

Creating an Inclusive Preschool Classroom: Best Practices for Lesson Planning for Children with IEPs

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 considering the diverse needs and abilities of all children. Through lesson planning, teachers can ensure that all learners are able to fully participate in the general education setting. For children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), daily lesson plans and strategies should be designed to address IEP goals in the classroom, including multiple social and learning opportunities across a variety of modalities.

IEPs

The first step of lesson planning for children with IEPs is understanding and reviewing IEPs. An IEP provides information on how a child is developing and performing, annual goals and mandated services, such as speech therapy or physical therapy. Parts of the IEP include:

- **Present Levels of Performance (PLOP):** The PLOP details how a child is currently developing and performing in school. Information can come from authentic assessments, such as classroom work samples, videos, and photographs, or during evaluations and observations made by family members, care givers, teachers, special education service providers, and other school staff.
- **Measurable Annual Goals:** These are goals that a child can reasonably accomplish in a school year. Goals may be academic, address social or behavioral needs, relate to physical needs, or address other educational needs.
- **Recommended Special Education Programs and Services:** The IEP must list the special education, related, and supplementary services to be provided to the child.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** It is important to educate children with IEPs in their least restrictive environment. The IEP must consider a child's LRE including the maximum extent to which a child can participate with students without IEPs in a general education program and other school activities. The team will first consider whether a child's needs can be met in a general education setting. Other settings, such as integrated and special classes, are considered only if a child would not be able to make meaningful progress in a general education program, even with the help of supports and services.
- **Accommodations and Modifications:** Accommodations and modifications are types of adaptations that are made to the environment, curriculum, instruction, or assessments that allow a child with an IEP to participate in the classroom on an equal basis with peers without disabilities.

Another way to gather valuable insight about a child and how to meet his or her needs is to engage families and preschool special education providers.

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.

Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is a vital component of the teaching-learning process. For children with IEPs, lesson planning can support progress towards IEP goals in a natural setting and provide the necessary supports to ensure access to general education curriculum and peers. Components of lesson planning include:

- **Collaboration:** Teachers can co-plan and check-in with preschool special education providers including Special Education Itinerant Teachers (SEITs), related service providers (physical, occupational, speech therapy, among others), and paraprofessionals. During these meetings, teachers and providers can plan instruction and supports, ensure the delivery of service, share data and strategies, and monitor student progress.
- **Approaches to Learning:** All children have a wide range of abilities, challenges, and interests. Teachers should provide flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways children demonstrate understanding and skills, and in the ways children are engaged. This means that teachers present curriculum in multiple sensory modalities, provide alternatives for children to show what they know, and encourage interest exploration and offer choices in the classroom.
- **IEP Goals:** A child's measurable annual goals, or IEP goals, can be embedded in natural occurring activities in the classroom rather than worked on in isolation. This way, skill development can be incorporated into daily schedules so that skills are generalized across a variety of settings. For example, if a child's IEP goal focuses on following two-step directions during large-group activities, a teacher could scaffold the complexity of two-step directions she gives the group over time, starting with simple requests and moving toward more complicated asks. The teacher could also start with a group of six students and move to a group of 18, modeling and adjusting for the child as needed.
- **Accommodations and Modifications:** Accommodations change how a child learns material (environment, delivery of instruction) and modifications change what a child is being taught or expected to learn (curriculum, assessment). Teachers can proactively identify specific accommodations and modifications while lesson planning based on the child's needs and the activity. Some examples include, posting expectations and schedules on the wall, giving preferential seating, providing sensory breaks and quiet time, explaining a system for transition, allowing extra time, reducing the length of activities, teaching memory strategies, repeating directions slowly and loudly, providing visual prompts and non-verbal cues, giving immediate feedback, using materials that are manipulative and of interests to the child, utilizing positive behavior management techniques, and considering how technology can support and engage students.

Progress Monitoring

In order to effectively lesson plan for children with IEPs, teachers need to know how a child is performing, developing, and progressing towards classroom and IEP goals in order to make decisions about instruction. Progress monitoring can include:

- **Authentic Assessments:** Teachers use authentic assessments to understand what a child knows and is able to do in order to guide curriculum, instruction, and supports. Teachers should collect evidence for authentic assessments during classroom activities and experiences throughout the year. This can include children's work, photographs, and observation notes during a variety of activities, such as activity centers, class meetings, outdoor play or small group time.
- **IEP Goal Tracking:** Tracking progress toward IEP goals can lead to accelerated learning, informed instructional decisions, and more efficient communication with families and special education providers. To track how a child is progressing toward reaching IEP goals, teachers should collect data regularly (every week or two) by observing and assessing the child. For example, if a child's IEP goal centers around establishing and maintaining appropriate proximity to peers during free-choice activities, the teacher would ensure the child has the ample opportunity to work on this skill, and collect and record data on this skill on a regular basis. Teachers can create progress graphs to show if and how the child is progressing. This data can then be used to make decisions about instruction and interventions, and be shared with families.