

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page features three overlapping blue circles of varying sizes. Two thin blue lines cross the page diagonally, one from the top-left to the bottom-right, and another from the top-right to the bottom-left. The circles are positioned in the upper right, middle right, and bottom right areas.

Delaware MAPS Meaningful Access Participation & Supports

**A Guide to High Quality Inclusion
of Children with Disabilities for
Families and their Communities**

Delaware MAPS (Meaningful Access Participation & Supports) is a component of Delaware's Early Childhood Inclusion Toolkit and is a project of the State of Delaware Expanding Inclusive Early Intervention Opportunities (EIEIO) Workgroup, intended for families of children with disabilities and those essential to making high quality inclusion happen. (Other essential stakeholders are early childhood practitioners, related service personnel, community programs and families without children with disabilities.)

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Introduction

Delaware MAPS (Meaningful Access Participation & Supports) is a component of Delaware's Early Childhood Inclusion Toolkit and is intended to be a resource to those who want to know about and make certain of high quality environments and experiences that meaningfully include children with disabilities.

Delaware MAPS:

- Is intended as a starting place for the journey of inclusion
- Contains the definition of inclusion
- Has information beneficial for:
 - Families of children with disabilities
 - Families of children WITHOUT disabilities
 - Practitioners in community programs and educational settings
 - Related services providers who support the individual needs of children with disabilities
- Relies on experts' research and evidence-based information
- Shares guideposts for the journey of including children with disabilities geared specifically toward families
- Provides a worksheet for families to complete to aid in their search for a good fit for their child



About EIEIO

The Expanding Inclusive Early Intervention Opportunities (EIEIO) Workgroup comprises family members, early interventionists, representatives from school districts, the Department of Education, and the early childhood community. This group, originally called Expanding Opportunities, formed in 2006 to focus statewide attention on how to increase awareness and the practice of meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities in their communities and educational programs. In 2009, this committee joined forces with a subcommittee of Delaware's Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) – Building Capacity in Natural Environments (BCNE) to form the EIEIO Workgroup.

Separating children with disabilities from their typically developing peers is no longer considered the best way of promoting learning, growth and development and a sense of belonging for children with disabilities. Research has shown that children with and without disabilities benefit by learning, playing and growing together. Inclusion is a protected right under the law.

There is no longer a question about whether or not to include children with disabilities. The question is how and where to begin. The Delaware MAPS Guide for Families lets its readers know they can start here.

To begin your conversation about inclusion, please access the Birth to Three inclusion brochure: <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dms/epqc/birth3/files/brochure.pdf>

INCLUSION QUIZ FOR FAMILIES

1. My child has access to any setting (including an early education center or community program) that I choose.
 TRUE FALSE

2. If a program has never served a child with disabilities, they won't be able to meet the needs of my child.
 TRUE FALSE

3. Someone I know had a bad experience with a certain program. That means I will too.
 TRUE FALSE

4. Inclusion looks the same for every child.
 TRUE FALSE

5. I should make sure that my child is included 100% of the time.
 TRUE FALSE

6. I am the expert on what would best meet the needs of my child.
 TRUE FALSE

7. A high quality inclusive program does not need parents to partner with them to make this the best experience possible for my child.
 TRUE FALSE

8. Inclusion is a bad thing because it exposes my child to teasing.
 TRUE FALSE

9. If I keep my child with other kids with disabilities, I can get more of the services my child needs.
 TRUE FALSE

10. Inclusion cannot be used as a goal in an IFSP or an IEP
 TRUE FALSE

Definition of Inclusion

The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) definition of Inclusion is:

“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.”¹

Defining Features of Inclusion



ACCESS

Providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments is a defining feature of high quality early childhood inclusion. In many cases, simple modifications can facilitate access for children with disabilities.²

FAMILY FOCUS - Gaining Access

The fact of the matter is there are still programs out there that may have little to no experience with children with disabilities. Even for those who do, the level of expertise in providing high quality service may not be where it needs to be. Often, families may find themselves as pioneers in a particular program or activity. Communication and willingness to work in partnership are essential guideposts to a high quality inclusion experience.

Common concerns that families express:

- **Will I find a program willing to accept my child with a disability?**
- **Can I enroll my child with a disability in dance class, sporting activities, etc.?**
- **Will the professionals care for my child as I would?**

THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO

- Identify the childcare center, program or extra-curricular activity that you want to enroll your child
- Call to set up a tour or opportunity to observe the class to confirm that you think your child could benefit
- Schedule an appointment to talk to the program director
- Ask about experience with children with disabilities
- Ask if a child with a disability has ever participated
- Ask about that experience – what went well, what went wrong
- Explain your child’s particular situation
- Share strategies about how best to work with your child
- Ask if there is any more information they need about your child
- Know your style. Know the traits you need to see and are deal breakers if you don’t
- Acknowledge the fact that no one can care for your child like you would. Try to make a list of the characteristics that come close. Look for those traits in the staff

PARTICIPATION

Even if children with disabilities are able to access programs and environments, some may require additional individualized accommodations and modifications to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers.³ Early intervention services should be integrated into the child's routine.

FAMILY FOCUS – An Honest Look at Participation

Families know what experiences they think could benefit their child. Sometimes it may be hard to put into words or it may be difficult to find the right program that meet the needs of their child. Once access to a particular program has been made, the next crucial step is to figure out how it's going. A positive, respectful relationship between staff and parents is crucial in making certain that the participation of a child with a disability is meaningful and beneficial.

A family's concerns about program activities:

- **My child is off playing by him or herself and not with the other children or involved in the instructional activities**
- **I don't have any idea how it's going**
- **The staff doesn't seem to know how to work with my child**
- **The specific needs of my child are not being factored in to how my child is being asked to participate**
- **Activities not adapted to be benefit my child or are not challenging enough**

THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO

- Ask the program director and/or those working with your child how they are engaging him or her
- Ask to see some specific examples or state specific examples of how activities have been adapted
- Ask if the staff knows how to differentiate their instruction for children with differing abilities
- Share the interests of your child

MORE THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO

- Observe the classroom culture. Take a look at such things as the staff's ability and willingness to promote belonging, participation and engagement of children with disabilities; the compassion and empathy of the staff when interacting with your child as well as with other children
- Determine the staff's ability to work toward ensuring that your child is meaningfully participating in the activities of the group
- Voice your concerns with the staff

Other concerns families might have:

- **The other children are making fun of, or not playing with, my child**
- **Parents of the other children are angry that my child seems to be getting more attention than their child**
- **Parents or children are afraid of my child because they're different**
- **Someone said something very offensive to me about my child**

THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO

- Make sure that the staff knows that you want to be made aware of any unpleasant events that involve your child
- REMAIN CONSTRUCTIVE in your dealings with other children and adults
- Ask the program director and/or instructor what they know about any unpleasant episodes
- Ask if and how the program director and/or instructor handled any incidents
- Talk about any concerns you have with their strategies
- Offer to speak to staff and the other children about your child. Share what you're comfortable sharing
- Ask the staff if they hold parent education workshops to help keep the lines of communication open with all families served by the program
- Offer to answer questions
- Inquire about staff/child ratios to ensure that the program is able to meet the needs of your child

SUPPORTS

Achieving high quality inclusion of children with disabilities requires that there be a strong foundation of systems-level supports to ensure that the efforts of individuals, programs and organizations are successful and can be maintained. Systems-level support addresses such things as providing on-going training, well defined processes, and procedures to be able to work collaboratively amongst all stakeholders (families, therapists, and staff) to provide specialized services and ensure that quality standards are able to be met. Without these being in place, the efforts of individuals and organizations providing inclusive services to children and families will be compromised.⁴

FAMILY FOCUS – Is This Program Ready for My Child?

Family Observations:

- **The program guidelines or parent handbook clearly describes the commitment to inclusion and to helping each child achieve his/her full potential.**
- **Staff (teachers, assistants, specialists) meets regularly to discuss the children and how to support them in a collaborative manner. Family members have the opportunity to participate in staff meetings, if they desire.**
- **Staff (teachers, assistants, specialists) participates in professional development to support the knowledge, skill, and dispositions needed to implement effective inclusive practices.**

THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO

- Ask what training the staff has received regarding how to meet the needs of children with disabilities
- Provide the staff a copy of your child's IFSP or IEP
- Ask a representative from the program to be a member of your child's IFSP or IEP team
- Ask about the program's experience with your child's particular conditions
- Share your knowledge and expertise about your child with the program
- Share your hopes and dreams with the staff
- Ask to be part of program planning for your child
- Connect the program staff with any trusted supports that you already know or have
- Ask the staff how you can be more involved to help achieve the goals that are in place for your child

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion is welcoming every person, regardless of ability, to meaningfully participate in all aspects of life. Inclusion is based on the simple idea that every child and family is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences. Children with disabilities are included as part of their community by participating in athletic programs, cultural arts programs, library activities such as story time and simply going to the mall or playing on the playground.

Why Should Children with Disabilities be Included?

It's the right thing to do and supported by federal and state legislation. The rights of children with disabilities are protected and in place to ensure access to their communities through:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)
- Section 504—Rehabilitation Act
- The Head Start Act

Families must be confident in knowing that their children have the right to participate in their world—not separate or apart from other children.

How Do I Know Inclusion is a Good Thing?

Inclusion benefits ALL children. Children with and without disabilities become skilled at:

- Experiencing positive social interactions
- Making new friends
- Having pride in their achievements
- Using good language and communication skills
- Solving problems creatively
- Developing patience and compassion
- Understanding and accepting their own and others' strengths and gifts
- Helping others
- Experiencing and appreciating diversity

What Does a Welcoming, High Quality Environment Look Like?

The first contact you make with a program will be a strong indicator of whether or not the environment is welcoming. Look at how all of the activities are conducted. High quality programs employ practitioners who:

- Develop an awareness that all children have unique needs which expands their understanding of how best to meet those needs.
- Realize and appreciate these differences, ultimately enhancing their compassion, kindness and respect for others.
- Partner with parents to ensure that parent's understanding and parent expertise about their child are part of creating a successful program.

What About My Child – Who Does NOT Have a Disability?

It is important for families who may have their child *without* a disability in a community or educational program alongside a child who has disability to know that high quality programming addresses the needs of ALL children and that their child will not be negatively affected.

It is natural to wonder how accommodating someone with special needs will impact those who do not require special accommodations. Community programs and educational settings which are high quality know how to meet the needs of children with disabilities along with those of other children. A high quality program should provide parent education about the benefits of typically developing children interacting with children who have disabilities.

How Do I Choose an Inclusive Childcare?

Make an appointment to tour the site and learn about the program. Ask the program staff to describe their program in detail. Ask about:

- Schedule
- Staff Background and Training
- Staff Role with the Children
- Staff/participant ratio
- Activities, including field trips
- Goals and expectations for children attending the program
- How the program works with the children (ex: if achievements are affirmed and how they are reinforced, how inappropriate is addressed)
- Resources in place to address your child's needs

Be prepared to share:

- Your goals and expectations for your child
- Your child's: social skills, favorite activities, skills and interests
- How you address your child's behavior at home
- Your fears
- Your child's specific needs
- The best way to communicate with you

What Do I Do If A Program Refuses To Serve My Child?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 limit situations where a program can turn your child away. Your child can only be turned away when the accommodations requested are unreasonable and you are unable to work out a compromise with the program; or when your child poses a direct threat to him or herself or the other children in the program. A direct threat means a substantial risk of harm which must be documented by objective professional evidence.

What If I Think My Rights Are Being Violated?

You can contact:

Disabilities Law Program

Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.

Statewide toll free number: 1-800-773-0606

General Email is clasincc@declasi.org

Individual Offices

New Castle County:

100 W. 10th Street, Suite 801

Wilmington, DE 19801

(302) 575-0660

302-575-0696 (TTY/TDD)

Kent County:

840 Walker Road

Dover, DE 19904

302-674-8500 (TTY/TDD Also)

Sussex County:

20151 Office Circle

Georgetown, DE 19947

302-856-0038 (TTY/TDD Also)

Parent Information Center of Delaware

<http://www.picofdel.org/>

Main Office – (302) 999-7394

Toll free for families in Kent and Sussex Counties – (888) 547-4412

Who Do I Call for Help?

For Children Ages Birth – 3 years old

Part C Coordinator

Birth to Three Early Intervention System,

Division of Management Services (DMS),

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services

(302) 255-9135

For Children Ages 3 years old – 5 years old

Section 619 Coordinator

Early Development and Learning Resources

Delaware Department of Education

(302) 735-4219

Delaware Head Start Collaboration Director

Early Development and Learning Resources

Delaware Department of Education

(302) 735-4219

ANSWERS TO INCLUSION QUIZ FOR FAMILIES

1. My child has access to any setting (including an early education center or community program) that I choose.

TRUE FALSE

Your child should have ACCESS.

2. If a program has never served a child with disabilities, they won't be able to meet the needs of my child.

TRUE FALSE

Many families find themselves to be trailblazers in early childhood programs. Professional's willingness to work with you is the key.

3. Someone I know had a bad experience with a certain program. That means I will too.

TRUE FALSE

All children and families are different. Ask for a trusted support to come with you to make a site visit if you think a particular program could benefit your child. Refer to the qualities of inclusion.

4. Inclusion looks the same for every child.

TRUE FALSE

Every child's needs are different. Inclusion is based on what's appropriate for your child.

5. I should make sure that my child is included 100% of the time.

TRUE FALSE

Parents and professionals should work together to make sure children are included 100% of the time.

6. I am the expert on the needs of my child.

TRUE FALSE

Parents know their child best and have valuable insights into what would best meet the needs of their child.

7. A high quality inclusive program does not need to partner with parents to make this the best experience possible for my child.

TRUE FALSE

A high quality program partners with ALL parents – not just with the parents of kids with disabilities.

8. Inclusion is a bad thing because it exposes my child to teasing.

TRUE FALSE

Teasing may happen. But it is important to seize this opportunity to prepare your child to handle these situations; heighten awareness of those who have no or limited exposure to people with disabilities.

9. If I keep my child with other kids with disabilities, I can get more services.

TRUE FALSE

What a child needs may not be “more” services but a change in “how” services are delivered.

10. Inclusion cannot be used as a goal in an IFSP or an IEP

TRUE FALSE

Each goal should be looked at through a lens of inclusion. Inclusion is a value and a right that is guaranteed by law. Every aspect of programming should strive to include all children.

Delaware MAPS Meaningful Access Participation & Supports

Delaware MAPS Worksheet for Families

GPS – Good fit Program Survey

My child's disability is _____

I believe an inclusive setting is best for my child because _____

I need this program to know that my child _____

The thing that concerns me most about this setting is _____

Things the Program Already Has In Place (+)	<u>What To Look For</u>	Things the Program Needs to Work On (-)
	This program has children with disabilities already enrolled	
	This program embraces the concept of inclusion	
	Can address my concerns	

I am willing to work with this program to make inclusion work. I would be willing to:

(Please check ALL that apply)

- Provide a copy of my child's IFSP or IEP to the program
- Come in and talk with the staff about my child's disability
- Come in and speak to the other children in my child's program (in an age appropriate way)
- Provide connections to outside resources that could make this successful
- Partner with the staff
- Answer questions that other parents might have
- Be a resource
- Mentor other parents of children with disabilities who are considering the program
- Talk with the staff to resolve any problems that arise
- Participate in staff training

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Endnotes

^{1,2,3,4} DEC/NAEYC (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.