

First Steps to Preschool Inclusion

How to Jumpstart Your Programwide Plan

by

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About the Authors

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About the Contributor

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ASSESSING PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

Certain features of early childhood classrooms have been shown to support children’s social and emotional development (Diamond, Hong, & Baroody, 2007).

Step 1: Reflect on the following physical characteristics in a target classroom. List two or three ways each characteristic could support child learning and development in the first column.

Step 2: Review the physical characteristics—do they support children with special needs? List one or two changes you can make to better support a child with a disability. It might be helpful to think about one disability (e.g., physical impairment) to focus your recommended changes.

	Step 1	Step 2
Classroom space	1. 2.	1. 2.
Furniture (e.g., size, arrangement, comfort)	1. 2.	1. 2.
Schedule and routine	1. 2.	1. 2.

Form 4.1. Assessing Physical Characteristics and Inclusion Readiness

ASSESSING PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

	Step 1	Step 2
Centers and activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.
Number of adults	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.
Number of children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.
Ratio of adults to children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.

ASSESSING PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

Certain features of early childhood classrooms have been shown to support children's social and emotional development (Diamond, Hong, & Baroody, 2007).

Step 1: Reflect on the following physical characteristics in a target classroom. List two or three ways each characteristic could support child learning and development.

Step 2: Review the physical characteristics—do they support a child with special needs? List one or two changes you can make to better support a child with a disability. It might be helpful to think about one disability (e.g., physical impairment) to focus your recommended changes.

	Step 1	Step 2
Classroom space	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Classroom is one level (i.e., no steps or gradation in flooring or surface). 2. Shelves and tables are used to "partition" the classroom into centers and areas. For example, two shelves enclose the meeting area that is in the corner of the classroom near windows. Students move through the opening between the two shelves (from a linoleum floor onto an industrial carpet) to enter the area, which helps them build an awareness of space and movement. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Level surface allows for physical accessibility for all children. 2. The partitions may limit accessibility and participation for a child with motor issues or physical impairments. Will the opening allow space for a child with crutches or a walker, for example?
Furniture (e.g., size, arrangement, comfort)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chairs in the classroom are the same, child-size, plastic, and with a solid back. 2. Materials are available for children and within reach if they are sitting or standing. For example, the dramatic play area includes hollow blocks that are stacked on low shelves. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Including chairs with arms may better support children with postural issues or promote spatial awareness. 2. Place some hollow blocks on the floor for more immediate access.
Schedule and routine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A written schedule is posted on the back of the classroom door. 2. The teacher taps a musical wand to alert children to cleanup time and a transition to the next routine. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place the schedule in an area that children pass by daily, such as a morning meeting area. 2. Provide children who have a hard time with transitions a 2-minute verbal or visual prompt that cleanup will begin shortly and/or invite them to tap the wand after the 2-minute prompt.

Figure 4.2. Filled-in example of Form 4.1.

ASSESSING PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

Centers and activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are several centers in the classroom, including a meeting area with books, dramatic play items, sensory objects, manipulatives, and puzzles that children can choose to play with on the carpet or at tables; a writing center; and an art area. 2. During morning meeting, all children are expected to sit on a carpet square that the teacher prearranges. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To promote self-regulation, also include a "quiet" or "cozy" area designed for 1-2 children. Encourage all children to use the area, as they need it. 2. For children with postural or attention issues, provide additional seating options, such as a chair with arms or a textured exercise ball.
Number of adults	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are four adults in the classroom daily: two lead teachers, a paid student assistant, and a student volunteer. 2. At arrival time, parents stand in the doorway. Many stay for about 30-45 minutes chatting with one another. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Great! Are all the adults aware of their roles and responsibilities in the classroom and with the children? 2. Welcome parents and gently remind them that the school day will be beginning soon. Placing a schedule near the entrance may be a good way to visually prompt parents that the next routine will begin shortly.
Number of children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are 18 children ages 3 and 4 in the class. 2. Of the 18, one child expresses challenging behaviors, one child is medically fragile, and one child has speech and language delays. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure materials and activities are appropriate for a range of abilities, needs, and interests across ages. 2. Set aside time during each planning meeting to address supports that will prevent challenging behaviors, physically support the child with medical needs, and address language abilities.
Ratio of adults to children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are 18 children and 4 adults. 2. On some days, up to two more parents help in the classroom. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review state and county licensure requirements to ensure the ratio is appropriate for the ages of children. 2. Send home expectations for parent volunteers before they arrive in the classroom, or meet briefly with parents at the beginning of the school day to ensure they understand their role in the classroom.

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

Certain features of early childhood classrooms have been shown to support children's social and emotional development (Diamond, Hong, & Baroody, 2007).

Step 1: Use these questions to observe the social climate in a target classroom.

Step 2: As you observe, consider the implications of these characteristics and how they might facilitate or hinder learning, social interaction, and development for a child with a disability. List both positive and negative implications.

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Teachers greet children as they arrive.				1. 2.
The classroom follows a schedule or routine.				1. 2.
The schedule or routine is visible to children.				1. 2.
The group size is _____ and seems appropriate for the age group.				1. 2.
The ratio of adults to children is _____ and aligns with licensing regulations.				1. 2.

Form 4.2. Assessing Social Characteristics and Inclusion Readiness

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Teachers are observing children as they work and play.				1. 2.
Activities and areas support cognitive development.				1. 2.
Opportunities for creative and pretend play are available.				1. 2.
Teachers are engaged with children during work and play.				1. 2.
Teachers are responding to child requests.				1. 2.
Teachers are initiating activities.				1. 2.

(continued)

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Children are initiating activities.				1. 2.
Children are engaged with materials in the classroom.				1. 2.
Children are engaged with peers in the classroom.				1. 2.
Teachers seem aware of children's needs and abilities.				1. 2.
Teachers regard all children positively.				1. 2.
Teachers seem to anticipate child behaviors and emotions.				1. 2.

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

Certain features of early childhood classrooms have been shown to support children’s social and emotional development (Diamond, Hong, & Baroody, 2007).

Step 1: Use these questions to observe the social climate in a target classroom.

Step 2: As you observe, consider the implications of these characteristics and how they might facilitate or hinder learning, social interaction, and development for a child with a disability. List both positive and negative implications.

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Teachers greet children as they arrive.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers greet each child verbally at their eye level at morning arrival and wait for a verbal response. Children have also started to greet each other verbally, following the teacher’s modeling. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Consider the child with language delay. Though present with peers, is he communicating actively and engaged with peers as they greet each other? Maybe provide a series of visuals with emotions so that he can identify and share how he is feeling that day.
The classroom follows a schedule or routine.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Children expect a consistent daily routine. Teachers refer to the schedule at each transition. 2. <i>Negative</i>—None.
The schedule or routine is visible to children.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—The written schedule is posted at children’s eye level but behind the door. 2. <i>Negative</i>—A written schedule may not be appropriate for all children. Consider including visuals, expanding the print, and moving to a more central location in the classroom so that it is more visible and accessible for children.
The group size is <u>18</u> and seems appropriate for the age group.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Group size is appropriate given licensing guidelines. 2. <i>Negative</i>—A larger group size overall may meet licensing guidelines. Consider planning activities that encourage small group interactions so that children have opportunities to participate and interact with peers and teachers.
The ratio of adults to children is <u>1:5</u> and aligns with licensing regulations.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Ratio size is appropriate given licensing guidelines. 2. <i>Negative</i>—None. Consider utilizing adults to facilitate small group interactions so that children have opportunities to participate and interact with one another and adults.

Figure 4.3. Filled-in example of Form 4.2.

(continued)

Figure 4.3. (continued)

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS				
	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Teachers are observing children as they work and play.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers can gather informal or anecdotal information to learn about children's interests and abilities. 2. <i>Negative</i>—None.
Activities and areas support cognitive development.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Many centers offer children choices. 2. <i>Negative</i>—The painting easel offers children only one color and one brush choice. Consider adding another color and a brush with a different size handle to accommodate children's decision making and to provide varied opportunities for fine motor skills.
Opportunities for creative and pretend play are available.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Dramatic play area is in the classroom (though closed some days). 2. <i>Negative</i>—Consider keeping this area open daily as a choice.
Teachers are engaged with children during work and play.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Some teachers sit with children as they play. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Teachers that are seated in close physical proximity to children are not always guiding or scaffolding learning and play.
Teachers are responding to child requests.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Some teachers sit in close proximity to children at the snack table and facilitate conversations, respond to children's questions, and encourage interactions between children as they request items. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Teachers sit on the perimeter of the classroom during free play, often missing vocal or gestural requests for assistance with play or peers.
Teachers are initiating activities.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers set up several choices for children and then sit beside materials, encouraging children to join them. 2. <i>Negative</i>—None.

ASSESSING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND INCLUSION READINESS

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Potential implications for a young child with a disability
Children are initiating activities.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Children are provided materials that will help them build fine motor and cognitive skills, such as Unifix cubes. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Requiring children to use Unifix cubes for patterning may be too limiting. Encouraging children to build towers, modeling patterning of other objects, or praising children's matching of objects throughout the classroom are ways to individualize feedback and scaffold children's learning.
Children are engaged with materials in the classroom.		x		See "Children are initiating activities" section.
Children are engaged with peers in the classroom.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Mostly yes; however, at the manipulatives table, children are working independently. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Although independent exploration should be encouraged, teachers might also encourage peer interactions by modeling how to request items from their peers rather than from the teacher.
Teachers seem aware of children's needs and abilities.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers check in repeatedly with children in the class with physical disabilities and offer them individualized adult support. 2. <i>Negative</i>—Although the individualized support and care is positive, it may be shaping peers' perspective of the child as always needing adult assistance.
Teachers regard all children positively.	x			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers interact with children at their eye level, use a positive and enthusiastic tone, and invite children to join in play or activities. 2. <i>Negative</i>—None.
Teachers seem to anticipate child behaviors and emotions.		x		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Positive</i>—Teachers signal transitions using an aural cue (e.g., magic wand, bell). 2. <i>Negative</i>—One child, when engaged in play, consistently does not hear the cue over the sounds of her peers. Peers tell her to clean up suddenly and quickly, which leads her to grow frustrated and then push peers away from her toys. Supplementing the aural cue with a visual cue (e.g., musical wand + lights off) is one way to prevent any agitation and frustration. Alternatively, offering children who need more time with transitions an advance 2-minute warning may be helpful and may prevent potential challenging behaviors.