

Guidance for Operating Preschool Special Classes in an Integrated Setting (SCIS) Classrooms in NYC Department of Education (DOE) Public Schools

Introduction

In SCIS classes (sometimes called pre-K integrated co-teaching (ICT) classes) preschool students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are able to learn alongside their non-disabled peers. Preschool students with IEPs are recommended for and placed in SCIS classes by their local Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE). SCIS classes include preschool children with and without disabilities and have both a general education teacher and a special education teacher. The teachers work together throughout the day to adapt and modify instruction and ensure the entire class has access to the general education curriculum.

Preschool students recommended for SCIS may also receive related services, assistive technology, para-professional services or other supplementary aids and services if needed.

Least Restrictive Environment

Preschool children with disabilities have the right to receive their special education services in a classroom that, to the greatest extent appropriate, includes students without disabilities. Only when the preschool student's needs cannot be met in the general education setting with a fully-implemented IEP (which may include supplementary aids and services) should a more restrictive setting be considered. In other words, preschool students with IEPs should be educated in their **least restrictive environment**.

For additional information, please refer to "School Districts' Responsibilities to Provide Students with Disabilities with Specially-Designed Instruction and Related Services in the Least Restrictive Environment" Special Education Field Advisory issued by the New York State Education Department in December 2015, found here: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2015-memos/least-restrictive-environment-district-responsibilities.html>

Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood

Research shows that both young children with disabilities and young children without disabilities benefit from inclusion settings.

- Children with disabilities, including those with the highest needs, can make significant developmental and learning gains in inclusive settings.
- In inclusive classrooms, children with disabilities can experience greater cognitive and language development than those in more restrictive, separate settings.
- High-quality inclusion that begins early and continues into school can have positive long-term outcomes. Students with IEPs who spend more time in general education tend to have fewer absences, higher test scores, stronger social-emotional skills, and a better probability of employment and higher earnings than those who spend less time in general education.
- Children with disabilities in inclusive settings demonstrate more social interactions with typically developing peers, have a larger network of friends, and are more socially competent compared to children in separate settings.

- In inclusive early childhood programs, children without disabilities can benefit from teachers' advanced understanding and capacity for individualized learning and appropriate developmental supports, which are best for all learners.
- Students without disabilities in SCIS classes can show greater compassion and empathy, develop a better understanding of diversity, and have a more positive perception of people with disabilities.

For additional information, please refer to the U.S. Department of Education "Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs," found here: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>

Regulations Governing Preschool SCIS Classes

In New York State, preschool special education programs, including SCIS classes, are approved by the State Education Department (SED) pursuant to Section 4410 of the Education Law. Preschool SCIS programs are subject to SED regulations and guidance.

While DOE public schools (district schools) sometimes refer to integrated classrooms as Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT), SED uses the term Special Class in an Integrated Setting (SCIS) for authorized preschool integrated programs.

According to SED guidance, SCIS should be considered before a setting with only children with disabilities. Placement in a setting that does not include age-appropriate peers without disabilities should be considered only when the nature and severity of the child's disability is such that education in a less restrictive environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Approval to Operate

District schools must submit interest to open a SCIS class to the DOE Central Office (email Rebecca Burke at RBurke11@schools.nyc.gov). A submission of interest is not an approval to operate a SCIS class. The DOE Central Office will review the request, analyze need in the area, gather documents, submit an application to SED, and receive authorization prior to a SCIS class opening. The DOE Central Office will work directly with schools to gather necessary documentation and offer appropriate supports. All district schools will receive official notification upon approval by SED.

Age Requirements

In accordance with SED regulations, preschool SCIS classes must be available to children with IEPs ages 3 and 4; this includes students with IEPs transitioning to Kindergarten or going through the "Turning 5" process. Because SCIS is a state approved preschool special education program that serves children age 3 and 4, the age requirement set out by Chancellor's Regulation A-101 does not apply to students who are placed in a DOE-operated SCIS class by the CPSE. Therefore, all district schools must welcome all students placed in SCIS classes whose IEPs recommend SCIS, including 3-year-olds.

Classroom Ratios and Requirements

Guidelines for SCIS classes regarding student-teacher-paraprofessional special education classroom ratios are as follows:

- SED guidance states that no more than 12 students with IEPs can enroll in a SCIS class.
 - However, while 12 students is the maximum throughout the state, district schools are approved to operate classes of 18 students with **up to six or eight students with IEPs**. The

DOE Central Office can provide more information about a school's approved classroom ratio(s) (email Rebecca Burke at RBurke11@schools.nyc.gov).

- Only preschool students with disabilities whose IEPs recommend SCIS should be placed in a SCIS class.
 - An IEP recommending this setting should state “Special Class Integrated Setting” as the recommended program.
 - It has been determined that students with IEPs recommending Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) and/or Related Services can be successful in a general education program; SCIS is not the least restrictive environment for these children.
 - Students with IEPs that recommend Special Class or Residential Placement require a more restrictive setting than SCIS.
- DOE guidance requires that SCIS classes in district schools include a special education teacher, general education teacher, and two classroom paraprofessionals.

Placement and Enrollment

SCIS classes are comprised of special education and general education seats. These two types of seats are filled through separate processes.

- **Special education seats** are reserved solely for preschool students with IEPs that recommend SCIS.
 - The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) is responsible for placement of these children. The CPSE will reach out to a district school to make placement arrangements.
 - After a student with an IEP is placed by the CPSE in a SCIS program in a district school, the school should enroll the student on the school's register in ATS using the **grade code 359**.
 - The preschool special education process is rolling. At no point during the school year should empty special education seats in a SCIS class be opened up to or filled with general education students. Special education seats must only be filled by **students with IEPs that recommend SCIS**.
- **General education seats** are filled through the DOE's pre-K admission process.
 - The number of offers made to a class will equal the number of general education seats in the class. For example, a SCIS class of 18, with 10 general education and 8 special education seats, will receive up to 10 offers—not 18.
 - District schools should follow the pre-registration/registration guidelines received from the Office of Student Enrollment. Students should be enrolled on the school's register in ATS.

Children with IEPs that recommend SEIT and/or Related Services receive placement through the DOE's pre-K admissions process. These students should be placed in general education not SCIS classes. If a district school only has SCIS classes and needs additional guidance regarding placement for students recommended for SEIT and/or Related Services, allow the family to register the child and email ESEnrollment@schools.nyc.gov.

Children with IEPs for Special Class or Residential Placement are recommended for a more restrictive setting. The CPSE is responsible for placement of these students. If, however, a student recommended for Special Class or Residential Placement receives a general education seat through the DOE's pre-K admission process, allow the family to register the child and email SpecialEdPreK@schools.nyc.gov.

Evaluations, IEPs, and Arrangement of Services

The CPSE is responsible for coordinating evaluations, case managing IEPs, and arranging preschool special education services that cannot be provided by district schools. District schools are expected to implement IEPs, oversee the delivery of services, notify the CPSE of any changes in a child's services or needs, and participate in IEP meetings.

District schools should work with a child's affiliated CPSE office as needed. CPSE offices serve families in their home district, regardless of where children attend preschool. CPSE contact information is available at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/Help/Contacts/CSECPSE>. **Related services** for preschool students should be provided by DOE providers whenever possible. Physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), speech therapy, counseling and 1:1 paraprofessional mandates should be **assigned to providers at the district school**, whether children are enrolled in SCIS or general education only classes. DOE providers are approved to serve pre-K students. Additional related services, including orientation and mobility, hearing, vision and health services, are arranged by the CPSE. If a district school does not have capacity to provide related services to preschool students, the school should reach out to their assigned OT, PT and/or speech supervisor for support. If the supervisor indicates that there is no DOE provider available to serve, the school should contact the CPSE responsible for the child's case and request that they identify a contract provider. Ultimately, it is the district school's responsibility to work with relevant DOE staff, including providers at the school, district supervisors, and CPSE staff, to ensure that related services are in place as required by the student's IEP.

Questions regarding preschool related services can be emailed to relatedservices@schools.nyc.gov. To contact your OT, PT and/or speech supervisor for your district, please see the directory at <http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/4E2907B6-23C0-49BF-8993-A3E7A6F9EAED/0/ORSDirectory.xlsx>.

District schools have access in SESIS to the IEPs of preschool students with disabilities registered at the school. District schools should ensure that all services indicated on a child's IEP, whether arranged at the school or by the CPSE, begin and are monitored so that all children at the school are served in accordance with his or her IEP.

For additional information, please refer to "Pre-Kindergarten IEP Distribution and Best Practices" at <http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/3667C684-37CA-4667-AC8F-179459490739/0/IEPDistributionLettertopreKPrograms20152016FINAL082515.pdf>

Hours of Operation and Instruction

Full-day preschool SCIS programs in district schools should operate for no less than 6 hours and 20 minutes per day with a minimum of five hours of instruction.

Budget

The Pre-Kindergarten Programs School Allocation Memorandum (SAM) provides resources to support the implementation of preschool programs at district schools. SCIS classes are identified as Universal Pre-Kindergarten Plus (UPK Plus) models in the SAM. According to the SAM, SCIS classes support all of the elements of the preschool general education model but also include a special education teacher (with prep period and absence coverage), an additional classroom paraprofessional (with absence coverage), attendance at professional development conferences, and other than personnel services. Beginning in FY16, district schools also received the following funding for both teachers and the classroom paraprofessionals:

- Absence coverage (8 days per teacher and classroom paraprofessional)

- Prep period coverage (0.2 of teacher position for each full-day class)
- Shared planning time for teachers and classroom paraprofessionals

For additional guidance, please refer to the “School Allocation Memorandum No 22, FY 2016” found here: http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/allocationmemo/fy16_17/fy17_pdf/sam22.pdf

Transportation

In SCIS classes, **all preschool students with an IEP recommendation for SCIS are provided transportation** to and from the program. These children will appear in the NYC Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) pre-K rider system. District schools should utilize their OPT issued username and password to access the pre-K rider system and enter the required session time for children. Once the session time has been entered and saved, the information is immediately sent electronically to the appropriate transportation provider. If a school requires assistance or guidance in accessing or utilizing the pre-K rider system, they may contact the OPT pre-K customer service hotline by calling 718-855-2300.

Toileting

Preschool programs must assist all children in their varying stages of proficiency in toileting. Children cannot be denied entry to or removed from any pre-K program if they have not yet mastered all of their developmental milestones.

The paraprofessional is responsible for changing diapers and helping children after bathroom accidents as necessary. All paraprofessionals involved in diapering and helping children after accidents must receive Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogen Training and the Hepatitis B vaccine free of charge.

For additional guidance, see the Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) “Toileting Guidelines and Resources” found here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/E89009A0-E7E5-4C20-804F-24D5EFAC1C1E/0/ToiletingGuidelines070114.pdf>

Curriculum and Instruction

Inclusive classroom cultures have high expectations for all students, with and without disabilities. In SCIS classrooms, co-teachers focus on high-quality curriculum and instruction, and are responsible for creating a variety of supports and structures to ensure access to the general education curriculum. This includes flexibility in the ways information is presented, students are engaged, and children demonstrate understanding.

If your school requires support with curriculum and instruction in your SCIS class, contact the DOE Central Office (email Rebecca Burke at RBurke11@schools.nyc.gov).

For additional guidance, see “Creating an Inclusive School for Principals” at <http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/670DDE59-16E9-4A21-9A0D-66F358567329/0/CreatinganInclusiveSchoolInformationforPrincipals050813.pdf> or “Creating an Inclusive Classroom for Teachers” at http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/31D7CFC5-3865-4B74-8B40-098CCB8E4B68/0/Teachers_Guide_to_Inclusive_Classrooms_2013_Final.pdf.