centers, Head Start and family day care programs, or public school-based, such as Even Start, Title I preschool programs, preschool programs for 4-year-olds (Virginia Preschool Initiative), school division-sponsored Head Start, and occupational child care programs in secondary schools. Children with disabilities receive all of their special education and related services in these educational programs designed primarily for children without disabilities (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005).

Critical features

Program philosophy. A well-defined program philosophy supports the belief that all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, have the right to participate actively in ECE settings within their community. This means that no child is excluded from an early childhood setting based on the type or degree of disability. The philosophy should include a written statement that represents the goals and values of the program personnel and defines the program's purpose and outcomes. A strong philosophy will allow the team to function optimally with a shared perspective (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005; Odom, 2002). The philosophy may include statements such as, "children, staff, administrators and families accept, understand and value individual differences." To be most effective, develop the philosophy statement with input from administrators, staff and families (All Children Belong, 1994; Peck, Furman, & Helmstetter, 1993). See the appendices on CD for a sample statement of program philosophy.

Collaborative policies. Successful inclusive programs share responsibility for the children between the ECE and the ECSE professionals (Odom, 2002). Collaborative policies should be established between the school division and ECE program to support the inclusive program (Peck et al., 1993). The policies should foster the program philosophy and goals. For example, if a program goal is that all children will follow the same schedule, then a policy may be needed to specify that the children with disabilities in the program will follow the ECE program schedule (versus the ECSE program schedule). Other policies may be needed with regard to transportation, tuition payment and provision of special education and related services at the early childhood setting.

Classroom composition. Classroom composition may be determined by considering the needs of all children. Natural proportions are generally accepted to be 10 percent to 12 percent of the total class (Guralnick, 1981; Snell & Brown, 2005). Decisions should be based on the needs of the children with disabilities being included, characteristics of the children without disabilities, the attitudes and training of the staff, support services available, and the ratio of adults to children. Class size/ratio must respond to community changes and be flexible (Odom, 2002). Class size or ratio should remain flexible in order to take into consideration the above mentioned variables during the school year.

Joint training. Staff should be prepared through training to be equipped for the role changes that are required in an inclusive program. Teams of participants may include ECE teachers, early childhood special educators, paraeducators, therapists and families (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). Topics may include collaborative teaming and use of recommended practices in ECE and ECSE.

Collaborative team meetings. Teamwork is necessary when planning for students.

It is important to schedule collaborative meetings between ECE, ECSE and related service staff to plan to meet the educational needs of each child in the early childhood setting (Fox & Williams, 1991; Rainforth, York, & MacDonald, 1992; Odom, 2002). Collaborative team meetings can include interaction, problem solving, brainstorming and sharing concerns and experiences (Cavallaro & Haney, 1999). Research shows that ongoing staff communication is critical for program success in inclusive settings. Effective ECSE and ECE teams meet frequently (e.g., one hour per week) with the related service staff attending the team meeting at least once per month.

Role definitions. Each staff member's role and responsibilities must be clearly defined; staff must understand each other's responsibilities in an inclusive program. Staff roles may vary based on the program design and staff, in addition to child and family needs. For example, in one classroom the ECSE and related service staff may not provide direct services but consult regularly with the ECE staff, while in another classroom they may need to provide direct as well as consultative services in

order to meet staff, child and family needs. See the appendices on CD for sample roles and responsibilities.

Adequate supports. A wide range of strategies is required to ensure meaningful participation by all children, including those with disabilities, in the ongoing activities of the classroom (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005). Supports for children may include environmental adaptations, instructional or curricular modifications, specialized instructional strategies, peer supports, team teaching strategies, assistive technology or additional adults in the class. Supports for staff may include planning time, training, collaborative teaming, parental involvement and administrative support (All Children Belong, 1994; Grisham-Brown et al., 2005; Odom, 2002).

Effective instructional methods. Materials should be shared among ECE, ECSE and related service staff in the program. Odom (2002) also suggests that IEP objectives should be embedded in activities and routines that naturally occur in the class. Teachers can systematically provide short interactions that help children build new skills. This will allow for high rates of engagement for students with disabilities with the materials and peers within natural classroom routines (McWilliam, Wolery, & Odom, 2001).

Integrated therapy. When therapy is provided in the classroom, teachers and specialists consult with each other four times as much as they do when therapy is provided out of the class (McWilliam, 1996). Grisham-Brown et al. (2005) recommend that therapists also conduct activities in the classroom in order to observe the children they serve. For example, the occupational therapist may observe fine motor and sensory skills during a cooking activity. A physical therapist may observe gross motor skills on the playground, and a speech and language pathologist can observe communication during center time. This service delivery model provides opportunities for children to learn and use skills in functional settings where they are required (Rainforth et al., 1992). In another example, a speech therapist may be working on language goals for a specific child while reading a story to the entire class during story time. See the appendices on CD for an article on integrated therapy.

Facilitation of friendships. Friendships between children with and without disabilities can be fostered using the least intrusive strategies, such as environmental arrangement, curricular activities and materials, peer-mediated approaches and child-specific strategies (All Children Belong, 1994; Odom, 2002). See the appendices on CD for a PowerPoint presentation on fostering friendships.

Family involvement. Families should be involved in planning and evaluating the inclusive program as well as in designing and supporting their children's educational program. It is important for families to have the opportunity to participate in family-to-family socialization and support (All Children Belong, 1994). According to Cavallaro and Haney (1999), family involvement is especially critical in inclusive preschools. In order to provide the maximum educational benefits for children with disabilities, coordinated efforts between home and school are essential to support the social goals of inclusion for

all children and to address the special concerns of families who choose inclusive programs.

Misconceptions

Not all programs that include children with disabilities in ECE settings have been well planned. This has led to many misconceptions on the part of administrators, staff and families about this option. During the planning process, it is critical to dispel common misconceptions. Participants should understand that including children in early childhood settings does not mean:

- Placing children with disabilities into early childhood education settings without the supports and services they need to be successful.
- Grouping children by ability level within the ECE classroom.
- Eliminating or reducing special education services.
- Teaching all children the same thing, at the same time, in the same way.
- Expecting ECE teachers to teach children with disabilities without the support they need to teach all children effectively.
- Ignoring each child's unique needs.
- Sacrificing the education of the children without disabilities so those children with disabilities can be included.
- Identifying children by their special education label (e.g., the child with autism in my class).
- Teaching children with disabilities in isolation or outside of the usual classroom routines.
- Ignoring the parent's concerns.
- Separating families of children without disabilities from families of children with disabilities for program activities such as parent meetings or workshops, etc. (All Children Belong, 1994; Biklen et al., 1987).

Program designs

There are two ways to serve children with disabilities in general education settings: collaborative and consultative.

1. **Collaborative design.** In this program design, a group of children with disabilities (e.g., an ECSE teacher's caseload) is enrolled in one or two early childhood programs. An ECSE teacher and assistant are based full-time at the early childhood setting to team teach, coach, learn from and meet periodically (e.g., weekly) with ECE staff. Related service staff provides integrated therapy in the ECE classrooms and participate regularly in monthly team meetings. There are a variety of ways this design is implemented.

School division examples:

- Up to 10 children eligible for special education services from a local educational agency (LEA) attend

a private child care center. Three to four children with disabilities are enrolled in three classes at the center. The ratio of children with disabilities to children without disabilities varies in each class (e.g., 3-to-17 in the older 4s class). An ECSE teacher and assistant are based full time at the center and related service staff provides itinerant consultative and direct services at the center.

- Up to eight children with disabilities are enrolled in two LEA 4-year-old program classrooms that are located next to each other. The ratio of children with disabilities to children without disabilities is a maximum of 1-to-4 in each class. An ECSE teacher and assistant are located full time at the program and split their time between the two classes. One of them is in each classroom at all times. Related services are also included into the classroom.
- Up to eight children with disabilities are enrolled in one school division's ECE classroom. The ratio of children with disabilities to those without disabilities in the classroom is 1-to-3. An ECSE teacher and assistant team teach with an ECE teacher and assistant in the program.

2. Consultative design. In a consultative program design, children with disabilities are enrolled full time in multiple ECE programs with same-aged peers. An ECSE teacher may serve multiple settings and go from program to program to consult with ECE staff and/or provide direct services as needed to the children with disabilities. A typical caseload includes up to 12 children, some of whom may only receive home-based services. The ECSE teacher meets regularly (e.g., weekly) to consult with the ECE staff. When children with disabilities require more support to succeed in the ECE setting, additional ECSE teaching assistants may be placed in settings to provide additional support. The ECSE teacher provides guidance and feedback to the assistant.

School division examples:

- One local school division uses a variety of placement opportunities for their students with disabilities. Children are enrolled full time in a variety of early childhood settings, such as Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative as well as in community-based preschool programs or child care centers. An ECSE teacher and assistant may have between eight and 12 children on their caseloads depending on the amount of hours of direct and consultative support services that are specified on the children's IEPs. The teacher and assistant travel from program to program to provide direct support as needed and to consult with the ECE staff. They also spend a large part of their time assisting the ECE staff to make modifications or accommodations as needed (e.g., developing a communication system or picture schedule for a

classroom, etc.). The ECE and ECSE staffs meet on a regular basis (e.g., weekly or biweekly) depending on staff and children's needs. Related service staff attends meetings once a month.

- One public school program enrolls up to 12 children with disabilities full time in five early childhood settings (e.g., Head Start, child care centers). One ECSE teacher and three teaching assistants provide support to these sites. ECSE staff is based full time at three of the sites where children with severe disabilities are enrolled. The ECSE teacher provides limited direct support and meets with the ECE staff and ECSE assistants on a weekly basis.

Advantages and disadvantages

Collaborative and consultative program designs have numerous advantages as well as some disadvantages. (See Table 2, Page 14.)

B. Part-time ECE/part-time ECSE settings

A second inclusive placement opportunity for preschoolers with disabilities may be in a part-time ECE/part-time ECSE setting. With this option, children with disabilities participate in both an ECSE program and a school or community-based ECE program (e.g., community-based preschool or child care center, Head Start, Even Start, Title I preschool program, LEA-sponsored 4-year-old program, Virginia Preschool Initiative, occupational child care program in secondary schools). The child with disabilities attends the ECE program either at the same time on a daily basis (e.g., for free choice or center time) or on the same days each week (e.g., every Monday, Wednesday and Friday). Children with disabilities receive a portion of their special education and related services in the ECE program and the remainder of their special education and related services in the ECSE program. The main purpose of part-time inclusion is to provide children with disabilities access to meaningful interactions with children without disabilities.

Special considerations

For school divisions just beginning to expand their placement opportunities, part-time placement in a setting with inclusive practices may be a stepping stone to full-time placement in a setting with inclusive practices. More planning time can be allocated to prepare for full-time placement while children with disabilities concurrently have access to interaction with peers without disabilities. Time can be spent planning for reallocation of staff and a new definition of staff roles while their roles remain fairly intact during the year of planning.

Critical features

Successful part-time ECE/part-time ECSE programs include some specific features. A program that includes these features will be more successful.

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of collaborative and consultative program designs

	Collaborative	Consultative
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to attend natural settings within their community, to form friendships and to participate actively with their peers without disabilities. • Resolves fiscal and space issues for administrators by freeing up space in the public school building and eliminates the cost of furnishing new ECSE classrooms. • Lowers the overall cost for educating some children with disabilities by using existing ECE programs. • Facilitates the scheduling of regular team meetings as ECSE and ECE staff are housed in the same program. • Allows for adequate on-site staff support to meet the needs of children with severe disabilities. • Facilitates the provision of on-site related services as multiple children are located at one or two sites. • Provides opportunities for ECSE teacher and assistants to feel like they are part of the ECE program as they are based there full time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides more choices for families regarding the ECE programs they prefer their children to attend (e.g., a full-day child care, a part-day nursery school program, a Montessori preschool or a Head Start program) as children may be enrolled in multiple programs in the community. • Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to attend natural settings within their community and to form friendships and participate actively with their peers without disabilities. • Resolves fiscal and space issues for administrators by freeing up space in the public school building and eliminating the costs of furnishing new ECSE classrooms. • Lowers the overall cost for educating some children with disabilities by using existing ECE programs. • Lowers the overall cost for educating students with disabilities.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is difficult for staff to switch roles from direct service providers in their “own” classrooms to team teachers and collaborative team members. • Presents administrative challenges (e.g., coordinating program schedules and policies, supervising staff, arranging for transportation, paying tuition). • Limits the community placement choices available to families as the school division develops collaborative agreements with a select number of sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessitates traveling to a variety of ECE programs which can be time-consuming and tiring. • Makes the scheduling of regular meetings with ECE staff more difficult because the ECSE teacher and related service staff are working at numerous sites. • Limits the time for the ECSE teacher and related service staff to provide direct services to the children with disabilities within the ECE program. • Presents administrative challenges (e.g., coordinating transportation of children with disabilities to numerous early childhood programs, paying tuition). • Requires hiring additional staff if children with severe disabilities are enrolled in multiple sites.

Program attendance. According to Odom (2000, p. 24), “If we expect that children with disabilities will learn from, interact with and form relationships with typically developing children, then the children with disabilities need to be around typically developing peers for a substantial part of their day.” Attendance should be regularly scheduled (e.g., three days per week; every afternoon; Monday, Wednesday and Friday; etc.). Settings should meet the needs of physical membership (being a presence in the classroom) and critical mass (having appropriate numbers of typically developing children in order for children with disabilities to participate in activities with their typically developing peers).

Collaborative policies. Collaborative policies should be established between the school division’s ECSE program and the school-sponsored or community-based general ECE program to support part-time placement. Policies must specify the responsibilities of each program in regard to numerous issues (e.g., transportation, liability, staff roles).

Program coordination. Teamwork is necessary when children with disabilities are in programs using inclusive practices. ECE and ECSE teachers, related service providers, families and administrators need to work together as a team in order to coordinate services for the individual students (Odom, 2002). In addition, ECE and ECSE staff develop similar classroom rules and expectations, behavioral plans and classroom schedules, etc., to provide coordinated services to the children enrolled in both programs.

Regular meeting and consultation time. Regularly scheduled meetings and consultation time should be scheduled between ECE and special education staff (Odom, 2002). Ideally, ECE and ECSE teachers and assistants meet weekly or biweekly and related service staff attends these meetings monthly. Direct services are also provided as needed. This consultation time, as well as any direct service time, is included in children’s IEPs.

Consistent schedule. To promote independence and help children understand routines, class schedules must be implemented consistently. When this happens, children learn to predict and anticipate what they should do during daily activities (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Grisham-Brown et al., 2005). Families and ECSE and ECE staff work together for this to occur. For example, a child with disabilities may attend the ECSE class every morning and an ECE program every afternoon or a group of children with disabilities may visit the ECE class daily for free choice time. See the appendices on CD for an article on the preschool classroom environment.

Smooth transitions. Even when young children follow a predictable schedule, it is developmentally appropriate to have difficulty with transitions. A significant number of young children experience four or more transitions in one day (e.g., from home to child care provider, to the ECSE program, to the child care provider and back home). To best meet the children’s needs, transitions should not be rushed and they require planning and preparation from all parties involved. Lazzari (1991), Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003), and Grisham-Brown et al. (2005), among others, suggest numerous strategies to improve transitions between home and school and within school

programs. Strategies include decreasing the number of whole group transitions; being prepared with interesting activities for those who must wait for others; giving all children a warning or signal; modeling or “practicing” routines related to transition activities; sharing important information through a home-school notebook or other means of communication; talking positively to the children about where they will go next; and providing time for children to talk about their experiences in the previous setting.

Misconceptions

There are numerous misconceptions about placements in part-time ECE/part-time ECSE settings. Prior to beginning a program with inclusive practices, it is important to eliminate these. Explain to program participants that part-time placement does not mean:

- Allowing children with disabilities to have two very different educational experiences in ECE and ECSE classrooms (e.g., different behavioral expectations that will exacerbate problem behaviors).
- A lack of communication between ECSE and ECE teachers, related service staff and families.
- Placing children with disabilities into ECE classes without the supports and services they need to be successful there.
- Erratic scheduling (e.g., when the child attends the ECE program on Monday and Wednesday one week and Tuesday and Thursday the next week).

Program designs

There are several ways to provide part-time ECE/part-time ECSE programs that include dual enrollment, visiting and part-time kindergarten program designs.

1. **Dual enrollment design.** In a dual enrollment program design, children with disabilities are enrolled in both ECSE and ECE classes. Children either attend each program for part of each day (e.g., mornings in the ECSE class and afternoons in the ECE class) or attend the ECE class on certain days of each week and the ECSE class on the other days. ECE, ECSE and related service staff meet regularly and coordinate services, but direct services are minimal in the ECE class.

School division examples:

- In one LEA, an ECSE class and two Head Start classes are located on the same campus. The ECSE teacher and four children with disabilities attend one Head Start class and the ECSE assistant and three children with disabilities attend the other Head Start class Monday through Friday from 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The ECSE teacher and assistant switch classrooms weekly. From 12:30 to 2:45 p.m., the children with disabilities go to the self-contained classroom with their teachers. The ECSE teacher and the Head Start teachers meet weekly and plan monthly.

- In one public school ECSE program, the children with disabilities attend Monday through Thursday. Fridays are used by ECSE staff for activities such as completing screenings and evaluations, program planning, home visits and consultation. Some of the children with disabilities attend the ECSE class two days a week and the ECE class the other three weekdays. The children receive related services in the ECSE classroom. The ECSE teacher visits the ECE program on Fridays to provide limited direct service as needed and to consult with ECE staff.

2. Visiting program design. In the visiting program design, ECSE and ECE classes are located in the same or adjacent buildings. Children with disabilities are enrolled solely in the ECSE program, but a planned schedule of daily joint class activities occurs or individual children with disabilities have regularly scheduled opportunities to participate in selected ECE program activities (e.g., free choice, story time, group work). When classes join, the ECSE teacher and assistant accompany the children with disabilities; when individual children visit ECE classes, ECSE staff members go with these children to provide support if needed.

School division example:

- Up to three children with disabilities and an ECSE staff person visit First Step (Title I preschool) classrooms four days per week during circle and planned center times. Staff from the First Step and ECSE programs participate in collaborative team meetings for one hour each week to plan for quality programming. These meetings began prior to children with disabilities visiting the classrooms. School administrators participate in these team meetings and also observe in the classrooms and provide suggestions regarding ways to further improve the quality of the classrooms.

3. Part-time kindergarten design. Kindergarten classes are available in the building and provisions are made for same-aged preschoolers with disabilities to participate in activities on a regularly scheduled basis (e.g., daily) in kindergarten classes. ECSE programs that operate a transition class for older 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds may join classes daily for certain activities or the ECSE teacher or assistant may accompany individual children with disabilities as they visit the kindergarten class.

Advantages and disadvantages

There are specific advantages as well as disadvantages to each of these program designs that are depicted in Table 3 (Page 17).

C. Reverse inclusion settings

A third opportunity for inclusive practices at the preschool level is known as placement in a reverse inclusion setting. With this option, children with disabilities receive all of their special education and related services in educational programs designed

for children with disabilities, but that also includes children without disabilities.

Special considerations

The quality of a program will dramatically affect the success of the inclusive practices. Many school divisions are faced with a lack of quality ECE programs in their community. This placement option provides a way for children with disabilities to accrue the benefits provided by having peers without disabilities as role models when quality ECE settings are not available. An inclusive practices planning team may recommend initiating a reverse inclusion program as the first step. The team may then investigate ways to begin quality ECE programs or work collaboratively with established programs to improve their quality in order to expand inclusive opportunities for the future.

Critical features

Class composition. A review of the literature does not suggest a consensus of the number of children without disabilities that should be included in a reverse inclusion setting. The U.S. OSEP defines reverse inclusion as 50 percent or more typically developing children in a class designed for children with special needs. While Guralnik (1990) suggests that a reverse inclusion program may offer some developmental advantages for children with disabilities who are higher functioning, research shows that there is a more limited potential for growth and development with a program design where only a few children without disabilities serve as “role models.” In order to produce the desired social and instructional outcomes for the children with disabilities, the children without disabilities must attend the program on a regular basis, at least several days per week.

Program policies and procedures. Policies and procedures should be developed for the reverse inclusion program. Many issues related to serving the children without disabilities should be addressed, including a nondiscriminatory selection process, transportation guidelines and liability.

Combined use of ECE and ECSE practices. As teachers plan their classrooms, develop lesson plans, etc., they should use recommended practices from ECE and ECSE. For example, learning centers should be clearly defined; materials should be accessible, labeled and adapted for use by children with disabilities; the schedule should include a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities; and IEP objectives should be taught within the ECE routines and activities.

Facilitation of friendships. The value of friendships is critical for young children. The social component of the environment can be structured to promote engagement, interaction, communication and learning by providing peer models and responsive and imitative adults, and by expanding children’s behavior and play (Sandall et al., 2005).

Integrated therapy. Preschool teachers and therapists should embed individual therapy goals into ongoing routines and activities in the classroom. Fine and gross motor, sensory, and speech and language skills can be integrated during classroom

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages of dual enrollment, visiting and part-time kindergarten program designs

	Dual enrollment	Visiting program	Part-time kindergarten
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the opportunity for children with disabilities to play and learn with peers without disabilities on a regular basis. • Enables ECSE staff to maintain their current roles in ECSE classes. • Requires little change in services (with the exception of transportation and meals if the child is in an ECE class in an adjacent building or on separate days). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the opportunity for regular interaction between peers with and without disabilities as classes are located near each other. • Role changes are not required of teachers because they still have their “own” classrooms. • No additional costs are incurred for tuition. • No additional transportation arrangements are needed if programs are in the same building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for interaction between peers are available. • Children with disabilities are better prepared to transition to kindergarten.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demands additional transitions and requires adjusting to differences in the ECE and ECSE programs which can be difficult for some young children. • Makes it difficult to arrange regularly scheduled meetings between the ECE, ECSE and related service staff as children with disabilities may be placed in multiple ECE programs. • If staff meetings cannot occur, children with disabilities may be excluded from some of the ECE program activities (e.g., the physical therapist and ECSE teacher may not have time to meet with the ECE teacher to explain how to use adaptive equipment the child needs to participate in planned activities). • Makes it difficult to arrange for the ECSE teacher or assistant to support individual children who are included part time in the ECE class as they must ensure that adequate support is also provided in the ECSE class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to arrange for the ECSE teacher or assistant to support individual children that are included part time in the ECE class because they must also provide adequate support in the ECSE class for the other children. • When children with disabilities visit, they may not be viewed as true members of the ECE classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preschooler with disabilities may have difficulty participating in the kindergarten class if the class does not provide age-appropriate activities. • It is difficult to arrange for the ECSE teacher or assistant to provide on-site support to assist the student in the kindergarten classroom since they are serving other children in the ECSE class. • Peers may adopt a tutorial role if they perceive that the children with disabilities are coming from a special education classroom.

activities (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005). When related services (such as speech, physical and occupational therapies, behavioral support, etc.) are integrated into the classroom, the learning needs of all children are addressed.

Family involvement. Families must be involved in planning and evaluating the inclusive program as well as in designing and supporting their children's educational program. By providing opportunities for family-to-family socialization, support and participation in these activities, families increase their competence and confidence.

Misconceptions

There are numerous misconceptions about reverse inclusion settings that should be eliminated prior to initiating this type of program. Program participants should be informed that reverse inclusion does not mean:

- Having less than equal numbers of children with and without disabilities (e.g., six preschoolers with disabilities and two preschoolers without disabilities) enrolled in ECSE classrooms.
- Using only special education practices with all children.
- Providing different programs or activities for the children with and without disabilities.
- Sacrificing the education of children without disabilities.
- Grouping the children by ability level in the ECSE classroom.
- Ignoring each child's unique needs.
- Requiring all children to learn the same thing, at the same time, in the same way.
- Separating families of children without disabilities from families of children with disabilities for program activities such as parent meetings, workshops, etc.

Program designs

1. Full-time reverse inclusion. In a reverse inclusion model, equal or greater numbers of same-aged children

without disabilities attend the ECSE classroom on the same days and times as the children with disabilities. A systematic nondiscriminatory method (e.g., a lottery) is used to select the children without disabilities to include in the classroom.

School division examples:

- An LEA enrolls equal numbers of children with and without disabilities in its ECSE classes. Each special education teacher has a caseload of eight children with disabilities but four children attend the morning program and four children attend the afternoon program. This is how they can provide equal numbers. The children are selected by using a lottery system. The school division provides transportation.
 - An ECSE classroom in a public elementary school enrolls eight children with disabilities and eight children without disabilities. The enrollment of the children without disabilities may be funded with Title I or Virginia Preschool Initiative monies. Staffing, meals, transportation, materials, building space, etc., are determined by program administrators by written agreement prior to establishing the classroom.
- 2. Part-time reverse inclusion.** In a part-time reverse inclusion model, equal or greater numbers of children without disabilities attend the ECSE classroom on designated days of the week or for some regularly scheduled activities. The ECSE class is either co-located with an ECE class (e.g., at a community-based preschool program or at a high school with the occupational child care program) or is located at a public elementary school.

Advantages and disadvantages

There are characteristic advantages as well as disadvantages to each of these program designs. These are delineated in Table 4 (Page 19).

Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages to full- and part-time reverse inclusion program designs

	Full-time	Part-time
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an option for inclusion in school divisions where quality ECE programs are not available within the community. • Offers the opportunity for children with and without disabilities to play and learn together on a daily basis and develop friendships. • Provides a quality program for parents of preschoolers without disabilities in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with and without disabilities have opportunities to interact without the administrative issues involved when children with disabilities attend the program on a full-time basis.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents a challenge as children with disabilities who are identified during the year must be guaranteed ECSE services. • Presents a challenge to provide appropriate staff-child ratios. An extra staff person or regular volunteers could be secured to meet the needs of children in the classroom. • Introduces administrative issues related to serving children without disabilities (e.g., transportation, liability, nondiscriminatory selection etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the children with and without disabilities may have difficulty adjusting to the different schedules on different days (e.g., some days the children without disabilities are there and other times they are not).

Section III: Collaborating programs

To initiate a full- or part-time placement option in a general ECE setting, partnerships must be established between ECSE and ECE programs. This section describes the variety of ECE programs that may be used as inclusive placement sites for preschoolers with disabilities. These include Title I preschool programs, LEA-sponsored 4-year-old programs, occupational child care programs in secondary schools, Head Start and community-based early childhood programs. Specific information is provided about each program and explicit issues related to serving children with disabilities within each program are discussed.

For the past several decades, research has consistently demonstrated that high-quality early education programs that are designed to support the full range of children's development can have long-term positive implications on later school success. In the commonwealth of Virginia, preschool programs for at-risk children have been funded for many years by both state and federal grants. With the exception of Head Start programs, which are funded directly to the locality, the programs are administered by the VDOE. Programs currently being offered by the VDOE include Title I (with federal monies), Virginia Preschool Initiative, ECSE (with federal monies) and Even Start (with federal monies). Head Start programs are granted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, federal Head Start office.

A. Title I preschool programs

Legislative authority

The legislative authority for Title I preschool programs is Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by P.L. 107-110: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Program purpose and description of services

The overriding goal of the Title I program is to improve the teaching and learning of children in schools with high poverty rates and to enable children to meet challenging academic content and performance standards. The Title I Part A funds are primarily intended to provide funding for elementary and secondary education. Although there is no specific designated funding source for preschool services within Title I Part A, these funds may be used for preschool services for at-risk children within Title I funded schools and school divisions at the discretion of the school or school division. Title I preschool services may be offered in school buildings or central locations.

Title I has three goals: to help children succeed in regular classrooms, attain grade-level proficiency and improve achievement in basic and more advanced skills. Developmental instruction is encouraged at the preschool level where curricula are individualized, and key concepts are taught with age-appropriate activities. In the classroom, the teacher-to-child ratio is

1-to-16, while the adult-to-child ratio is 1-to-8. Title I education programs may also include transportation, materials for children to use at home, parent training and, for areas without a district preschool program, a preschool needs assessment. Funding is also available for before and after school programs, leasing space and mobile or portable units, if necessary.

Participant eligibility

Children are eligible for Title I preschool programs if they live in Title I attendance areas and are below the age or grade level at which a local school division provides free education. This includes preschoolers with disabilities, as long as they reside in a Title I attendance area, meet the LEAs "greatest need" standard and Title I funds are not used to provide special education and related services. New students are selected yearly via assessments of their educational needs. Parent input, observation and developmental assessments are encouraged, as opposed to pencil and paper tests, for student selection. Children are screened for academic risk factors. Those most in need are served in rank order with the most at-risk students receiving priority in placement.

Funding

Title I is a categorical grant. Funding originates at the federal level. School divisions are awarded money based on a formula that takes into account the number of children in poverty; schools with a higher poverty level receive more funds. If an LEA already provides a preschool program, Title I funds may be used to supplement that program. Approximately 4,400 preschoolers in Virginia are served with Title I funds. Forty-five school divisions offered preschool services in 2006-07. Most of the programs are full-day.

Also, if an LEA does not offer a preschool program and none would otherwise be offered in the absence of Title I funds, a Title I preschool program may be initiated.

Local school divisions in Virginia allocated approximately \$19 million in Title I funds to serve preschool children in 2003-04. School districts are not required to report separately the expenditures for programs serving preschool children.

Collaboration with special education

ECSE programs in Virginia and across the nation have developed collaborative agreements to serve preschool children with disabilities in Title I preschool programs with special education and related services supplied through the ECSE program. These programs coordinate their resources to provide quality educational experiences for all children. For example, some ECSE and Title I preschool programs incorporate funding where both programs fund the program and costs are prorated to particular funding sources. Other ECSE and Title I preschool programs both count children for funding purposes and split the

costs but provide all services in the Title I preschool program (one might provide space, materials and transportation, while the other provides personnel). Still others co-locate or combine ECSE classes and Title I preschool classes but maintain separate administration and personnel.

A child with disabilities cannot be served in a Title I preschool program if (a) the LEA is unable to provide special education services to implement the IEP in the Title I setting, (b) the child with disabilities does not live in the Title I attendance area or (c) the LEA includes an age requirement and the child with disabilities is not that age.

B. Virginia Preschool Initiative

Legislative authority

In January 1994, the Virginia Legislative Commission on Equity in Public Education recommended the establishment of state-funded preschool programs for at-risk 4-year-olds. Legislation from the 1995 General Assembly reinforced all components of the 1994 package and determined a need for an initiative for at-risk 4-year-olds. The legislative intent of the initiative was designed to establish a quality preschool education program for at-risk 4-year-olds.

Program purpose and description of services

The purpose of the legislation was to serve 4-year-old children who are at-risk for school failure and not presently receiving service from the Head Start program. Each locality coordinates resources to serve the greatest number of 4-year-old children. Localities are responsible for establishing new programs, purchasing services in existing programs or purchasing certain services, expanding programs or improving the quality of programs. Programs are full-day, and at least school-year services. Coordination with other agencies is required. Service coordination may include combining child care subsidy dollars administered by local social service agencies for wraparound services.

Programs have the following key elements: an appropriate curriculum, a small class size, a qualified staff, in-service training for staff, home-school communication and formal assessment procedures. The curriculum is designed to address the learning needs of preschool children. For example, provisions are made for centers of interest such as blocks, housekeeping, science, art and library. There is ample space to arrange and stock the classroom environment to support inquiry and exploration, and active and quiet work simultaneously. Provisions also are made for active outdoor play and quiet rest. The class size limit is 16 children, with a staff-to-child ratio of 1-to-8.

Staff must be trained in early childhood development. It is preferred that teaching staff have credentials, certification and/or post secondary course work in ECE. Ongoing training is provided for teaching staff and program administrators on curriculum and teaching. Furthermore, staff has planned release time to attend training sessions. Also, plans are made to bridge children's transitions from home to program through

home visits. Finally, observations, ratings and other assessment instruments are used to determine individual progress and areas in which intervention is needed. Localities are encouraged to coordinate resources and combine funding streams in an effort to serve the greatest number of at-risk 4-year-old children, including children with disabilities that meet the eligibility criteria.

Participant eligibility

Children must be 4 years old by Sept. 30 of the school year to qualify to participate and must meet the eligibility criteria established by the locality based on identified at-risk factors.

Funding

In the first year of funding, the 1994 Virginia General Assembly committed \$10.3 million for grants to help localities reach unserved 4-year-old children who were at-risk for school failure. The Virginia Preschool Initiative is coordinated by the VDOE and the Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Programs. Thirty percent of the number of at-risk 4-year-olds who were not counted in 1993 as being served by Head Start and Title I in Virginia were served under this program. Funding amounted to \$5,400 per child. The state and eligible localities share actual program costs. In 2004-05, the Virginia General Assembly committed \$34.9 million to help localities reach 90 percent of the unserved 4-year-old children. In 2006-07, \$46.7 million was allocated to help reach the unserved at-risk 4-year-old population. In 2004-05, 115 localities in the state were identified to have unserved 4-year-olds. Ninety localities of the 115 applied for and received funding. Approximately 10,300 preschoolers were served with Virginia Preschool Initiative funds in 90 school divisions. In 2006-07, 101 school divisions provided programs for approximately 12,500 children.

To obtain state funding, interested localities submit plans for programs to include five services: quality preschool education, parental involvement, comprehensive child health services, comprehensive social services and transportation.

Collaboration with special education

ECSE programs in Virginia have developed agreements with school division sponsored 4-year-old programs to include children with disabilities. One of the major barriers to full-time placement of children with disabilities in this program has been that most of these programs have waiting lists and accept children on a first-come, first-serve basis. Some programs feel they are not able to "save" spaces for children with disabilities when they have a waiting list and the children with disabilities can be served in other self-contained classrooms. In some cases, families of children with disabilities line up to register their children for the program just as any other family would. In other cases, models are used where the children with disabilities are guaranteed spaces because the ECSE and 4-year-old programs both contribute funding to the program. For example, one program

funds the classroom, material and ECE staff and the other provides ECSE staff, specialized materials and equipment, and staff training.

C. Occupational child care programs in secondary schools

The occupational child care program is a two-year secondary program that meets for a block of time (two to three hours) each day and trains high school students for entry-level positions in the child care industry. The students in the program are juniors and seniors. All programs have a laboratory training component. The schools may opt for a child care laboratory in the school setting or students may be placed in jobs in the community through a “cooperative education” agreement. The ratio of high school students to preschoolers in a classroom varies. Otherwise, child care laboratories operate similarly to community-based early childhood programs.

Virginia ECSE programs in school divisions collaborate in a variety of ways with occupational child care programs to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities. Some school divisions co-locate ECSE classrooms at secondary schools or career centers to provide opportunities for full- or part-time placement of children with disabilities in the child care lab programs. High school students enrolled in the program benefit tremendously from this arrangement as they gain firsthand experiences working with children with disabilities. One of the greatest challenges to collaboration with this type of program is coordinating the communication that is needed with all of the students, the occupational child care instructor and ECSE staff. Regular meetings as well as the use of notebooks to communicate daily are effective. Another challenge is to promote child-initiated learning when there may be a high ratio of adults to children in the classroom.

D. Head Start programs

Legislative authority

The legislative authority for Head Start is the 1981 Head Start Act (as amended by P.L.103-218 and P.L. 105-285). The 1994 reauthorization of the Head Start Act established a new Early Head Start program for low income families with infants and toddlers.

Program purpose and description of services

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the social competence of young children in families that meet the income eligibility requirements.

Head Start services include these major components: developmentally appropriate education, health, parent involvement, social services and cultural competence. Individualized education is required for all children

in the education component. Comprehensive health care, including medical, dental, mental health and nutrition services (including one hot meal per day) is provided, if needed, by the health component. The parent involvement component includes ongoing opportunities for parent education, parent participation in program governance and preference for employment of parents in Head Start jobs which are nonprofessional. The social services component provides families with a method for assessing their needs and then provides services that build upon the individual strengths of families to meet their own needs. These services range from emergency assistance to providing information about community resources and how to obtain and use them.

Head Start programs conduct a community needs assessment that determines the Head Start program design. Each Head Start is unique in reflecting the needs of the community it serves (e.g., home-based, center-based, combination, half day, full day, wraparound with child care, etc.). Comprehensive staff development in the areas of child development and related subjects is a requirement in all Head Start programs.

Participant eligibility

A child is eligible for Head Start if he meets the age and income requirements as established in the Head Start regulations. Up to 10 percent of the children enrolled may be from families that exceed the income eligibility guidelines. Additionally, at least 10 percent of children enrolled must be children with disabilities. To be eligible for Head Start services, a child must be at least 3 years old by the date used to determine eligibility for public school in the community in which the Head Start program is located. Early Head Start programs serve children from birth to 36 months.

Funding

Grants are awarded by the federal Administration for Children and Families regional offices and the Head Start Bureau’s American Indian and Migrant Program branches directly to local public agencies, private nonprofit and for-profit organizations, Indian tribes and public school divisions for the purpose of operating Head Start programs at the community level. For the 2005-06 Head Start program year, \$98,833,397 was awarded to Head Start programs in Virginia. In 2005-06, there were 54 Head Start Programs, serving 14,011 children. Most of the programs are full-day. Head Start programs may be classroom-based, home-based or a combination of these. School-sponsored Head Start programs are beginning to require that teachers be certified in ECE; community-sponsored Head Start programs typically require a child development associate certification.

Collaboration with special education

At least 10 percent of Head Start program enrollment must be available for children with disabilities. The income eligibility requirement does not apply to this 10 percent, although some

Head Start programs prefer to enroll families that meet this requirement. The full range of Head Start services must be made available to children with disabilities and their families. Head Start is required to write interagency agreements with local education agencies.

Head Start programs have served children with disabilities since their inception; however, in the past, ECSE and Head Start programs did not always coordinate their services for children with disabilities. Virginia school divisions have developed collaborative agreements between the ECSE program and school- or community-based Head Start programs to provide full- and part-time placement opportunities for children with disabilities. Now that Head Start is mandated to develop interagency agreements with school divisions, these collaborative relationships should only increase. When children with disabilities are enrolled in Head Start but receive special education and related services from the school division, then children can be counted for funding purposes in the school division's IDEA Part B child count. Head Start program monies also are available to provide services. Each program's responsibility should be specified in the interagency agreement. One of the greatest challenges to serving children with disabilities in the Head Start program is that the Head Start program and school division ECSE program policies can be very different. Policy issues should be examined and addressed in this agreement.

E. Community-based early childhood programs

Program purpose and description of services

Community-based early childhood programs are diverse. They may be private for-profit or private nonprofit. Community-based programs may be housed in recreation centers, private buildings, private homes, universities, churches and many other locations. These programs may operate part or full time.

Licensure and accreditation

Some programs are licensed or regulated by the Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs while others are not licensed. Licensed or regulated child care programs must meet certain requirements. Contact the local licensing office for specific program requirements.

Community-based programs also may be accredited by national organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Nationally accredited programs offer some quality assurances. In order to be accredited, these programs must complete a self-study and then demonstrate to outside validators that they use developmentally appropriate practices. "The concept of developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. ... Teachers use child development knowledge to identify the range of appropriate behaviors, activities and materials for a specific age group. This knowledge is used in conjunction with understanding about individual children's growth patterns, strengths, interests and experiences to design the most appropriate learning environment" (Bredenkamp, 1987, p. 2-3).

Funding

Parents typically pay a fee or tuition for their child to attend community-based programs. Local school divisions may use special education monies to fund placement in these settings if determined appropriate by the child's IEP team.

Collaboration with special education

Community-based programs are required by the ADA to accept children with disabilities and they must make reasonable accommodations to meet these children's needs. Virginia school divisions have developed agreements with a wide variety of community-based programs to provide opportunities for full- or part-time placement in ECE settings. For example, some school divisions have based an ECSE teacher and an assistant full time at one or two community programs and enrolled children with disabilities full time in the early childhood classes. Other ECSE programs have rented space at community-based centers in order to co-locate ECSE classes to assist in providing part-time placement opportunities. Still other school divisions "buy slots" and pay tuition for children with disabilities to attend. Some of the major challenges related to collaboration between ECSE and community-based programs involve administrative issues (e.g., tuition payment, transportation) and philosophical issues (e.g., use of ECSE practices in complement with ECE practices).

Section IV: Planning steps

Changes associated with initiating preschool inclusive practices

Once an inclusive practices planning team has a good understanding of why it is important to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers, it must then recognize the inevitable changes which will be required to initiate these options.

Change is difficult because it is always accompanied by its three cousins: risk, fear and possible failure (Alessi, 1991). Reasonable risk taking is essential in order to grow and develop. Remember, when initiating programs with inclusive practices, the team is free to make mistakes; there is no such thing as failure, only feedback and results. The team's success depends to a large degree on how well it processes the feedback it gets regarding its efforts (Alessi, 1991).

Because change is personal, some individuals in school divisions will be very excited and ready to include children with disabilities into programs with peers without disabilities. Others will be ready but afraid they cannot meet the needs of all the children in the inclusive programs. Still others will feel comfortable with the current programs and question the change. Concerns should be shared and addressed by the team. Initial program implementation may include only staff who are ready for change. Long-term success could very likely depend on the attitudes of staff and families involved the first year the new option begins. When not forced, others will be more likely to participate after they hear and see colleagues, peers, children, families and community benefit from the inclusive programming. Remember the underlying success to initiating placements utilizing inclusive practices: communication between team members, administrative support and commitment to implementing an inclusive program.

The key to the success and longevity of inclusive placement opportunities is systematic planning and a community sense of ownership for the program being offered (Peck et al., 1993). This requires that ECSE programs in local school divisions form grassroots initiatives with early childhood programs to make decisions regarding what inclusive placement opportunities are compatible with their local assets and priorities. Many initially successful inclusive early childhood programs fail to sustain because preliminary steps are not taken to gain support from all the key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, educators, families and related service staff) and to involve them in planning for implementing inclusive practices.

This section of the guide is written specifically for the preschool inclusive practices planning team and describes 15 planning steps which may be taken to plan for and initiate or expand quality placement opportunities with inclusive practices for preschoolers within your local school division. First, a rationale for the planning step is provided. It is followed by tasks that are needed to complete each step, including strategies or special considerations that will assist the team. Examples of sample materials that have been used by Virginia school divisions to complete the steps and tasks are also provided in the appendices on the enclosed CD.

A. Planning steps overview

These planning steps are designed to be completed over a one- to two-year period by preschool inclusive practices planning teams. Year one is devoted to planning prior to offering a new inclusive placement option. Planning continues in year two while the program is operating. Some school divisions may take longer to complete these planning steps if more than one new option is going to be offered.

As teams prepare, the planning steps may sound overwhelming. The key is to work collaboratively and to prepare. Planning is proactive; fewer problems will arise if the new program or expansion of an existing program is planned for a year before beginning. Steps one through five will prepare teams to investigate preschool inclusive opportunities and gain administrative approval for initiating one. Steps six through 15 will ensure the success and longevity of the new program and may be completed simultaneously. Some begin prior to placing children with disabilities in the setting(s) with inclusive practices; others continue throughout the first year of operation of the program with inclusive practices. The following chart depicts these steps.

Inclusive practices planning steps

- Step 1: Form an inclusive practices planning team.
- Step 2: Educate the team about inclusive practices.
- Step 3: Visit quality ECE programs with inclusive practices.
- Step 4: Expand inclusive placement opportunities.
- Step 5: Gain administrative support for the proposed plan.
- Step 6: Identify barriers and solutions to initiating approved inclusive placement opportunities.
- Step 7: Recommend job revisions and develop a sample roles and responsibilities description to use for staff selection.
- Step 8: Share information about the inclusive placement opportunity, elicit concerns and gain support from key stakeholders.
- Step 9: Develop a philosophy and goals for the inclusive practices.
- Step 10: Provide ways for ECSE, ECE and related service staff to learn about each other's programs.
- Step 11: Plan for and conduct a series of in-service training sessions on recommended practices.
- Step 12: Develop contracts (if applicable) and policies to support the philosophy and goals for the inclusive placement opportunity.
- Step 13: Develop and use a process for making individualized placement decisions in the least restrictive environment.
- Step 14: Plan for and conduct ongoing evaluations and use results for program improvement.

Step 15: Recommend orientation activities to begin the inclusive placement opportunities.

B. Planning steps

Step 1: Form an inclusive practices planning team

The first step in planning for inclusive practices is to form a team of representatives from all groups of key stakeholders who could be affected by early childhood inclusive programming (e.g., families, teachers, administrators) in order to make recommendations regarding inclusive placement opportunities that the school division could offer and conduct the necessary planning steps to provide these options.

- _____ Determine the procedures within your school division for forming a team and obtain permission from school division administrators:
 - Prepare written materials regarding the purpose of forming a team, the rationale for and benefits of preschool inclusive programming, and the steps the team will take to plan for the practices.
 - Make a formal presentation to the school board or schedule an informal meeting with your superintendent.
- _____ Obtain approval to appoint members to serve on the planning team.
- _____ Once approval is obtained, develop a list of potential representatives (e.g., Head Start, Title I preschool programs, Virginia Preschool Initiative, home child care providers, community-based programs). It is strongly recommended that an administrator be included on the inclusive practices planning team.
- _____ Determine what method to use to invite key stakeholders to the first meeting.
- _____ Select and use a structured collaborative team meeting process; identify monthly meeting times. See the appendices on CD for a sample team process and action plan forms.

Step 2: Educate the team about inclusive practices

Beginning a quality inclusive preschool program is a challenging task that embraces the process of change. In order for the changes to be implemented systemwide, team members must not only have a strong belief in the value of inclusive practices but also must understand the significance of their involvement on the team. Team members must understand and acknowledge the importance of planning for program(s) with inclusive practices and be willing to learn about and endorse recommended inclusive practices in ECE programs.

- _____ Review the rationale behind preschool inclusive practices, including educational, philosophical, legal and cost-effectiveness research.

- _____ Provide an overview of the planning steps and the team’s purpose. See the appendices on CD for steps in systems change.
- _____ Review the potential placement options for preschoolers. See the appendices on CD for PowerPoint overview of IPOP options.
- _____ Review recommended practice guidelines for use in early childhood programs that merge recommended ECSE and ECE practices. See the appendices on CD for quality indicators and inclusive preschool classes.
- _____ Review information about the process of change and the specific organizational and programmatic changes required to develop inclusive practices option(s) for preschoolers.
- _____ Conduct a needs assessment with staff to gain consensus about potential changes.
- _____ Determine how many stakeholders are willing to be active team members now that they have a better understanding of their potential role.

Step 3: Visit quality ECE programs with inclusive practices

A picture is worth a thousand words. Seeing inclusive practices in action is a critical step in planning. By visiting different programs offered by other school divisions, team members will gain perspective of potential placement options.

- _____ Select a variety of programs with inclusive practices to visit and determine which team members will visit which program.
- _____ Schedule and observe classrooms and team meetings and ask program participants to identify the benefits of the program as well as the challenges they encountered and how they addressed these. See the appendices on the enclosed CD for questionnaires to use when visiting a model site.
- _____ Collect written program materials (e.g., program descriptions, contracts or interagency agreements, job descriptions, etc.).
- _____ Ask team members to describe the programs they visited during a regularly scheduled team meeting.

Step 4: Expand inclusive placement opportunities

Following visits to quality sites with inclusive practices, the team will determine potential inclusive placement opportunities to best meet the diverse needs of children and families in the school division.

- _____ Identify potential ECE sites offered within the school division (e.g., Title I, Virginia Preschool Initiative) and in the community (e.g., family child care, preschool).

- Decide how to contact potential ECE sites to determine their receptivity to collaboration.
- Decide how to determine the quality of the interested sites:
 - Consider visiting early childhood programs in the area, talking personally with program directors and using an observation guide to assess program quality.
 - Consider limiting contacts of ECE programs to only those that are accredited by the NAEYC National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. Consider conducting a survey or using a request for proposal process to identify interested sites that meet specific standards of quality set by your locality.
- Observe programs to rate program quality and collect specific program information.
- Determine the number of children who will be eligible for ECSE services in the upcoming school year.
- Contact families to determine interest in and share information about potential inclusive placements (e.g., letter, survey, home visit, phone call). Decide which team members will make these contacts. See the appendices on the enclosed CD for a sample letter and brochure for families.
- Develop a matrix of support. See the appendices on the enclosed CD for the sample matrix of levels of support and steps in scheduling.
- Make recommendations regarding inclusive placement opportunities to initiate next year. Recommendations for the long-range plan for inclusive practices should be incorporated into the school system's long-range plan.

Step 5: Gain administrative support for proposed plan

The next step is to obtain administrative approval and support to provide inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities.

- Determine your LEA's existing procedures to obtain approval to initiate new or expanded programs. Tailor the following tasks to fit these procedures.
- Request time to meet with administrators and revised proposed inclusion plan.
- Prepare the overview of the summary that will be presented to the administrators.
- Identify administrators' questions and concerns and take them back to the full planning team to develop solutions.
- Share your team's next planning steps upon approval of the proposal, including expanding the team, if needed, to include representatives from additional collaborating ECE programs.

Once your team has gained administrative approval to begin your recommended options, there are 10 additional steps to complete concurrently as you continue planning. Review these next steps and their associated tasks during regularly scheduled team meetings. Prioritize the order in which they will be completed based on your local needs and concerns.

Step 6: Identify barriers and solutions to initiating approved inclusive placement opportunities

To avoid possible roadblocks to programming using inclusive practices, it is important to address the team's concerns about the placement opportunities before the concerns become realities.

- Identify questions/issues/barriers about initiating the approved placement opportunities and prioritize the most urgent barriers to resolve first.
- Brainstorm solutions for each prioritized question/issue/barrier.
- Reach consensus on solution(s) for each question/barrier/issue:
 - Discuss issues and potential solutions in more detail as you decide which solutions to implement.
 - Contact stakeholders who are not part of the team to gather more information if necessary prior to selecting solutions.
- Continue to identify questions/concerns/barriers from the team as well as all participants in the inclusive program and bring these to subsequent team meetings to resolve.

Step 7: Recommend job revisions and develop sample roles and responsibilities description to use for staff selection

In order to identify the most qualified, appropriate and interested staff to serve children in the new placement sites, develop or modify job descriptions to include the duties associated with the new inclusive practices.

- Ask appropriate administrators what procedures to follow to make changes to job descriptions and obtain permission for the team to make recommendations regarding job revisions.
- Gather current direct service staff job descriptions and modify as needed based on the staff roles and responsibilities required in implementing inclusive practices. Elicit suggestions about job revisions from the staff who may work in the program.
- Develop a description of the roles and responsibilities and include general specifications (e.g., flexibility, an ability to work cooperatively with other adults, etc.) as well as specific criteria for each staff position (e.g., competency in using an integrated therapy approach for related service staff).

- Develop sample job announcements, letters eliciting staff interest in inclusive practices and sample interview questions.
- Share recommended job descriptions and the sample roles and responsibilities description with person(s) within your school division and with collaborating ECE administrators (if applicable) responsible for hiring/selecting staff.
- Share the revised job description with interested staff. Encourage them to visit a program using inclusive practices like the one you plan to initiate.
- Interview appropriate personnel and select the most qualified staff.

Step 8: Share information about the inclusive placement opportunity, elicit concerns and gain support from key stakeholders

It is important to identify and address stakeholder concerns prior to beginning the placement(s).

- Generate a list of the stakeholders in need of information about the inclusive practices opportunities and select method(s) for sharing information (e.g., individual or group meetings, phone calls, written information, videos).
- Determine what information to share (e.g., the rationale and benefits for inclusive practices, a description of the option, etc.), identify person(s) responsible and set deadlines for accomplishing these tasks.
- Designate team representatives to contact stakeholders to share information about the placement(s) with inclusive practices, elicit concerns and gain support for the option(s).
- Address all stakeholder concerns in regular team meetings. It is important to share information regarding all actions taken to address particular concerns.

Step 9: Develop a philosophy and goals for the inclusive practices

Having a shared vision will guide the team as they make future decisions.

- Determine how to develop a philosophy statement and goals.
- Involve representatives from all stakeholder groups in the development of the philosophy and goals:
 - Include the development of a philosophy statement and goals as an agenda item for team meetings that occur prior to initiating the placement option(s).
 - Invite all families, staff and administrators who are directly involved in the placement option to these meetings to provide input.

- Use the philosophy and goals during team meetings to guide decisions, develop/revise policies, etc.
- Refine the philosophy and goals, if needed, following the completion of in-service training and firsthand experiences with inclusive practices.
- Use the refined philosophy and goals to develop collaborative agreements or contracts, revise policies, if needed, and make future decisions about the inclusive placement opportunities.

Step 10: Provide ways for ECSE, ECE and related service staff to learn about each other's programs

In order to foster collaboration among staff in programs getting ready to implement inclusive practices, it is critical for staff to learn about each other's programs and practices. Once staff understands each other's practices, they can decide how these practices can complement each other to provide the best services for all children.

- Identify important practices for the programs' staffs to learn. Ask those regularly involved in the classroom, such as the ECE and ECSE teachers, paraprofessionals, related service staff and volunteers, to identify what they want to learn about each other's practices and what they feel is important to share about their practices.
- Recommend ways for staffs to learn about each other's programs.
- Ask staffs to identify preferred methods of learning and identify team members responsible for collecting this information.

Step 11: Plan for and conduct a series of in-service training sessions on recommended practices

Training on how ECE and ECSE practices may be used in complement will furnish staff with a common foundation regarding quality early childhood programs with inclusive practices.

- Identify who will be involved in the program and participate in in-service training.
- Select methods to identify in-service training needs, preferred times/locations for training and preferred training methods. Assign persons responsible for collecting this information:
 - Conduct a needs assessment and/or a self-study related to implementation of recommended practices.
 - Generate a list of potential training methods (e.g., workshops, videotapes, reading).
- Select topics for training and variety of training methods based on the results of the needs assessment or self-study. Contact your regional T/TAC for training materials related to inclusive practices.

- _____ Prepare for follow-up technical assistance to assist staff in applying the information presented at in-service training. Identify persons responsible for facilitating these activities:
 - Consider using checklists, peer coaches and/or mentors to assist with implementation.
 - Schedule regular team meetings for staff to discuss classroom issues and encourage use of in-service training materials to select strategies and solutions to issues.

Step 12: Develop contract(s) (if applicable) and policies to support the philosophy and goals for the inclusive placement opportunity

Establishing policies to support the inclusive placement opportunities will clarify the responsibilities of the ECSE and collaborating ECE program (if applicable) staff and administrators.

- _____ Identify appropriate procedures to use to develop/revise contracts and policies. Obtain permission to do so.
- _____ Develop a formal contract (if applicable) between the collaborating program(s) specifying each program's responsibilities related to accomplishing the philosophy and goals. See the appendices on CD for a memorandum of agreement.
- _____ Obtain approval for the agreement or contract from LEA and ECE officials as needed (e.g., the superintendent, director of special education, school board, school attorney, ECE director, ECE advisory board).

Step 13: Develop and use a process for making individualized placement decisions in the least restrictive environment

Another important planning step involves developing a process for IEP committees to use to make individualized placement decisions in the least restrictive environment (Odom, 2000). "Parents and professionals should have a full range of placement options from which to make individual placement decisions" and "all placement options should be of sufficient quality to result in the delivery of appropriate and effective special education and related services." Once these criteria are met, then "placements should be made individually for each child — tailoring the location and services to meet the individual needs and preferences of the child and family" (Odom, 2000, p. 77). See the appendices on the enclosed CD for IEP resources.

- _____ Develop written guidelines for IEP teams to use to make placement decisions in the LRE. See Table 5 (Page 29) for examples of activities to conduct prior to and during IEP meetings.

- _____ Gain approval for the use of this decision-making process in IEP team meetings.
- _____ Determine strategies to use if more children qualify for the program than the number of spaces that are available:
 - Pilot the option in one geographical area of the division and provide access to children who live in that area.
 - Give priority of placement based on child and family needs (e.g., those families needing full-day care would have the priority of placement in a day care setting).
 - Explain this dilemma to families and involve them in developing creative solutions. Inform them of the team's goal to develop additional options so all children will be served in the LRE.

Step 14: Plan for and conduct ongoing evaluations and use results for program improvement

Programs are most successful when ongoing improvements are based on informed decisions.

- _____ Determine the overall evaluation purpose. Ask families, staff and administrators what information they would like to have about the program's impact.
- _____ Identify evaluation participants.
- _____ Select evaluation methods and instruments (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, cost-benefit analyses, standardized tests, portfolios, etc.) and assign staff to collect or develop them. See the appendices on CD for sample evaluation tools.
- _____ Select staff or ask college/university students to conduct evaluation activities.
- _____ Develop an evaluation timeline.
- _____ Conduct evaluation activities and summarize evaluation results. Use the results to make program improvements and to provide feedback to program participants.

Step 15: Recommend orientation activities to begin the inclusive placement opportunities

Orientation activities may be helpful for children with disabilities and their families at the onset of the new placement opportunities. See the appendices on the enclosed CD for resources.

- _____ Determine what information to share about the children with disabilities (e.g., children's strengths, preferences, use of adaptive equipment, etc.) prior to their beginning the program, when it will be disseminated, and who will do this.
- _____ Share information with ECE staff about the children with disabilities.

- Develop guidelines to facilitate ongoing communication among families, staff and administration in the ECE and ECSE programs:
 - Ask families to identify preferred contact persons (e.g., ECSE teacher, ECE teacher, related service staff) and method(s) of communication such as written notes, phone calls, home visits, team meetings, etc.
 - Identify one person to be responsible for coordinating communication between the direct service providers in the classroom and the ECE and ECSE administrators, if applicable.
- Recommend pre-enrollment activities to facilitate a smooth transition to the placement:
 - Recommend that each child with disabilities visit her next classroom with ECSE staff prior to attending the classroom.
 - Following the visit, conduct a team meeting to elicit and address issues, concerns and barriers.

- ECSE and ECE programs should collaborate to develop one introductory packet for all parents that includes all necessary paperwork.

Conclusion

Although forming a team and completing these planning tasks requires time and commitment, it is truly worth the effort. Research on what sustains programs with inclusive practices indicates that programs that succeed have a clearly articulated philosophy and use highly collaborative planning and decision-making processes (Sandall & Smith, 2005). Programs that fail are ones that were planned and implemented by administrators or special education staff alone, without the involvement of the early childhood professionals or families (Peck et al., 1993). The planning steps described in this section of the guide aim to ensure your success in developing inclusive placement opportunities for preschoolers. Consider that the efforts that are devoted in one year of planning for these options will make a lifetime of difference to preschoolers with and without disabilities in your community.

Table 5. Examples of IEP activities

Pre-IEP meeting activities	IEP meeting activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide families with information about placement options (e.g., ECSE classroom, Head Start, community preschool, etc.). • Have ECSE staff share information with families about each of these options (e.g., providing written information or videotapes, discussing options during visits with families, having families meet others with children with disabilities currently placed in each of the options). • Arrange for families, ECSE staff and ECE staff to discuss the pros and cons of each option in regard to meeting their children’s individualized needs. • Have staff elicit family preferences and concerns about the option(s). • Invite staff and administrators from the collaborating ECE program (if applicable) to attend IEP meetings. • Schedule meetings at mutually convenient times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin IEP meetings by addressing the present level of performance, and then develop goals and objectives. • Determine the amount and type of special education and related services needed to assist the child to accomplish these goals and objectives. • Determine the LRE in which these goals and objectives can be accomplished. Prior to making this decision, determine if modifications are needed to assist the child to achieve skills in a general early childhood setting and, if so, what these modifications will entail. • If the team feels modifications will not enable the child to achieve skills in a general ECE setting, then they must document why. • The team must identify and verify on the IEP the LRE in which the child can receive appropriate special education and related services. • Take family and child needs into consideration when making a placement decision (class size, teacher-child ratio, structure of the program, staff attitudes and a family’s need for day care or family services should all be considered). • If a placement is made in an ECE program, the IEP must specify the amount of consultation time the ECSE and related service staff will have with the ECE staff and the amount of direct service time the ECSE (and related service staff if applicable) will provide to the child.

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