

Fact Sheet of Research on Preschool Inclusion

Erin E. Barton & Barbara J. Smith

June, 2014

1. In 27 years, the practice of providing special education and related services in regular early childhood settings to preschoolers with disabilities has increased only 5.7% and many young children with disabilities continue to be educated in separate settings.

U. S. Department of Education. (2014). 2012 IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environment. Retrieved from <https://explore.data.gov/Education/2012-IDEA-Part-B-Child-Count-and-Educational-Envir/5t72-4535>

Summary: In 2012, across all states, a total of 42.5% of children 3 – 5 served under IDEA received their special education and related services in a regular early childhood classroom.

U. S. Department of Education. (1987). Annual report to congress on the implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act. US Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Summary: During 1984-85, across all states, a total of 36.8% of children 3 – 5 served under IDEA received their special education and related services in a regular early childhood classroom.

Comparing the 1985 data to the 2012 data, the practice of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities age 3-5 years old in regular early childhood settings increased by only 5.7%.

2. Inclusion benefits children with and without disabilities.*

Buysse, V., Goldman, B. D., & Skinner, M. L. (2002). Setting effects on friendship formation among young children with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 68*, 503–517.

Summary: Typically developing children in specialized classrooms had more friends than their peers with disabilities. However, typically developing children in child care programs did not have more friends than their peers with disabilities. The authors noted that when children with disabilities have access to multiple playmates they have more opportunities to develop social and play skills. Also, child care teachers in this study reported that young children with disabilities inclusive settings had friends who were typically developing.

Cross, A. F., Traub, E. K., Hutter-Pishgahi, L., & Shelton, G. (2004). Elements for successful inclusion for children with significant disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 24*, 169–183.

Summary: The authors examined the teacher practices and parent beliefs related to inclusion of several young children with disabilities. The authors found that peers of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms were helpful. Parents and teachers reported the peers were learning compassion and empathy. Furthermore, the authors noted that individualized instruction was specifically related to learning and achieving goals for the children with disabilities.

Holahan, A., & Costenbader, V. (2000). A comparison of developmental gains for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive and self-contained classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20*, 224 – 235.

Summary: The authors examined outcomes for children with disabilities in inclusive versus segregated settings. The authors found that children with higher social-emotional skills performed better in inclusive settings than segregated ones. Children with lower social-emotional development performed equally well in both types of settings.

Odom, S. L., Zercher, C., Li, S., Marquart, J., Sandall, S., & Brown, W. (2006). Social acceptance and social rejection of young children with disabilities in inclusive classes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*, 807-823.

Summary: The authors found that a substantial number of children with disabilities are accepted by their peers in inclusive preschool settings. However, at least equal numbers of children with disabilities are not accepted by their peers. The authors highlight the importance of early identification and interventions focused on social competence and the development of friendships among children with and without disabilities.

Strain, P.S., & Hoyson, M. (2000). The need for longitudinal, intensive social skill intervention: LEAP follow-up outcomes for children with autism. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20*, 116 – 122.

Summary: Follow-up data at age 10 for six children who participated in inclusive preschool programs indicate positive outcomes, including reduced autism severity, average IQ, positive rating of social behaviors by parents, levels of social interactions similar to typically developing peers in the same settings, and participation in general education classrooms for five of the six children.

Comparing the 1985 data to the 2012 data, the practice of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities age 3-5 years old in regular early childhood settings increased by only 5.7%.

3. The quality of preschool programs including at least one student with a disability was as good as or better than that of preschool programs without children with disabilities. However, traditional measures of early childhood program quality might not be sufficient for assessing the quality of programs that include children with disabilities.*

Buysse, V., Wesley, P. W., Bryant, D. M., & Gardner, D. (1999). Quality of early childhood programs in inclusive and noninclusive settings. *Exceptional Children, 65*, 301–314.

Summary: The authors examined multiple factors that impacted program quality in early childhood settings. They found that programs that included at least one child with a disability scored significantly higher on measures of program quality (i.e., Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale; ECERS, Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) than programs that did not include children with disabilities. The authors provided multiple explanations for this finding, including (a) parents of children with disabilities might seek higher quality programs for their children with unique learning needs, (b) programs for children with disabilities might attract or seek better resources and more funding, and (c) programs for children with disabilities might seek more qualified and experienced staff.

Soukakou, E. P. (2012). Measuring quality in inclusive preschool classrooms: Development and validation of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 27*(3), 478–488.

Summary: The author examined a new observational measure, the Inclusive Classroom Profile, which was developed based on current research regarding inclusion and using quality indicators that were applicable to groups of children with disabilities. This measure correlated with other, more traditional measures of classroom quality (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale; ECERS, Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) and provided additional information regarding the quality of adaptations, supports, and instruction for children with disabilities.

4. Children with disabilities can be effectively educated in inclusive programs using specialized instruction.*

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

Summary: The DEC Recommended Practices were developed to provide guidance to practitioners and families about the most effective ways to improve the learning outcomes and promote the development of young children, birth through 5 years of age, who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The DEC Recommended Practices are based on the best available empirical evidence as well as the wisdom and experience of the field.

Odom, S. L., DeKlyen, M., & Jenkins, J. R. (1984). Integrating handicapped and nonhandicapped preschoolers: Developmental impact on the nonhandicapped children. *Exceptional Children, 51*, 41–48.

Summary: The authors found that children in segregated and inclusive settings have similar outcomes and follow a similar trajectory.

Rafferty, Y., Piscitelli, V., & Boettcher, C. (2003). The impact of inclusion on language development and social competence among preschoolers with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 69*, 467–479.

Summary: The authors found that children with severe disabilities in inclusive settings had higher scores on assessments of their language development than children in segregated settings. Preschoolers with less severe disabilities made similar gains across both inclusive and segregated settings.

Strain, P. S., & Bovey, E. H. (2011). Randomized, controlled trial of the LEAP model of early intervention for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 31*, 133–154.

Summary: The authors provide empirical support that children with disabilities (i.e., children with autism in this study) can make significant progress in inclusive, public school classrooms with teachers implementing evidence-based practices with high fidelity. In this study, children with autism in classrooms with teachers implementing LEAP with 90% fidelity or higher did better than children with autism in programs with low fidelity. Furthermore, social validity ratings indicated that teachers found the LEAP program to be feasible and related to positive outcomes for their students.

5. Parents and teachers influence children's values regarding disabilities.*

Diamond, K. E., & Huang, H.-H. (2005). Preschoolers' ideas about disabilities. *Infants and Young Children, 18*, 37–46.

Summary: The authors provide a comprehensive review of the literature and suggest that participation in inclusive preschool programs by children with typical development might positively impact their attitudes regarding children with disabilities. Further, they provide multiple examples of ways in which teachers can promote positive attitudes about disabilities.

Innes, F. K., & Diamond, K. E. (1999). Typically developing children's interactions with peers with disabilities: Relationships between mothers' comments and children's ideas about disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 19*, 103–111.

Summary: The authors found that children's comments regarding pictures of young children with Down syndrome were similar to their mother's comments about the same pictures.

Okagaki, L., Diamond, K. E., Kontos, S. J., & Hestenes, L. (1998). Correlates of young children's interactions with classmates with disabilities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*, 67–86.

Summary: The authors found that a child's acceptance of people with disabilities was related to his/her parent's beliefs about disability.

6. Individualized embedded instruction can be used to teach a variety of skills, including those related to early learning standards, and promote participation in inclusive preschool programs to children with and without disabilities.*

Daugherty, S., Grisham-Brown, J., & Hemmeter, M. L. (2001). The effects of embedded skill instruction on the acquisition of target and nontarget skills in preschoolers with developmental delays. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 21*, 213–221.

Summary: The authors found that children with disabilities could be taught to count objects during typical classroom activities. Furthermore, one child learned nontarget information (i.e., colors).

Grisham-Brown, J., Schuster, J. W., Hemmeter, M. L., & Collins, B. C. (2000). Using an embedding strategy to teach preschoolers with significant disabilities. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 10*, 139–162.

Summary: Teachers used embedded instruction to teach two children with disabilities multiple IEP goals during typical classroom activities. Furthermore, teachers implemented the embedded instructional procedures with fidelity.

Grisham-Brown, J., Pretti-Frontczak, K., Hawkins, S. R., & Winchell, B. N. (2009). Addressing early learning standards for all children within blended preschool classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 29*, 131–142.

Summary: In a series of studies, the authors found that embedding intensive instruction into daily activities is effective and efficient for teaching individual skills to children with and without disabilities.

Robertson, J., Green, K., Alper, S., Schloss, P. J., & Kohler, F. (2003). Using a peer-mediated intervention to facilitate children's participation in inclusive childcare activities. *Education & Treatment of Children, 26*, 182–197.

Summary: The authors found that a peer-mediated intervention that embedded songs and finger plays, visuals, and peer verbal cues into typical daily routines was related to increases in on-task behaviors, play skills, and participation in circle time for two children with disabilities.

Venn, M. L., Wolery, M., Werts, M. G., Morris, A., DeCesare, L. D., & Cuffs, M. S. (1993). Embedding instruction in art activities to teach preschoolers with disabilities to imitate their peers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8*, 277–294.

Summary: The authors found that children with disabilities could be taught to imitate their peers during an art activity using progressive time delay. Furthermore, results generalized to fine motor activities (i.e., children with disabilities imitated their peers across settings and activities).

7. Families of children with and without disabilities generally have positive views of inclusion.*

Kasari, C., Freeman, S. F. N., Bauminger, N., & Alkin, M. C. (1999). Parental perspectives on inclusion: Effects of autism and Down syndrome. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 29*, 297–305.

Summary: Authors surveyed parents of children with Down syndrome and autism regarding their current placement and their desire to change their placement. Results indicated that parents of children with Down syndrome were most likely to endorse inclusive settings, while parents of children with autism were more likely to endorse at least part-time inclusion with peers. Parents of young children and parents who had children in inclusive settings were most likely to have positive views of inclusion.

Rafferty, Y., & Griffin, K. W. (2005). Benefits and risks of reverse inclusion for preschoolers with and without disabilities: Perspectives of parents and providers. *Journal of Early Intervention, 27*, 173–192.

Summary: The authors surveyed parents of children with and without disabilities and teachers from an inclusive early childhood program. Results indicated that parents of children with and without disabilities as well as teachers viewed inclusion favorably and considered it to be beneficial for children with and without disabilities.

8. Inclusion is not more expensive than having separate programs for children with disabilities.*

Odom, S. L., Hanson, M. J., Lieber, J., Marquart, J., Sandall, S., Wolery, R., Horn, E., Schwartz, I., Beckman, P., Hikido, C., & Chambers, J. (2001). The costs of preschool inclusion. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 21*, 46–55.

Summary: The authors found that six of the nine inclusive programs were less expensive than self-contained special education placements. They authors also identified specific cost features of inclusive programs.

Odom, S. L., Parrish, T., & Hikido, C. (2001). The costs of inclusion and noninclusive special education preschool programs. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 14*, 33–41.

Summary: The authors examined the costs of different models of inclusion and traditional special education preschool programs located in five different states. Inclusion was defined as classrooms in which children with disabilities and typically developing children participate together for over 90% of the time. The authors found lower costs associated with more inclusive programs across public schools, community programs, and Head Start programs. Furthermore, the inclusive preschool models were less expensive for school districts than segregated models.

Summary of additional findings regarding inclusion based on principles guiding the field of early childhood special education, recommended practices, and our collective knowledge and experiences:

9. Successful inclusion requires intentional and effective collaboration and teaming.**

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

10. The individual outcomes of preschool inclusion should include access, membership, participation, friendships, and support.**

DEC/NAEYC. (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

11. Children with disabilities do not need to be “ready” to be included. Programs need to be “ready” to support all children.**

DEC/NAEYC. (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

*A sample of empirical citations are provided for each “fact.” Thus, this fact sheet does not provide a comprehensive list of the references for each “fact.” The citations were intentionally identified to include recent references, representation across disabilities when possible, and studies using rigorous methods.

**These facts are based on principles guiding the field of early childhood special education, recommended practices, and our collective knowledge and experiences.

References

Buysse, V. (2011). Access, participation, and supports: The defining features of high-quality inclusion. *Zero to Three Journal*, 31(4), 24–29.

Buysse, V., & Hollingsworth, H. L. (2009). Research synthesis points on early childhood inclusion: What every practitioner and all families should know. *Young Exceptional Children*, 11, 18–30.

DEC/NAEYC. (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

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

- Lieber, J., Hanson, M. J., Beckman, P. J., Odom, S. L., Sandall, S. R., Schwartz, I. S., Wolery, R. (2000). Key influences on the initiation and implementation of inclusive preschool programs. *Exceptional Children, 67*, 83–98.
- National Professional Development Center on Inclusion. (2009). Research synthesis points on early childhood inclusion. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, Author. Retrieved from <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/NDPCI-ResearchSynthesis-9-2007.pdf/view>
- Odom, S. L. (2000). Preschool inclusion: What we know and where we go from here. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20* (1), 20–27.
- Odom, S. L., & Bailey, D. B. (2001). Inclusive preschool programs: Classroom ecology and child outcomes. In M. Guralnick (Ed.), *Focus on change* (pp. 253–276). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Odom, S. L., Vitztum, J., Wolery, R., Lieber, J., Sandall, S., Hanson, M. J., ... Horn, E. (2004). Preschool inclusion in the United States: A review of research from an ecological systems perspective. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 4*, 17–49.
- Odom, S. L., Buysse, V., & Soukakou, E. (2011). Inclusion for young children with disabilities: A quarter century of research perspectives. *Journal of Early Intervention, 33*, 344–357.
- Purcell, M. L., Horn, E., & Palmer, S. (2007). A qualitative study of the initiation and continuation of preschool inclusion programs. *Exceptional Children, 74*, 85–99.
- Sandall, S., Hemmeter, M. L., Smith, B. J., & McLean, M. E. (Eds.). (2005). *DEC recommended practices: A comprehensive guide for practical application in early intervention/early childhood special education*. Missoula, MT: Division for Early Childhood.
- U. S. Department of Education. (2014). 2012 IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environment. Retrieved from <https://explore.data.gov/Education/2012-IDEA-Part-B-Child-Count-and-Educational-Envir/5t72-4535>
- U. S. Department of Education. (1987). Annual report to congress on the implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act. US Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Suggested reference:

Barton, E. E., & Smith, B. J. (2014). *Fact sheet on preschool inclusion*. Pyramid Plus: The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion. Denver, CO.

About the authors:

Erin E. Barton, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, Vanderbilt University.

Barbara J. Smith, Ph.D. is a Research Professor, School of Education and Human Development, University of Colorado Denver.