



# STATE INDICATORS AND ELEMENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY INCLUSION (*FIELD REVIEW*)

*September 1, 2020*

The State Indicators detail the key elements needed to be in place for an early childhood infrastructure across state agencies and federal programs. They are designed to inform state level leadership efforts relative to supporting high-quality inclusion across the state to increase access and meaningful participation of young children with disabilities. It is assumed that all federal and state legal requirements are in place at the state level. These indicators are not meant to examine federal and state requirements. They are intended to enhance state policies, procedures, and guidance on high-quality inclusive practices for community and local programs.

*For more information, visit <http://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion>*

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*"Inclusion in early childhood programs refers to including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations; and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities."*

—U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) (2015)

## **INDICATOR 1: Cross-Sector Leadership**

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A state level cross-sector leadership team exists with the ability to implement a shared mission, vision, strategic plan and make recommendations to support high-quality inclusion across the early childhood system.

### **The State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team:**

1. Maintains written criteria for cross-sector membership which ensures broad representation from a range of stakeholders, programs, and agencies (e.g., families, state pre-K, Head Start, private pre-K, child care, family child care homes, early childhood special education, early intervention, higher education, mental health, and child welfare).
2. Adopts team processes and policies, including norms for attendance, orientation, and facilitation strategies for holding meetings and making decisions in order to ensure meaningful participation of all members.
3. Develops and uses a cross-sector vision and mission that guides agencies to expand access to, and participation in, inclusive local programs and settings for children with disabilities.
4. Develops and implements a written strategic plan that reflects the vision and mission, and builds on an assessment of the current landscape of state early childhood initiatives.
5. Establishes expectations and secures resources for local programs to implement the state vision and mission.
6. Uses both qualitative and quantitative data on a routine basis to inform implementation and assess the impact of the cross-sector strategic inclusion plan.
7. Implements and maintains a communication and dissemination plan to share information about progress with stakeholders.

## INDICATOR 2: Policy/Guidance

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State early care and education agencies have aligned policies and procedures that promote high-quality inclusion.

### **Policies:**

1. Are reviewed and eliminated when identified as barriers to children with disabilities' access to, and participation in, inclusive local programs and settings.
2. Promote the recruitment of, access to, and enrollment of children with disabilities in environments in which all children would naturally participate.
3. Support the provision of services for children with disabilities in environments in which all children would naturally participate.
4. Address and promote the cross-sector collaboration of agencies and local programs.
5. Include language that affirms the diverse experiences of children with disabilities and their families and promotes belonging.
6. Can be implemented by local programs regardless of geographic locations and population settings.
7. Are informed by data related to inclusion.
8. Are supported by accompanying procedures or guidance that provide information about implementing the policy.
9. Hold local programs accountable for implementing high-quality inclusion.

## INDICATOR 3: Family Engagement

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State early care and education agencies engage families as essential partners when developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and initiatives that facilitate inclusion.

### **Agencies:**

1. Individualize supports for families in developing, implementing, and evaluating inclusion policies and initiatives.
2. Provide opportunities for families to utilize their knowledge and skills to engage them as partners in developing, implementing and evaluating inclusion policies and initiatives.
3. Provide financial supports, structures, and resources that allow families to effectively participate in activities (e.g., flexible meeting times, childcare, transportation costs).
4. Communicate consistent and strong messages regarding the importance of families and providers being authentic partners with critical expertise and ideas.
5. Use intentional planning with agencies and families to take on leadership and advocacy roles in early childhood systems and local programs.
6. Recruit families of young children with disabilities from the beginning of all initiatives to serve as essential partners in the development, implementation, and evaluation of inclusion policies and initiatives.
7. Implement ongoing family partnerships in using data to inform continuous improvement in inclusive early childhood systems and services.
8. Establish equitable protocols for reciprocal sharing of knowledge and experience between families and professionals.

## INDICATOR 4: Accountability, Data Use and Continuous Quality Assurance Systems

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State early care and education agencies require and support local programs in collecting and using data to evaluate and improve how well children with disabilities are accessing and participating in inclusive early childhood programs.

### Agencies:

1. Have a quality assurance process in place that addresses the provision of services and supports for the participation of children with disabilities in inclusive settings.
2. Use data from the quality assurance process to develop and inform the goals in the State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's strategic plan.
3. 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.
4. Use data to track progress toward the goals in the State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's strategic plan.
5. Review and revise benchmarks as needed based on data quality and state context.
6. Provide data to stakeholders in user-friendly formats that show progress toward State Level Cross-Sector Leadership Team's goals in relation to benchmarks.
7. Assist local programs in using progress data to improve decision-making.

## INDICATOR 5: Funding

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State early care and education agencies actively implement cross-sector strategies to allow coordination and leveraging of funds and resources at the local level to provide high-quality inclusion.

### Agencies:

1. Ensure there are policies that support the coordination of resources across agencies.
2. Determine how to most efficiently and effectively utilize funds from different funding streams to increase access to inclusive settings.
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. Provide written guidance that references policies, regulations, and requirements for local programs on braiding and coordinating resources.
6. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of braiding and coordination of funds.

## INDICATOR 6: State Early Learning Standards/Guidelines

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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 Guidelines/Standards:

1. Specifically address the learning and developmental needs of children with disabilities.
2. Are required by state agencies to be used by local programs to guide curriculum and instruction for children with disabilities.
3. Are incorporated in state agencies' training and technical assistance (TA) to improve outcomes for children with disabilities.
4. Use is evaluated, as part of state agencies' accountability system, such as state quality rating systems or other quality assurance processes.

## INDICATOR 7: Program Standards

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

### State Program Standards:

1. Have standards that define high-quality inclusion.
2. Promote the use of voluntary or required program standards by all local programs to guide inclusion practices.
3. Include the standards in state quality rating or other quality assurance processes.
4. Provide information on environmental assessments and tools to local programs that specifically measure the quality of inclusion.
5. Hold local programs accountable for providing access to inclusive learning environments for children with disabilities.

## INDICATOR 8: Allocation of Resources to Support Personnel

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State early care and education agencies provide sufficient specialized technical assistance and consultative services to support local programs in implementing high-quality inclusive practices.

### Agencies:

1. Provide sufficient funding to support the provision of technical assistance (TA) and consultative services.
2. Provide access to specialized technical assistance and consultative services and supports regardless of geographic location.
3. Plan and provide TA that uses local program self-assessment data to illustrate the unique strengths and concerns of the program.
4. Offer incentives to support local program use of TA.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of TA provision and consultative services.
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 evidence-based practices.

## **INDICATOR 9: Coordination of Professional Development Resources**

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State early care and education agencies use a cross-sector approach to coordinate evidence-based professional development efforts to build personnel capacity to provide high-quality inclusive programs.

### **Agencies:**

1. Ensure policies allow for the coordination of 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 personnel across sectors.
4. Provide access to cross-sector professional development opportunities on evidence-based inclusion practices.
5. Coordinate access to coaches, mentors and/or consultants for local programs.
6. Coordinate access to information on resources and tools for assessing and improving inclusion in local programs.
7. Evaluate the impacts of a cross-sector approach and coordination of professional development efforts to build local program capacity for high-quality inclusion.

## **INDICATOR 10: EC Personnel Standards, Credentialing, Certification and Licensure Requirements**

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State early care and education agencies' personnel standards, certifications, credentialing and licensure requirements include competencies for supporting children with disabilities and their families.

### **Agencies:**

1. Review the relevance of content and effective use of personnel standards, periodically, to ensure they address skill development and competencies that promote inclusion.
2. Use personnel standards that reflect the standards of national professional organizations and associations.
3. Work with Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) to align curriculum and state standards to criteria for licensure, certification, and credentialing.
4. Ensure policies for licensure address the delivery of early intervention, special education and other specialized services in early care and education environments.
5. Assure state personnel standards are based on core knowledge and skills needed for working with young children and their families in cross-sector early childhood systems.

## INDICATOR 11: Preservice Education and Personnel Preparation

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Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) require specific courses and practicum experiences that prepare early care and education personnel to implement effective inclusive practices to engage children with disabilities and their families.

### Agencies:

1. Partner with IHEs to work with local programs in providing pre-service learning opportunities in inclusive settings.
2. Partner with IHEs to ensure courses and practica include experiences in consultative, coaching, and mentoring practices.
3. Partner with IHEs to ensure courses and practica include competencies in collaboration and teaming.
4. Partner with IHEs to ensure courses and practica include content on developing and supporting family partnerships and engagement.
5. Partner with IHEs to ensure courses and practica reflect and align with national organization and association standards of practice.
6. Partner with IHEs to periodically review the effectiveness of course content and practica experiences to ensure that they address skill development and competencies that promote high-quality inclusion.

## INDICATOR 12: Public Awareness

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

### Agencies:

1. Work together across agencies with stakeholder input to develop a unified public awareness plan for target audiences.
2. Use data to identify attitudes and beliefs that are barriers to inclusion for strategies to include in the public awareness plan.
3. Address state context and content related to laws, attitudes and beliefs, and benefits of inclusion in the public awareness plan.
4. Secure financial resources to implement the public awareness plan.
5. Implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the public awareness plan.