Engaging Families of Children with Disabilities in Child Care  
Fulfilling the Promise – March 8, 2017

Who Am I?
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  - WI Department of Children and Families  
  - Race To The Top – Early Learning Challenge  
  - Inclusion Policy Analyst

- My background:  
  - Early Childhood Special Education Teacher – 12 years  
  - Arc Advocate and Program Trainer  
  - Parent of a child with a disability

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Let’s Find Out a Little About You  
Please let me know what you do and why you chose to attend this session

A Couple Questions Before We Start
- What do you know about Inclusion?  
  - Laws or policies that support it?  
  - Stereotypes surrounding it?

- Do you know families that have struggled or still struggle to have their child included in the activities and routines of their day?

- How about child care providers that struggle with the idea of including a child with special needs?

My Framework For this Session

Our Agenda
- Section 1 (What’s Being Done)  
  - My job at DCF  
    - YoungStar  
    - DCF Inclusion Training Modules

- Section 2 (What’s Been Done)  
  - Federal Support for Inclusion  
    - Challenges to Inclusion  
    - The Path Ahead

- Section 3 (What We Still Need To Do)  
  - High Quality Inclusive Child Care  
    - Partnering with Parents  
    - A New Philosophy/DEC Recommended Practices

Could the simple act of including children with special needs strengthen our families and communities?
Section 1 (What’s being done?)

My Job at DCF

• What does an Inclusion Policy Analyst do?
  – Research and develop initiatives around inclusion for the following purposes:
    • Writing policy statements
    • Providing Technical Assistance
    • Supporting the YoungStar program
    • Creating training materials
      – DCF Inclusion Modules

DCF Inclusion Training Modules

• Designed to inform, support, and assist Wisconsin child care programs in moving toward more inclusive practices
• Each of the 5 modules are designed to show the ongoing progression of inclusion, becoming more focused in scope with each module

Section 2 (What’s been done?)

Federal Support for Inclusion

U.S. Department Of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Education
Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood
September 14, 2015

The purpose of this policy statement is to set a vision and provide recommendations to States, local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and public and private early childhood programs for increasing the inclusion of infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs.

The Aim of the Policy Statement

• Increase the public understanding of the science that supports meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities
• To set an expectation for high-quality inclusion in early childhood programs
• Highlight the legal foundations (IDEA and ADA) supporting inclusion
• Identify free resources for States, programs, personnel and families to support high-quality individualized programming and inclusion in early childhood programs
So Why Isn’t Inclusion Happening on a Larger Scale?

- Research identifies the following challenges to inclusion:
  - Our Attitudes and Beliefs
  - Lack of Staffing, Training and Expertise of the Early Childhood Workforce
  - Lack of Services and Supports being Delivered in Early Childhood Programs
  - Limited Time and Commitment to Building Partnerships

Attitudes and Beliefs
Have you heard any of the following?

- My staff and I lack the knowledge and/or skills necessary to successfully include children with special needs.
- It would require so much training (child development, supporting children with special needs, etc.) before we could ever feel comfortable caring for a child with special needs.
- I’m afraid that the children with disabilities will take time and attention away from the other kids.
- Kids with disabilities aren’t able to participate in the same activities that the other children do.

What message do the above statements send to families looking for care for their child who has a disability?

Our Attitudes and Beliefs

- Our mistaken beliefs and negative attitudes about inclusion are often influenced by:
  - Misinformation about the feasibility of inclusion (It’s too difficult. We’ll never be able to do that.)
  - Fear of the unfamiliar (I don’t know how to. I’m scared to work with them.)
  - Resistance to changing our current practices (That’s not the way we were taught to do things. Sounds like a lot of work.)

Our Attitudes and Beliefs

- Our mistaken beliefs and negative attitudes about inclusion are often influenced by:
  - Our stereotypes of children with disabilities (They can’t learn like the other kids. All kids with a particular disability are the same.)
  - Worry that attention and resources will be diverted away from typical peers (They take a lot of time away from the other kids.)
  - A lack of awareness of the benefits of inclusion for ALL children

The Path Ahead
How do we overcome these challenges?

- Addressing these challenges “requires a community-wide partnership that brings families, advocates and self-advocates, developmental specialists, early childhood programs, schools, LEAs, and community and State leaders together to build a culture of inclusion, supported by the empirical and legal foundations of inclusion.”

The Path Ahead
Partnering to Build a Nationwide Culture of Inclusion

- What we need to do:
  - Talk about the importance of inclusion
  - Highlight the universal benefits of inclusion for all
  - Address myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about children with disabilities
  - Provide access and support to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs
  - Strongly communicate inclusion as a shared responsibility (Federal, state, local, and neighborhood)
  - Celebrate diversity in all its many forms

Resource for review:
DCF Early Childhood Inclusion Tip Sheet: Power of a Positive Attitude
The Path Ahead
Building a Culture of Inclusion

- The following are the three critical features of inclusion that should be used to define, as well as identify, high quality early childhood programs and services.
  - **Access** refers to removing barriers (both physical and assumed) to full participation for all.
  - **Participation** refers to the instructional strategies and social interactions used to promote a child’s learning, development, and sense of belonging.
  - **Support** refers to the broader aspects of the system that support inclusion, such as professional development and collaboration within, between and among professionals, programs, and families.

Section 3
High Quality Inclusive Child Care

- **Partnering with Parents**
  - Inviting parents to talk
  - Talking with parents
- **DEC Recommended Practices**
  - Three main themes
  - A Program’s Philosophy
    - Separate policies
    - An inclusive program

Resources for review:
- A Thinking Guide to Inclusive Childcare - Mark Sweet, Disability Rights Wisconsin
  and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Inviting Parents to Talk
#1 - An inclusive attitude

- An Inclusive child care has an Inclusive attitude
  - Begins with:
    - A genuine curiosity about children
    - Actively wondering about and learning from a child’s unique perspective
    - Being flexible about the ways children develop and participate
    - Asking questions about how a child might be supported, not separated

Inviting Parents to Talk
#2 - Gathering USABLE information

- As a provider, the questions you ask a family should have a purpose, but what is that purpose?
  - To include or reject
    - Does your child have a special need?
  - To support and nurture or disapprove
    - Is your child toilet trained?
  - To get to know the child’s strengths or their weaknesses
    - Can your child write their name?

Inviting Parents to Talk
#3 - The questions you ask

- Questions that support an inclusive attitude take more than a simple Yes or No to answer.
  - What are some of the things your child really likes to do?
  - What kinds of situations does your child find difficult or stressful?
  - What are some things that your child is really good at?
  - At this time, how does your child let you know if they are not feeling well or need something?
  - When your child is upset, what types of things comfort them or help them to calm themselves?

Talking with Parents
The information you share

- **Gathering** usable information is an ongoing process that should help you answer the question:
  - Who is this child?
- **Sharing** usable information should help a parent understand how their child acts and interacts while in your program.
  - How would you describe their temperament while in your care?
    - Enrages? Stays? Happy? Upset?
  - How do they cope with frustrating situations?
    - Ask for help? Tantrum? Cry?
  - Are there specific things that help them to learn?
    - A quiet place? One-on-one interactions? Hands on activities?
Talking with Parents
How you share information

- When talking to parents remember to think about:
  - Your purpose (To inform? To gain information?)
  - Your message (What are you wanting to accomplish?)
  - Your attitude (Are you upset? Concerned? Excited?)
  - Your words (Are you professional? Accusatory? Friendly?)

Have you ever read: "Welcome to Nobody" by Emily Fer Kingley

Talking with Parents
How you share information

- Beginning a difficult conversation:
  - Approach the conversation as a caring reporter
    - How would you like information to be delivered to you?
    - Be truthful, but compassionate
  - Give specific examples that reference the usable information
    you’ve gathered about the child
  - Allow the parent a chance to talk and make sure you actively
    listen to their perspective
  - Attempt to locate supportive information and resources that
    you could share with the family

Supports the protective factor:
Concrete support in time of need – care providers should be able to assist a family by
providing support and helping them find resources

DEC Recommended Family Practices
Three main themes

1) Family-Centered Practices
- Practices that treat families in a respectful, flexible way and
  provide them with unbiased information to make informed decisions
- Examples:
  - Practitioners build trusting and respectful partnerships with the family through interactions that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity
  - Practitioners provide the family with up-to-date, comprehensive and unbiased information in a way that the family can understand and use to make informed choices and decisions.

Supports the protective factor:
Parental Resilience – building and sustaining trusting relationships and finding ways to solve problems

DEC Recommended Family Practices
Three main themes

2) Family capacity-building practices
- Practices that enhance a parents knowledge, abilities, and opportunities for participation and self-efficacy
- Examples:
  - Practitioners engage the family in opportunities that support and strengthen parenting knowledge and skills and parenting competence and confidence in ways that are flexible, individualized, and tailored to the family’s preferences.
  - Practitioners support family functioning, promote family confidence and competence, and strengthen family-child relationships by acting in ways that recognize and build on family strengths and capacities.

Supports the protective factor:
Knowledge of parenting and child development – providing accurate information about development and expectations

DEC Recommended Family Practices
Three main themes

3) Family and professional collaboration
- Practices that build relationships and work toward achieving mutually agreed upon goals to support the development of the child
- Examples:
  - Practitioners work with the family to identify, access, and use formal and informal resources and supports to achieve family identified outcomes or goals.
  - Practitioners inform families about leadership and advocacy skill-building opportunities and encourage those who are interested to participate.

Supports the protective factor:
Concrete support in time of need – providing support and helping to identify goals that focus on a family’s specific needs

OK, Now What?

- These are great suggestions and examples, but....
  - How do I embed these ideas within my program?
  - How do I make these suggestions to the teachers or program leaders in my child’s child care?
A Program’s Philosophy

• A written statement of the values and beliefs that underpin all aspects of the program’s operations
  – Fundamental Questions to Ask:
    • What do we believe in?
    • Why do we have these beliefs?
    • How can we translate our beliefs into practice?

No Connection - Separate Policies

• No real connection between the program’s mission/values and the written policies
• Policies are written separately and stand alone without connection to something bigger

Or...

A Program’s Philosophy

• Inclusive = open to everyone; not limited
• Attitude = the way you think and/or feel about someone or something
• It’s important to be honest with yourself when answering the following:
  – Is your child care program truly open to everyone?
  – How does it, or would it, make you feel to fully include all children?
  • Nervous?
  • Stressed out?
  • Excited?
  • Overwhelmed

Inclusive Policies

Main principles of inclusion

• So what do you value as a provider of care for children?
  – Principle #1 - Access
    • Is every child able to attend your program? (community inclusion)
    • Is the physical environment set up to welcome the unique needs of all children? (inclusive environment)
    • Do you adjust routines based on the needs of those in your program?
    • Are the additional support needs of a child supported and even welcomed?
Inclusive Policies
Main principles of inclusion

• So what do you value as a provider of care for children?
  – Principle #2 – Participation
    • If supports are necessary for a children to participate, are they provided in natural environments along with peers?
    • Do you provide opportunities for children to play together so they develop strong social relationships? (meaningful participation)
    • Does your program approach learning with the philosophy that all kids can learn and that it is your primary job to figure out how best to make that happen? (individual learning)

Supports the protective factor: Social Connections – provides opportunities for children to interact positively with others and self-regulate behavior

Inclusive Policies
Putting these principles to work

• The questions on the previous slides should act as a framework to help you think about how you would embed the key concepts of inclusion throughout your program

• The policy statements you come up with around access, participation and support should stem from the values you have about caring for children

Inclusive Policies
Main principles of inclusion

• So what do you value as a provider of care for children?
  – Principle #3 – Support
    • Do you acknowledge and respect the desires and input of the families in your program? (family centered practices)
    • Are you open to collaborating with parents and other service professionals in order to meet the unique needs of the children in your program? (collaboration)
    • Are professional development opportunities taken advantage of by you or your staff so that you know the best methods for supporting all the children in your program? (staff supports)

Supports the protective factor: Social Connections – providing support, advice and assistance to parents through collaboration

An Inclusive Program

• Developing a mission statement grounded in the core principles of access, participation and support will result in:
  – A set of policies that guide ALL aspects of your program
    • The curriculum you use
    • The set up of the environment
    • The way you interact with and treat the children
    • How you include and partner with parents
    • The training of your staff
    • Who you enroll in your program
    • The way you manage behavior
    • How you partner with support staff
    • How you go about building an inclusive community

Bringing Things Together

• Federal support for Inclusion
  – Laws: IDEA and ADA
  – Policy Statements: DOE and DHHS

• State support for Inclusion
  – Quality Rating Improvement System: YoungStar
  – Training: Inclusion Modules

• Local support for Inclusion
  – Partnerships and Collaboration with Parents
  – Recommended Family Practices
  – An Inclusive Program:
    • Mission/Values > Policies
    • Inclusive attitude

Any Questions?

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