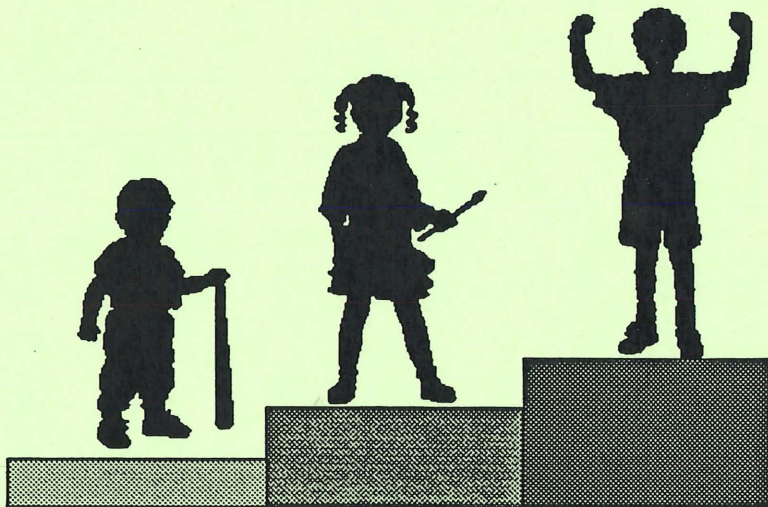


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A Planning Guide for Integrating Young Children with Disabilities into Community-Based Early Childhood Programs



Iowa Early Childhood Special Education
Technical Assistance Network
Iowa Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education

1993

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A Planning Guide for Integrating Young Children with Disabilities into Community-Based Early Childhood Programs

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Introduction

Educators and parents are increasingly recognizing the benefits of providing young children with disabilities opportunities for interaction with children without disabilities. Services for preschool children with disabilities can include both the individualized intervention that is essential to meeting the special needs of the child and participation in community-based early childhood (CBEC) programs, e.g., private preschools, Head Start, kindergarten, or child care programs.

Early childhood educators have experience in providing a nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children and expertise in dealing with a wide range of developmental interests and abilities. Many CBEC programs that serve preschool children have a long history of meeting the needs of children who exhibit diverse learning styles and ability levels.

Early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel offer knowledge about disabilities, techniques for serving children with complex educational needs, and strategies for maximizing a child's strengths to meet educational goals. The ECSE staff helps to assess the child's strengths and needs and to plan an educational program that will facilitate the child's competence in activities of the early childhood program. The ECSE staff also assists with actively involving parents in the planning, decision making, and implementation of the educational program.

Positive outcomes for all children, parents, early childhood educators, and special educators can be achieved through the carefully structured participation of young children with special needs in community based early childhood programs. This *Planning Guide* is a tool to use in planning integrated services for young children with special needs.

It is through the joint efforts of early childhood special educators, early childhood educators, and parents that quality integration of children with disabilities and children without disabilities can occur. Ongoing communication and mutual respect are critical to sharing the responsibility for meeting the needs of the child and family.

The *Planning Guide* is designed to:

- provide a framework for decision making, planning, and problem solving.
- encourage collaboration, assure mutual understanding of the child's needs, and clarify roles and responsibilities for carrying out recommendations.
- facilitate communication among parents, community-based early childhood (CBEC) staff members and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel.
- provide a mechanism for collecting and storing information.

-
- facilitate a smooth transition for the child, family, and staff as the child moves from one program into another.

What is Integration?

There are many interpretations of the term “integration.” For the purposes of this planning guide, **integration** refers to the participation of a child with disabilities in an early childhood program that is typically provided for normally developing young children. The child with disabilities receives all or part of his/her instructional program in a setting that provides instructional programming and opportunities for social interaction with typical young children.

Federal and state regulations require that children who receive special education services must be provided with opportunities for interaction with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. This requirement is referred to as providing services in the **least restrictive environment (LRE)**. Each child that receives special education has an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**, which describes the child’s strengths and needs, services to be provided, goals, and objectives. The IEP must list where, when, and how the child will participate with non-disabled peers.

What are the Benefits of Integration?

Integration enhances the development of the child with disabilities through:

- the availability of peer models to facilitate imitation, sharing, play organization, modeling behaviors, and reinforcing appropriate social behavior.
- the opportunity to observe and participate in appropriate patterns of communicative interaction.

Research suggests that integrated preschool settings have been found to provide:

- models for more complex speech and language development.
- more appropriate and more mature forms of social interaction with peers.
- increased environmental demands for classroom performance.

Normally developing children have shown only positive developmental and attitudinal outcomes from integrated experiences.

Shared Beliefs About Integration

- All children with and without disabilities can learn and grow together in integrated settings.
- Young children with disabilities need developmentally appropriate environments that address their individual needs.
- Partnerships among CBEC personnel, ECSE personnel, and families can meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.
- Equal status should be given to all children.
- Diversity should be valued.

Planning

Successful integration requires careful planning. Designing an appropriate set of services for the child involves matching the child's abilities, strengths, and needs to the curriculum, environment, and activities of the typical setting. Creating a good match between the child's needs and the community setting requires communication regarding philosophy, strengths of the personnel, physical setting, routines, and activities occurring in the center.

There are several procedural steps that must occur prior to the IEP team's finalizing the decision that a child should receive his/her special education in a particular community-based early childhood program. These steps include:

- assessment of the child by the special education team, including an interview with the family.
- staffing to discuss the strengths and needs of the child, develop goals and objectives, and consider all placement options.
- discussion of the CBEC options available to meet the child's needs within the community.
- discussion with the community-based program staff to determine if the child's needs can be met in their center.

-
- planning accommodations and support to meet the needs of the child.
 - completion of the IEP.
 - determining the special education staff to be responsible for monitoring the progress of the child on IEP goals and objectives.
 - designing training for the CBEC staff on topics and skills pertaining to meeting the needs of the child with a disability.
 - identifying the needs of the CBEC and suggesting alternatives for meeting those needs.
 - completion of a contract between the school district or the area education agency (AEA) and the community-based programs if the district or AEA is paying tuition.

Note: The order in which these steps are implemented will vary depending on local procedures and policies.

After deciding to enroll the child in the community-based program, the team should plan for the child's initial participation. The special education staff can work with the CBEC staff and family to plan strategies that will enable the child to make a comfortable transition into the center. In most situations, the first days of attendance are no different for a child with a disability than for other children.

Team Members

Planning should be based on a collaborative team approach that includes the parents, the CBEC staff, the local school district staff and/or the area education agency (AEA) staff members that provide services to children with disabilities. Teamwork with professionals from other backgrounds and disciplines can broaden the perspectives of all those involved.

The composition of the team should be determined by the individual needs of the child. A team usually includes family members, CBEC representative(s), school district administrator, ECSE teacher, and special education support staff as needed.

Examples of support personnel that may be included as needed to meet the needs of the child, family, and center, include speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, vision specialist, hearing specialist, psychologist, registered nurse, school social worker.

Typically, one person on the team will be assigned to monitor the IEP and be the primary contact for that child. A district or AEA may assign an LRE facilitator, ECSE teacher, strategist, or consultant to perform this role, which includes assisting with the following:

- participate in the ongoing implementation of the IEP.
- observe the child, conduct assessment, and monitor goals and objectives.
- offer teaching strategies and suggestions.
- identify training needs and implement training activities.
- coordinate teaming activities with CBEC and ECSE personnel.
- make site visits as scheduled.
- assist with coordinating parent activities.

A form for recording information about each team member is provided in Appendix A.

Families

The family members of the child with a disability are essential members of the IEP team and must be an integral part of the decision-making process. A family's well being, values and goals should be considered when determining the appropriateness of an early childhood placement and planning the educational program.

Parents of children with disabilities and parents of normally developing children share similar concerns about their child's program. Parents of children with disabilities may have questions about the capacity of an integrated setting to serve their child's needs. These family concerns should be addressed in the IEP process and through ongoing communication. Parents may need encouragement to talk about their concerns with staff.

Parents typically want information about the routines and events occurring in the CBEC. Parents of children with disabilities should be encouraged to participate in the activities and opportunities offered to all families.

Experience suggests that parents of children with disabilities see their child being accepted and successful in integrated settings.



Potential Expectations of the Community-Based Early Childhood Provider

The director and staff of a CBEC program may wonder what they will be expected to contribute and how their jobs might change. The CBEC staff may be asked to:

- answer some questions when interviewed by a visiting special educator. The special education team will need information on the numbers of children and staff; DHS licensure status; philosophy of the program; strengths of the program; schedules and routines; and policies regarding parent involvement, transportation, snacks and meals.
- participate in training on topics and skills related to special needs.
- provide suggestions for how to help the child to be successful.
- contribute information that could help with the collection of assessment data and with prioritizing skills needed in this setting.
- be observed working with the child as the special education staff collects assessment data on the child.
- work collaboratively with special educators and the family to develop teaching techniques and strategies.
- discuss expectations and sign a contract between the center and the school district.



The IEP Process

A meeting must be held to determine that the child needs and qualifies for special education services, summarize assessment and planning, make decisions about program options, and design an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The local school district and area education agency have procedures in place for conducting the IEP process. Some districts have found that the most efficient procedure for making decisions about the educational program for the child and for working together with the CBEC staff is to conduct two meetings:

The preliminary meeting is an opportunity to determine the need for special education, review options with the family, and discuss what type of services the child needs. The team will use information collected from family interviews, observation notes, multidisciplinary assessment data, social skills ratings, and checklists to draft a statement describing the child's present levels of educational performance and to formulate goals. After the team identifies the child's needs and sets goals, they will need to select the appropriate services and identify the program(s) which meet the needs of the child.

Following this meeting, the ECSE staff will confer with the CBEC staff and observe the center to determine whether it is feasible for the services discussed at the preliminary meeting to be provided at the center. Parents will be encouraged to visit the program.

The second meeting enables the family, ECSE staff and the CBEC staff to meet and plan specific objectives and accommodations needed to implement the IEP. At this meeting the IEP is finalized.

If the district or AEA will pay tuition for the child to attend the program, the school district or AEA administrator must work with the CBEC director to develop a contract.



Prioritizing Objectives and Accommodations

When an integrated program has been determined to be the appropriate placement for the child, the ECSE staff, CBEC staff, and parents need to prioritize objectives and design accommodations that will be implemented in the CBEC environment. Recommendations for physical accommodations, adaptive equipment, and the support of the appropriate adults should be made at this point in the planning.

Prioritizing objectives and planning accommodations that will be practical in the CBEC setting and will meet the needs of the child require careful observation and analysis of early childhood settings. The team will compare the needs stated in the child's present level of educational performance, goals, and objectives to the schedule of the daily activities and routines of the integrated program. The *Observation System for Prioritizing Objectives and Planning Accommodations* (See Appendix A) will help the CBEC staff to communicate their expectations and priorities, and provide the special educators with a method for selecting those objectives that will help the child to be successful.

Note: Although an IEP for an integrated setting should emphasize the skills and behaviors needed to be successful in that environment, not all the goals and objectives on an IEP must be implemented in the integrated environment. Some goals and objectives may be implemented by the special education teacher or support staff in another setting.

The strategies for facilitating social interaction and the instructional procedures for achieving objectives in the integrated setting should be described in writing on the IEP. Observation procedures and data collection should be listed as part of the evaluation component of the IEP. The special education staff will do most of the assessment and data collection. The CBEC staff may be requested to provide a limited amount of data.

Examples of Objectives

Current literature identifies skills critical for children with special needs to experience success in integrated settings as falling into the five areas identified below (Murphy & Vincent, 1989). Teachers ranked these skills as being necessary for successful performance in kindergarten classrooms and child care settings:

Communication – language skills needed to initiate and respond to peers, maintain conversation, and make needs known. Speech pathologists have a variety of assessment instruments that are used to identify concerns in this area. Examples of skills:

- asking a child to play
- smiling at a child or adult
- greeting others
- relaying information to peers or adult

Independence – skills needed to take care of personal needs such as self help skills, i.e., dressing, eating, toileting. Most early childhood curriculum based assessments include a variety of self-help items. The parent interview will also yield extensive information on levels of independence at home and in other settings. ECSE staff should interview CBEC staff to identify expectations and routines for dressing, eating and toileting. Examples of skills:

- using the toilet independently
- eating meals independently
- putting on and taking off clothing
- working fasteners on clothing

Compliance with rules and routines – social behaviors that are usually required to remain in group settings, such as complying with requests, attending, and remaining on task. These behaviors have been termed “teacher-pleasing behavior” skills and “kindergarten or preschool survival skills”. A variety of checklists are used to assess these skills. Examples of skills:

- attending to group activities.
- controlling tone and pitch of voice in a large group.
- using acceptable physical contact on the playground.
- following one direction related to task.
- recognizing and staying within classroom boundaries.

Pre-academic instructional skills – most of the assessment procedures typically used in early childhood special education settings would be appropriate for identifying cognitive, pre-math, pre-reading and other skills frequently worked on in early childhood settings. A variety of curriculum-based assessment and norm based assessment instruments are used to assess pre-academic and other preschool skills. Examples of skills:

- cutting shapes
- drawing shapes and pictures
- working puzzles
- manipulating small toys
- following one or more directions
- solving problems independently
- categorizing objects by color, shape, or size

Social interaction – behaviors used to interact and to make and keep friends. Teachers and parents may complete checklists and/or teacher ratings of social behaviors. Examples of skills:

- participating in play activities
- sharing toys
- taking turns
- engaging in imaginary play

Reference:

Murphy, M., & Vincent, L. (1989) Identification of Critical Skills for Success in Day Care. *Journal of Early Intervention*. 13(3), 212-220.

Examples of Accommodations and Teaching Strategies

Environmental strategies to modify space and materials, as well as teaching techniques to increase opportunities for appropriate social and instructional interaction, are listed below.

Environmental Strategies: Space

Limit boundaries to increase the probability of child-to-child interactions.

- Use table top – provides more proximity, child is less able to move away.
- Tape off play area on floor to form a boundary.
- Restrict toys to carpeted area.
- Provide a small table or work area with only two chairs.

Plan seating to control proximity of children, which increases opportunities for initiating and responding.

- Arrange seating during center-time, snack, and fine motor activities. Seat children that are likely to initiate a social interaction with less interactive children.

Environmental Strategies: Materials

Select specific materials that are more likely to promote social interaction.

- doll corner, housekeeping
- props for sociodramatic play
- toys for two or more
- novel, special effects toys
- water or sand table
- climbing equipment

Limit number of materials to create a need to request, trade, or share with peers. For example, provide the same number of toys as pairs of children. Limit:

- kitchen materials in playhouse
- glue, scissors, crayons in art
- balls, trikes, riding toys on playground
- snack foods
- musical instruments



Withhold materials or keep them out of reach to create a need to ask for items and encourage initiation.

- Place new toy in view but out of reach.
- Install a shelf out of reach for special materials.
- Leave juice in the refrigerator but pass out glasses.
- Introduce project that requires glue without offering glue.

Offer fine motor manipulatives and construction toys to foster dyad or small-group interactions.

- large wooden blocks
- plastic assembly toys
- farmyard and animals
- dollhouse, people, and furniture

Schedule riding and climbing activities to elicit movement in space with peers.

- bikes, riding toys, gas station, stop signs
- wagons and seesaw
- climbers

Teaching Techniques

Provide dramatic play roles to create a context and routines.

- Assign groups of children to participate in selected play activities with appropriate props and settings, e.g., beauty salon, birthday party, zoo. Review roles, vocabulary, and social competencies.

Redirect initiations to promote child-child interaction rather than child-adult interaction.

- Respond to child's initiation, then redirect the child to tell, ask or show a friend.
- Strengthen approach strategies by offering an expression to initiate play. Try asking, "Can I build this part of the barn?"
- Ask child to be a greeter at the door in the morning.
- Help children find common ground. "Josh likes trucks, too."

Use cueing and reinforcement techniques to facilitate initiation and responding that may increase social interaction.

- Use verbal or physical prompts to encourage child to show something, invite, share, trade, greet or defend.
- Reinforce. "You two are sharing, looks like fun!"
- Fade teacher support over time.
- Avoid interrupting natural exchange between children.
- Plan for generalization.

Model appropriate interactions for children to see and imitate.

- Adults demonstrate sharing, turn taking, asking for materials as part of daily routines.
- Promote children as being capable to enhance their social image. Ask children to be line leader, snack helper, or to lead songs and finger plays.

Structure group time to create opportunities for children to initiate and respond to each other.

- Present child with photo of peer and prompt the child to greet or ask a question of the peer in the photo.
- Teacher models initial question and prompts children to ask each other until each child has had a turn.
- Have child rather than teacher present and demonstrate task to be performed.
- Present structured games, such as Lotto, Candy Land, Go Fish.

Set up team-learning lesson.

- Have a group of children complete tasks in art, cooking, putting together assembly toys.
- Create an assembly line to finish one project with each child having a special job.

Individualize within a group by planning the lesson to give each child a trial on an IEP objective.

- Design lesson around theme. Pre-plan activity so that each child has an IEP objective embedded into the lesson.

Social skills training

- Present lessons on how children can play together including skills such as starting a social interaction, sharing, agreeing, leading a game, and try a new way.
- Follow with structured play and incidental teaching.

Group affection activities designed to encourage children's social behavior during routine pre-school activities.

- "If you're happy and you know it, hug a friend."
- "The farmer hugs the wife, the wife gives the child a pat."
- "Simon says, Jason, give Maggie five."



Questions the CBEC Staff May Want to Ask

The process described in the *Planning Guide* is designed to address most of the questions and concerns of the CBEC staff. Listed below are potential questions that should be asked to facilitate planning. If these questions or other concerns are not addressed, contact the special education team.

What are the strengths, interests, preferences of the child? What is the age of the child?

Do I have all of the medical information that I need?

How can I get more information on the child's disability if I need it?

What help will the child need with activities, events, routines?

What are the concerns and priorities of the family?

What type of involvement in the center would the family prefer?

What is the best way to help the family to feel included and informed?

Am I responsible for any part of the IEP? Do I need to attend staffings?

Can the objectives recommended by the team be implemented in the lessons, activities, and routines throughout the day at our center?

Are accommodations and recommendations compatible with our philosophy?

Does my classroom meet the needs of each child in my room, including the child with a disability?

Are there some changes I could make in the environment? in routines? in planned activities? in the teaching techniques I use?

What kinds of questions can I anticipate from the child's peers, and what are some appropriate answers?

What kinds of questions can I anticipate from parents of other children, and what are some appropriate answers?

What kinds of questions can I anticipate from staff members and what are some appropriate answers?

What can we do to prepare staff members?

Who will be coming to help us? What will they be doing?

What will their schedule be? Can I call them at any time?

What are they responsible for? What am I responsible for?

What is the best schedule for meeting with the ECSE classroom teacher, if the child is in a special education classroom in addition to the CBEC program?

Information to Share with Parents of Children Without Disabilities

Experience and research with integrated preschool programs has shown that the parents of children without disabilities report positive feelings about integration.

Integration offers parents of non-disabled children the benefit of:

- an experiential basis for teaching their own children about differences in growth and development.
- a greater understanding of persons with disabilities.
- a greater sensitivity to the needs of families of children with disabilities.

Questions that may be raised include:

- Will my child learn inappropriate behaviors from children with disabilities?
- Will my child be safe?
- Will the curriculum be changed to meet the needs of the child with special needs?
- Will the teacher have to spend so much time with the special needs child that my child's needs will not be met?

The literature suggests several advantages of integration for non-disabled children. When non-disabled children have positive interactions with children with disabilities, they become sensitive to the needs of others and learn to appreciate individual differences.

- Integration seems to have no detrimental effects on the social, cognitive, or play behaviors of young, normally developing children.
- Non-disabled children do not imitate socially unacceptable or immature behaviors in play or structured activities.
- Non-disabled children make expected progress in settings where children with disabilities are integrated.
- Typically non-disabled children are gentle with disabled peers and will try to help, encourage and demonstrate affection to children with disabilities.



APPENDIX A

Primary Special Education Contact Person: _____

Phone: _____

Other team members you may be working with include: _____

Name	Role/Agency	Phone
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX B

Observation System for Prioritizing Objectives and Planning Accommodations

Integrated Classroom Observation: The team should observe what the center offers to all children for each portion of the preschool day as well as how the child with disabilities interacts in the integrated environment. The *Integrated Classroom Observation Form* provides a method for structuring the observation and recording comments.

Record observation notations as described below for each section on page 1 of the form.

Schedule: List the activity or routine being observed in the early childhood environment, i.e., opening, language lesson, snack, play time, outdoor play, nap, transition periods, etc.

Observation of peers: Observe the children without disabilities as they participate in activities, lessons, or routines, as well as the interaction between staff and children. Consider the following questions for each activity or routine:

- What are typical children expected to do?
- What are children learning/enjoying?
- What techniques are the teacher(s) using to meet objectives?
- How many children and adults are involved in this activity?

Observation of target child: The next step is to observe the child with a disability to identify interests, abilities, and situations in which the child demonstrates behaviors that are different from peers. During each segment of the day the observer should notice:

- What the target child is able to do well and activities which give the child an opportunity to be seen as successful by peers.
- What the child is not able to do independently.
- Discrepancies between what the child with disabilities exhibits and what is expected of typical children.
- What type of help adults provide that enables the child to participate.

-
- Skills/interests that are the same or similar to those the typical children exhibit during participation in this activity.

Potential Objectives: This column may be used to record suggestions for potential objectives, such as skills the child needs to develop to be successful in this activity, behaviors that are critical to meaningful participation, or elements of the lesson or activity that would provide an opportunity for working on IEP objectives. All potential ideas can be listed here for discussion with the team.

Planning strategies and accommodations: Page 2 of this form is used to prioritize objectives generated on page 1, generate suggestions for strategies and accommodations, and document progress.

Priority Objectives: To prioritize which objectives are best worked on during this section of the preschool day, the center staff, special education staff, and parent will need to consider assessment data, the IEP, and information generated during the observation. (See first three columns of this form.) The priority objectives should:

- enable the child to participate with peers during this activity.
- develop motor, sensory and/or communication functioning, as listed on the IEP.
- decrease any behavior that interferes with social interaction or successful participation in the activity.
- increase independence.

Accommodations and strategies: The team should list the accommodations and strategies the staff can implement that will facilitate a positive outcome for that portion of the day and provide an opportunity for one or more trials on IEP objectives. Examples include changes in routines, use of associates, use of peers, reinforcement, and adjustment of position in the group.

Progress: Teachers or support staff can record at specified intervals how the child is doing on IEP objectives. This information can be used to assist in decision making. Progress data may be used to plan modifications in the objectives, change strategies and accommodations, and to update the family and teachers on the child's performance.

PLANNING STRATEGIES & ACCOMMODATIONS

Name of Child _____
Name of Observer _____

Center _____
Date _____

SCHEDULE	PRIORITY OBJECTIVES	ACCOMMODATIONS & STRATEGIES	PROGRESS

INTEGRATED CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Name of Child _____

Name of Observer _____

Center _____

Date _____

SCHEDULE	OBSERVATION OF PEERS	OBSERVATION OF TARGET CHILD	POTENTIAL OBJECTIVES

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