



# Preschool Students with Disabilities

Office of Special Education

## Overview

Preschool (ages 3-5) special education services are provided free of charge through the public school system in accordance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Office of Special Education (OSE) works with districts to build capacity, enhance knowledge, use effective instructional practices, build language-rich environments and promote development for all children ages 3-5 within a highly effective preschool program. A key component of the guidance from the Office of Special Education for preschool students with disabilities includes promoting an inclusive environment that includes multiple opportunities for preschool students with disabilities to be in the same setting with typical developing peers.

## Data and Statistics (2020-2021)



**66,759**

preschool students in the state of New Jersey



**19.5%**

of these preschool students are classified with a disability (IDEA Public Data)



Research has found that children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms are **more likely** to engage in peer interactions compared to children with disabilities in segregated settings. (NCCP, 2016)



## Promising Practices

1

### Establish the Learning Environment, Promote Language Building and Use Visual Supports (MED)

The physical environment and arrangement in a preschool program should support best practices that focus on opportunities for purposeful play and foster meaningful learning experiences for all children. Educators in high-quality preschool programs offer a range of learning experiences to promote greater possible outcomes for the individualized achievement of children while supporting self-directed discovery. Ensuring access to the students' learning environment can promote greater opportunity for social interaction and establish an inclusive environment to meet the universal needs of students with or without disabilities.

2

### Develop Social-Emotional Functioning Through Play-Based Learning

To promote happy, successful, lifelong learners, children must be immersed in developmentally appropriate practice and rich curricular learning that is culturally relevant. Play-based learning in preschool is implemented through exploring, problem solving, and active engagement in meaningful activities. This includes peer interactions while teachers maximize learning through individualizing learning goals. (NAEYC, 2020)

#### Key Components of Facilitated Guided Play as a Powerful Pedagogical Tool:

- Provide high quality materials
- Eliminate distractions
- Strategically prepare the space
- Give time for the children to play the active role
- Point the way without directing- "be a facilitator"
- Give opportunities for integrating new information with existing knowledge
- Let children explore

## Resources



Office of Special Education: Preschool Students with a Disability



Learning Acceleration Principles



Universal Preschool (NJPS)



Challenging Behavior Backpack Series