



Early Childhood Inclusion Policy Summit Outcomes: Executive Summary

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Can our research and cross-agency discussions lead us to a shared vision for inclusion in Illinois?

VISION

Illinois commits to the inclusion of each and every child with special needs with typically developing peers in all early childhood environments.

DEFINING INCLUSION

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.

-Adapted from Joint Position Statement on Inclusion from the DEC and NAEYC

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Increase Equitable Opportunity: Inclusion of children with special needs will be a priority in decision making about program design and resource allocation in order to ensure equitable access and full participation in all early childhood environments.

Partner with Families: We ensure the meaningful and supported engagement of families in policy/guidance decisions, planning, and evaluation of programs, as well as in IFSP, IEP, transition and other family/professional meetings.

Share Benefits of Inclusion: We recognize and intentionally raise public awareness of the well-researched benefits (for all children) of high-quality inclusion of children with special needs in all early childhood settings.

Build and Support a Competent Workforce: All professionals who work with children should have the knowledge, competencies and supports to implement evidence-based practices. We will deliberately shift policy to ensure the appropriate professional standards, embedded professional development, and dedicated system of supports that promote culturally and linguistically responsive practice, positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, and knowledge of disability that are so critical to this effort.

Unified Purpose: We will intentionally and strategically engage in formal collaboration across agencies to make significant progress toward high quality inclusion across early childhood settings.

Set Goals and Track Data: Across agencies we will set concrete goals for expanding access to inclusive and high quality early learning opportunities, including a base line number of children with and without disabilities in all early childhood settings, and benchmarks that track progress toward the goal.

INCLUSION SUMMIT

What do cross-field strategy discussions tell us about the inventory of tactics that might guide our way forward?

A WAY FORWARD: DRIVING QUESTIONS

Three driving questions arose from the federal policy statement and formed the basis for summit discussion:

1. How do we shift policies and resources at a systems or community level to ensure that early childhood teachers, providers, and leaders have the knowledge and skills required to serve children with diverse needs in all early childhood settings?
2. How can we assure inclusion of children with special needs is a priority in program design and resource decision-making so that all children have access to high quality opportunities across early childhood settings?
3. How do we work across agencies to leverage existing structures and systems to establish a coordinated, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure for inclusion in early childhood?

Summit discussion yielded ten high opportunity areas supported by an inventory of potential tactics:

Workforce	Access	Collaboration
1. Move toward shared competencies in our ECE workforce (teachers & leaders) that promote high quality, inclusive programs	4. Address funding restrictions and challenges to support implementation of inclusion	8. Cultivate a shared Illinois vision/approach to inclusion
2. Improve our pre-service preparation for ECE providers	5. Address beliefs, attitudes and skills to increase access	9. Better understand who we are serving and how we are doing as system
3. Surface and address priority needs for professional development (on-going & embedded) within ECE settings to increase high quality inclusion	6. Emphasize quality while still holding the field accountable	10. Facilitate and support successful ECE collaboration toward inclusion
	7. Incorporate our common definitions of inclusion and natural environments into policy & practice	

OVERARCHING IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Convene key leaders in various areas/agencies to lead work and be the constant champion for inclusion
2. Develop a shared cross-sector vision statement for inclusion and plan to support implementation
3. Incorporate our common definitions of inclusion and natural environments into policy & practices across statewide infrastructure
4. Deliver research and the case for inclusion in an easily accessible and sharable format beginning with Summit participants
 - i. Create a glossary of definitions and terms to support shared understanding regarding policy (ex. what natural environment means); distribute
 - ii. Share research used at Summit more broadly for participants to use in their work
5. Engage home visiting workforce in a survey of their understanding of, and role in, inclusion – including what supports they need
6. Examine opportunities to provide cross-sector professional learning, technical assistance and coaching that leverages existing expertise and infrastructure
 - i. Amend existing workforce trainings to encompass high quality inclusive education content across early childhood systems
 - ii. embed and expand expertise within CCR&R system; online resources and training
 - iii. embed expertise in the ongoing support system
7. Address higher education system to integrate inclusion more deeply in training for all teachers
8. Work with field leaders to identify modifications to teacher preparation that promote inclusion; Align efforts as appropriate with Children’s Cabinet early childhood workforce project.
9. Address curricula in core programs in higher education so all teachers are prepared to teach in inclusive settings
10. Examine opportunities to scale out social emotional supports within each early childhood sector including pyramid model and early childhood mental health consultation supports

NEXT STEPS:

- Share Summit outcomes with participants
- Identify champions throughout different sectors of the field to lead action
- Begin to prioritize tactics and adopt roles and responsibilities in partnership with the following key audiences:
 - Summit Steering Committee Meeting
 - Inclusion Sub-committee
 - Early Learning Council
 - Interagency Early Childhood Team
 - Early Childhood Least Restrictive Environment Stakeholders (EC LRE) Consortium
- Ultimately, our hope is for the full Early Learning Council of Illinois to approve a statewide plan in summer or fall of 2017.

