

Joint Inclusion Position Statement



Our Work

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) have collaborated to better understand, support, and increase the use of inclusive practices for children birth to 5 with disabilities across the state of Washington. Over the span of more than three years, DCYF and OSPI have worked with partners in the state to better understand what inclusion means to communities and families. DCYF and OSPI understand that having a definition of inclusion and inclusive practices for providers, school districts, community partners, and state leaders is essential to ensuring high-quality inclusive early learning settings that are appropriate for all students. This joint position statement was developed with many stakeholders across the state. School districts, family advocates, state leadership, community partners, and other key participants have provided critical input toward the development of a definitive realization of inclusion in Washington State.

While there is no one all-encompassing practice guide to inclusion, there are essential values and practices that form the foundation of inclusive practices in classrooms and programs. This joint statement offers providers an outline of these values and practices that will support students and families in all communities.

Inclusion

Inclusion embodies the values and practices that create access to individualized opportunities for every child and their family. State agencies, community partners, and families all work together to provide access to inclusive high-quality early learning settings for all children. Inclusive practices ensure that all children and their families, regardless of ability, can participate in a broad range of activities and are supported to engage as full members of their program, school, communities, and society. The desired result of inclusive experiences for all children and their families is that they feel a sense of belonging to a community, develop positive social relationships and friendships, and experience learning that engages the individual child's development.

Values

Values guide our work toward inclusion. Strong values that promote inclusion are grounded in relationship building, active participation, demonstrating empathy, respecting diversity, and securing equity for all children and their families.

- **Relationship Building:** Families and the communities they live in have a wealth of knowledge that enrich the learning environment and are important in supporting children in learning environments. We respect the whole child and the culture of the child's family as the foundation for building community relationships. Inclusive environments require human-centered approaches rooted in affirming dignity and respect for all. We also prioritize building relationships and forming partnerships across school districts, community-based centers, and family child care homes so that young children are served in the best setting for their individual needs.
- **Participation:** We seek input from all within an environment and utilize targeted instruction. This might include tiered models of intervention with clear understanding of intensity, scaffolded learning structures, routine-based teaching, and active participation of all students.
- **Empathy:** We establish social-emotional support for individual students and focus on cultivating relationships.
- **Diversity:** We seek representation of the community and show respect for individual and family culture.
- **Equity:** We lead with racial equity and provide access for all students.





Practices

Practices are the things we do to reach the goal of inclusion. Practices are how we actualize these values into our daily work to ensure all children can participate in a broad range of activities. Practices that help promote inclusion include culturally responsive instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and evidenced-based methodology. These practices are crucial and, when implemented to fidelity, children gain the opportunity for autonomy along with cognitive and social-emotional growth.

Examples When Supporting Inclusive Practices

Culturally Responsive Instruction	<p>LANGUAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using home language in classroom through speaking, visual supports around the room, showing the importance of their language. <p>FAMILY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input from family and incorporating their experience, and knowledge in the classroom or program. Access to language supports.
Universal Design for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work spaces for children are flexible and can move when needed. Children have access to varied instructional supports for all learners (tactile, visual, kinesthetic, and auditory).
Evidence-Based Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizing research that has been hypothesized, tested, and implemented with fidelity. Continuously growing and adjusting with the individual children in the classroom.

This isn't a complete list. These are examples that have been found to support inclusive practices.

Recommendations and Guidance on Inclusive Practices

Developing a Vision for Inclusion

When developing a vision for inclusion, gathering insight from the surrounding community and understanding the belief systems around inclusive practices are important to ensuring sustainability. Creating a vision in partnership with the community creates buy-in and thus ensures a higher rate of application and implementation of the vision. Families, children, and staff that understand the benefits of inclusion are more likely to instill the practices in their daily life.

Articulating Inclusive Early Childhood Settings

Developing inclusive early childhood settings is necessary to achieving equitable access for all children in programs. Programs should share the values of the surrounding community and proactively engage with them during decision making. Developing a collective goal that incorporates a vision will support sustainability of implementing inclusive practices.

Leading with Racial Equity

All children have the right to access programs and classrooms that give equitable learning opportunities in their communities. Increasing awareness and understanding of the impacts of biases, racism, and systemic inequities should be a priority in every program. Providing equitable learning opportunities means recognizing the inequities forced onto some and the privilege afforded to others. When inclusive and equitable practices are implemented in classrooms, educators demonstrate respect for diversity and the value of individual strengths.

Fostering Relationships

Building relationships in early learning settings between children, families, and staff is important to developing an inclusive environment. Fostering relationships and acknowledging the individual differences of children supports their social-emotional growth, self-confidence, and safety in the environment. Supporting the whole child is dependent upon the interaction of all supportive factors in the life of each child. Incorporating family belief systems and dynamics, culturally responsive teaching, and universal design for learning develops opportunities for families to be a part of their child's learning. Research shows that children have improved outcomes when their families are included in their education and have closer ties to their classroom environment.

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