

Illinois Inclusion Guidelines

User Guide

The **Illinois Inclusion Guidelines** assist programs in identifying practices that support children with disabilities in inclusive settings. The IIGs were developed as a component of the Award of Excellence in 2014 and are aligned with the ExceleRate Standards. The guidelines were revised in 2026 under the guidance of the Statewide [EC LRE Stakeholders Consortium](#).

Use this guide to support you with navigating the Illinois Inclusion Guidelines.

The text in blue denotes additional context to help you better understand each item.

Please Note: The identified “levels” (i.e. Systems, Building, Classroom) are offered as a flexible framework that may shift based on the size and structure of a district or program.

Systems Level Items

1 – Continuous Improvement Using Illinois Inclusion Guidelines

ExceleRate Standard 3C. Continuous Quality Improvement

Program administrators engage staff in systematic, collaborative program and classroom self-assessment using the Illinois Inclusion Guidelines Checklist (IIGC) and demonstrate progress toward achieving program goals based on results of the assessment.

The IIGC should have multiple team members, from a variety of roles, contributing to the self-assessment. Notes should include comments and specific details indicating the IIGC has been reviewed more than once to indicate self-assessment and program improvement.

2 – Continuous Improvement using Inclusive Classroom Profile

ExceleRate Standard 3C. Continuous Quality Improvement

Teachers, related service providers, and administrative support staff engage in systematic self-assessment using the [Inclusive Classroom Profile](#) and demonstrate progress toward achieving classroom and individual professional development goals based on results of the assessment.

Programs can use information from Early CHOICES regarding using the ICP for self-assessment. All staff should have an opportunity to review inclusive practices identified in the ICP, observe to some extent, and contribute to feedback and goal-setting.

3 – Proportions of Children with Disabilities

ExceleRate Standard 3B. Group Size and Ratios

Early childhood programs and classrooms serving children with disabilities meet program, state, and federal requirements that promote inclusive practices and meaningful family participation.

[General Early Childhood Requirements](#) | [Special Education Requirements](#) | [OPI Requirements](#)

4 – Collaborative Agreements

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

Written agreements support collaboration among members of the local early childhood community (childcare, the Early Intervention system, Head Start, public school early childhood program).

This includes written procedures, roles, and responsibilities for shared tasks and activities (e.g., identifying children and families in need of services, sharing information, coordinating services, providing services to children with disabilities and their families).

5 – Transition Policy

ExceleRate Standard 2B. Transitions

Program policies, procedures, and practices to support transition of children with disabilities entering and exiting the program are included in partnership agreements.

The evidence for this item might be found in your policy/staff manual, parent handbook and/or your website. Review your process for children entering the program from Early Intervention and determine whether that process is documented and shared within the program, with partners and with parents. The procedures for the Kindergarten transition should be clearly identified and standardized across the program and classrooms.

6 – Policies and Procedures for Collaborative Planning

ExceleRate Standard 1F. Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

Written policies and procedures encourage and support collaboration and teaming with consent, among internal and external personnel and agencies serving the same child and family, including specific guidelines for joint decision-making and problem solving.

The intention of this item is to ensure that the program explicitly communicates internally and externally to prevent duplication of services, identify gaps in services and ensure that families are receiving all of the supports that they need.

7 – Policies to Access Supports

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

Written policies support families in identifying and accessing needed services and benefits within the program and in the community.

The key aspect in this item is that policies are written. Documenting policies contributes to sustainability in programming as well as equity in access for families. All staff should be aware of the policies and implement them to the extent possible in their roles.

8 – Policies to Support Families as Partners

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

Written policies and procedures encourage and support families of children with disabilities as partners.

Family engagement policies and procedures need to specifically indicate how they include families of children with disabilities as partners in programming.

Building Level Items

9 – Program Advisory Committee

ExceleRate Standard 1F. Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

Members are regularly updated and have input about policy and practices related to inclusion. The program actively recruits parents of children with disabilities for service on the committee or board.

Evidence for this item includes recruitment policies, meeting notes, family handbook, and/or website. The intention of this item is to ensure that inclusion is not an “add-on” part of programming; it is an aspect of quality that is routinely reviewed and promoted across the program.

10 – Inclusion and Families

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

Families of children with disabilities are included in all family activities provided or facilitated by the program. Information about the program's vision and strategies for inclusion of all children is shared with all families.

Recruitment materials, the program's website, family handbook and written materials shared by the program would all provide evidence for this item. As with item 9, inclusion is part of the way the program does business and is an integral part of quality.

11 – Inclusion Leadership

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

The program administrator and leadership team participate regularly in community and state systems activities that support public knowledge of and coordination of inclusive practices as well as provide leadership for high quality inclusion within the program.

Leadership in a high-quality program requires on-going program assessment, connecting to the broader systems and a growth mindset. To stay up to date with current best practices and research leadership should also be connected to community and statewide groups that focus on early care and education inclusion such as local early childhood partnerships, statewide workgroups or professional organizations.

12 – Child Screening Procedures

ExceleRate Standard 1D. Child Screening

Multiple sources and data points are used to inform the need for further evaluation.

Best practices for child-screening can be demonstrated by sharing written policies or procedures, a case study with redacted identifying information, and/or website information.

13 – Procedures for Gathering Information from Families

ExceleRate Standard 1E. Child Assessment

The program has written procedures and guidelines for gathering information from families.

Evidence should demonstrate clearly that gathering information from families is completed and the information is utilized in a meaningful way, across classrooms and teachers.

Classroom Level Items

14 – Use of Assessment Information

ExceleRate Standard 1E. Child Assessment

Teachers, related service providers, and administrative support staff collaborate in implementing and using initial and ongoing assessment for classroom planning, and for data-based decision making regarding individual and group outcomes.

Staff schedules, team meeting agendas and classroom paperwork (lesson plans, assessment data, individualized intervention plans) should reflect multiple sources of data and inter-disciplinary collaboration.

15 – Inclusive Environment

ExceleRate Standard 1A. Learning Environment

All program and classroom spaces that children use, indoors and outdoors, are accessible and support the inclusion of children with disabilities in all activities with other children.

This item addresses the “access and participation” elements of inclusion. Evidence could be photographs or short videos.

16 – Adaptations

ExceleRate Standard 1A. Learning Environment

Accommodations and modifications are made to support each child's participation related to their own individual goals and outcomes.

This item addresses the “access and participation” elements of inclusion. Evidence could be lesson plans, individualized plans, or activity matrices. The intent is to ensure access to the general education curriculum.

17 – Belonging

ExceleRate Standard 1B. Curriculum

Classroom and program staff help each child engage in positive, sustained social interactions and play with peers, and provide opportunities for each child to be a fully participating member of the classroom community.

Individual plans, activities matrices and lesson plans should indicate specific strategies to promote play with peers and social interactions.

18 – Strategies

ExceleRate Standard 1B. Curriculum

Strategies are documented on individualized plans and/or on lesson plans. Classroom staff support development and learning by using individual support strategies.

Evidence should indicate the specific strategies for children with disabilities in the classroom.

19 – Embedding Goals

ExceleRate Standard 1B. Curriculum

Teachers, related service providers, and administrative support staff collaborate with families to identify goals and outcomes from the general education curriculum and from individual education and service plans such as IFSPs and IEPs to incorporate into play, activities, and classroom routines.

The intention of this item is to document ways in which meaningful collaboration with families and staff extends past the standard parent-teacher conference, although it may be part of that meeting. Documentation should show family input into plans.

20 –Embedding Strategies

ExceleRate Standard 1B. Curriculum

Strategies, supports, and services identified in individual service plans are provided in the classroom and are embedded into classroom play, activities, and routines.

The intention is to ensure that accommodations and modifications from the IEP are embedded into classroom routines rather than using non-inclusive strategies (i.e. pull-out models, “work boxes”).

21 – Embedding Strategies into Family Routines

ExceleRate Standard 2A. Family and Community Engagement

Teachers collaborate with families, related service staff, and administrative support staff to incorporate individual and classroom goals, strategies, and supports into family routines at home and in the community.

Evidence could include meeting notes, home visit notes, or other documented collaboration between staff and families.