State

Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion

https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp

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The State indicators will use the term "state" throughout the document. In most cases this should be understood to include relevant programs and policies in territories and tribes as well.

INDICATOR S1: Cross-Sector Leadership

A state level cross-sector leadership team, along with partners, implements a shared purpose statement, and strategic plan, and makes recommendations that support high-quality inclusion across the early childhood system.

The state level cross-sector leadership team:

1. Maintains written criteria for cross-sector membership to ensure broad representation from relevant parties, programs, and agencies. These include families, adults with disabilities, state and private Pre-Ks, Head Start, child care, home child care, early childhood special education, early intervention, higher education, mental health, and child welfare. This team looks like the community it serves.
2. Establishes and uses specific outreach strategies to communities of color, immigrant communities, rural communities, and so on.
3. Adopts processes and policies for meetings and decision making, such as norms for attendance, orientation, and facilitation strategies.
4. Develops and uses a cross-sector purpose statement to help agencies expand access and participation for children with disabilities in inclusive local programs and settings.
5. Develops and implements a written strategic plan that reflects its purpose statement, and builds on an assessment of the current landscape of state early childhood initiatives. The strategic plan includes specific policies and funding that address issues affecting children from underserved communities (for example, those in rural communities).
6. Establishes expectations and secures resources for local programs to implement the state purpose statement.
7. Uses disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data routinely to inform implementation and assess the impact of the cross-sector strategic inclusion plan.
8. Creates and implements a communication and dissemination plan to update relevant parties.

INDICATOR S2: Policy or Guidance

State early care and education (ECE) agencies have aligned policies and procedures that promote high-quality inclusion and prevent segregation by disability.

Policies:

1. Promote the recruitment of, access to, and enrollment of children with disabilities in environments where all children would naturally participate.
2. Support service delivery for children with disabilities in environments in which all children would naturally attend.
3. Address and promote the cross-sector collaboration of agencies and local programs, including alignment of state educational agency (SEA) and local educational agency (LEA) policies.
4. Include language that promotes belonging and explicitly acknowledges and values the varied experiences of children with disabilities and their families.
5. Ensure all state or tribal needs assessments across ECE systems include data about family strengths, needs, participation, and voice.
6. Are informed by data related to inclusion.
7. Are supported by accompanying procedures or guidance about how to implement the policy.
8. Hold local programs accountable for implementing high-quality inclusion.

INDICATOR S3: Family Partnerships

State ECE agencies partner with families when developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and initiatives that promote inclusion.

Agencies:

1. Provide accessible opportunities for families to use their knowledge and skills in developing, implementing, and evaluating inclusion policies and initiatives. This applies especially to families from underserved communities (for example, those in rural areas).
2. Provide financial supports, structures, and resources that allow families to effectively participate in activities. This includes flexible meeting times, child care, and transportation costs.
3. Ensure access to materials and resources by using translation and interpretation services, multiple communication formats (for example, written or visual), and plain language.
4. Partner with community members to recruit and support families through the process of identification, placement, and service provision.
5. Formalize procedures for including families at every stage of developing inclusion initiatives.
6. Ensure all state needs assessments across ECE systems include data about family strengths, needs, participation, and voice.
7. Establish interdisciplinary teams that include community partners and help them support families and children in responsive and sustaining ways.

INDICATOR S4: Accountability, Data, Use of Continuous Quality Assurance Systems

State ECE agencies require and support local programs in collecting and using data to evaluate and determine barriers to inclusion (for example, attitudes and beliefs, perceived policy or financial barriers, lack of workforce preparation and professional development, and uncoordinated services and systems).

Agencies:

1. Use data from the quality assurance process to develop and inform the goals in the State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's strategic plan.
2. Use data from the quality assurance process to determine a baseline and set benchmarks to achieve the goals in the State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's strategic plan.
3. Use data to track progress toward the goals in the State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's strategic plan.
4. Provide data to partners in user-friendly formats that show progress toward State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's goals.
5. Require states to track district level data to support all populations of children with disabilities.
6. Mandate periodic reviews of IEP Teams' decisions on placement and services provided.
7. Develop and enforce policies on data reporting requirements.
8. Help local programs use progress data to improve decision making.
9. Ensure all TA supports use data to inform:
    - Effective, quality services for all children
    - Ongoing professional development for providers and administrators
    - Policies that support children, families, and providers

INDICATOR S5: Funding

State ECE agencies actively implement cross-sector strategies to coordinate and leverage funds and resources locally to provide high-quality inclusion.

Agencies:

1. Ensure there are policies that support the coordination of resources across agencies and programs.
2. Determine how to use funds most efficiently and effectively from different funding streams.
3. Allow the braiding of funds by state and local programs, when appropriate.
4. Determine strategies for leveraging funds and resources at state and local levels.
5. Write guidance for local programs on braiding and coordinating resources that reference policies, regulations, and requirements.
6. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of braiding and coordination of funds.

INDICATOR S6: State Early Learning Standards or Guidelines

State early learning standards or guidelines for developmental expectations of children include specific strategies and adaptations to support the needs of children with disabilities.

State early learning standards or guidelines:

1. Specifically suggest the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) and developmental advocacy programs (DAPs) to meet the learning and developmental needs of children with disabilities, including all functions (for example, gross motor or communication).
2. Address the developmental trajectory of children with disabilities.
3. Are required by state agencies to guide local programs in curriculum development and instruction for children with disabilities.
4. Are incorporated in state agencies' training and technical assistance (TA).
5. Are required by state agencies to guide local programs in curriculum development and instruction for children with disabilities.
6. Support the development of children whose disabilities or developmental delays are related to adverse childhood experiences (for example, toxic stress, or separation from caregiver).
7. Are evaluated as part of the state agencies' accountability system to offer guidance on how to support children with disabilities in inclusive settings.

INDICATOR S7: State Program Standards

State ECE agencies have standards for measuring program quality that contain procedures and practices for including children with disabilities within local ECE programs.

State program standards:

1. Define high-quality inclusion.
2. Include the standards for high-quality inclusion in state quality rating or other quality assurance processes.
3. Embed instruments that measure high-quality inclusion in general early childhood quality frameworks and systems.
4. Encourage investing in training for local programs on environmental assessments and tools that specifically measure the quality of inclusion such as the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP), the Early Care and Education Environment (ECEE) Indicators of Inclusion, and SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale.
5. Hold districts or local education agencies accountable for providing access to inclusive learning environments for children with disabilities.
6. Include specific indicator of quality for children with disabilities that are also Dual-Language Learner (DLLs) to ensure they are receiving support for their development needs, while also receiving instruction that fosters English and home language development.
7. Establish inclusion as a required Pre-K program standard at the state level.
8. Apply the natural proportions principle to guide inclusion. This means including children with disabilities in proportion to their presence in the general population, without a cap or quota on the number allowed to be enrolled or served.

INDICATOR S8: Allocation of Resources to Support Staff

State ECE agencies provide sufficient specialized TA and consultative services to support local programs in implementing inclusive practices.

Agencies:

1. Provide sufficient funding to local programs for child care programs and state level and local TA to ensure high-quality inclusion support and consultative services.
2. Provide access to specialized TA and consultative services and additional financial and informational resources for under-funded and under-supported communities.
3. Plan and provide TA that uses local program self-assessment data that includes data related to access, experiences, and outcomes in early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education.
4. Offer incentives to support local program use of TA (for example, free and locally tailored TA, stipends for providers who engage in the TA, funds to invest in TA for paying consultants, or buying professional developmental materials).
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of TA and consultative services across a range of provider and child-level outcomes.
6. Build capacity of local programs to use TA and consultative services for working within their programs and settings.
7. Use a variety of formats, including on-site activities, to build capacity of local programs to use EBPs.

INDICATOR S9: Coordination of Professional Development Resources

State ECE agencies use a cross-sector approach to coordinate evidence-based professional development to build staff capacity to provide high-quality inclusive programs. Staff include child care, Head Start, and public Pre-K providers and aides, early interventionists, special educators, related service providers, and administrators.

Agencies:

1. Ensure policies allow for coordinated cross-sector professional development.
2. Identify and coordinate funding streams and resources for cross-sector professional development.
3. Use a common knowledge, language, and competency base for all staff across sectors, centered around developmentally-appropriate pedagogy, inclusive practices, and belonging in ECE settings.
4. Ensure access to cross-sector professional development opportunities on evidence-based inclusion practices.
5. Coordinate access to instructional coaches, mentors, or consultants (for example, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC)) for local programs focused on inclusion.
6. Provide information on environmental assessments and tools to local programs that specifically measure the quality of inclusion in ways that are easily accessible (for example, by language, reading level) and adapted to various relevant parties (for example, teachers, therapists, administrators, or families).
7. Evaluate how a cross-sector approach and coordination of professional development impact local program capacity for high-quality inclusion by:
    - Composition of eligibility and service teams.
    - Duration, focus and topics of professional development.
    - Meeting times to discuss children's needs.

INDICATOR S10: EC Personnel Standards, Credentialing, Certification, and Licensure

State ECE agencies' personnel standards, certifications, credentialing, and licensure requirements include competencies for supporting the varied needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Agencies:

1. Conduct a periodic review of content relevance and use of effective personnel standards.
2. Consult with representative caregivers, adults with disabilities, providers, and community experts to inform standards development.
3. Work with institutes of higher education (IHEs) to align curriculum and state standards with criteria for licensure, certification, and credentialing.
4. Ensure licensure policies address EI delivery, special education, and other specialized services in ECE environments.
5. Advocate for state personnel standards that are based on core knowledge and skills needed to effectively support young children with disabilities and their families.
6. Ensure inclusion best practices are embedded in state level entry licensure or credentials.
7. Ensure continuing education requirements and license renewals emphasizing the diverse needs of children with disabilities, including those from underserved communities.

INDICATOR S11: Preservice Education and Personnel Preparation

Institutes of higher education (IHEs) require specific courses and practica that prepare ECE personnel to implement inclusive practices to engage children with disabilities and their families.

Agencies partner with IHEs to:

1. Work with local programs to provide pre-service learning opportunities to inclusive child care, Pre-K, and Head Start settings, with children with disabilities.
2. Include competencies in collaboration and teaming in courses and practica.
3. Include content on developing and supporting family partnerships in courses and practicum.
4. Ensure courses and practica reflect and align with national organization and association standards of practice.
5. Ensure courses and practica explicitly differentiate implementing the medical versus social models of disability and offer guidance that ensures perspectives of disabled individuals, are included.
6. Review periodically the effectiveness of course content and practical experiences to ensure they address skill development and competencies that promote high-quality inclusion.

INDICATOR S12: Public Awareness

State ECE agencies implement ongoing public awareness strategies regarding attitudes and beliefs and the legal foundations and benefits of inclusion that target a variety of audiences, including families.

Agencies:

1. Co-create public awareness materials with other agencies and community leaders in the target audience that promote the benefits and legal foundation of inclusion.
2. Use informal and formal data to identify attitudes and beliefs that are barriers to inclusion.
3. Address state context and content related to laws, attitudes and beliefs, and benefits of inclusion in the public awareness plan.
4. Ensure materials are available in at least the state's top four languages, including English, and accessible in various formats (for example, written or visual).
5. Secure financial resources to implement the public awareness plan.
6. Implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the public awareness plan, including effectiveness in low-income, rural, and other underserved communities.

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