



EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER
Indiana Institute on Disability and Community
Indiana's University Center for Excellence on Disabilities
Indiana University-Bloomington

What's Happening?

Volume 3, Issue 3 • Fall 2017 • November 7, 2017

A quarterly newsletter published by the Early Childhood Center at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC), focusing on current research and best practices for Early Childhood professionals and settings to inform practices in the state of Indiana.

Editor: Kirsten Bonifacio (knhisson@indiana.edu) • Center Director: Michael Conn-Powers (mipower@indiana.edu)

Indiana Preschool Inclusion: Inclusive Special Education Services for Preschoolers with Disabilities

An analysis of the 2015-2016 Indiana Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data revealed that, despite 30+ years of research indicating that preschool children with and without disabilities benefit from inclusive early education, only 30% of approximately 12,000 Indiana preschool children with disabilities received special education services in regular early learning classrooms (Barton & Smith, 2014). However, the potential to move Indiana's preschool children with disabilities into regular education classrooms is now stronger than ever due to the state's recent investment in expanding access to high quality prekindergarten classrooms in 15 counties, including some in public schools.

The Early Childhood Center (ECC) began working with the Indiana Department of Education Office of Special Education to examine and increase inclusive preschool services for children with disabilities in December 2016. The project's long-term goal is to increase the number of preschoolers with disabilities who are served in high quality inclusive early childhood programs and successfully transition into inclusive kindergarten classrooms. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were formed:

1. Pinpoint school districts who currently provide inclusive early childhood special education services, demonstrate a high impact on child outcomes, and successfully transition these children into inclusive kindergarten classrooms.
2. Use pinpointed school districts as models for other districts by documenting their use of evidence-based practices for effective inclusive early childhood education and effective transition planning into inclusive kindergarten classrooms.
3. Provide training and technical assistance to school districts to increase the number of preschoolers with disabilities served in high quality inclusive early childhood settings that demonstrate positive outcomes.



Seventeen Indiana school districts participated in this project's preliminary study. Fifty-seven district personnel completed an online survey (rating evidence-based practices in their program as in place, partially in place, or not in place); 27 district administrators and 34 classroom practitioners participated in phone interviews (documenting details regarding their inclusive practices); 12 classrooms were selected for observations (confirming the presence or absence of reported practices); 3 state agency administrators and 6 state inclusion specialists were also interviewed (obtaining the state's perspective on preschool inclusion).

Data from the above measures is currently being analyzed to discover examples of high quality inclusive classroom models and practices in our state. Additional analyses will identify barriers to, and resources needed for these evidence-based practices to occur. The findings will inform the development of training and technical assistance, including professional development opportunities intended to increase the number of preschoolers with disabilities served in high quality inclusive early childhood settings.

References

Barton, E. E. & Smith, B. J. (2014). Fact sheet of research on preschool inclusion. Pyramid Plus: The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion. Denver, CO. <http://www.pyramidplus.org/>

Division for Early Childhood. (2014). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

United States Department of Health and Human Services and United States Department of Education. (2015). *Policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs.*

What is Inclusion?

An analysis of the 2015-2016 Indiana Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data revealed that, despite 30+ years of research indicating that preschool children with and without disabilities benefit from inclusive early education, only 30% of approximately 12,000 Indiana preschool children with disabilities received special education services in regular early learning classrooms (Barton & Smith, 2014). However, the potential to move Indiana's preschool children with disabilities into regular education classrooms is now stronger than ever due to the state's recent investment in expanding access to high quality prekindergarten classrooms in 15 counties, including some in public schools.



The Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC) is a part of the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at Indiana University, Bloomington (OVPR). OVPR works with individuals, teams, centers, institutes, and schools to foster excellence in research and creative activities and to support faculty in successfully competing for external funding.

Home Visiting: It's All About Family

Early childhood home visiting is complicated. Depending on the program, home visits might include anything from interviews, assessments of child and family strengths and/or needs, provision of information on child development and progress, structured parent-child activities, family goal setting, assistance addressing crises or resolving problems, coordination with needed community services, and/or emotional support during stressful times. While home visiting can be profoundly challenging, it is also extremely important. Programs using evidence-based home visiting practices can positively impact the caretaker-child bond leading to improved social emotional outcomes.

Successful providers engage the entire family to improve outcomes for children in the home. Effective home visitors view families from a holistic perspective, understanding that developmentally, young children exist within the context of their caregiver relationships and home environment. Creating positive caregiver relationships and home environments supports optimal brain architecture development. Constructing strong architecture early enables children to build upon a firm foundation later in life. Home visitors can't control how children's lives turn out, however, they can help caregivers develop positive relationships with their children and understand the value of providing a caring home environment.

There are ways for home visitors to work towards this goal with families in their homes. The Joint Taskforce on Social-Emotional Development in the New York State Department of Health Early Intervention Program has published 7 guidelines on strengthening family engagement to deepen the social-emotional skills of infants and toddlers.* The guidelines outline seven research-based recommended practices, of which, a few are shared below and include some skills explanations and home visiting specifics.



1. Listen to parents/caregivers by asking questions and listening to responses. Parents/caregivers are the experts on their child and family. Ask clarifying questions to make sure what is being communicated is truly understood. Make certain to account for language or cultural barriers to minimize misunderstandings so that the family's perspective can truly emerge.

2. Discuss developmental milestones with parents/caregivers on a regular basis. Screening tools, assessments, and interviews are helpful in determining both children's strengths

and areas the parent-provider team can work on together to develop children's skills and capacities. Referrals to other services that a child might be eligible for or benefit from and that interest the family should be provided.

3. Be mindful of the multiple and potentially interactive origins of infant and toddler behavior.

Home visitors must understand the history of children and caretakers, including past and current environmental experiences, in order to accurately interpret the communications of infants or toddlers. Environmental influences can shape the biological expression of numerous genes and developmental processes, therefore the behavior and communications of families should be considered within this broader context.

4. Identify and share observations of strengths in infant and toddler relationships with their parents/caregivers and teachers. Focusing on specific strengths of caregiver relationships and caring environments reinforces positive interactions. Sincerely reflecting strengths back to caregivers promotes a solid relationship between family members and home visitors. Concrete feedback is much more powerful than general praise during these reflective sessions.

5. Seek immediate expert consultation and referral when the social-emotional well-being of the parents/caregivers or the young child appears compromised. Home visits vary by day and family. Service providers are legally bound to abide by the codes of conduct and statutes of their particular discipline. If stretched beyond capacity, home visitors should reach out to other experts and providers for consultation and referral or consult with supervisors for reflective mentoring. Utilizing supports and mentors is a productive way of coping with reactions to particularly challenging home visits and could help prevent burnout or isolation.

Reference:

NYS Department of Health Early Intervention Coordinating Council and NYS Council on Children and Families Early Childhood Advisory Council Joint Task Force on Social-Emotional Development (2017). NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM *Meeting the Social-Emotional Development Needs of Infants and Toddlers: Guidance for Early Intervention Program Providers and Other Early Childhood Professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/4226.pdf>



First Steps' Home Visiting Professional Development Series

Early Childhood Center staff in partnership with Steve Viehwig, Associate Director of the Riley Child Development Center and Associate Director of the IUPUI Center for Translating Research into Practice, are working to address this topic with First Steps providers as part of a grant to provide professional development on best practices related to home visiting. A series of trainings will be offered between October and April. For more information, visit: <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/home-visiting-series>



Early Intervention: Family Driven Assessment in Indiana

Family-driven assessments

All families have a story to tell. Giving families the opportunity to tell their stories during early intervention (EI) services and within early childhood settings not only lets them feel heard, but it also ensures that their priorities and concerns are fully embodied in any goals that are set when they partner with EI professionals. It can be difficult to follow through on goals that are set by another person. Therefore, family-driven assessments are effective and useful for deciding which services fit best for a family and their child. Interventions and assessments that take the context of children and families into consideration reassure families that they are the primary participants in their child's growth and development. Caregiving includes not only the places where families spend their time, but even more importantly, the opportunities for mutual learning that occur through daily communications and routines. Family-driven assessments seek to capture each level of these interactions and routines allowing EI and early childhood services to build upon skills that already exist, thus strengthening areas of challenge.

Does Indiana use one?

Indiana's First Steps Program recently developed a new family assessment tool that will bring family priorities and needs into focus. This new tool provides the opportunity to learn about family daily routines and how their child's disability or delay may impact these unique daily activities. Indiana first surveyed many states around the country to discover what family assessment tools were currently being used. The results revealed that many states developed their own tool or were using a routines-based tool, such as the Robin McWilliam's Routines-Based Interview. Next, Indiana developed its own tool and piloted it for six weeks. During the pilot, First Steps incorporated stakeholder feedback from various groups to make Indiana's Family Assessment Tool as strong as possible

How do you implement a tool like this across an entire state?

Regional First Steps offices are equipped to provide Family Assessment trainings to their current and new staff after creating and training local implementation teams. The new tool went live on October 1, 2017. Indiana hopes that using this tool to become familiar with First Steps families, in the context of their routines, will provide better family-driven outcomes that truly address families' priorities and concerns.

Additionally, continuity of care will be achieved within the First Steps program by providing ongoing providers with the information gathered from the Family Assessment Tool. This information will give ongoing providers insight into a family's day-to-day routines enabling services to incorporate the family's needs into therapy from the very first visit. Indiana's goal is for First Steps providers to use this new tool to better understand the individual routines, needs, and priorities of the families they serve.



Get Involved!

- (1) Want to hear Dr. Mary Beth Bruder talk about the power of Family Assessment? It's as easy as 1. [CLICK HERE](#) 2. Register Now / Login 3. Select Trainings and view the Webinar titled: First Steps: The Role of Family Assessment in Home Visiting
- (2) Learn more from ECTA about Gathering Information from Families. [CLICK HERE](#).
- (3) Want to read about McWilliam's Routines-Based Interview? [CLICK HERE](#)

