

Championing Belonging: A Call to Action for Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Leaders

Alissa Rausch



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POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES CENTER

Positive Early Learning Experiences (PELE) Center Vision and Mission



Our Vision:

One day, every early childhood system will be equipped to effectively support and celebrate ALL children, honor their individual strengths, needs and identities, and welcome ALL families by saying, "If you live nearby, you belong in our high-quality, inclusive environment."

Our Mission:

Positive Early Learning Experiences (PELE) Center delivers customized, comprehensive supports to leaders and providers in states, communities, and local programs who aspire to create and sustain effective, high-quality, inclusive experiences with every young child and family.

Positive Early Learning Experiences (PELE) Center Values



Our Values:

Complex change requires transformative solutions. Together, we will:

- ❖ Promote the fundamental truth that if experiences are not inclusive, they are not quality
- ❖ Challenge attitudes and beliefs that limit possibilities and potential for children and families
- ❖ Ensure that families are integral to the design, delivery and evaluation of high-quality inclusive experiences
- ❖ Dismantle barriers at many levels
- ❖ Adopt, sustain, and scale up solutions through implementation science
- ❖ Prioritize provider wellness and build capacity with practice-based coaching
- ❖ Commit to kind and supportive interactions and relationships that result in belonging for everyone
- ❖ Continuously improve by examining relevant data and making responsive changes

Dedications and Contributions



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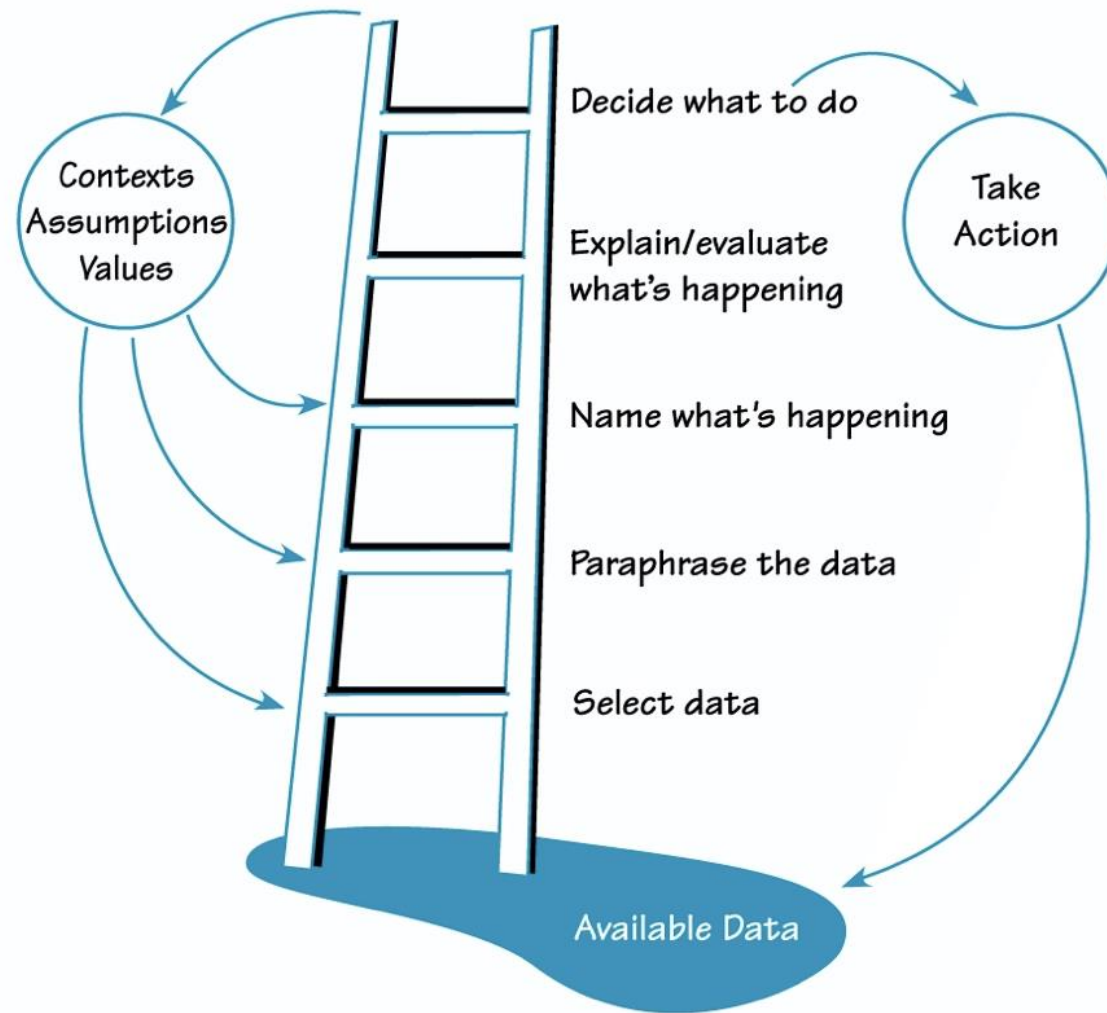
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The Ladder of Inference

Retrieved from: <https://thesystemsthinker.com/>



The State of Preschool “Inclusion”



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Fact Sheet on Advancing Racial Equity In EI and ECSE



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Preschool Special Education

Read online at <https://ectacenter.org/topics/racialequity/factsheet-racialequity-2023.asp>

Updated January 5, 2023

The science is clear that the first years of children's lives set the foundation for their healthy development. A young child's race, gender, location, language, and ability should not determine their access to needed services, experiences, and outcomes.

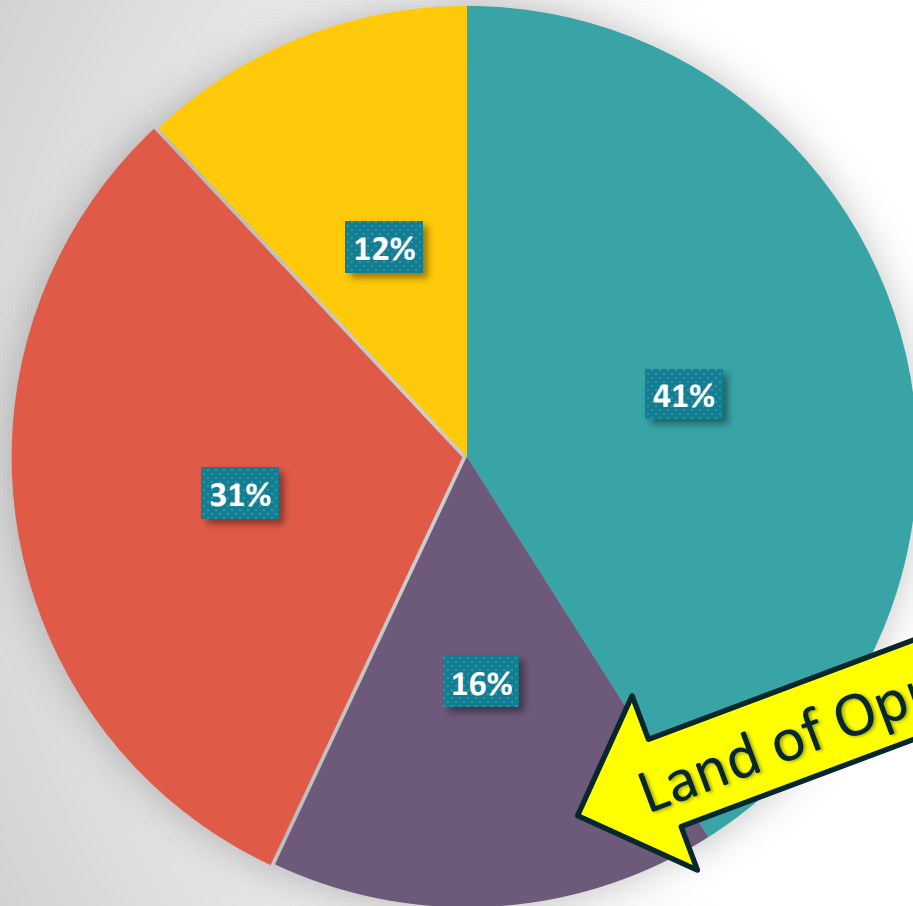
This fact sheet provides key information and supporting evidence about racial disparities and inequities for young children with a disability, and questions for state and local leaders seeking to advance equity for all children with disabilities and their families. What we know about equity, or lack thereof, for early intervention ([Part C](#)) and early childhood special education ([Part B, Section 619](#)) authorized under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) needs further research. We have intentionally included research on school-age children with disabilities and on school-age workforce knowing there are insights and lessons for the early years.

produced in collaboration with:



The UNC Equity Research Action Coalition and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill created this document in partnership with the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This fact sheet is a collaborative effort across researchers, TA revisitors, and state early intervention and early childhood

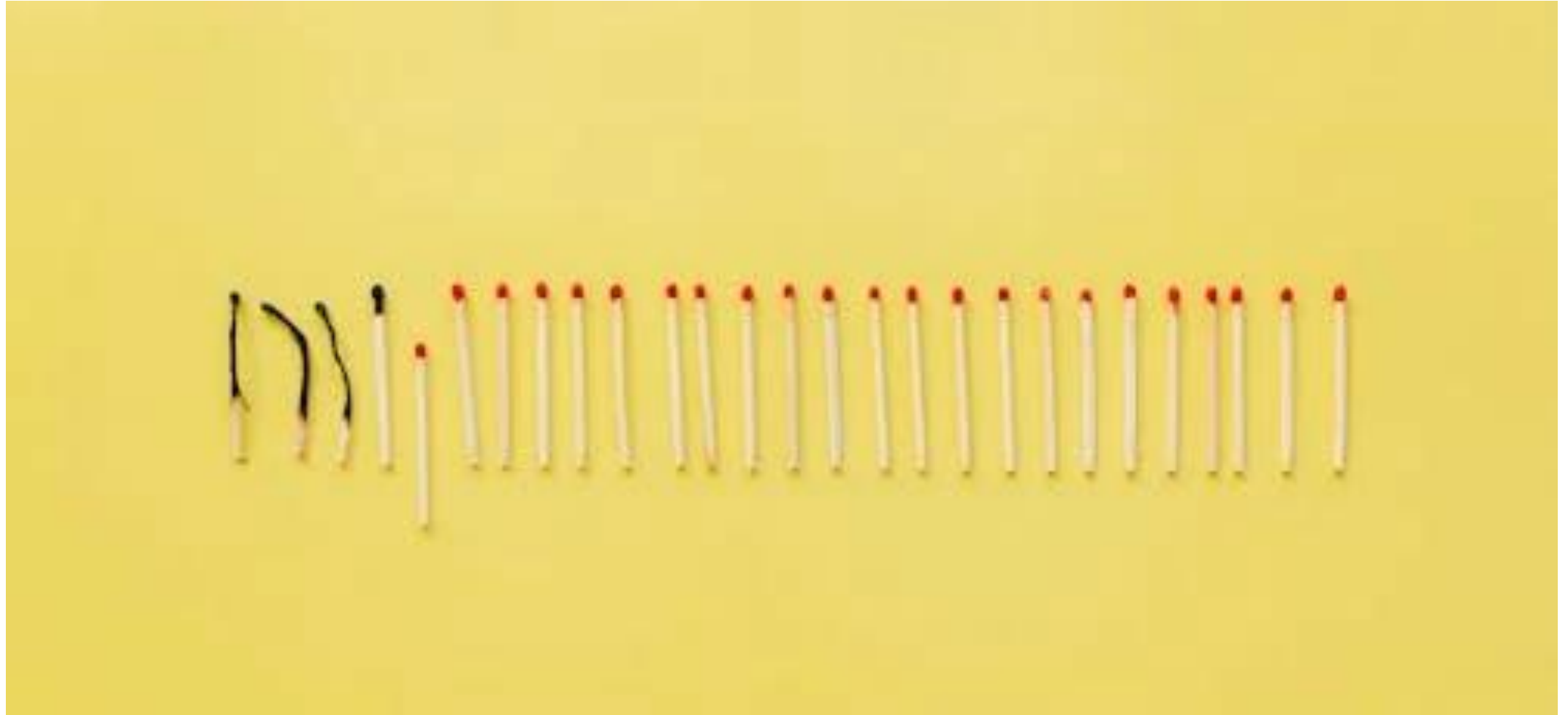




- Children Receiving Special Education Services in the Regular Ed Setting
- Children Receiving Services Outside the Regular Ed Setting but Attend Regular Ed Setting
- Children Receiving Services Outside a Regular Ed Setting and Do Not Attend a Regular Ed Setting



Data Considering the Intersection of Race and Disability



There are racial disparities in ALL aspects of our system from referral to implementation of the IFSP/IEP.



Children's Equity Project, 2023

Getting Clear On Definitions



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Access

- ❖ Minimum requirements set by law- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and continuum of services
- ❖ Push-in services that happen near peers but not with peers
- ❖ Pull-out services based on diagnosis



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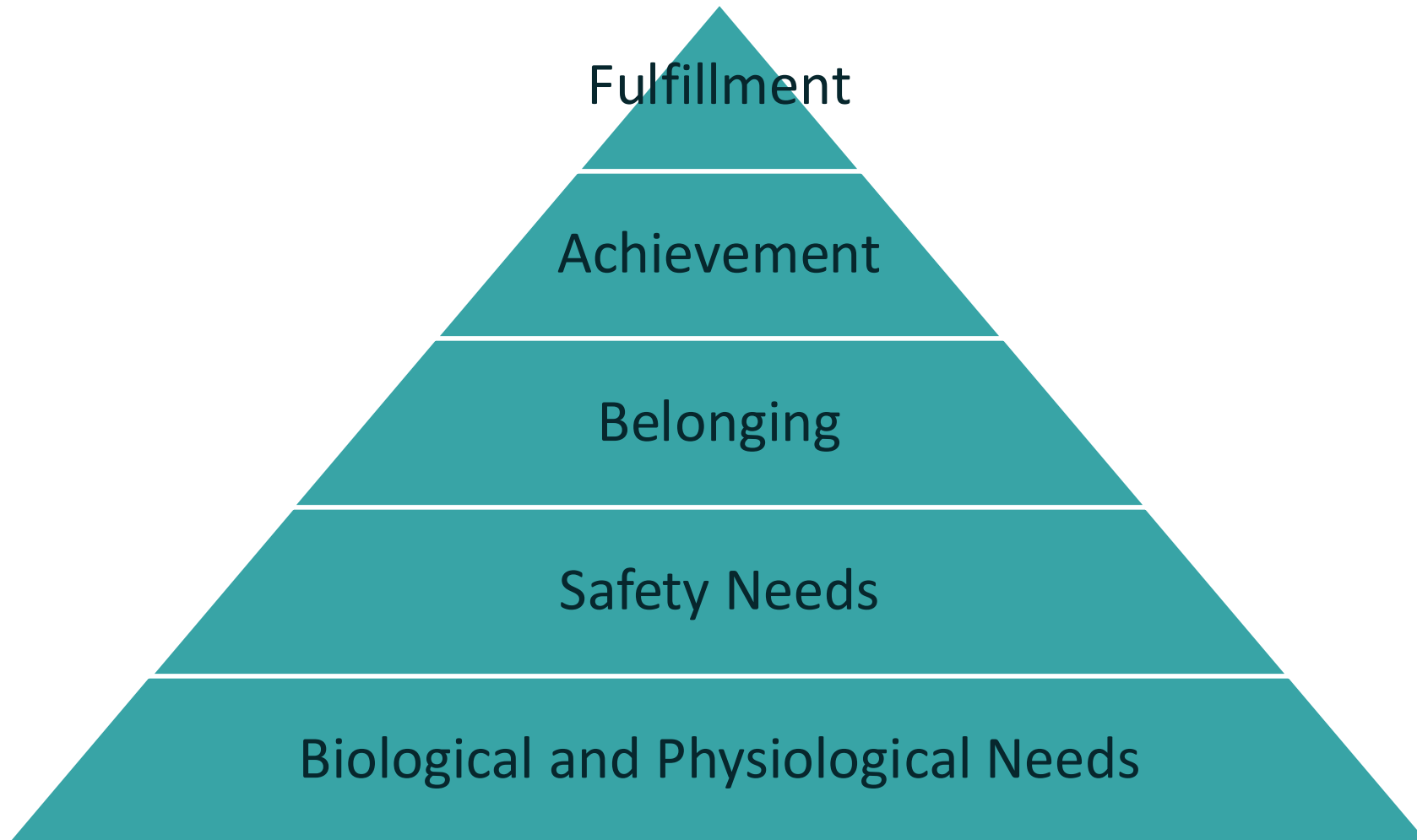


Inclusion with a Lens on Belonging

- ❖ Social Focus
- ❖ Community embedded
- ❖ Driven toward families' priorities
- ❖ All day everyday
- ❖ With naturally occurring peers in natural proportions and demographics



Adapted from:
Wilson, R.A. (2012). Belonging. www.ChildCareExchange.com



Our Greatest Barriers



- The Danger of Fixing Children
- The Danger of Expert-Over Thinking
- The Danger of Simple Solutions
- The Danger of Not Prioritizing Provider Mental Health

Key Takeaways from the 2023 Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

- All young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive early childhood programs and receive the support they need to reach their full potential
- Disability is a natural part of the human experience and should not diminish one's right to participate in or contribute to society
- Inclusion occurs across a lifespan, beginning at birth and continuing into schools, communities, and places of employment



5 Hopeful Opportunities and Considerations



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1. Share Your Story, Experience the System



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What We Think is the Problem...



The Golden Circle- Simon Sinek (2009)





Guidance from the Policy Statement

“Shared responsibility and a nationwide commitment to:

1) work together to reshape attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and expectations for what children with disabilities can achieve;

2) implement policies, budgets, and practices that prioritize access to and participation in high-quality early childhood programs for children with disabilities; and

3) create a comprehensive system that meets the individualized learning and developmental needs of each and every child. ”



The anonymous sticky note on my computer...
“You can choose to desegregate.
The practices are not the way in which desegregation occurs.
Culture, leadership, practice, repeat...
This is what creates pathways to belonging.”

What is your WHY for inclusion/belonging?



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2. Mutual Trust, Respect and Collaboration



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Turn Toward One Another's Professional and Life Experiences



Giving all partners voice in collaboration, coaching, problem-solving and decision-making is critical.



Guidance from the Policy Statement



“Coordinating across systems is complex, so fostering relationships between early childhood system leaders and providers requires an ongoing commitment and a willingness to build systems by aligning policies and practices, providing dedicated funding and resources for inclusion, and enabling structures for educators and providers to implement evidence-based inclusive practices.”

State Example: Memorandums of Understanding for a Mixed Service Delivery Model



Local Examples: Collaborative Teaming and Services

Collaborative teams are ALL OF US!

- ❖ Build on capacity
- ❖ Embed services into naturally occurring environments and routines
- ❖ Support adaptations and accommodations in the physical environment



How are you fostering a collaborative spirit toward inclusion?



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3. Worthwhile Environment Practices



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Guidance from the Policy Statement



Build a Coordinated Early Childhood Workforce System

- Ensure that State Certifications, Credentials, and Workforce Preparation Programs Have a Strong Focus on Inclusion and Supporting Children with Disabilities

State Example: Breaking Down Barriers for Braiding Funding



States and local communities may braid, blend, or layer multiple federal funding streams to increase the supply of quality early care and education (ECE) and increase access to comprehensive early childhood and family support services within a coordinated, comprehensive early childhood system. This tool will help those interested in braiding better understand what the process entails and how to find existing resources that can help with the process.



For questions or comments about this tool please contact Pia Caronongan (pcaronongan@mathematica-mpr.com) or Katie Gonzalez (kgonzalez@mathematica-mpr.com)

Local Example: Shared Professional Development



Wiggins, Colorado, is a rural community in the eastern portion of the State that provides special education with a mixed service delivery model across State-funded preschool, community child care and family home child care. Professional development has been delivered in cross-sector trainings for all partners who serve children in the community. Additionally, coaching is provided by a trained community coach to implement inclusive practices from the Early Childhood Education Environment Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion. Providers across sectors who serve children with disabilities are creating a video library of high-quality inclusive practices in order to implement an ongoing community of practice. Community child care leaders have created a monthly newsletter featuring: (1) administrator supports for high-quality inclusion, (2) provider training and opportunities for coaching, and (3) other local TA focused on early childhood inclusion.

What barriers to worthwhile practices can you break down?



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4. Conquering “Attitudes and Beliefs”



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**Does inclusion
work for
children with
disabilities and
their families?**

YES!!!!

**And is that the
right/only
question we
should be
asking?**

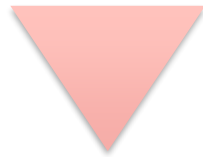


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**Belonging
is a human
right.**



**Therefore,
the
question
should be...**



**HOW do we
make
belonging
possible for
every child?**

Our fidelity obsession for all the wrong reasons

The **why** is just as important as the **what** we have to do. It's a reminder that we

Fidelity as a north star

It's **harder** to do a little than scaling practices

From fearing change to embracing it, understanding ourselves of our priorities to improve

Thank you to the Rise School of Denver and Dr. Jackie Joseph for this understanding!!!!



Guidance from the Policy Statement



Young children with disabilities must be given access to the early childhood programs, services, and experiences that children without disabilities have within a State or local community. Specifically, high-quality inclusive early childhood programs are ones that:

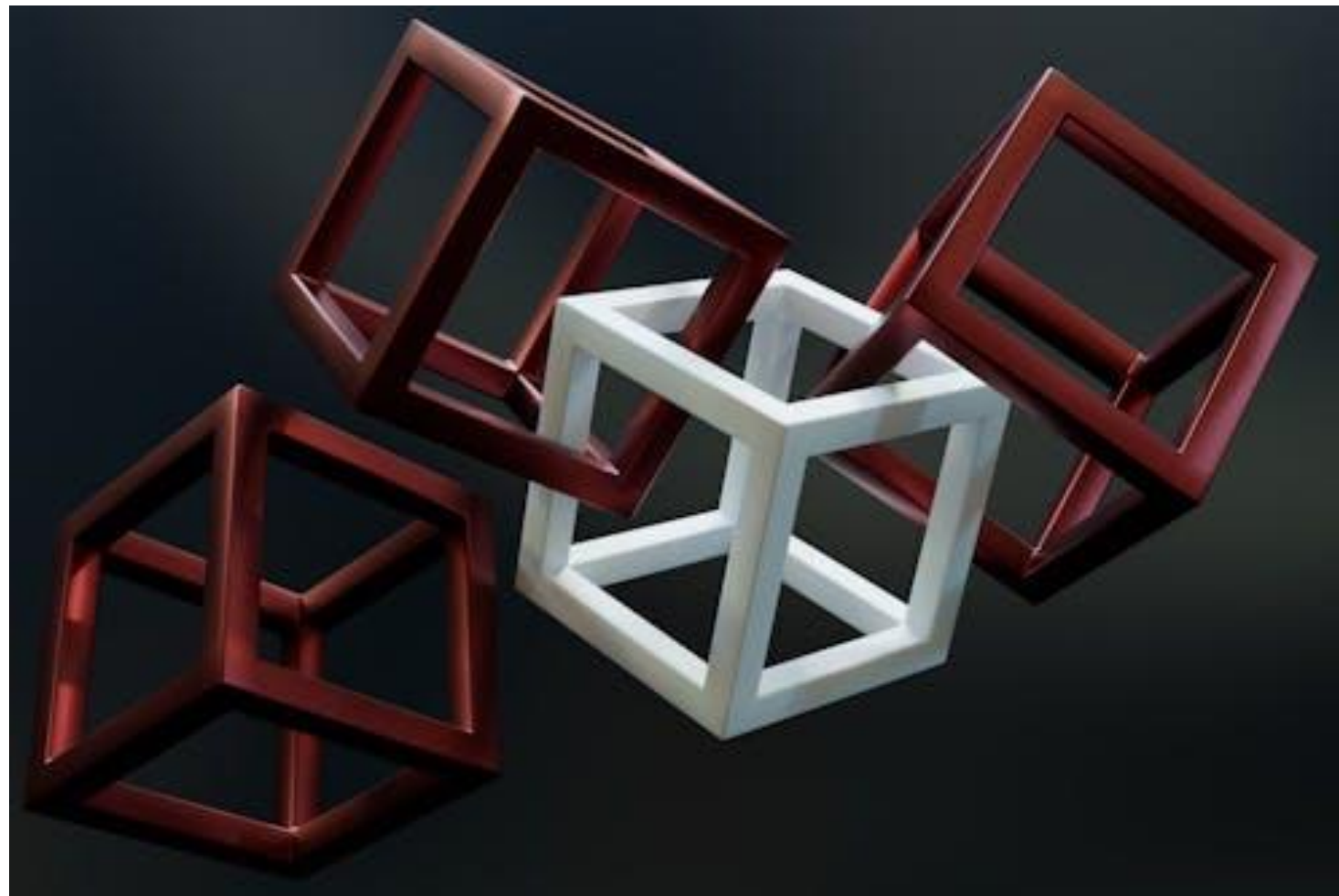
- Include children with disabilities in early childhood programs they would participate in if they did not have a disability, so they can learn together with their peers without disabilities;
- Provide high-quality teaching and learning environments that support children's development and allow all children to meet high expectations;
- Intentionally promote children's participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations and differentiated interventions and instruction;

State Example: Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Eight Shared Competencies



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Local Example: Universal Design for Learning: Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression



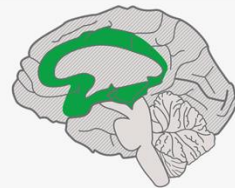
Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The UDL Guidelines are a tool to support educators, curriculum developers, researchers, parents, and more to apply the UDL framework to practice. These guidelines offer a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities.

The UDL Guidelines are organized into three principles: **Engagement**, **Representation**, and **Action & Expression**. When a variety of options are available to provide multiple means of approaching each principle, barriers are reduced and access to that principle is increased.

Explore the UDL Guidelines website to access full descriptions of each guideline and associated considerations.

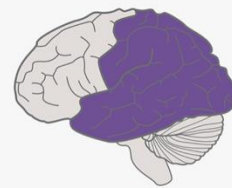
[Visit the UDL Guidelines](#) 



Engagement

Design options for welcoming interests and identities, effort and persistence, and emotional capacity.

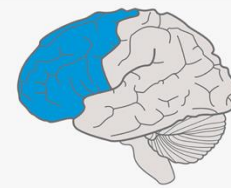
[Explore Engagement](#) 



Representation

Design options for perception, language and symbols, and building knowledge.

[Explore Representation](#) 



Action & Expression

Design options for interaction, expression and communication, and strategy development.

[Explore Action & Expression](#) 

**How do you encourage leaders and providers
to support children rather than “fix” or
“change” them?**



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5. Focus on Access to Inclusion and Belonging



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Guidance from the Policy Statement

“High-quality inclusion that begins early and continues into school likely produces the strongest outcomes. Studies have shown that children with disabilities who spend more time in general education classes tend to be absent fewer days from school and have higher test scores in reading and math than those who spend less time in general education classes and spending more time in general education classes was related to a higher probability of employment and higher earnings.”





State Example: California Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program

The purpose of the IEEEP funding is to increase access to inclusive early learning and care (ELC) programs for children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities.

- Facilities
- Adaptive Equipment
- Professional Development



Local Example:

When in doubt, make it social!





Remember the following as you attend sessions and return to work in your programs and communities:

- ✓ The opportunities for improvement are system-based and include understanding evidence-based inclusion, IDEA requirements, staffing and training the early childhood workforce and building community partnerships.
- ✓ Families are essential partners in mapping inclusion.
- ✓ We need shared responsibility across the system to achieve the vision of the policy statement and evaluate the implementation of inclusion for all children.



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Thank you!
Alissa.rausch@du.edu

Website:

<https://morgridge.du.edu/pele-center>



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