

Creating an Inclusive Preschool Classroom: Best Practices for Collaborating with Preschool Special Education Providers

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is committed to creating inclusive preschool classrooms that enable all children to enter Kindergarten with a solid foundation for future success. Inclusive preschool classrooms offer the opportunity for special education students to learn and socialize with typically developing peers in their least restrictive environment.

An important component of creating an inclusive classroom is collaborating with preschool special education providers. When preschool programs and providers work together, services can be integrated into classroom learning rather than delivered in isolation. Integrated services weave special education goals into a child's daily schedule so that skills develop in naturally occurring activities and adults maximize the sharing of knowledge and methods across disciplines.

Integrated Services

Integrated preschool special education services are:

- Holistic, so that services are incorporated into daily schedules and activities or provided within the classroom (as appropriate) so that skills are generalized across a variety of settings;
- Functional, meaning they occur in the context in which the child lives and plays, and promote independence, social relationships and self-esteem;
- Practical, so that activities and strategies are meaningful to the child's routine, and if appropriate, can be implemented by not just the provider but the teacher and family members;
- Collaborative, meaning they are the responsibility of all adults who work with the preschool child including teachers, special education providers and parents; and
- Aligned to IEP goals.

Preschool Special Education Providers

A preschool child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) will outline the recommended special education, related services, and supplementary services to be provided to the child. Preschool special education providers are responsible for the delivery of preschool special education services as outlined on the IEP. Some of the services that a preschool child might receive within the general education setting include:

- **Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT)**, a certified special educator who works closely with a preschool child on academic, social, and emotional skills one-on-one or in small groups; and/or
- **Related service provider**, a qualified professional who provides services that benefit a child's educational goals including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, counseling, orientation and mobility services, and hearing, vision and health services; and/or
- **Paraprofessional**, an aide who works with a preschool child one-on-one or in a small group to support management needs, including behavior and health.

Implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

In preschool, IEPs are developed by the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) and implemented by programs and providers. It is important for programs and providers to review and monitor IEPs in order to gain information about a child and his or her special education services. IEPs document a child's current skills and abilities, establish educational and developmental goals, and determine what supports and services will be provided.

The CPSE provides copies of IEPs to preschools at the beginning of the school year. For more information about IEP delivery, please contact specialedprek@schools.nyc.gov.

In order to effectively integrate services within the preschool classroom and support collaboration efforts, programs should implement structures to:

- Ensure that all staff responsible for implementing a student’s IEP are provided with electronic access to or a paper copy of the IEP;
- Review the IEP with teachers to better understand how the child learns, currently performs, and is progressing towards individualized goals, and when, where, and how to deliver special education services;
- Create and implement program-wide expectations regarding lesson planning and progress monitoring that support IEP implementation;
- Establish a system for ongoing communication between teachers and providers to create a schedule for services and avoid any scheduling conflicts;
- Collect and share data to measure student progress toward IEP goals and inform planning and implement strategies as needed;
- Provide regularly scheduled time for teachers to meet with special education providers;
- Work with special education providers to discuss ways to integrate services into the classroom setting to increase effectiveness and decrease disruptiveness; and
- Connect with families regarding student progress and ways to support learning and development at home.

Co-Planning and Check-In Meetings

Teachers and providers should routinely co-plan and check in to effectively implement IEPs and integrate services. This protected time allows for adults to plan instruction and supports, ensure the delivery of service, share data and information, and monitor student progress. Co-planning and check-in meetings might include:

- Supporting teachers in the development of daily lesson plans that consider differentiation, accommodations and modifications, and integrating IEP goals and services into lessons;
- Providing a daily sign-in sheets for related service providers and SEITs to ensure that students with IEPs are receiving their services as outlined on their IEPs, including frequency (e.g., 2x/week) and duration (e.g., 45 minutes/session). If services do not start being provided, or stop being provided, for whatever reason, programs should notify the family and CPSE;
- Sharing and analyzing student data to measure progress toward IEP goals and develop targeted lesson plans and supports as needed;
- Regular meetings with teachers and SEITs to discuss effective strategies and techniques for instruction and intervention for individual students;
- Time at the beginning and end of each day for teachers and paraprofessionals to discuss plans for the day and for individual students;
- A conversation with related service providers who provide services to children whose IEPs recommend one-on-one services in a separate location; and
- Developing communication plans to connect with families on student progress and ways to support learning and development at home.

Scheduling

It is important for programs and special education providers to collaborate to create a schedule that works for everyone. Scheduling involves several moving parts such as:

- Considering what time of day work best for the child to receive services, by considering, e.g., a student’s attention, physical stamina, classroom activities, and behavior;
- Examining the provider’s schedule, which may include seeing other children in different locations;
- Carving out protected time for co-planning and check-ins that considers everyone’s schedules and promotes effective outcomes for students; and
- Remembering school breaks and holidays.