

Overcoming Common Challenges to Preschool Inclusion

The purpose of this document is to provide a general overview of common barriers for preschool inclusion, offer proposed solutions to barriers and provide an action planning template for anticipating and addressing barriers.

What is Preschool Inclusion?

The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) developed a joint position statement which provides a shared definition on early childhood inclusion (2009):

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.

What are Common Barriers for Preschool Inclusion?

Common barriers for preschool inclusion at the local and district level can be grouped into three main categories: (1) challenges with attitudes and beliefs, (2) challenges with policy and procedures and (3) challenges with resources. In the tables below, we explore each category of common barriers and identify proposed solutions to overcome these barriers.¹

Attitudes and Beliefs Barriers

When it comes to attitudes and beliefs, understanding what high-quality inclusion looks like in practice and who benefits from preschool inclusion can create roadblocks for families and program staff. Additionally, knowing how the laws and requirements for inclusion should be interpreted can be challenging to navigate.

¹Barton, E. & Smith, B (2015). *The preschool inclusion toolbox: How to build and lead a high quality Program*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing. Gupta, S. & Vihn, M. (2014). *First steps to preschool inclusion: How to jumpstart your programwide plan*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Potential Barrier	Proposed Solution
Uncertainty or misinformation on the meaning and implementation of inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a resource library for families and staff to access videos, handouts and other informational materials on inclusive settings and high-quality inclusive practices. - Establish a plan to communicate with families and staff to share updates on inclusion efforts in the local program. - Provide training, coaching and other professional development opportunities to program staff to strengthen practical and theoretical knowledge on inclusion.
Unfamiliarity or misunderstanding of laws and requirements pertaining to inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reach out to national advocacy organizations and affiliated local chapters for summaries and resources explaining laws and requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Arc - Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights, known as the PACER Center - Reach out to the local Parent Training and Information (PTI) center for resources. TN STEP is the PTI for the state.
Unfamiliarity with research on inclusion benefits for all children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey families and staff to identify questions or misconceptions on inclusion and develop a resource, such as a FAQ, to address those questions and misconceptions by providing research-based benefits. - Organize a series of family events and professional development opportunities for staff to share benefits on inclusion and expectations for implementing high-quality inclusive practices. - Share anecdotal success stories from staff members and families on the importance of acknowledging individual learning styles and abilities.

Policy and Procedures Barriers

A lack of clearly defined preschool inclusion policies and procedures can cause challenges with coordination and collaboration within the program and across service delivery to support children and their families.

Potential Barrier	Proposed Solution
Lack of coordination with services, programs, personnel, and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish an Inclusion Leadership Team (ILT) to spearhead coordination efforts across programs, personnel, and procedures. - Develop and execute a shared collaborative vision and action plan for implementation of high-quality inclusion.



Lack of collaboration with services, personnel, and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocate resources and time to plan and develop an infrastructure that supports an integrated system of high-quality inclusive services. - Establish standards to ensure high-quality instruction and related services are implemented to meet the needs of individual children and their families.
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Resource Barriers

Many resources such as time, funding, and personnel needed to implement a high-quality inclusive preschool program are finite, therefore intentional strategizing and planning are needed to overcome resource barriers.

Potential Barrier	Proposed Solution
Funding shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Braid and blend funding from multiple sources. - Establish partnerships between community-based programs and district programs to reduce or distribute service delivery costs. - Advocate for partners with community-based programs that provide high-quality settings for preschool children, including children with disabilities.
Personnel shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement a collaborative co-teaching model between paraprofessionals and certified teachers. - Establish an agreement with a licensed early childhood special educator to provide supervision to teaching and family support staff at multiple sites. - Access other sources of information to build staff capacity, such as CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge, if expertise is not available within the current team.
Limited staff planning time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide educators and service providers planning time ahead of the school year to proactively prepare. - Schedule weekly planning times for instructional teams and/or monthly brainstorming sessions for the entire inclusion team to determine challenges and develop solutions. - Develop a staff position, such as an inclusion coach, to coordinate and assist staff in identifying areas of support and provide ongoing mentoring.



Resources Referenced

The Arc

The Arc is a national advocacy program promoting and protecting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetime. The Arc Tennessee has several local chapters available across the state and works closely with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to provide family services, accessible at <https://www.thearctn.org/>.

Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center

Parent and Training Information Centers and Community Partner Resource Centers have nearly 100 locations across the US and territories. These Centers are designed to support families and caregivers in securing access, participation, and outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. TN STEP is the PTI for the state, accessible at <https://tnstep.org/>.

Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights, known as the PACER Center

The PACER Center is a resource and advocacy center enhancing the quality of life and expanding opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families to reach their highest potential. The PACER Center is an Office of Special Education (OSEP) funded program based in Minnesota, impacting families across the nation, accessible at <https://www.pacer.org/>.

CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge

CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge is a web-based instructional resource for faculty and other professional providers to support the use of evidence-based practices in work with young children (0-5) and their families. The CONNECT modules are free, practice-focused instructional resources, accessible at <https://connectmodules.dec-sped.org/>.



Action Planning Template for Preschool Inclusion Barriers

Instructions: This template can be used during preschool inclusion team planning sessions within local programs and districts to identify actual and anticipated barriers for preschool inclusion. For each barrier identified, the team will brainstorm proposed solutions, list resources needed to overcome the barriers, and identify a lead team member to manage and track all efforts to address the barriers. Lastly, the team will identify any next steps to follow up on progress over time.

For additional support on action planning for preschool inclusion, contact Sarah Whitman, Assistant Director of Technical Assistance at AnLar, swhitman@anlar.com.

Actual or Anticipated Barrier	Proposed Solution	Resources (needed and/ or available)	Lead Individual	Action Taken	Next Steps for Follow-up

Adapted from Form 7.2: Anticipating and Addressing Barriers, *First Steps to Preschool Inclusion: How to Jumpstart Your Programwide Plan*, S. Gupta & M. Vihn (2014): 178.



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